

Complimenting Behavior and (Self-)Praise across Social Media

EDITED BY

María Elena Placencia
Zohreh R. Eslami



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Complimenting Behavior and (Self-)Praise across Social Media

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Volume 313

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New contexts and new insights

Edited by María Elena Placencia and Zohreh R. Eslami

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Introduction

María Elena Placencia and Zohreh R. Eslami

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1. Focus, scope of this volume, and its rationale

This volume focuses on complimenting behavior and the awarding of (self-) praise on social media. Complimenting and giving praise are two commonplace activities that, while not always easily distinguishable from one another (see Section 2 below), have been found to fulfil a range of discursal, relational and other functions in face-to-face interaction (see, e.g., Golato 2011; Jaworski 1995; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1994; Sifianou 2001; Wolfson and Manes 1980). They have also become pervasive practices in online environments (Placencia and Lower 2017). Indeed, complimenting is to be found in different types of social media. In this broad genre, more or less instant (positive) feedback on one's posts, often in the form of photographs, seems to be expected from friends and family in the private and/or semi-private sphere, from fans reacting to celebrities' posts or their performance in the public arena, to take but two examples. Praise, in turn, is omnipresent in consumers' reviews of products and services, and also in social media forums. Although less common, *public* compliments and praise are resources used by political actors too, in the press and on social media.

Self-praise, on the other hand, appears to be gaining ground online (see, e.g., Dayter 2018) where it fulfils different functions. This stands in contrast to face-to-face interaction in Western and other cultures where it has seemingly been regarded as appropriate only in a reduced number of contexts. The existence of what Pomerantz (1978) refers to as a constraint against self-praise in interaction, or the prevalence of Leech's (1983, 2014) Modesty Maxim have been referred to, in order to explain this situation. Nevertheless, new trends in research suggest that the study of face and politeness in social interaction needs to be viewed from an identity perspective that is action-oriented (Spencer-Oatey 2009; Ruhi 2009). Spencer-Oatey (2009), for example, argues that an a priori approach to face and politeness (e.g., Brown and Levinson 1987) ignores the dynamic aspect of people's face sensitivities. She claims that attention should be paid to both speakers' and hearers' face

concerns and that a speaker's own face concerns may emerge as crucially important in naturally occurring interaction.

Instances of self-praise are the “humblebrags” in Luo and Hancock's paper in the present volume, and the achievements proffered through self-praise by reforming smokers in health forums in Rudolf von Rohr and Locher's study. Self-praise – a kind of self-disclosure (Dayter 2018) – can elicit compliments, as can be seen in Rudolf von Rohr and Locher's study. Some self-praise also appears in Placencia and Powell's paper on compliment responses (CRs) among teenage girls on Instagram, and in Heaney's study of live sports commentary – over by over (OBO) cricket commentary, more specifically. In the latter work, Heaney identifies ironical uses of self-praise – a kind of self-mockery – employed to “strengthen the bond within the group.”

All in all, the pervasiveness of complimenting behavior in everyday life online makes it an interesting and fertile ground for analysis. However, while there is a wealth of research on the realization of compliments and CRs in different languages and sociocultural contexts in relation to face-to-face contexts (see Chen 2010 for an overview), relatively little attention has been given to online environments, and social media, in particular (Placencia and Lower 2017).

Interesting findings are emerging from recent work in this area on social networking sites such as Facebook (e.g., Das 2016; Eslami, Jabbari, and Kuo 2015, 2019; Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Placencia and Lower 2013; Placencia, Lower, and Powell 2016), Instagram (Placencia 2019), Orkut (Das 2010), and Renren (the “Facebook” of China) (Eslami and Yang 2018). Nonetheless, there is still a great deal to be explored: for example, how complimenting behavior is shaped by technology and the affordances and constraints of different sites as well as by features of the genre. Concerning the latter, for example, Heaney, in this volume, shows how complimenting behavior in the OBO cricket commentary genre is shaped by and helps shape the culture of the OBO community, and how certain features of the genre influence the form compliments take (see below).

Other aspects that need exploration include whether globalization processes are resulting in homogenized behavior (Sifianou 2013) (see, e.g., Eslami, Yang, and Qian; Ruiz-Tada, Fernández-Villanueva, and Tragant in this volume); the objects/topics of compliments and the form that compliments take in these new environments (see, e.g., Hernández Toribio and Mariottini in this volume), including the use of multimodality (see Maíz-Arévalo; Placencia and Powell, this volume); questions of who compliments whom and how compliments and/or self-praise are perceived by different groups (see Luo and Hancock; Rudolf von Rohr and Locher, this volume); and how social networking sites influence Chinese and American English users' CRs (see Eslami, Yang, and Qian in this volume); which actions appear to elicit compliments (see, e.g., Rudolf von Rohr and Locher in this volume), and so forth. These and other aspects are addressed in the present volume.

Additionally, in relation to who compliments whom, the influence of macro social factors such as age and gender are also in need of exploration. Concerning age, for example, the studies available at present focus on young to middle-aged adults. Complimenting behavior among teenagers and older participants has received only limited attention (but see Placencia and Powell, and Maíz-Arévalo in this volume, respectively). With respect to gender, the focus has mostly been on compliments received and given by women; scarce attention has been given to male-to-male complimenting behavior, which is the focus of Lower's paper in this volume. Heaney's study also centers on the predominantly male population of journalists and contributors that take part in the live cricket commentary that he examines.

Another important aspect of the analysis of compliments and (self-)praise is their function. So far, existing studies have mainly focused on interactions among friends and family where the phatic function of compliments comes to the fore. Some of the contributions in the present volume look at the function(s) of compliments and (self-)praise in contexts not previously explored: for instance, in the (international) political arena on Twitter (Danziger and Kampf); on live sports commentary (Heaney); and in the world of fitness and dieting forums (Bączkowska). Danziger and Kampf, for example, note that the effects of Twitter compliments and praise in the political sphere transcend the interpersonal level; as such, they suggest that these actions constitute "metonymic symbols for interstate friendship, not just interpersonal ones." To give another example, in the e-health setting that Rudolf von Rohr and Locher analyze, they identify a motivating function of compliments, aimed at encouraging smokers to persevere in their efforts to quit.

In examining the function of compliments, it is also important to consider the acts that they occur with, or that they may be replacing. For instance, Hernández Toribio and Mariottini in this volume find that compliments accompanying congratulations in their Twitter study perform a supportive function, enhancing the congratulatory act, but may also realize congratulations when occurring on their own or as multi-head acts. Likewise, in her study on Spanish political discourse on Twitter, Pano Alamán finds that compliments often co-occur with other speech acts such as congratulations and advice-giving.

We do not know much at all about how other social networking sites around the world, such as China's Renren, operate and how the affordances and limitations of these other sites influence complimenting behavior. While social networking sites (SNSs) can be similar in terms of their overall goal and functionality, recent studies have shown that users of different SNSs display different online practices. However, there is a lack of research on cross-cultural comparisons of online CRs in different SNSs. This is a topic explored by Eslami, Yang, and Qian in their analysis of Chinese CRs used on Renren, compared with American English speakers' CR patterns on Facebook.

Live text commentary (see, e.g., Jucker 2010), with a traditional focus on football, is a hybrid online genre we do not know much about either. Heaney contributes to this area by focusing on complimenting behavior on a subtype of this genre: the OBO cricket commentary. Characteristics of this genre appear to facilitate the occurrence of compliments (unlike other types of live sports commentary) and influence their formulation: a large proportion of compliments are non-conventional, displaying humor, wit, and inventiveness in a setting where contributors need to be noticed for their contributions to be included in the commentary. In turn, OBO journalists who select the entries are guided by the ultimate aim of the site – to offer entertainment. Certain non-conventional formulations may also be chosen “so as to involve the whole [OBO] community” (Heaney, this volume) and not just the complimenter and complimentee.

Additionally, the works in our volume show different perspectives and methodological approaches to the examination of complimenting behavior in social media, from the use of netnography (Maíz-Arévalo) and interpersonal pragmatics (e.g., Rudolf von Rohr and Locher) in relatively small-scale studies to large-scale (Lower), corpus linguistics (Bączkowska) studies.

Finally, in a broad sense, the studies in our volume aim to contribute to our understanding of face-enhancing activities such as complimenting and praising online. We agree with Bedijs’s (2014) observation that impoliteness has been given more attention in recent years both in face-to-face and in online contexts, and that there is a need to pay greater attention to face-enhancing activities:

Research on politeness has, in the past few years, focused on impolite speech acts [...]. Positive politeness and face-enhancing acts have been theorised but not tested empirically. At the same time, research on computer-mediated communication (in the following, CMC) has often dealt with the assumed rudeness of CMC – “friendly” online communication is rarely the object of research. (p. 136)

Bedijs suggests redressing this imbalance, and this is what we attempt to do here by looking at complimenting and praising on social media. This is not to say, however, that compliments always fulfil a face-enhancing function; they can carry out different functions in different settings and may be used instrumentally (see, e.g., Jaworski 1995). For instance, Pano Alamán’s study in this volume shows that compliments are often paid to politicians by their followers when making a specific request. Also, to advance the area, it is important to look at the subtleties of face-enhancement. For example, in Pano Alamán’s study, compliments can constitute “direct expressions of endorsement” to politicians.

In the context outlined above, the overall goal of this volume is to add to the body of work currently available by shedding light on a number of aspects in complimenting behavior and the expression of (self-)praise online across a

range of languages and socio-digital environments, thus opening up the area for further study.

The volume includes 12 papers that examine complimenting behavior and/or (self-) praise in the (semi) private and public spheres on various social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Renren, Twitter, as well as web forums, message boards and live text commentary. In Eslami, Yang, and Qian's paper, CRs by American English speakers on Facebook, and by Chinese Mandarin speakers on Renren are examined in contrast. Facebook is also looked at in relation to other sociocultural contexts and languages/language varieties, including Ecuadorian (Lower) and Peninsular (Maíz-Arévalo) Spanish. Additionally, it is the platform employed by bilingual speakers of English and Japanese (Ruiz-Tada, Fernández-Villanueva, and Tragant), and by American speakers of English (Luo and Hancock; Eslami, Yang, and Qian).

Instagram, on the other hand, is the platform used by older Spanish-speaking Ecuadorian teenage girls (Placencia and Powell), whereas compliments on Twitter are examined as they were employed by fans congratulating Spanish athletes during the 2016 Olympics (Hernández Toribio and Mariottini), as well as by a range of international political actors, including speakers of Hebrew, English, etc. (Danziger and Kampf), and Peninsular Spanish (Pano Alamán). Speakers of British and American English (Rudolf von Rohr and Locher) and Polish (Bączkowska) are represented in studies based on online forums. Finally, live cricket commentary, supported by a British newspaper's digital platform, is the focus of attention in Heaney's paper.

2. Compliments and (self-)praise

Compliments and praise may be regarded as distinct speech actions. They nonetheless share a "pragmatic space" (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000) and, hence, distinguishing between them is not always desirable or a straightforward matter (see Danziger and Kampf, and Rudolf von Rohr and Locher in this volume). Indeed, compliments share features with other actions too, such as congratulations, and some scholars see the latter as embedded within the former (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008) or vice-versa (Bach and Harnish 1979). As such, it can also be difficult to differentiate between these two speech acts (see Bączkowska in this volume). When looking at dictionary entries for compliments and praise, the reader encounters rather circular definitions whereby compliments are described as praise or expressions of admiration, and appear to be presented as synonymous also with congratulations. We can see this, for example, in the following online Oxford dictionary entries:

Compliment: “A polite expression of praise or admiration.”

To compliment: “Politely congratulate or praise (someone) for something.”

(Lexico.com)

Likewise, praise is partly defined in the same dictionary along the same lines as a compliment (i.e., as an expression of admiration):

Praise: “The expression of approval or admiration for someone or something.”

To praise: “Express warm approval or admiration of.”

(Lexico.com)

These dictionary definitions could be said to be attempts at reflecting common usage and the ways in which different terms are perceived by the population at large, thus illustrating, in this particular case, how futile it is to attempt to make clear-cut distinctions. Definitions provided by language philosophers and linguists certainly provide more nuance, with the more detailed characterizations that they offer, as can be seen in Vanderveken’s (1990) differentiation between complimenting and praising:

To compliment someone is to *express approval* of the hearer for something [...]. Complimenting does not necessarily relate to something done by the hearer, since we can compliment someone on his intelligence, musical ability, and so forth for which he is not (at least not primarily) responsible – as well as for his act of courage, etc. for which he is responsible [...]. (p. 115, our emphasis)

To praise is to *express a high degree of approval* (increasing the degree of strength), while not necessarily being directed to the hearer. That is, I might praise the hearer or I might praise someone else in his absence. (p. 215, our emphasis)

As can be seen, both definitions are centered on the expression of approval, a key difference being the degree of approval – high in one case, and presumably low in the other. This distinction, however, does not seem to be valid in some social media contexts at least where the use of maximization strategies (Held 1989) in compliment realization seems to be the norm (see, e.g., Placencia 2019). In such cases, compliments also convey a high degree of approval.

A clearer distinguishing feature in Vanderveken’s (1990) definitions above is obtained by analyzing who the compliment or praise is directed at: the hearer in the case of compliments, and “not necessarily [...] the hearer” when it comes to praise: it could be “someone else in his absence” (Vanderveken 1990: 215). This distinction can become blurred, though, particularly in public discourse (see Danziger and Kampf in this volume) where the beneficiary can be the person at whom the positive assessment is directed (e.g., a world leader), but also a group (e.g., the world leader’s people) (see also Rudolf von Rohr and Locher regarding online forums, and Heaney with respect to live sports commentary). Furthermore, in private discourse, it is not uncommon to find cases of positive evaluation or approval of someone’s

children or spouse, for example, in their absence. For instance, in Placencia and Lower's (2013: 618) paper, a woman (A) compliments another woman (B) on her children's good looks. B replies with a "thanks," thus seeming to take personal credit for her children's physical attributes.

Attributing credit to the addressee for some praiseworthy action, state or object is a crucial element in Holmes's (1986) characterization of compliments (see also Holmes 1995):

A compliment is a speech act which 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 the hearer. (p. 485, our emphasis)

Holmes (1986) further stresses that compliments "normally attribute the valued 'good' to the addressee" (p. 485). However, credit attribution to the addressee can also be found in praising, albeit as an optional rather than an essential feature of praising. There appear to be other considerations that need to be taken into account in distinguishing praising from complimenting: for instance, the discourse genre, the social role of the participants, and probably the audience. In an award ceremony, for example, when recounting the award presenter's words, it would probably be more appropriate to say that he/she praised (rather than complimented) the winner; in private, the winner may be complimented for his/her talent (rather than praised) by his/her friend. Holmes (1995: 119) also maintains that praise is often directed downwards (e.g., by teachers to their pupils); however, this is not a clear differentiating feature either, because compliments are not usually paid upwards. All in all, this brief discussion shows the difficulty in attempting to offer clear distinctions between speech actions such as complimenting and praising which share a pragmatic space. This applies to other pairings such as complimenting and congratulating as in Hernández Toribio and Mariottini's and Bączkowska's studies in this volume.

3. Prospects for the future

Chen's (2010) literature review of complimenting behavior in face-to-face interaction, while inevitably limited to a selection of works, shows the enormous interest that complimenting behavior has generated over the years, given that complimenting is such a commonplace activity across many languages and cultures. We believe that this level of interest is being extended to social media as a result of users' continuous global engagement with social networking sites such as Facebook and other emerging sites.

Considering that social media provide a different set of options for paying compliments and new ways of responding to compliments, there are many topics that need to be explored: for example, the use of multimodal resources in both compliment and CR realization; the possible role of gender in how compliments in same or cross-gender relations are interpreted. The appropriateness of practices such as retweeting compliments needs investigation as well (Placencia and Lower 2017).

The perceptions of people's intentions in making online compliments also provides ample opportunity for research (Grant, Fabrigar, and Lim 2010). Likewise, unwanted negative ramifications that could result from paying compliments to others in semi-public online social contexts need further research, too. Moreover, the impact of the dynamic and interactive character of the negotiation of norms as well as identities needs further exploration. Following online communities of practice over longer periods of time would enable researchers to document the dynamics and development of interpersonal practices as realized by relational speech actions such as complimenting, praising, and others.

There is also a need to conduct further research on different aspects of complimenting behavior in different online social arenas in relation to topics such as politics, health, beauty, and sport.

Multilingualism and the use of multiple languages by users of social networking sites have become the norm rather than the exception. The use of different languages and the mixing and meshing of linguistic resources by multilingual individuals in their online communication and how this may relate to their identity formation is a highly important area of research. Translanguaging practices of bilingual and multilingual users as they evaluate and pay compliments in multilingual environments would reveal the complexities and intricacies involved in using multimodal and multilingual resources to convey their intended messages. It would also be insightful to examine the gendered and cultural identities of multilingual populations when engaged in complimenting behavior and (self-)praise, as well as in other actions. Further work in these areas would contribute to the growing body of research on the "multilingual Internet" (Danet and Herring 2007), revealing the fluidity and dynamism of multilingual users' online practices.

The use of critical discourse analysis and the examination of the discursive construction of compliments in different social networking sites and different cultural contexts needs further research too. For instance, Facebook dialogic conversations tend to be replete with manipulative tendencies aimed at influencing the social behavior of readers/peers (see, e.g., boyd 2008). Adopting a critical discourse analysis can illuminate the motives behind complimenting, identifying manipulative (Wilson and Peterson 2002) and other tendencies. Also, practices involving sexism in complimenting behavior (see, e.g., Aldridge 2015) (and other speech acts) need to be identified and contested (Placencia and Lower 2017).

Extending the research to other languages and other online cultures opens up the appealing prospect of researchers adopting a more extended cross-cultural approach to investigate complimenting behavior as it relates to both globalization and glocalization processes.

In analytical terms, the studies in the present volume approach the examination of complimenting behavior (or its) perception from both qualitative and quantitative perspectives, or a mixture of both. Concerning quantitative analyses, descriptive statistics are mostly used. Future studies could benefit from more sophisticated statistical analyses. This, however, is related to the size of the corpora employed. A number of studies in the present volume are of an exploratory nature, based on relatively small corpora. Nonetheless, Lower's and Bączkowska's works show how large corpora can be collected and examined.

4. Organization of the volume and contents of the individual chapters

The volume is divided into four sections, according to the particular study domain of each. **Section I** focuses on complimenting behavior in the private sphere, among family and friends, on Facebook, Renren, and Instagram. It includes five chapters. In Chapter 1 ("A comparative study of compliment responses among Chinese Renren users and American Facebook users"), Eslami, Yang, and Qian examine CRs in two SNSs: Renren and Facebook. This study builds on previous works on CRs given online, particularly Eslami and Yang (2018), by examining CRs given by Chinese users of Renren in comparison with CRs by American users of Facebook. The authors explore if, and to what extent, globalization and use of SNSs has led to homogenization among discourse practices of Chinese and American English users as reflected in their CR strategies. The findings indicate that increasing use of online SNSs and interconnectedness does not necessarily mean eradication of cultural differences in discourse practices but does decrease cultural differences in language use. More importantly, changes in discourse practices are unidirectional and dominated by the English language and American/Western cultural values.

In "Gracias pana: A glimpse into Ecuadorian male CRs on Facebook" (Chapter 2), Lower examines how young males in Quito, Ecuador, respond to compliments from other males on Facebook. In doing so, she extends the previous literature on complimenting behavior on SNSs to male compliment and CR behavior – a less frequently studied population in research on compliments. Her findings reveal that Ecuadorian males' compliment response behavior is similar in some ways to other widely studied groups, including American females and Spanish males and females. The study shows that the majority of compliments receiving a response from Ecuadorian males related to physical appearance – appearance often being

the most frequent topic of compliments, especially on SNSs. Additionally, when relevant, males paid frequent compliments on ability. Interestingly, the study reveals that despite the ubiquitous nature of emoticons in online communication, their use in CRs by Ecuadorian males on Facebook was completely absent.

In Chapter 3 (“Pero... y las caritas esas, ¿cómo se ponen?": Age effects on Facebook compliments in Peninsular Spanish”), Maíz-Arévalo seeks to assess the influence of age as a macrosocial factor in the realization of compliments among Spanish women on Facebook. This is a topic not previously examined. The participants in her study correspond to two different age groups: 18–25 and 60–75. Maíz-Arévalo analyzes both verbal and non-verbal realizations of compliments, finding that there is variation across the two groups particularly at the non-verbal level. For instance, looking at the use of emoji, she found a considerably higher frequency among younger users, compared to older ones.

In “Tu masssss ♥ te amo”: Responding to compliments on Instagram among Ecuadorian teenage girls” (Chapter 4), Placencia and Powell examine CRs among a group of Ecuadorian teenage girls. They find that the majority of compliments are accepted. The authors suggest that this is not unexpected in a context like Instagram where the teenagers post the best images of themselves, implicitly seeking approval from their peers. However, they do not accept compliments forthrightly either, but choose to convey some modesty. They accomplish this through a variety of verbal and non-verbal strategies: for instance, by producing augmented return compliments, the teenagers put their complimenter higher without denying their own attractiveness. Expressions of (intensified) affection as acceptance tokens also abound. Conveying “mutual adoration” thus appears to be what the teenagers in the study orient to when engaging in complimenting behavior with their friends on Instagram.

While the majority of studies on compliments in online contexts available to date have focused on single language groups, in Chapter 5 (“Compliment response behavior among Japanese-English bilinguals on Facebook”), Ruiz-Tada, Fernández-Villanueva, and Tragant examine CRs produced by Japanese-English bilingual women who post photos of their manicures and pedicures on Facebook. The CRs are directed at Japanese monolinguals, (American) English monolinguals, and Japanese-English bilingual audiences. The findings indicate that acceptance of compliments was the most common strategy used by the Japanese-English bilingual women in the study, followed by evasion, rejection, and non-acknowledgement. The study highlights the importance of examining the online practices of bilinguals who interact with multilingual audiences.

Section II offers two studies on complimenting and praise in the political arena. The first (Chapter 6) is Pano Alamán’s work entitled “Complimenting behavior in

Spanish political discourse on Twitter.” In this study, Pano Alamán investigates compliments by employing a corpus-based methodology. She looks at the topics that elicit compliments and the linguistic strategies that are adopted by users in their complimenting replies to politicians within the microblog. The analysis reveals that users frequently pay compliments to praise the recipients’ performance and abilities and to support their decisions and actions. They often do so by combining explicit and implicit realizations of compliments with congratulations, requests, and advice. Thus, these compliments act as direct expressions of endorsement which, in turn, contribute to strengthening group solidarity and enhancing affiliation on the basis of a shared ideological and political stance.

The second study in this section (Chapter 7) is Danziger and Kampf’s work entitled “#Lovely country, #wonderful people: Diplomatic compliments and praise on Twitter.” Danziger and Kampf explore the extent to which international political actors use (public) compliments and praise on Twitter as digital diplomacy tools, that is, as a means of enhancing sociability in the international arena; they also examine the realization patterns of compliments and praise. For this, they analyze a corpus of “amicable actions” collected from 14 different accounts of foreign-affairs actors. They find that complimenting and praise are not as frequent as other solidarity-enhancing actions such as congratulations, a state of affairs which they attribute to various reasons, including the “perils of context collapse” on Twitter. In terms of their use and realization, they find that the object of approval tends to be limited to the quality of performance, such as high levels of skillfulness, as well as a friendly personality; appearance and possessions are not complimented. Additionally, compliments and praise in the Twitter context examined were found to be formulated as facts and not as affective judgements. Finally, while the function of compliments has usually been assessed at the interpersonal level, Danziger and Kampf note that public compliments and praise in the international political arena are ultimately aimed at enhancing good relations between states.

Section III examines complimenting behavior and self-praise in health, sports and fitness domains. In Chapter 8, the first chapter of this section, entitled “The interpersonal effects of complimenting others and self-praise in online health settings,” Rudolf von Rohr and Locher focus on the pragmatic effects of complimenting and self-praise in two forums for smoking cessation. They also refer to two professional e-health contexts, as a point of contrast. They find that the occurrence of compliments and self-praise in this sort of forum is partly related to the status of the posting as new or as showing that the member is succeeding in his/her attempts at giving up smoking. Among new members, self-praise is used to mark milestones in their recovery progress, and it is not perceived negatively by other participants. Indeed, self-praise can elicit compliments from other members who are at a more

advanced stage of their smoking cessation. Compliments in this context thus serve a supportive and motivating function and are aimed at encouraging members of the forums to persevere. These functions of compliments are less apparent in the professional e-health contexts examined, which aim to educate people rather than offer them solidarity. As such, compliments and self-praise in the professional context are scarce.

Bączkowska, in Chapter 9 (“Healthy lifestyle, dieting, fitness and bodybuilding: Compliments in the context of Polish online discussion forums and message boards”), offers the first study of complimenting behavior online, in Polish, using the methodology and analytical tools of Corpus Linguistics. Also, it is the first study on complimenting behavior to focus on healthy lifestyle, dieting and fitness discussion forums and message boards. One of Bączkowska’s aims is to explore the usefulness of a Corpus Linguistics approach in the study of online compliments. Her analysis and results validate its usefulness for the study of direct compliments. When it comes to indirect compliments, on the other hand, Bączkowska finds that manual searches are unavoidable, and, therefore, not practical when dealing with very large data sets. In terms of her analysis of the Polish compliments retrieved, Bączkowska found them to be largely formulaic, as in Manes and Wolfson’s (1981) study, albeit with a different distribution of syntactic patterns, and other variations.

In the third chapter of this section, Chapter 10 (“‘I want your brain’: Complimenting behavior in online Over by Over cricket commentary”), Heaney examines complimenting behavior in an online sports commentary genre with a significant level of audience participation. The genre is described and its social media credentials are assessed, revealing asymmetrical and time-bound virtual groupings in which simulated interactions between journalists and readers-contributors are increasingly noticeable. There was frequent use of compliments in the interactions. To analyze their form and functions, Heaney examined a corpus of commentary on two days’ play in separate international cricket matches for complimenting content. His results show that, contrary to findings in previous studies for other social media, most compliments occurred in non-formulaic patterns. The author provides a number of explanations for these findings.

Finally, in the last chapter in this section, Chapter 11 (“Compliments in congratulatory tweets to Spanish Olympic athletes”), Hernández Toribio and Mariottini examine compliments in congratulatory tweets sent to a group of athletes during the 2016 Olympic Games. Their results suggest that compliments play an important role in such tweets. In terms of their realization, they found that in implicit congratulations, compliments occur as head acts that replace the actual congratulations, whereas in explicit congratulations, compliments function as supportive moves that appear alongside formulaic expressions of congratulations.

The last section, **Section IV**, mainly focuses on the perception, rather than the realization of self-compliments/self-praise and it includes Luo and Hancock's chapter (Chapter 12), entitled "Modified self-praise in social media: Humblebragging, self-presentation, and perceptions of (in)sincerity." Drawing on literature in pragmatics and social psychology, Luo and Hancock define "humblebrags" as "modified, self-praise speech acts" in that the self-promotion that is at the core of these speech acts is presented with a coating of modesty or humility (hence their name). While they are aimed at creating positive impressions in others, the authors suggest that humblebrags may not be an effective tool for positive impression management. This was confirmed by an experimental study that they conducted where a group of undergraduate students were asked to rate brags and humblebrags on Facebook in terms of their reliability and the sincerity of the person concerned. They found that humblebrags were seen as "significantly less reliable," and that the humblebraggers were perceived as "significantly less sincere" than braggarts.

To help readers, a schematic summary of the main topics of the different contributions to this volume is presented in Table 1. The language variety examined is listed when specified. Language variety can possibly be identified in private Facebook groups, for example, but this is far more problematic in open online forums, to give but one example. The main areas in which new insights are offered are presented in the last column. It should be noted that the role of multimodal resources in complimenting behavior and (self-)praise – not listed in Table 1 – is explored in the majority of chapters.

Table 1. Contributions in the present volume: A schematic summary

Ch.	Author(s)	SNS(s)	Focus	Language / language variety/ varieties	New insights on complimenting behavior relating to:
<i>1: Complimenting behavior among family and friends</i>					
1	Eslami, Yang and Qian	Facebook and Renren	CRs	American English / Chinese Mandarin	Variation across two languages and cultural groups, and across SNSs
2	Lower	Facebook	CRs	Ecuadorian Spanish	Males in interaction with other males
3	Maíz-Arévalo	Facebook	Compliments	Peninsular Spanish	Age variation across two groups of users
4	Placencia and Powell	Instagram	CRs	Ecuadorian Spanish	Use among a group of teenage girls, taking into account the nature of the SNS.

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Ch.	Author(s)	SNS(s)	Focus	Language / language variety/ varieties	New insights on complimenting behavior relating to:
5	Ruiz-Tada, Fernández-Villanueva and Tragant	Facebook	CRs	English / Japanese	Use by bilingual speakers of English and Japanese interacting with multilingual audiences
<i>2: Complimenting behavior and praise in the political domain</i>					
6	Pano-Alamán	Twitter	Compliments	Peninsular Spanish	Use and functions in Spanish political discourse; co-occurring speech acts
7	Danziger and Kampf	Twitter	Compliments and praise	Hebrew / English	Public compliments and praise by international political actors as digital diplomatic tools
<i>3: Complimenting and fitness behavior and domains self-praise in health, sports</i>					
8	Rudolf von Rohr and Locher	Health forums	Compliments and self-praise	American and British English	Functions of compliments and self-praise in smoking cessation forums
9	Bączkowska	Lifestyle and fitness discussion forums and message boards	Compliments	Polish	Use of corpus linguistics in the study of compliments online; the realization of direct compliments
10	Heaney	The Guardian's over by over (OBO) cricket commentary online platform	Compliments and self-praise	British English (predominantly)	Predominantly male behavior in a sub-genre of live-text commentary; how complimenting is shaped by and shapes the OBO culture
11	Hernández Toribio and Mariottini	Twitter	Compliments	Peninsular Spanish	Use and function of compliments in the realization of congratulations
<i>4: Perception of self-praise</i>					
12	Luo and Hancock	Facebook	Humblebraggs	American English	The nature of <i>humblebraggs</i> ; perception of their use

To sum up, as the reader can see from this Introduction, the different contributions to this volume explore complimenting behaviour and the awarding of (self-) praise in social media in a range of languages / language varieties, in new sociodigital contexts – supported in some cases by SNSs not previously examined. They provide new insights into a variety of aspects of this exciting research area, as shown in Table 1. With respect to multimodal resources, examined in most chapters, these new insights correspond to the uses and functions of ‘likes’, emoticons/emoji, laughter, hashtags as well as unconventional orthography.

The contributions also illustrate different theoretical and methodological approaches, offering a contrastive perspective in some cases, with SNSs, languages and age groups in contrast. The volume also includes contributions that look at complimenting practices in multilingual environments – an under-investigated area of research in complimenting behavior.

With the focus of the volume on complimenting and (self-) praise giving behavior, and the different contexts examined, our aim has been to contribute to different (sub)fields of research such as socio- and intercultural pragmatics as well as Internet pragmatics, but also to the field of technology-mediated communication¹ more broadly: the different papers show the influence of technology in social interaction and the ways in which complimenting behavior and (self-) praise online can be influenced by a host of different factors in dynamic and complex ways.

Our hope is that this volume will both inform and stimulate readers, and that its publication will lead to further innovative research in complimenting behavior and (self-)praise. That our contributions here should themselves win compliments if not praise is for our readers to judge.

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1. In this volume, we have opted for the term *technology-mediated communication* in preference to *computer-mediated communication*. This is in order to more accurately reflect current use of technology in social media interaction where the role of computers is probably quite limited in comparison with the use of other technological devices such as mobile phones and ipads. The qualifier computer-mediated, however, has been retained with reference to *computer-mediated discourse analysis* as a field of study (see, e.g., Herring 2004).

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PART I

Complimenting behavior among friends and family

A comparative study of compliment responses among Chinese Renren users and American Facebook users

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Advancements in technology, spread of English language worldwide, increasing use of online social networking sites (SNSs) and globalization are recognized as highly powerful forces influencing everyday language use and practices. This has led to concerns that technologization, in line with globalization, and increasing dominance of English language will lead to the homogenization of the world, reducing cultural and linguistic diversity in discourse practices. which fall within the heart of this interconnectedness (Sifianou 2013). In this paper, we examine if, and to what extent, the use of SNSs lead to homogenization among discourse practices of Chinese and American English users in two similar SNSs (Facebook and Renren [the Facebook of China]), as reflected in their compliment response (CR) strategies. The findings may provide evidence as to the kinds of changes that increased interconnectedness may produce in language use of different speech communities. An analysis of the data revealed that increasing use of online SNSs and interconnectedness does not necessarily mean eradication of cultural differences in discourse practices but does decrease cultural differences in language use. The changes are uni-directional and dominated by the English language and American/Western Cultural values.

Keywords: compliment responses, social networking sites, Facebook, Renren, globalization, homogenization, discourse practices, cross-cultural communication, Chinese, American English

1. Introduction

Technology-mediated communication (TMC) is a growing area of research aiming to explore everyday interactions and the ways different medium-related affordances impact communication and social norms. A number of recent studies on compliments and compliment responses (CR) in the context of social networking

sites (Eslami, Jabbari, and Kuo 2015, 2019; Eslami and Yang 2018; Maíz-Arévalo 2013; Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Placencia and Lower 2013; Placencia, Lower, and Powell 2016) have revealed differences in complimenting behavior in online vs. face-to-face (FtF) settings. However, research on how technology enhances or displaces discourses and practices of tradition is scarce (Wilson and Peterson 2002). In order to expand research on cyber-pragmatics to other social networking sites and examine how the tools of new media are changing communicative practices, this study focuses on Chinese speakers' compliment response patterns on Renren (RR) (the Chinese version of Facebook) in comparison to previous studies on FtF complimenting behavior. Furthermore, cross-cultural differences found between Chinese and American English CR strategies in FtF contexts will be compared to examine if technology and online language use has eradicated or decreased differences in the use of discourse practices and if the change is bi-directional or uni-directional. As submitted by Smith (2007: 1994), the relationship between global and local processes might best be viewed as two sides to the same coin rather than being binary categories. Similarly, Sifianou (2010) shows the interplay between global and local in linguistic and cultural practices as the age of global mobility has created more fluid and seamless relationships.

With the development of online communities in social networking sites, there is great interest to examine the rise of online cultures and their users' corresponding behavior and language practices. Online cultures are a product of, and producer of culture simultaneously (Bell 2001). As revealed by a recent study (Eslami and Yang 2018) while RR and FB are two technically similar platforms, the same Chinese-English bilingual users who were members of both online cultures flexibly switched and adapted their compliment response patterns in response to the online community in which they were participating. Similarly, Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) examined online compliments between Spanish and English on one platform (Facebook). Their findings indicated that despite superficial similarities, compliments in Spanish and English follow remarkably different frequencies of use, reflecting deep cultural differences and indicating that offline language and cultural patterns are reproduced in virtual contexts.

Cross-cultural studies on FtF compliment responses between Chinese and English speakers have revealed that compliment response strategies were influenced by cultural protocols (Chen 1993; Tang and Zhang 2009). Chinese and American speakers were motivated respectively by the modesty maxim and the agreement maxim. However, recent research on online complimenting behavior indicates that unique features of TMC, such as "disembodiment," "asynchronicity," and "hybridity," have resulted in new strategies and features of online compliment responses (e.g., Maíz-Arevalo 2012). Although there are several cross-cultural studies comparing FtF complimenting behavior in different languages, there seems to be a lack

of studies that focus on the cross-cultural comparison of online CRs on different online platforms.

Examinations of whether the emergence of SNSs has broken down culture boundaries are needed where online CR strategies used by Chinese and Americans in SNS interactions are compared to cross-cultural differences found between these two linguistic communities in CR practices used in FtF interactions. Such investigations may enhance research findings on the effect of globalization and increasing interconnectedness on language use and discourse practices (Sifianou 2013).

In the next section, we briefly review the literature on cultural differences in SNSs and how different online cultures have emerged in different SNS communities. Following that, a brief overview of complimenting behavior is presented, focusing on Chinese and American English CR patterns. We continue the chapter by describing the methodology and data used in the study. Section four discusses results and the possible reasons underlying the choice of response by the two speech communities in this study. Finally, this chapter concludes with a summary of the study and points to consider in future research.

2. Literature review

2.1 Social networking sites and culture

Ease of access to the Internet has made it possible for people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds to participate in different online cultures and communities. Consequently, it has become important to understand the language use implications of exposure to different online cultures.

SNSs, recognized as a vital part of many individuals' daily life, make it possible to stay connected to family, friends, and other online users. An SNS is a web-based service that allows individuals to construct a public or semipublic profile, build and maintain relationships, and display their social relations to other members (boyd and Ellison 2008). Maintaining relationships with family and friends, communicating thoughts and activities, and meeting new individuals are primary functions of SNSs. Facebook (FB) is thought to be one of the most popular SNSs, attracting users of different nationalities. As of March 2017, there were over 1.94 billion active FB users (Facebook MAUs). RR is similar to FB, with a similar platform, and used by a majority of Chinese people. In 2017 (Statista 2019), the Chinese social media platform RR.com had around 257 million active users.

Emerging literature submits that different online communities may have their own cultural attributes. As indicated by Fuchs (2008) online, open-source, community culture highlights the values of sharing freely, adapting, redistributing source

materials, and promoting collaborative and cooperative perspectives. Similar to offline cultures, online cultures may influence individuals by using shared group norms. Qiu, Lin, and Leung (2013) revealed cultural differences in SNSs by comparing FB and RR. They found that users who were members of both online SNSs switched their in-group sharing behaviors in response to the online community they were in with a flexible and dynamic manner. Similarly, research indicates that the family-oriented and territorially rooted culture of Catalonia was reflected in the way they formed social relationships on the Internet (Castells, Tubella, Sancho, Díaz de la Isla, and Wellman 2004). Cho's (2010) study evidenced that users of the Korean-based SNS, Cyworld, tend to keep their public profile anonymous, have fewer but more intimate friends, and use more non-verbal communication strategies (e.g., graphics or icons); whereas users of FB, exhibit more frequent self-disclosure, have more friends, and use more direct text-based communication.

Although online practices of cultural communities on different SNSs have been researched (e.g., Cho 2010; Qiu, Lin, and Leung 2013; Marcus and Krishnamurthi 2009), there seems to be no study that has examined culturally-based language patterns as related to the use of compliment response on different SNSs. The only cross-cultural study done on language use patterns was conducted by Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) on online compliments between Spanish and English on one platform (Facebook). Their findings indicated that despite superficial similarities, compliments in Spanish and English follow remarkably different frequencies of use, which reflect deep cultural differences. Their findings seem to be in line with sociolinguistic studies that place the Spanish and British cultures within the positive and negative politeness spheres, respectively (e.g., Lorenzo-Dus 2001), indicating that offline cultural patterns are reproduced in online interactions. In the following section, we will present related literature on complimenting behavior in FtF and online contexts, focusing on American and Chinese compliment response patterns.

In SNSs, where social relationship maintenance is the primary function, phatic speech acts such as complimenting others for the purpose of "greasing the social wheels" (Wolfson 1983: 89), are ubiquitous (Eslami et al. 2015; Maíz-Arévalo 2013; Placencia et al. 2016). Maíz-Arévalo (2013) states that casual 'chit chatting' among participants abound in SNSs who communicate solely for the pleasure of establishing or keeping social rapport. Previous research has examined cultural differences between SNSs such as FB and RR. However, there is no study that focuses on differences in compliment response patterns of the same users who are members of both SNSs.

2.2 Compliments and compliment responses

A compliment, as Holmes (1988: 446) defined it, is “a speech act which 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 the hearer.” Compliments, as positively affective speech acts oil the social wheels, pay attention to positive face wants and thus increase or consolidate solidarity between people (Holmes 1988). As submitted by Wolfson (1983, 1989) complimenting behavior mirrors the socio-cultural values and politeness norms of language users. The study of compliments can be traced back to the work of Pomerantz (1978) while Manes and Wolfson’s (1981) study is considered to be one of the earliest studies on compliments in American English.

An extensive body of research – utilizing both discourse completion tests (DCTs) and natural data collection procedures – has been devoted to the study of compliments and CRs (see Chen 2010 for a review). Similar to compliments, responding to compliments maintains solidarity and increases harmony in social interactions (e.g., Manes and Wolfson 1981). Speakers may choose from a set of possible compliment responses available (accept, reject, or evade). Nevertheless, responding to compliments is not as easy as it seems. Rejecting a compliment, mainly used to enhance solidarity, may be considered impolite; and agreeing may be considered arrogant (Pomerantz 1978). The majority of compliment responses fall somewhere in between (Lower, this volume).

Based on Leech’s (1983) politeness maxims of agreement and modesty, accepting a compliment adheres to the Agreement Maxim of minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement, while rejecting it can indicate adherence to the modesty maxim, the minimization of the praise of self, and the maximization of dispraise of self. Researchers like Pomerantz (1978) and Holmes (1986) have identified a wide range of CR strategies to handle these dilemmas in face-to-face conversations. These CRs are largely divided into three categories: (a) acceptance, with appreciation tokens like thanking and agreeing comments, (b) rejection, by disagreeing or downgrading the compliment, and (c) deflection/evasion, by using strategies such as shifting credit or giving an informative comment. Research shows that acceptance is mainly favored in Western cultures (Pomerantz 1978; Wolfson and Manes 1980) while rejection is favored more frequently in Eastern cultures (Chen 1993; Chen and Yang 2010; Daikuhara 1986; Saito and Beecken 1997).

2.3 Compliment responses in Chinese

Cross-cultural studies on CRs indicate that in Eastern cultures such as Chinese and Japanese, (see Ruiz-Tada, Fernández-Villanueva, and Tragant, this volume) traditionally rejection is the most common CR strategy (Chen 1993; Tang and Zhang 2009; Saito and Beecken 1997). Based on Leech's (1983) politeness framework the modesty maxim plays a more pivotal role in CR practices in Eastern contexts than in English-speaking cultures in which the agreement maxim plays a more pivotal role.

As mentioned by Chen and Yang (2010), Chinese is probably the second most studied language in CR research, next only to the different varieties of English (Chen 1993; Loh 1993; Rose and Ng Kwai-fong 1999; Spencer-Oatey and Ng 2001; Tang and Zhang 2009; Yuan 2002; Yu 2003, 2004). These studies have revealed a wide range of findings about the CR behavior of Chinese speakers. Chen and Yang, use macro strategies of the accepting, evading, and rejecting continuum to group the findings of different studies for ease of comparison. Based on their categorization, Chen's (1993) findings show that Xi'an Chinese language users rejected compliments the majority of the time, whereas Loh (1993), as reported in Spencer-Oatey and Ng (2001: 181), shows Chinese users with a greater acceptance rate compared to rejection. Studies by Rose and Ng Kwai-fong (1999) and Spencer-Oatey and Ng (2001) on participants in Hong Kong and Mainland China both revealed that acceptance is judged by their subjects as the preferred choice for responding to compliments. In contrast with the studies above, in Yu's (2004) work on CRs in Taiwan, participants more often used an evading strategy.

Table 1. Changes of Chinese compliment responses over time

	Subjects	Accepting %	Evading %	Rejecting %
Chen (1993)	Xi'an Chinese	1.03	3.41	95.73
Loh (1993)	HK Chinese in UK	41.00	N/A	22.00
Yuan (2002; DCT)	Kunming Chinese	50.28	20.79	28.93
Yuan (2002; Natural)	Kunming Chinese	31.26	34.76	33.98
Yu (2004)	Taiwanese	13.00	63.00	24.00
Tang and Zhang (2009)	Chinese in Australia	48.82	36.66	14.55
Chen (2010)	Xi'an Chinese	62.60	28.27	9.13
Guo, Zhou and Chow (2012)	Shanghai Chinese	38.00	39.00	23.00

In sum, the findings in Table 1 show a noticeable variation in CR strategies used by Chinese in different studies. However, as submitted by Chen and Yang (2010), still, on average, Chinese CRs show a larger percentage of rejection than English does. Similar findings have been found for other East Asian languages such as Japanese and Korean (Chen 2010). Variations in data collection methods could

partially explain the variations in findings as reflected in Yuan's (2002) study using DCT vs. natural data. On the other hand, method of data collection cannot be the only reason for variation as findings about CRs in English, for example, seem to be rather consistent regardless of what methods are being used by researchers. Early works on American English (Wolfson and Manes 1980; Manes and Wolfson 1981) are all based on naturally occurring data; later works that study English CRs as part of comparative studies between English and other languages adopt drastically different data collection methods: role-play, the DCT, interview, strategy assessment, as well as natural conversation. While findings about languages other than English have differed from one language to another, the findings about English have all placed English as a language that clearly favors compliment acceptance. Chen and Yang (2010) believe the change in CR strategies in their study reflects societal changes that have taken place in Xi'an and the Northwest Region it represents. They believe that these changes have partially happened due to the contact of Chinese culture and other cultures that have been brought into the region by the country's political and economic reform.

In a globalized and a fast-shrinking world where connection between cultures and languages has become the norm, changes in discourse practices are inevitable. Most importantly, technology has resulted in increasing interconnectedness between people all over the world and online language use is a vital part of this process. It certainly is insightful to examine if online language use is aligned with the discourse practices in FtF contexts or if it shows divergence and less affinity to the FtF language use, aligned with the dominating effects of the English language in this globalized world.

2.4 Online complimenting behavior

Technological advancement and increasing use of online communication have contributed to an increasing number of studies on online complimenting behavior (e.g., Das 2010; Cirillo 2012; Eslami et al. 2015, 2019; Eslami and Yang 2018; Maíz-Arévalo 2013; Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Placencia and Lower 2013, 2017; Placencia et al. 2016). These studies have indicated how complimenting behavior is shaped by technology and how globalization processes may result in homogenizing behavior (Sifianou 2013) (see also Ruiz-Tada et al., this volume). Among these studies, only a few have focused on compliment response strategies (e.g., Cirillo 2012; Eslami et al. 2015; Eslami and Yang 2018; Maíz-Arévalo 2013; Placencia and Lower 2017; Placencia et al. 2016) (see also Lower; Placencia and Powell; Ruiz-Tada et al. in this volume). Placencia and Lower (2017) provide a comprehensive overview of compliment and compliment response studies on social media.

Most of the studies on online CR patterns show a variety of findings, mainly due to different classification systems and variation in data collection methodologies used. Categorizing affordances of social media technology such as the function of 'like' or emoticons have led to noticeable divergence in researchers' findings. Placencia et al. (2016) affirm that digital elements such as emoticons (e.g. smileys) are medium-specific phenomena – affordances of the technology – that nonetheless, perform interpersonal functions, and can thus be assigned a certain value (e.g., a smiley can be interpreted as signaling acceptance of a compliment). Maíz-Arévalo (2013) and Eslami et al. (2015) argue that emoticons and the 'like' function are implicit or non-verbal responses, respectively. Other affordances provided by asynchronous online communication offer the alternative of no compliment response which can be a 'marked' discourse practice in FtF interaction.

Similar to FtF contexts, complimentees on SNSs need to deal with conflicting cultural values of agreement or modesty (self-praise avoidance) when responding to compliments. Maíz-Arévalo (2013), for example, demonstrated that compared to FtF communication, online communication demonstrated new compliment response strategies (Maíz-Arévalo 2013). Most users availed themselves of the built-in toggle 'like' as the compliment response strategy. While the 'like' function is unique to FB, other SNSs have equivalent mechanisms to convey a similar message. The 'like' function on FB offers a simple and relatively generic option for responding to compliments. Placencia and Lower (2013) maintain that the 'like' function "essentially constitutes a cyber "thumbs up" gesture, expressing approval of the hearer, his/her comments, possessions, taste or skills, etc" and it is in this sense that they consider it as a subset of compliments, albeit a medium-specific one (p. 633). They acknowledge, nonetheless, that there is an element of opacity in the use of 'like' in that while its force is relatively clear as an expression of approval, the object of the 'liking' is often ambiguous as "there is no explicit indication of what is liked" (p. 634).

Concerning compliment responses, Placencia et al. (2016) give FB's 'like' function its own place as a sub-category of compliment acceptance because, as they say, "'liking' something is a positive evaluation," which suggests acceptance (p. 648). 'Likes' could be interpreted as tokens of appreciation or agreement (p. 648). While there has been some research on compliment responses of different language speakers (English, Persian, and Spanish), there are hardly any cross-cultural comparisons of online complimenting behavior. An exception to this is Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) who compared the online compliments of Spanish and English users of FB using a systemic functional framework. The analysis reveals that compliments provide a system of choices where several available options help FB users to express their evaluation of the other from various perspectives. More

importantly, and of relevance to the present study, is that compliments in both languages followed different frequencies of use, reflecting important cultural differences. Spanish FB users preferred to express their compliments as emotional outbursts signified by exclamative sentences, whereas British English users were inclined to use objective evaluations and opted for declarative sentences (see also Danziger and Kampf in this volume).

While there have been few studies on cross-cultural comparisons of online complimenting behavior as presented above, there are hardly any studies comparing complimenting behavior on different social networking sites. An exception to this is the study done by Eslami and Yang (2018). As the findings of Eslami and Yang's (2018) study indicated, while RR and FB are two technically similar platforms, the same Chinese-English bilingual users who were members of both online cultures flexibly switched and adapted their compliment response patterns in response to the online community in which they were participating.

Building on previous work on complimenting behavior, and complimenting in online contexts, this study seeks to examine if online culture, as formed by assemblages of shared practices, expectations, and structures networked through computer technology (Fuchs 2008), can lead to different language practices. The main purpose of this study is to understand language use ramifications (e.g., compliment response patterns) of exposure to different online SNSs by two different groups of users. The specific research questions addressed are the following:

1. How do Chinese speakers' CRs on RR differ from American English speakers' CRs on FB?
2. How are Chinese speakers' CRs on RR different from face-to-face CR patterns found in previous research?
3. Are the cross-cultural differences between American and Chinese CR patterns reported in FtF interactions increased or decreased when these users use online SNSs?

3. Methodology

In order to examine the difference of CRs between Chinese speakers and American English speakers, a comparative analysis was conducted. Additionally, the results of the study were compared to those of previous studies, which investigated face-to-face CRs by Chinese speakers.

3.1 Participants and data

The participants were 38 FB users (11 male and 27 female) and 31 RR users (6 male and 25 female). All the FB participants were in their 20s–30s except for three participants who were in their 40s–50s. All the RR participants were in their 20s–30s. These participants were selected from one of the researchers' FB and RR friend lists. They were identified as "active FB users" (All the participants had at least a weekly update on their FB or RR timelines).

The researchers wrote a message on FB and RR to the potential participants explaining the aims of the study. In the message, the researchers also informed the participants that they will ensure anonymity to protect the participants' privacy. The participants demonstrated informed consent by responding affirmatively to the message. Then, the researchers began to collect compliments and CRs from the FB and RR participants' most recent posts that appeared in their timelines at the time of data collection, collecting 1–3 posts from each participant. A system was used by which the name, gender, and age of each participant were coded. Additionally, the exact wording of the compliments and CRs, the topic of compliment, the unique features of online compliment responses ('likes' and emoticons) were also recorded. Compliment topics on FB included the following: appearance (43.40%), performance/ability (11.33%), personality (3.79%), pictures of food, children, scenery, etc. (32.06%), and other (9.42%). For the topic "other," the objects of the compliments were shared links posted by the user. Compliment topics on RR were similar to those on FB. The percentages included appearance (51.16%), performance/ability (20.93%), pictures of food, scenery, etc. (18.61%), and other (9.30%). The topic "other" refers to compliments made on shared blogs or pictures. To preserve the anonymity of the participants, any reference to the complimenters' and complimentees' identity (e.g., names) was removed.

3.2 Coding scheme and analysis

After the CRs were collected, they were coded into different patterns by adapting Maíz-Arévalo's (2013) system of online Spanish response to compliments with several modifications, to reflect the features of the data in the current study. Specifically, the "combination" strategy was added. In sum, the adapted system consists of three CR patterns: explicit response, implicit response, and no response (see Figure 1). Under the explicit response pattern, there were three strategies: accept, reject, and evade. Non-verbal strategies were divided into 'likes' or emoticons. In other words, if the participant did not provide any text response but only clicked 'like' on the

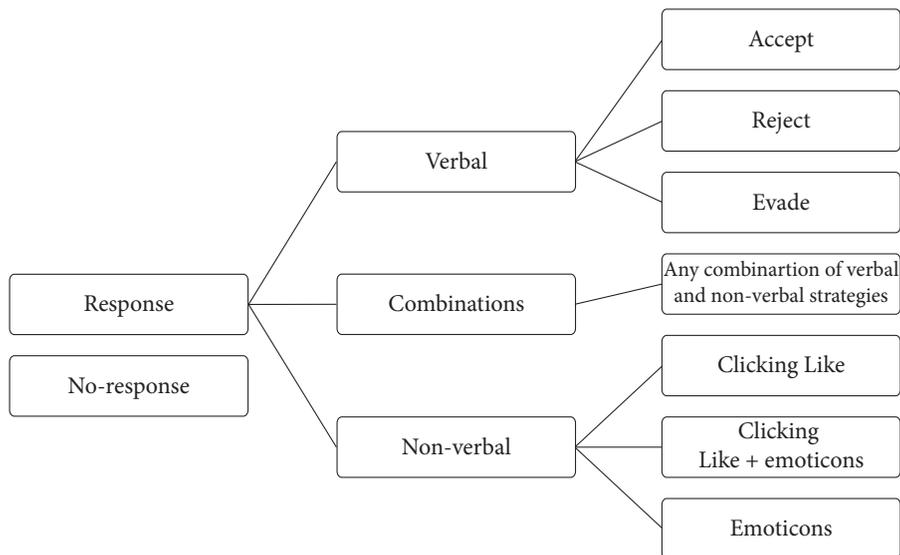


Figure 1. Coding scheme of the current study

compliment or responded with emoticons, those responses were considered non-verbal. Combination strategy refers to strategies that contain both explicit and implicit response patterns. No response means the complimentee did not respond to the compliment. Another researcher coded 30% of the sample, and inter-rater reliability was .95.

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Comparing Chinese and American English online compliment responses on Renren and Facebook

4.1.1 *Verbal CRs*

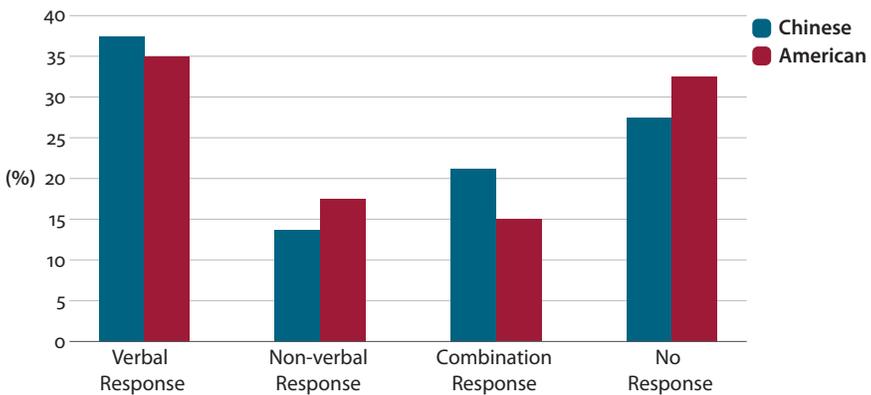
Table 2 and Figure 2 display the proportions of CRs on RR and FB. Verbal CR was the most frequently used strategy by both Chinese and American participants (RR: 37.5%, FB: 35%), followed by no-response strategy (RR: 27.5%, FB: 32.5%). Non-verbal strategies in Chinese compliment responses on RR, (RR: 13.75%, FB: 17.5%) and combination strategies in American compliment response on FB (RR: 21.25%, FB: 15%) were the least used strategies.

Table 2. Types and frequencies of compliment responses on Renren and Facebook

	Verbal response			Non-verbal response		Combination *			No response
	Accept	Reject	Evade	'Like'	Emot.	Accept+	Reject+	Evade+	
RR (n = 80)	19 23.75%	5 6.25%	6 7.50%	2 2.5%	9 11.25%	13 16.25%	3 3.75%	1 1.25%	22 27.5%
FB (n = 80)	25 31.25%	0 0%	3 3.75%	14 17.50%	0 0%	7 8.75%	5 6.25%	0 0%	26 32.50%

Note: Emot. = Use of emoticons; Accept+ = Accept accompanied with emoticons; Reject+ = Reject accompanied with emoticons; Evade+ = Evade accompanied with emotions.

* Combination: Both verbal and non-verbal responses are used in a single compliment response sequence.

**Figure 2.** Online compliment response patterns

As shown in Figure 3, for RR users, accept is the most frequently used strategy (23.75%) (Examples 1 and 2 below), followed by evade (7.50%) (Example 3) and reject (6.25%) (Example 3).

- (1) F (emale) 2 has posted a photo of herself.
M (ale) 2: 我是来点赞的!!
'I'm here to click "Like"!!
F2: 多谢鼓励!
'Thank you for your encouragement!'
- (2) F5 has posted a photo of her decorated nails.
M5: 哈哈,我觉得小清新!
'Hahaha, I think it looks fresh!'
F5: 我也觉得还不错啊!
'I also think it's good!'

(3) F1 has posted a photo of a dish she cooked.

F2: 唔。。。想吃 🍴
‘Oh, I want to eat that!’

F1: 哈哈!
‘Haha!’

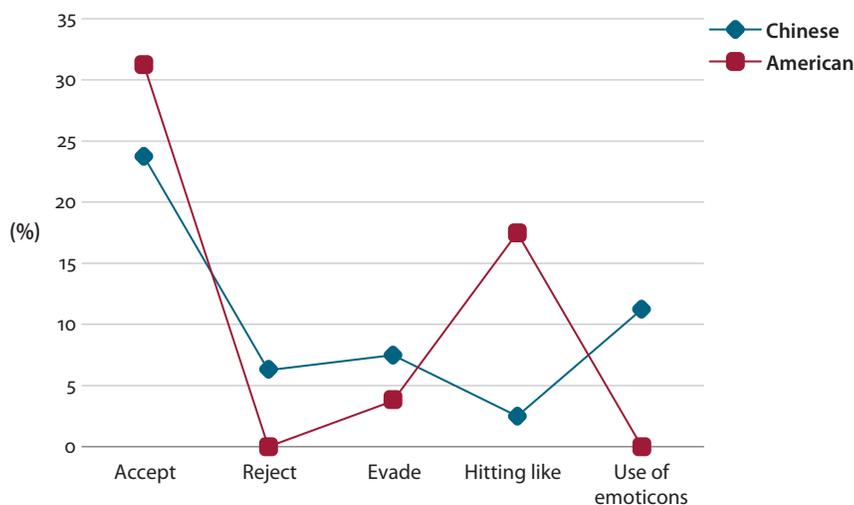


Figure 3. Verbal and non-verbal compliment response strategies used by the two groups

Similarly, accept accounts for the highest number of compliment responses on FB (31.25%) followed by evade (3.75%). There was no case of the ‘reject’ CR strategy on FB. Among accept responses, the most commonly used strategy is showing appreciation, as in (4):

(4) F13 has updated her profile picture.

F2: Beauties!

F13: Thank you darling!

Evading, as in (5) amounted to 7.50% of total Chinese compliment responses on RR.

(5) F6 has posted a photo of two DIY (Do it yourself) seals she made.

F7: 你刻的吗?好棒好棒~在哪儿学的?
‘Did you carve it by yourself? Well done! How did you learn it?’

F6: 没学过,大二开始,买了工具就上石刻了。
‘I didn’t learn it before. In my sophomore year, I started practicing it after I bought the tools.’

Compared to Chinese RR users (7.5%), the use of evading strategies was almost half as much for American English speakers on FB, (3.75%). Just like the examples in the Chinese corpus, this option is more likely to be used when the compliment is accompanied by another potential topic:

- (6) F11 has updated a group of pictures taken by herself.
 F12: XX (the name of user 1), those pictures are amazing!! The action shots are really cool! I really need to take lessons from you!
 F11: I will be offering some photography workshops this fall. Feel free to join!

As the least frequently used strategy, rejecting accounted for 6.25% of the Chinese compliment responses on RR as shown in the following example:

- (7) F6: has posted a photo of herself.
 M7: 气质美女
 ‘Stylish girl’
 F6: 哪有
 ‘Not really’

American English speakers used no rejecting strategies in the corpus examined. Given that they are motivated by the agreement principle (Chen 1993), and since the corpus of this study is relatively small, this result is not that surprising.

4.1.2 *Non-verbal responses*

Non-verbal CRs in face-to-face communication are often realized through body language and facial expressions. Non-verbal response strategies on online SNSs consist of two major types: ‘like’ and emoticons. The ratio of non-verbal CR strategies was 13.75% in Chinese compliment responses on RR. Use of emoticons accounted for the majority of non-verbal responses (11.25%). Only 2.50% of Chinese compliment responses on RR were performed by clicking ‘like’. This is mainly related to technological and design related issues of the two platforms (see Figure 4). On RR, it is more convenient to use emoticons than ‘like’ whereas on FB, the opposite situation held true until 2017 as it was more convenient to use ‘like’ than emoticons.

According to Dresner and Herring (2010), emoticons and the ‘like’ function can be considered as illocutionary force indicating devices as they can perform the speech act alone (e.g., ‘like’ meaning acceptance). If these devices were used with verbal strategies of CR, we considered them as modifiers enhancing or softening the force of the illocutionary act. For instance, an emoticon representing a shy face can be regarded as downgrading the force of acceptance. Using this emoticon enables online language users to establish rapport by agreeing with the complimenter and following the modesty principle as well. Additionally, the use of non-verbal



Figure 4. 'Like' button on Facebook and Renren

strategies such as 'like' or emoticons can clarify interlocutors' positive intent and prevent misunderstandings in cases where a compliment and/or its response can be misinterpreted.

- (8) F17 has posted a photo of herself.

M7: 特别特别的喜欢这一张~~

'I especially love this photo!'

F17: [兴奋] 😄 (Excited face)

There were no instances of emoticon use on FB, whereas 'like' was used (17.5%) by American English speakers on FB.

4.1.3 Combination strategies

Combination takes up 21.25% of Chinese compliment responses on RR. These included accept + emoticons (Example 9), evade + emoticons (Example 10), and reject + emoticons (Example 11).

- (9) F15 has updated the profile picture.

F2: 高三一别我都要不认识你了!好美丽~[吻] 😘

'I can hardly recognize you after graduating from high school! So beautiful! [Kiss]'

F15: 你不也是? 😊 [微笑]

'Aren't you the same? [Smile]'

- (10) F11 has posted a photo of her dress on Halloween.

F2: 真可爱~~

'Really cute~~'

F12: 你那边有活动不:)

'Did you have a plan too? :) [smiley face]'

- (11) F14 has posted a photo of herself.
 F22: 好瘦啦!![色迷迷] 😍
 ‘You look so slim! [Flirting face]’
 F14: [不]真没有] 🙄
 ‘[Shaking head] I’m really not’

As shown in Figure 5, the proportion of combination strategies on FB was lower than RR (RR: 21.25%, FB: 15%). These included accept + emoticon (Example 12) and evade + emoticons (Example 13).

- (12) F20 has posted a photo of her and her friends.
 F2: XX (referring to user 1), Your hair is sooo long [smile]
 F20: ^^biggest compliment ever
- (13) F12 has posted a photo of her new haircut.
 F10: So cute. I miss you, beautiful!
 F12: I miss you too Kayla!! [Sad face]

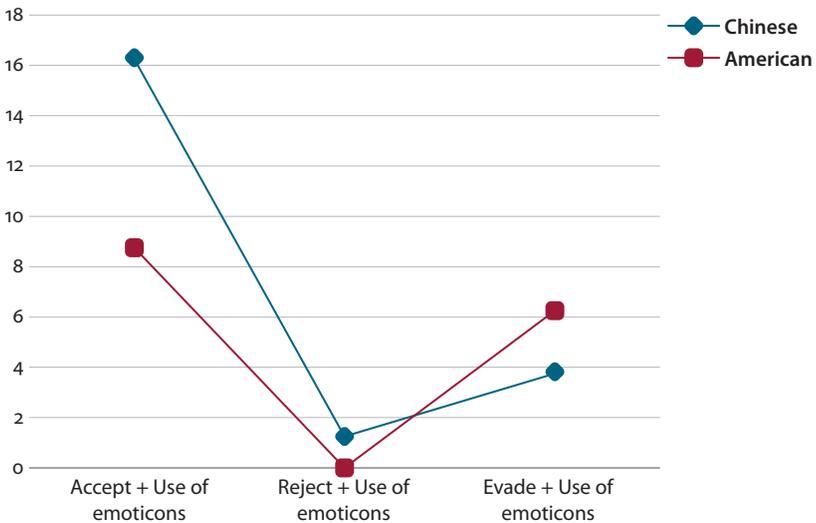


Figure 5. Compliment response strategies: Combination strategies

The most frequently used combination strategy in both data sets was accept + emoticons followed by evade + emoticons and reject + emoticons.

4.1.4 *Chinese compliment responses on Renren and American English compliment responses on Facebook: Discussion*

As presented in Figures 2 and 3 above, online users of RR and FB have a multifaceted system of response choices as they receive compliments. One of these choices is not responding to a compliment. This strategy is not a choice likely to be made in FtF conversations, where a compliment – as an initiating move – is expected to be followed by a response. However, on SNSs, where communications are mainly asynchronous, non-response is not considered a marked strategy but rather a natural effect of the asynchronous nature of the communication channel. Furthermore, by using this strategy, complimentees can avoid self-praise while not rejecting the compliment.

As shown in Table 2 above, the Chinese complimentees did not respond to 27.5% of the compliments they received on RR. This figure was 32.50% for American FB users. This shows that Chinese speakers had a higher rate of responding to compliments (73.5%) compared to American FB users (68.50%). This may indicate more obligation felt by Chinese participants to respond to a compliment than FB users in English.

After deciding to respond to a compliment, speakers need to decide to accept, reject, evade, or use a combination of these three strategies. For each of these options they can opt for verbal strategies, non-verbal strategies or combinations of both. Verbal responses to compliments constituted 37.5% of the responses by Chinese participants on RR and 35% on FB. Again, using verbal response seems to need more effort than non-verbal, an indication that Chinese participants spent more effort to respond to a compliment. Acceptance was the most frequently used compliment response strategy used by both groups (RR: 23.75%, FB: 31.25%). However, the use of evasion and rejection strategies was 13.75% by Chinese RR users compared to 3.75% by American English FB users. This shows a tendency for Chinese to reject/evade a compliment three times more than American FB users (13.75% vs 3.75%). Furthermore, results showed that American English FB users employed more acceptance strategies in response to compliments they received than Chinese RR users (FB: 31.25%, RR: 23.75%). On the other hand, the use of evasion and rejection strategies was higher on RR compared with FB. These findings may reveal a higher tendency in American English users towards the agreement maxim than Chinese participants and a higher tendency towards alignment with the modesty maxim by Chinese compared with American English speakers.

Combination strategies were used more by FB users than RR (RR: 27.5%, FB: 32.50%). However, when combination strategies were used, FB participants mainly used non-verbal responses to enhance the force of acceptance (accept + like) whereas Chinese RR participants used accept + emoticons mainly to soften the force of acceptance (i.e., using shy face). This is aligned with the modesty principle in Chinese society.

The results of our study suggest that the use of different strategies in responding to compliments on the two SNS platforms were possibly due to cultural differences among the platform communities, and not because of technical capabilities or design. Users shifted and aligned their response strategies to compliments in conformance with both the national/local culture of their speech community and the global culture affected by the dominance of English language and its norms of language use. The Chinese RR users' response patterns are more in line with the modesty maxim than the American FB users and less in line with the agreement maxim compared to AE Facebook users. This was reflected in Chinese online users' rate of fewer acceptance strategies than FB users, more evading and rejecting strategies than FB users, and Chinese use of emoticons to downgrade the force of their acceptance.

4.2 Comparing Chinese face-to-face and online compliment responses

One of the research questions addressed in this study was to compare Chinese FtF CRs to CRs on RR in order to explore whether SNS has influenced compliment responding behavior and if cross-cultural differences between English and Chinese CR patterns reported in FtF interactions are changed in online SNS contexts. To do this comparison we used Chen and Yang's (2010) findings since it is a relatively recent study and because they compare their findings with previous research on FtF CRs by Chen (1993). Chen and Yang (2010) used DCT to collect their data; for better comparability, we also use another more recent study by Guo et al. (2012) that uses natural data to examine Chinese CR patterns from Shanghai as online CR strategies is natural language use in cyberspace.

Table 3. Changes of compliment responses over time

	Subjects	Accept %	Evade %	Reject %
Chen (1993)	Xi'an Chinese	1.03	3.41	95.73
Loh (1993)	HK Chinese in UK	41.00	N/A	22.00
Yuan (2002; DCT)	Kunming Chinese	50.28	20.79	28.93
Yuan (2002; Natural)	Kuming Chinese	31.26	34.76	33.98
Yu (2004)	Taiwanese Chinese	13.00	63.00	24.00
Tang and Zhang (2009)	Chinese in Australia	48.82	36.66	14.55
Chen and Yang (2010)	Xi'an Chinese	62.60	28.27	9.13
Guo et al. (2012)	Shanghai Chinese	38.00	39.00	23.00
Current study	Chinese RR users	74.14	15.52	10.34

The analysis of compliment response strategies by Chinese RR users compared to previous studies done in FtF contexts indicates that when the participants responded to compliments on RR, they used more accept strategies compared to Chen and Yang's study (74.14% vs. 62.60%). Comparing our findings with Guo et al.'s (2012), who used natural data, indicates a drastic change in the ratio of accept in our data compared to their study (74.14% vs. 38%). Accordingly, evading strategies on RR had the lowest ratio (15.52%) compared with Chen and Yang's (2010) study (28.27%) and Guo et al.'s (2012) study (39%). Rejecting strategies were used with a similar ratio in our study compared with Chen and Yang's (2010) study (10.34% vs. 9.13%). However, the percentage of rejecting strategies was more than twice as much in Guo et al.'s (2012) study (23%).

When we check the studies on Chinese CRs (Table 3), we find that the compliment responding behavior of Chinese differs radically from study to study. Still, on average, Chinese CRs, similar to other East-Asian languages, display a larger percentage of rejection than many other languages. English and German, for instance, seem to have a clear preference for compliment acceptance over rejection (see Chen 2010 for a review).

As submitted by Chen and Yang (2010), the variation in findings about Chinese CRs is a reflection of reality. This difference could be diachronic/longitudinal – as some of the difference can be attributed to change over a period of time (Spencer-Oatey and Ng 2001; Yuan 2002). Strong evidence for this change is provided by Chen and Yang (2010) as they used a quasi-longitudinal study to compare Chen's (1993) findings with their study to determine if there are significant changes in the CRs of Xi'an Chinese. Their study replicates Chen (1993) in the same location, using the same instrument of data collection and same classification system but with a different subject population. Compared to Chen's (1993) study, Chen and Yang's (2010) study shows a drastic change in the way Xi'an Chinese perform their CRs. Chen (1993) participants mainly rejected the compliments (95%) and hardly accepted any (1% acceptance). Contrary to Chen (1993) findings, Chen and Yang (2010) found acceptance to be the highest strategy (62.6%) and rejection the lowest (9.13%).

Comparing CR strategies from Chinese speakers, the results of our study reveal an acceptance rate even higher than Chen and Yang's (2010) study (Figure 6). The rate of acceptance in our study is almost twice as much as Guo et al.'s (2012) study in which natural data was used (74.14 vs. 38). The percentage of rejection strategies was half as much in our study compared with Guo et al.'s.

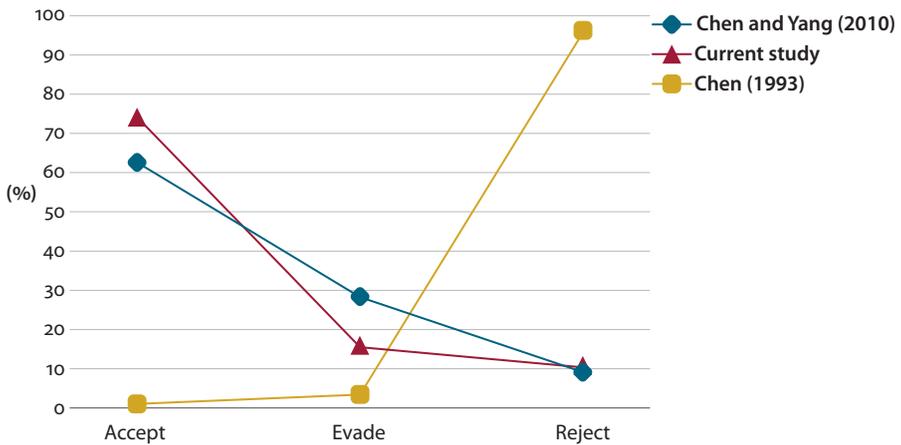


Figure 6. Chen 1993, Chen and Yang 2010 and current study

As it relates to cross-cultural differences between Chinese CRs and English, Chen's (1993) study revealed a drastic difference between English and Chinese CR behavior in FtF contexts (Figure 7). However, as our findings show (Figure 8), this difference has dramatically diminished. The Chinese CR patterns have moved towards English language use norms.

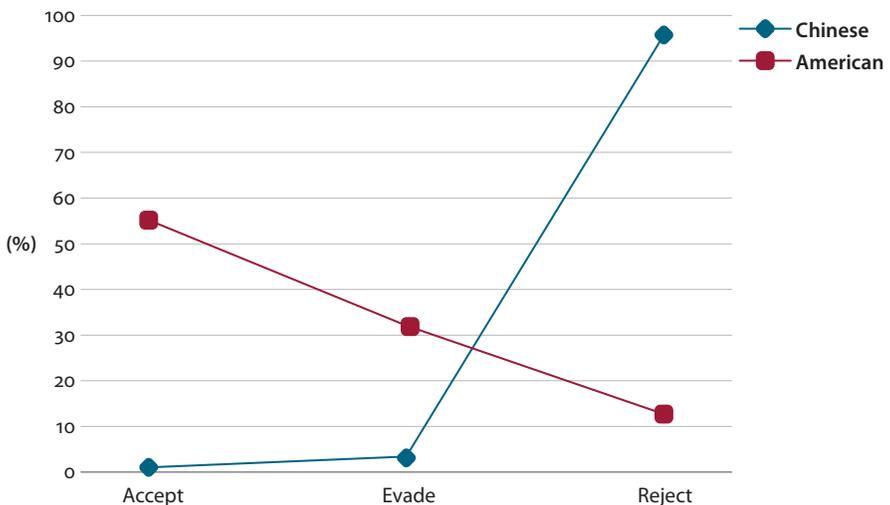


Figure 7. English and Chinese compliment response patterns based on Chen's (1993) findings

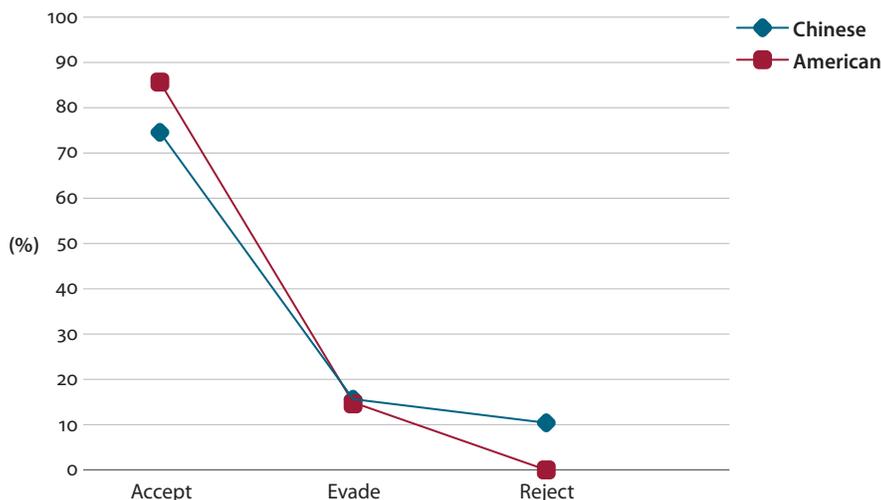


Figure 8. Cross-cultural differences between Chinese and English in this study

Our findings confirm that the Chinese and Americans still follow different patterns to a small degree (more acceptance and less rejection in English compared to Chinese). However, the differences between the Chinese and American English CR behavior is much less than before. It can be concluded that globalization and use of technology has a homogenizing power and plays a role in decreasing cultural differences in language use. The direction of change in discourse patterns in CR behavior in different linguistic communities (e.g., East Asian, Persian) seems to be towards English norms as the norms in CR behavior in English speaking communities such as Australian and American English communities have remained relatively stable (Chen and Yang 2010). Thus, it can be concluded that the change is mainly unidirectional with English norms prevailing over the discourse practice norms of other languages.

5. Concluding remarks

This study's findings endorsed the assumption that online cultural differences present in SNSs elicited distinct communicative behaviors, as exemplified in the compliment response patterns, from the same users. With online social networks becoming a highly viable research tool, and with the predominance of compliments being used in these sites, the current research not only offers a characterization of compliment responses in SNSs utilizing naturally derived data, but it also reveals

the force of globalization and technology in homogenizing language practices of groups from different language backgrounds and the dominance of English language norms in the change process.

These results are interesting because previous research on CR strategies among Chinese speakers (see Chen 2010 for a review) claimed that acceptance was the least employed CR strategy and rejection was the most polite CR strategy. This change of CR strategy could be due to the fact that these Chinese speakers were influenced by English pragmatics through language contact and the increased dominance of English as a lingua franca (e.g., Chen and Yang 2010). The present research confirmed that technology has provided more options and more flexibility in using discourse practices that are aligned both with the local/national culture (Chinese) as well as the global culture dominated by English speakers' cultural norms, as realized by compliment response patterns. The Chinese users opted for more acceptance strategies in response to compliments received on RR than in face-to-face contexts, and evasion and rejection strategies decreased compared with FtF contexts. Our research revealed that the Chinese participants change their discourse practices in different contexts and modalities of language use (online vs FtF) to accommodate both global and local norms of language use.

From the analyses of actual online compliment responses, our research makes two unique contributions to cross-cultural research. Specifically, our findings revealed that users in both FtF and online contexts remain aligned with the modesty maxim in Chinese cultural norms (national culture) and less aligned with the agreement principle compared to English speakers.

Furthermore, online language use encourages a move towards using English norms in CR patterns and thus leading toward some level of cultural homogenization. However, not all of this may be related to technology as shown in the diachronic change of CR strategies in FtF contexts as well (see Chen 1993 vs. Chen and Yang 2010). Chinese speakers, due to economic and social changes, when responding to compliments in FtF contexts, are moving towards exhibiting alignment with the cultural value of agreement and, thus, accept compliments more often. This is more so in online language use (RR) than in FtF contexts.

Our findings have important theoretical and practical implications. In terms of theoretical significance, our study demonstrates that technological capabilities on SNSs afford new norms and practices that were not previously observed in face-to-face interactions. For example, non-verbal strategies (e.g., 'like' and emoticons) available in SNSs provide unique choices for the participants to engage in exchanges, without having to confront the cultural ambiguities and challenges of preserving or losing "face."

In terms of methodological significance, our research provides an example of how online platforms can provide a fertile ground to study pragmatics and language

use in natural contexts. Most previous studies on pragmatic performance and transfer have used elicited data. The easily available data from different online communities can help us validate existing theories based on elicited data and gain a better understanding of the paradigmatic relationships between culture and language.

The most remarkable diachronic change revealed by this study lies in the fact that Chinese speakers noticeably tend towards the acceptance of compliments while rejection and evasion strategies are on the decline. The study also indicates that Chinese speakers appear to be in a transitional period from the modesty maxim to agreement maxim. Thus, many Chinese speakers tend to believe that it is through the agreement maxim (maximize agreement and minimize disagreement) that they can display their politeness.

We believe that the change in patterns of CR, as well as the conversational maxim that underlies its use, may be attributed to cultural change due to globalization and advancements in the use of technology (Eslami and Yang 2018; Eslami and Derakhshan in press). As mentioned by Mirzaei and Eslami (2013), discursive practices are the manifestations of continuous processes of cultural identity construction and development.

This could be due to overwhelming exposure and absorption of Western cultures with advancements in technology, globalization, and ease of intercultural communication. The differences in language use patterns through time in the use of CR strategies seem to indicate that the cultural contexts of socialization for the new generation of Chinese language users have changed. As submitted by Shaari and Maros (2017), cultural globalization due to the online social networking experience and popular culture media has modified people's communication strategies and behavior. Similar to our findings in this study, Shanmuganathan (2003: 129) also found that the majority of Malays who live in urban areas accept compliments by saying "thank you!". She concluded that "it is essential to acknowledge that Western culture has somewhat influenced the way in which the different ethnic groups respond to compliment" (Shanmuganathan 2003: 129).

The rapid advancement in information and communication technology provides greater access for people to other languages and cultures. It changes people's perspective, attitude, personality, and communication behavior. The language and cultural contacts and the dominant role of English and its culture in this globalized world may nevertheless put the assumptions of cultural values in new perspectives. Although the traditional values and customs still exist, one cannot deny the fact that due to the process of globalization, ease of communication through technology, and the dominant role of English as an international language, users from different speech communities are exposed to Western values and culture via a variety of media channels. This can greatly contribute to the change in people's views, attitudes, and discourse practices.

Accordingly, our study contributes to knowledge in the area of language contact as well as points out a direction for pragmatic research in general. Language contact, intercultural communication, and the dominant role of English as an international language influence the pragmatics of different languages. In a fast-shrinking world where contact between cultures and languages is becoming the standard, studies like ours and other similar ones can enhance our understanding of the pragmatics of different cultures as well as how the different cultures will influence each other.

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“Gracias pana”

A glimpse into Ecuadorian male compliment responses on Facebook

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Compliments and compliment responses are a frequent topic of study in face-to-face interactions (see Chen 2010 for an overview), and are gaining traction in online interactions. This study builds on works on compliment responses online; particularly work by Placencia, Lower, and Powell (2016), by examining compliment responses given by Ecuadorian males on Facebook (FB). The sole focus here is male behavior: how males respond to compliments from other males. Largely ignored in compliment research as a whole, this study demonstrates that Ecuadorian males frequently engage in compliment response behavior on FB, and, appear to be guided by face needs and constraints when responding. Despite the ubiquitous nature of emoticons in online communications, their use in compliment responses by Ecuadorian males on FB was totally absent.

Keywords: compliment responses, Facebook, Ecuadorian Spanish, male talk/complimenting behavior, ‘Like’, social media, computer-mediated communication, technology-mediated discourse analysis

1. Introduction

Compliments and compliment responses have been widely studied in a variety of languages and settings, primarily in face-to-face interactions (see Chen 2010 for a broad overview). While this extensive body of literature provides much insight into compliments and their responses, there is one area in which it is severely lacking: compliment behavior among males. When complimenting among males is discussed in existing literature, it is almost always mentioned in relation to female compliments, and even then, the overall verdict is that males do not compliment as much as females. This may be the case (though my research suggests otherwise, see Sections 4 and 5, below), but the fact that there are fewer examples hardly

warrants the large-scale dismissal that male compliments have received thus far in the literature.

In this chapter, which deals with a small portion of my PhD (Lower 2020), I will begin to rectify the balance in the literature between male and female compliment behavior (see also Heaney in a different context in this volume). Here I will focus exclusively on Ecuadorian male compliment responses in order to give an introductory view as to how young, Ecuadorian males from Quito behave towards each other on Facebook (FB) in terms of receiving compliments. The data employed is a small extract from my larger data pool (Section 3).

I will begin by giving a brief overview of compliment response literature (Section 2), focusing heavily on studies that have been conducted on a social networking sites (SNSs) such as FB. Next, I will discuss the methodology I used to gather my data (Section 3). I will then move on to present the results of my research and discuss the points that arise (Sections 4 and 5).

2. Literature review

The background to studies on compliments inevitably begins with Manes and Wolfson's (1981) study on compliments in American English (AmE), in which they describe the formulaic nature of compliments, both in terms of the topics of compliments, and the syntactic and semantic patterns that compliments follow (see also Wolfson and Manes 1980). The general consensus following this study is that compliments fulfill a social function, which often assists in establishing and maintaining solidarity. The study of compliment responses can be traced back to the work of Pomerantz (1978), which I discuss below.

2.1 Face-to-face compliment response studies

Pomerantz (1978) observed a certain formulaic nature in compliment responses. She described what she calls a system of constraints which limits compliment responses to opposites of acceptance and agreement or rejection and disagreement (p. 81). Despite this, the majority of compliment responses fall somewhere in between. In the first constraint (agree/disagree), agreement is typically the preferred response of the two (p. 81). With respect to the second constraint (accept/reject), acceptance is the preferred response (p. 83). These two constraints are interrelated, but perform differing functions. When the response to a compliment is either acceptance or rejection, it is in essence treating a compliment as having a supportive

function (p. 82). When a compliment response consists of either agreement or disagreement, it treats the compliment as an assessment (p. 82). Pomerantz found that despite a preference for agreement and acceptance, compliment responses did not include these most preferred responses the majority of the time. This relates to a third constraint in operation, which runs alongside the first two constraints: the avoidance of self-praise. Responding to a compliment with either an agreement or acceptance is in direct conflict with the desire to avoid self-praise.

Pomerantz explains that by accepting a compliment, the recipient is essentially agreeing with it, which is opposed to the recipient’s desire to avoid self-praise. In her data, Pomerantz observed patterns of compliment responses that suggest that recipients employ some solutions for avoiding self-praise while at the same time accepting the supportive function of compliments, including downgrading praise and shifting the focus of the compliment.

Holmes (1986) noticed similar constraints as Pomerantz (1978), but rooted these in Brown and Levinson’s (1987[1978]) politeness theory. Brown and Levinson consider compliments in terms of a person’s face needs requirements (pp. 62–64). They suggest that, to counter face-threatening acts, people use positive and negative politeness strategies, which they call “redressive actions” that seek to balance the potential damage to the interlocutors’ face. Brown and Levinson classify compliments as examples of positive politeness strategies as they diminish a face-threatening act by validating the hearer’s positive face. However, they go on to suggest that, alternatively, compliments and responses can be face-threatening acts in and of themselves in that they may be seen as expressing a speaker’s wish to have something belonging to the hearer, or prefacing a criticism (pp. 66, 68). However, others like Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1997) consider compliments as face-enhancing acts.

Holmes’s (1986) study analyzed compliment responses in New Zealand English (NZE), according to the taxonomy set out in Table 1.

Table 1. Holmes’s (1986: 492) classification of compliment response categories

Accept	Reject	Deflect/evade
Appreciation or agreement token	Disagreeing utterance	Shift credit
Agreeing utterance	Question accuracy	Informative comment
Downgrading or qualifying utterance	Challenge complimenter’s sincerity	Ignore Legitimate evasion
Return compliment		Request reassurance/repetition

The macro strategies of accept, reject, and deflect or evade deal with the credit contained within the compliment. The sub-strategies listed with each macro strategy deal with the content of the compliment. These sub-strategies co-occur with the overall strategies. Holmes notes the importance of distinguishing between the complimentee's reaction to the content of the compliment and the credit for the compliment (p. 491); that is, whether the recipient agrees or not with the positive evaluation (content) of the compliment, versus whether the recipient accepts or rejects the credit implied as the recipient of the compliment.

Holmes's categories of compliment responses in Table 1 address the credit aspect of a compliment, i.e., whether the recipient accepts, rejects, or deflects the credit implied in the compliment. She supplements each broad category with sub-categories. Holmes states that non-verbal indications of agreement can "clearly" be included under the category of accept – a sub-category of agreement token (p. 492). This is useful for studying compliment responses in social media as well, with its technological affordances that approximate non-verbal communication (e.g., 'like' on FB). While SNSs were almost certainly not contemplated at the time of Holmes's (1986) study, the fact that elements that are unique to SNSs can easily fit into Holmes's taxonomy shows how forward thinking her taxonomy is.

2.2 Male compliment response studies in face-to-face Spanish-speaking contexts

Some face-to-face studies on compliment responses among Spanish speakers have discussed the impact of gender in responding to compliments, but only in terms of how females respond to male compliments.

In her contrastive study of British English (BrE) and Peninsular Spanish (PenSp) compliment responses, Lorenzo-Dus (2001) suggests that Spain (and other Spanish-speaking societies) are positive politeness oriented, making it acceptable to accept, upgrade, or to ask for an explanation or expansion of compliments. In her study she found that Spanish males used humorous upgrades as their preferred strategy in response to compliments from females. It should be noted that Lorenzo-Dus did not examine how Spanish males respond to compliments from other males. For her analysis she used data elicited through discourse completion tests (DCTs) with situations involving cross-gender interactions.

Mack and Sykes (2009) also explored Spanish compliment responses via e-DCTs in their comparative study of compliment responses that used positive irony among Mexican (MxSp) and PenSp speakers. While they had participants of both sexes, they only analyzed cross-gender responses. Mack and Sykes found that speakers of MxSp and PenSp were similar in their overall response behavior

(p. 319), lending credibility to the idea that compliment responses are formulaic across different varieties of Spanish (p. 330). The authors note that acceptance was the most frequently used compliment response strategy; however, according to their data as presented, the most common strategy actually deployed was not acknowledging the compliment at all (32.5% of responses, as opposed to 26% acceptance rate). The authors chose to exclude non-acknowledgement of compliments in their analysis, but their results, as described above, demonstrate that interlocutors are less reluctant than previously thought to leave compliments unacknowledged (see also, for example, Holmes (1986), Herbert (1986), Placencia et al. (2016), among others, for much different rates of non-acknowledgement).

Maíz-Arévalo's (2010) study of compliments in PenSp (with data collected in spontaneous face-to-face interactions, presumably with the author) and NZE and AmE (using other authors' published results, p. 178) yields no examples of male-to-male compliments. The author explains that males view complimenting as feminine behavior, which accounts for the lack of examples of male-to-male compliments (and by extension, compliment responses) (p. 190). In relation to compliments received from females, Maíz-Arévalo's face-to-face examples in PenSp demonstrate that Spanish men accepted compliments in 63% of the instances, rejected compliments 12% of the time, and evaded compliments 25% of the time (p. 203).

Maíz-Arévalo (2012) undertook a contrastive study of compliment responses in NZE, relying on Holmes's (1986) results, and PenSp, using her own corpus collected via field-work notes from observation (p. 2). Similar to results in NZE, Maíz-Arévalo (2012) found that Spanish participants accepted compliments the majority of the time (47%) though less frequently than in NZE (64%). She also found that PenSp speakers were more likely to reject a compliment: 24.5% versus 8% in the NZE corpus (p. 7). PenSp speakers in Maíz-Arévalo's (2012) corpus evaded compliments 28.5% of the time (p. 8). Regrettably, there are no examples of male-male compliments in Maíz-Arévalo's (2012) study of PenSp. When responding to females, male participants in Maíz-Arévalo's (2012) study favored evasion as a compliment response (54.5%) with rejection being the dispreferred response (9%) (p. 10).

Finally, it is worth noting that Maíz-Arévalo (2012) highlights the idea of males "enhancing" the compliment, noting that this idea is not present in Holmes's (1986) compliment response taxonomy (p. 15). Lorenzo-Dus (2001) also mentioned a tendency in Spanish males to upgrade compliments, but again, this happens in response to compliments given by females.

2.3 Compliment response studies in an online context

Studies on compliments in social media have been emerging as the technology develops, and studies on compliment responses have followed suit (for a comprehensive overview of compliment and compliment response studies on social media, see Placencia and Lower 2017). Current compliment response studies on social media cover AmE (Placencia, Lower and Powell 2016), English as a lingua franca on Second Life (Cirillo 2012), Malaysian English and Malay on Twitter (Siti Yuhaida and Tan 2014), Persian on FB (Eslami, Jabbari, and Kuo 2015), and PenSp on FB (Maíz-Arévalo 2013).

Similar to the face-to-face studies that came before them, researchers of compliment responses on social media have used either Holmes's (1986) or Herbert's (1986) taxonomy to classify said responses, modifying existing taxonomies to varying degrees to suit their needs. Current studies are split approximately down the middle with Maíz-Arévalo (2013), Eslami et al. (2015), and Placencia et al. (2016) adopting various iterations of Holmes's (1986) taxonomy, while Cirillo (2012), and Siti Yuhaida and Tan (2014) follow their own iterations of Herbert's (1990) taxonomy. While the researchers following Holmes have modified her taxonomy to fit the needs of their data, what remains are Holmes's three overarching categories of accept, reject, and deflect or evade. I have interpreted the results of the aforementioned studies to fit within Table 2 for the purpose of comparison (see also Placencia and Lower 2017: 649).

Table 2. Results of digital compliment response studies to date

	Placencia et al. (2016)	Maíz-Arévalo (2013)	Eslami et al. (2015)	Cirillo (2012)	Siti Yuhaida and Tan (2014)
Accept	15%	19.7%	79.7%	54.1%	77.27%
Reject	1%	1.1%	1%	4.1%	1.81%
Evade	3%	7.9%	2.4%	24.2%	18.61%
No response	81%	30%	16%	17.4%	2.27%
Implicit response	–	41.3%	–	–	–
Combination	–	–	.6%	–	–

The results of the studies listed in Table 2 appear to have very few similarities. The most common thread is how infrequently compliments are rejected: this is fairly constant across the five studies. The differences in the corpora of these studies may assist in explaining the diverging results. The most obvious differences are in languages studied, and which social media platform was used to study those languages. Gender may also play a part: Placencia et al.'s (2016) study focuses solely on women, whereas Maíz-Arévalo (2013) examines both men and women. Another

example is Siti Yuhaida and Tan’s (2014) study, which reports an extremely low rate of *no response* (2.27%, sharply contrasted with Placencia et al.’s 81% in the same category). This may be explained by the fact that Siti Yuhaida and Tan’s corpus consists of replies by celebrities, who may be required to present a responsive public persona. Differences in results could also be explained by variation in data collection methodologies; see Placencia and Lower (2017).

How to account for the affordances of social media technology (for example, the ‘like’ function of FB and emoticons) causes divergence between the three studies. Placencia et al. (2016) assert that these digital elements, such as emoticons, are a close enough approximation of off-line phenomena such as facial expressions, to warrant treating them as they would be treated in a face-to-face context. Maíz-Arévalo (2013) and Eslami et al. (2015) argue that emoticons and the ‘like’ function are implicit or non-verbal responses, respectively (see also Placencia and Lower (2017) for a more detailed discussion of these points).

2.4 Social media-specific forms of compliment response

Social media platforms provide new ways to respond to compliments and comments: emoticons and the ‘like’ function. While the ‘like’ function is unique to FB, other SNSs have equivalent mechanisms to convey a similar message. How best to interpret the affordances of social media technology, particularly emoticons, is up for debate. Due to a lack of emoticons appearing in the data for the current study, I will not discuss their treatment here.

Facebook and other social media platforms offer a simple, relatively generic option for responding to comments with the ‘like’ function. In their 2013 study of compliments on FB, Placencia and Lower argue that the ‘like’ function is an expression of approval or appreciation of another user. Placencia et al. (2016) further define FB’s ‘like’ function as a type of compliment acceptance, because ‘liking’ something is a positive evaluation of that thing, whatever it may be (p. 348). Despite the fact that reasons for using the ‘like’ function can be fairly opaque, Placencia et al. (2016) give FB’s ‘like’ function its own place as a sub-category of compliment acceptance.

Similar to their treatment of emoticons, Maíz-Arévalo (2013) and Eslami et al. (2015) give FB’s ‘like’ function its own place in their taxonomies, but they do not classify it as an explicit acceptance, but rather as an implicit response or a non-verbal response. Nonetheless, Eslami et al. (2015) state that when used alone or when combined with emoticons, ‘like’ is a form of compliment acceptance (p. 256). When used in combination with verbal compliment responses, ‘like’ functions as an external modifier (p. 256).

3. Methodology

The data in this study are part of a larger pool of data of both Ecuadorian and Spanish male and female FB users that I collected for my PhD (Lower 2020). Due to space constraints, the focus of the current study is narrowed to Ecuadorian male compliment response behavior.

Before gathering the data for the current study, I took part in two exploratory studies (Placencia and Lower 2013; Placencia et al. 2016) in order to get a feel for collecting data on FB. With these experiences in mind, I was able to better focus my efforts in data gathering for this project. I wanted to gather as much data as possible, but needed a more automated way to gather it, and a way to store photographs in order to maintain as much of the original context as possible. With the help of a computer programmer, a program was designed to gather data automatically from FB and populate a customized database. The program and database were written in 2012.

In order to collect the sample, I set up a FB account separate from my personal FB account in December 2011. I acquired participants via personal FB contacts. In order to gain informed consent, I wrote a message to each potential participant, explaining the study and what I would be taking from their profiles if they elected to participate, and ensuring anonymity in order to protect their privacy. Participants were asked to respond to my message in order to demonstrate informed consent.

By December 2012, I had obtained a sufficient number of participants (26 Ecuadorian males). I then used my program to pull all the photos that each participant had posted to his or her FB account from when they created their FB accounts until December 2012 and populated my compliment analysis database with the information that I anticipated as being useful to my research: participant name and alpha-numeric code, sex, location, home town, the photo and caption on the photo (if any), 'likes' received on each photo, as well as the name, sex, location, and home town of each person 'liking' the photo, the album in which the photo appears, the date of upload onto FB, the date the photo was updated (if any), and the date the album was created and updated. All of the photographs of each participant were pulled from the participants' profiles, but only photographs that had at least one comment became part of the database.

After the database was populated, I coded the comments. If the comment was not a compliment, I gave it a unique code, which would allow easy exclusion during data analysis. Of comments that I deemed to be compliments, I coded them both for the topic of the compliment and for the syntactic pattern of the compliment, using the following categories for compliment topics: appearance, possessions, ability, personality, friendship, kids' appearance, pets, other compliment (meaning a compliment on another person in the photograph besides the participant), reiteration of the original compliment, a participant complimenting his or her own photo, and a compliment response.

Some photographs had only one comment, some had tens of comments. I went through each one and read them, trying to understand the context in terms of the photograph and the words, and made a judgment about the nature of the comment. At the time the database was created, I had not worked much on compliment responses, and neglected to include a mechanism for coding the type of response (accept, reject, etc.). However, the code within compliment categories pertaining to compliment responses enabled me to easily locate responses within the data.

Since finishing the initial data coding, I have done a fair amount of spot-checking, selecting a random point in the database, and checking approximately 25 photographs to see whether I agree with my original coding decisions. This chapter focuses on compliment responses, as previously indicated, and as there were not many of those, I have been able to re-analyze all of the compliments which provoked the responses, allowing for extensive spot-checking.

Because the database was built to my specifications, I had flexibility to add new categories of compliments and syntactic patterns whenever I saw fit. I did not have to add new categories of compliments as such, but instead found other interesting, recurring things that came up in the data and decided to add codes for those within my compliment categories. An example of this is laughter: many participants and their FB friends included some form of laughter (“*ja ja ja*”) within their comments. As it was such a common occurrence, I decided to give it a code of its own to see how often this form of online laughter occurred, and was especially interested in how often it occurred with compliments and compliment responses.

Once all the compliments were coded, I exported all of the data to an Excel spreadsheet and used pivot tables in order to compare various pieces of data. I pared down and rearranged data to suit the purpose of this study: male compliment responses to compliments from other males. I had the text of the original compliment side by side with the text of the response. Although the original photographs were not present in the Excel spreadsheet, I had the relevant photograph numbers to enable fast and easy crosschecking in the database in case I wanted to refer to the original context.

4. Results

4.1 Ecuadorian male compliment responses in context

The focus of this chapter, as previously explained, is compliment responses given by Ecuadorian males in response to compliments from other males. That said, it is useful to view the compliment and compliment response data among Ecuadorian and Spanish men as it compares to Ecuadorian and Spanish women. This is presented in Table 3, below, and starts with the total number of comments given to

Table 3. Overview of Ecuadorian male behavior on FB

Total photos with comments	2,913
Total comments (non-study participants)	10,285
made by males	4,790 (47%)
of which compliments	537 (11.2%)
made by females	5,495 (53%)
of which compliments	1,445 (26.5%)
Total study participant comments	4,551
Total compliment responses	479
*responses to males	131
*responses to females	348
Total 'likes' of compliments	752
*'Likes' of male compliments	195
*'Likes' of female compliments	557
Total 'Likes' (all comments)	3,019

the male participants by other males, as well as total comments and compliments given by females to the male participants.

Table 3 demonstrates that Ecuadorian males made many comments on the photos of the Ecuadorian male study participants, nearly as often as females: 47% of comments were by males versus 53% of comments by females. Not only did the males make many comments, but a healthy proportion of those comments were compliments. While it is true that Ecuadorian males did not make as many compliments as Ecuadorian females, it would be unfair to dismiss the compliments that were made. When one takes into account that the male participants themselves made 4,551 comments relating to their own photos (see Table 3 above), the proportions shift decidedly in favor of males being the more active participants here. When this is combined with the total number of comments made on male participant photos by other males (4,790), the total number of comments made by males is 9,341 or 63% of total comments. This brief comparative glimpse demonstrates how much male behavior has to offer in terms of compliment research in the context of SNSs.

While Table 3 demonstrates that males are indeed active in terms of posting photographs and making comments and compliments on FB, they are decidedly less active in the frequency of responding to compliments, both from males and females. The participants here responded to 24% of compliments received overall, which is higher than observed by Placencia et al. (2016) in compliment responses among American women on FB. Female compliments received responses 24% of the time from Ecuadorian male participants in this study as well (see Table 3 above). This is fascinating because the participants had more opportunities to respond to female compliments, but responded to male and female compliments with the

same frequency. I will not undertake a detailed comparison here of the differences in responses types in terms of responding to males or females.

The number of ‘likes’ (considered in Sections 4.3, 4.4, 5.2, and 5.4, below) as demonstrated in Table 3, above, presents a very interesting point of discussion as well. Table 3 shows that Ecuadorian male participants used ‘like’ frequently: participants ‘liked’ compliments from FB friends 38% of the time. This number is quite a bit higher than the response rate to compliments (24%). The higher number suggests that male Ecuadorian participants in this study favored using ‘like’ on its own as a response to compliments, and used ‘like’ much more often when responding to female compliments than to male compliments.

4.2 The effect of compliment topic on compliment response rates

Delving deeper into Ecuadorian male compliment response behavior, Table 4 shows the distribution of compliments in terms of compliment topic, and also shows the frequency of responses in each category (for a more detailed discussion of these categories, see Placencia and Lower 2013).

Table 4. Compliment responses vis-à-vis compliment categories

		Total male compliments	Number of responses	Percentage of responses per category
Categories of compliments	Appearance	156 (29.1%)	42 (32.1%)	26.9%
	Possessions	17 (3.2%)	7 (5.3%)	42.1%
	Ability	187 (34.8%)	46 (35.1%)	24.6%
	Personality	105 (19.6%)	28 (21.4%)	26.7%
	Friendship	56 (10.4%)	5 (3.82%)	8.9%
	Child’s appearance	9 (1.7%)	2 (1.53%)	22.2%
	Pets	7 (1.3%)	1 (0.8%)	14.3%
		537	131	

We can see that the majority of compliments given by males to Ecuadorian males in this study pertained to ability. Based on past compliment research, one would expect appearance to garner the majority of compliments, but it comes in second place here. There is some crucial background information one must account for when reviewing these results, and that is the situation with participant EM26. This participant works as a tattoo artist in Quito. He posted the majority of photographs that received comments (450 photos), and many of his photographs were of tattoos that he had done. This skewed the data heavily in favor of ability as the most frequently complimented topic. Table 5, below, shows a comparison of the results when excluding EM26.

Table 5. Comparison of Ecuadorian data with EM26 excluded

Categories of compliments	Total male compliments		Number of responses (M)	
	w/ EM26	w/o EM26	w/ EM26	w/o EM26
Appearance	156 (29.1%)	116 (32.3%)	42 (32.1%)	34 (37%)
Possessions	17 (3.2%)	12 (3.3%)	7 (5.3%)	6 (6.5%)
Ability	187 (34.8%)	60 (16.7%)	46 (35.1%)	17 (18.5%)
Personality	105 (19.6%)	100 (27.9%)	28 (21.4%)	27 (29%)
Friendship	56 (10.4%)	55 (15.3%)	5 (3.82%)	5 (5.4%)
Child's appearance	9 (1.7%)	9 (2.5%)	2 (1.53%)	2 (2.2%)
Pets	7 (1.3%)	7 (1.9%)	1 (0.8%)	1 (1.1%)
	537	359	131	92

The results without EM26 shift substantially: compliments on appearance move firmly to first place, with compliments on personality taking second place, and compliments on ability being the third most frequent. Excluding EM26 also shifts the response results, mirroring the results on compliments: compliments on appearance receive the majority of responses, with compliments on personality coming in second, and responses to compliments on ability coming in third, rather than first place as is the case with EM26 included in the data. These differences demonstrate how one participant can skew the data heavily, whether that be towards compliments on a particular topic, or the number of responses that certain compliments receive. However, the numbers and percentages of compliments and responses did not change hugely, apart from ability, of course. This demonstrates how it is not straightforward to take data as they come; researchers must look behind the numbers to try to determine what the causes of skewed data are.

Something interesting that stands out in Table 5, above, is that the percentages of compliment responses on each topic approximate the percentages of compliments on that topic. For example, 29.1% of male compliments were about appearance, and 32.1% of compliment responses pertained to compliments on appearance. The only instance in which the percentages are not close is on the topic of friendship: 10.4% of compliments received compared to only 3.82% of responses. To an extent, this pattern holds true even when EM26 is excluded. The proportion of responses to appearance compliments is slightly larger than when the data includes EM26.

4.3 Compliment response taxonomy

I applied the modified version of Holmes's (1986) taxonomy of compliment responses for this corpus, as described in Placencia et al. (2016) because it provided the best fit for the data examined, despite the original taxonomy being developed

for compliment responses in face-to-face interaction in English. Fitting naturally occurring, often very informal, responses neatly into one box proved difficult at times, and necessitated making some tough and sometimes arbitrary decisions, for example, when some responses used multiple sub-strategies.

As has been the case in other studies on compliment responses in SNSs, and even in some face-to-face studies (see Section 2, above), the most common type of response in the current study was no response at all. The strategy of no response was followed by ‘like’ on its own. The most frequently used written response was acceptance, with deflect or evade following behind. In this data set, there was only one instance of a compliment being rejected.

Table 6. Categories of compliment responses – Ecuadorian males

Response type	Number of responses
<i>Accept</i>	79*
Appreciation/agreement token	24
Appreciation token + downgrade	2
Emoticon (w/o comment)	0
‘Like’ (w/o comment)	136
Agreeing utterance	27
Agreeing utterance + upgrade	3
Upgrade	18
Downgrade/qualifying utterance	3
Return compliment	3
<i>Reject</i>	1
Disagreeing utterance	1
Challenge sincerity	0
<i>Deflect/Evade</i>	55
Shift credit	5
Informative comment	13
Ignore	25
Legitimate evasion	9
Request reassurance/repetition	2
Make a joke	0
<i>No acknowledgement</i>	270

* The overall numbers in this table and Table 7 below do not add up to the total number of responses, which is 131. This is because some responses spanned multiple strategies, for example, appreciation token + shift credit. Rather than create new categories for one-off instances, I have counted the same response twice or more times, where relevant, under various categories.

Table 7, below, shows further detail of the response strategies used by participants in this study by detailing the sub-strategies used within each category of compliment.

Table 7. Comparison of compliment category and response types used by Ecuadorian men

	Appearance	Possession	Ability	Personality	Friendship	Child's appearance	Pets
<i>Accept</i>	24	5	28	16	3	1	-
Appreciation/agreement token	7	-	17	1	-	1	-
Emoticon (w/o comment)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Agreeing utterance	8	3	7	10	-	-	-
Upgrade	8	2	3	4	1	-	-
Downgrade/ qualifying utterance	1	-	1	1	-	-	-
Return compliment	1	-	-	-	2	-	-
<i>Reject</i>	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Disagreeing utterance	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Challenge sincerity	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Deflect/Evade</i>	16	3	19	12	2	1	1
Shift credit	2	-	2	2	-	-	-
Informative comment	4	2	2	5	-	-	-
Ignore	9	-	8	5	2	1	-
Legitimate evasion	2	1	5	-	-	-	1
Request reassurance/repetition	-	-	2	-	-	-	-

We can see that acceptance was the preferred response across each category of compliment, save for the category of possessions, in which acceptance and deflection were equally preferred strategies. Despite a loose consensus of preferred overall strategies, there was considerable variation within the sub-strategies of compliment responses. For example, while acceptance was the preferred strategy of response in both the categories of appearance and ability, the most preferred sub-strategy of response with respect to ability was appreciation or agreement token (e.g., *gracias* 'thanks'). This was not the case with compliments on appearance, where the preferred sub-responses were agreeing utterances and compliment upgrades.

With respect to sub-strategies used with the response strategy of deflect or evade, failing to acknowledge a compliment seemed to be the most preferred strategy across the board. However, the sub-strategies deployed along with deflecting or evading a compliment varied widely and do not lend themselves to determining an overall response strategy with respect to deflecting a compliment.

4.4 External modifiers

In addition to examining what can be referred to as the head act of compliment responses on FB, I observed several different elements co-occurring with the typical

response strategies. These are what Placencia and Lower (2013) and Eslami et al. (2015) describe as external modifiers in their respective studies on FB. The external modifiers occurring in the current study include: ‘like’, laughter (*ja ja* or something similar), and ‘like’ + *ja ja*. Emoticons in compliment responses are conspicuous by their absence. Table 8 details where external modifiers occurred in terms of compliment response strategies and sub-strategies.

Table 8. External modifiers occurring with written responses

	‘Like’	<i>Ja ja</i>	‘Like’ + <i>ja ja</i>
<i>Accept</i>	22	14	12
Accept/appreciation token	12	5	3
Accept/agreeing utterance	7	4	3
Accept/upgrade	3	4	6
Accept/downgrade	–	1	–
Accept/return compliment	–	–	–
Accept/emoticon	–	–	–
<i>Reject</i>	–	–	–
Reject/Disagreeing utterance	–	–	–
Reject/challenge sincerity	–	–	–
<i>Deflect/Evade</i>	8	16	10
Deflect/shift credit	1	2	1
Deflect/informative comment	3	3	–
Deflect/Ignore	2	8	7
Deflect/legit evasion	2	2	2
Deflect/request clarification	–	1	–
Deflect/Joke	–	–	–
Total	30	30	22

To clarify, the instances of ‘like’ represented in Table 8 refer to ‘likes’ given by the Ecuadorian male participants to the compliments from males, in addition to a written response. Table 6 displays ‘likes’ relating to compliments with no further written element.

It is interesting to note that the Ecuadorian male participants used external modifiers in over half (63%) of their compliment responses. These strategies were used most often in conjunction with accepting a compliment (48 instances). This is not surprising as it fits with modesty expectations of minimizing self-praise. When a participant ‘likes’ a compliment that he ultimately attempts to deflect, the ‘like’ can be seen as an almost implicit acceptance, and, at the same time, allows him to appear modest while simultaneously fulfilling both his and the complimenter’s face needs. Alternatively, the ‘like’ could be seen as intensifying the compliment in some cases. Similarly, when a participant adds laughter after a compliment acceptance, it

demonstrates that he does not take the compliment or himself too seriously. In this way, external modifiers could be viewed as mitigation strategies, a sort of attempt at softening the response, while reinforcing friendship and positivity, and as an effort to avoid misunderstandings that can plague textual verbal communication online.

A further interesting point about the Ecuadorian male use of external modifiers in compliment responses is the absence of emoticons. This is surprising, because Ecuadorian males used emoticons fairly frequently in other comments and sometimes in compliments in the current study (205 instances), but there were no occurrences of emoticons in conjunction with responding to compliments from males. This is different than results observed in other compliment response studies, in which emoticons occurred frequently along with responses. So much so that they were given their own place within compliment response taxonomies (see Maíz-Arévalo 2013; Eslami et al. 2015; and Placencia et al. 2016).

One last element that occurred frequently in compliment responses given by Ecuadorian males was the use of various forms of address. These occurred primarily along with acceptances, and most often consisted of a friendly or an affectionate term, such as *pana* ('friend') in the title of this paper. Table 9, below, shows the forms of address and which overall acceptance strategies they occurred with.

Table 9. Address forms co-occurring with compliment responses

<i>Forms of address</i>	<i>Accept</i>	<i>Deflect</i>	<i>Reject</i>	<i>Total</i>
Full name/ <i>querido</i> +full name ('dear' + full name)	1	1		2
First name/first name + diminutive	3	2		5
<i>Amigo/amigo juez</i> ('friend')	5			5
Brother/brou/brow/m[i] brow	3	1		4
<i>Compadre</i> ('friend')	1			1
<i>Cuate</i> ('friend')	1			1
<i>Gordo</i> ('fatty')	2			2
<i>Guambra</i> ('boy')	1			1
<i>Hermano/mi hermano</i> ('[my] brother')	3	2		5
<i>Loco/loko</i> ('crazy')	1	2	1	4
Man/men	4	1		5
<i>Pana/panita(s)/mi pana/mi panaa/mi panita</i> ('[my] friend' [+diminutive])	9	3		12
<i>Mijo/mijín</i> ('my son' [+ diminutive])	2			2
<i>Ñañón</i> ('brother' + augmentative suffix)	1			1
<i>Primazo</i> ('cousin' + augmentative suffix)	1			1
<i>Viejo</i> ('old man')	2			2
	40	12	1	

Forms of address were most frequently used along with acceptances, in just under 50% of acceptances. Only 22% of deflective responses included a form of address, and the only rejection observed in these data included a form of address (*loco* ‘crazy’). The most frequently used form of address overall and in both the categories of accept and deflect was *pana* (‘friend’).

It is unclear why participants in the current study used forms of address so frequently as an external modifier. It is tempting to suggest that they are used in order to avoid confusion as to whom the response is directed, and one way to avoid confusion would be to name the person to whom you are replying. My data shows, however, that this technique was not frequently used, with participants preferring more affectionate or informal forms of addressing those from whom they received compliments. What this demonstrates is that forms of address are likely used as a more personalized form of external modifier, in contrast to ‘like’, which is generic in its nature. Forms of address as used in these data seem more like supportive moves.

5. Discussion

5.1 Ecuadorian male compliment responses in context

If we anchor the current study within the context of other studies of compliment responses on SNSs, we see that although it shares some commonalities, it is singular in its results. Figure 1, below, compares the results of other compliment response studies on SNSs.

In terms of study composition, it is difficult to say which study the current study most closely resembles. Maíz-Arévalo (2013), Eslami et al. (2015), and Placencia et al. (2016) conducted their studies on FB but on different languages (see Section 2). None of the previous FB studies are similar enough to the current study to merit a like for like comparison.

I have included ‘likes’ when occurring alone without any sort of text as an acceptance, in accordance with Holmes’s (1986) taxonomy, as modified by Placencia et al. (2016). This yields an acceptance rate of more than double that observed by Placencia et al. (2016), and double that observed by Maíz-Arévalo (2013) among PenSp speakers. If, however, I had adopted Maíz-Arévalo’s (2013) modified version of Holmes’s (1986) taxonomy and classified instances of ‘like’ on their own in response to a compliment as an implicit response, this would shift my acceptance percentage to 14.7%, which closely resembles the results observed by Placencia et al. (2016). The percentage of implicit responses for my study would be 25%, which is quite different still than the instances of implicit response observed by Maíz-Arévalo (2013), and still does not yield a similar result to Placencia

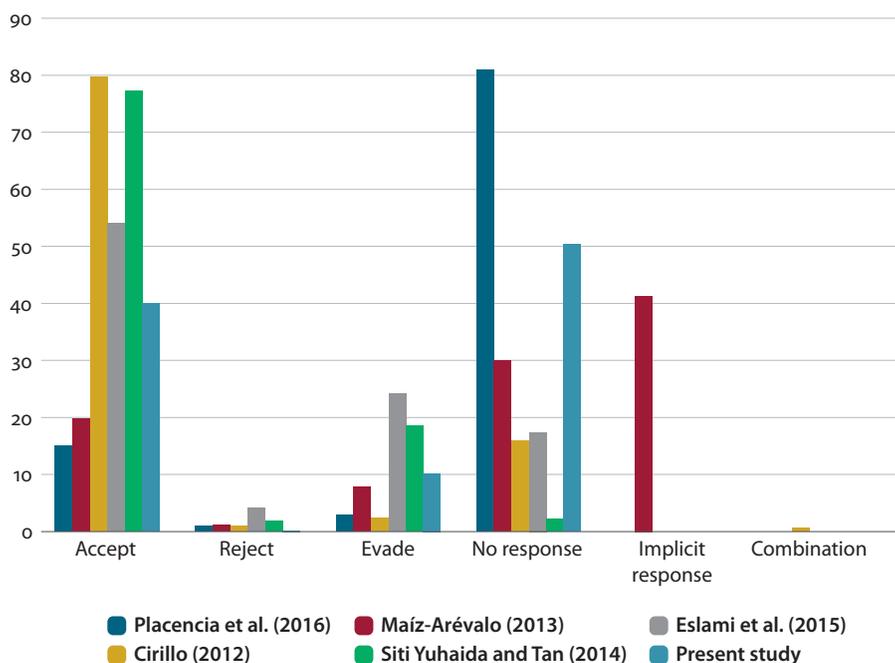


Figure 1. Comparison of compliment response studies on SNSs

et al. (2016) in terms of rate of acceptance, as the parameters for acceptance are not the same. These comparisons demonstrate that the results of the current study are fairly unique overall, and work to disprove the idea that male compliment and compliment response behavior are insignificant. The methodology for Placencia et al. (2016) closely resembles that of the current study, and the results in that study vary considerably to this one. This leads one to believe that in this instance at least, the differences in the results are due to the differences in the groups studied, which is not unexpected.

Another surprising difference between the results of the current study and other compliment response studies on SNSs is the rate of no response. Given the conventional wisdom that men do not engage in much complimenting behavior, and by extension, compliment response behavior, one would expect the figure for no response for Ecuadorian men to be the highest out of all the studies. While it is indeed high (50%), it is lower than that observed in American female behavior.

5.2 ‘Like’ and its multiple functions

As previously discussed, Placencia et al. (2016) determined that a ‘like’ in response to a compliment is effectively an acceptance of that compliment (p. 348). While I still agree with this view, it does not completely cover the results of the current study. As we saw in Table 8, there were several examples of ‘like’ co-occurring with written responses deflecting or evading a compliment, which conflicts with the view that ‘like’ is only a method of acceptance. The co-occurrence of ‘liking’ a compliment while giving a written deflection is an interesting one, but I cannot definitively state that it is one unique to the Ecuadorian male participants. The methodologies used by Maíz-Arévalo (2013) and Eslami et al. (2015) narrowed their samples in such a way as to make them incomparable to the current study: the samples in these studies were more controlled and did not take all data collected for analysis. For example, Maíz-Arévalo (2013) personally selected the participants of her study. Eslami et al. (2015) controlled their sample to include compliments on appearance only. The current study used people unknown to me, and took account of all compliments, rather than a selection. Placencia et al.’s (2016) methodology is similar to the current study in its inclusive nature, but the authors did not mention whether ‘like’ occurred along with any other response strategy, apart from acceptance.

The purpose of using ‘like’ alongside another response strategy seems to serve any number of functions, including softening a non-acceptance response, or showing gratitude without an overt thank you, which is likely intended to reinforce solidarity. Example (1), below, is an example of a participant ‘liking’ the compliment, but not accepting the compliment in his response.

(1) Photo of a tattoo done by EM26

Male 4: *q bien los tatuajes tu los haces quisiera hacerme algunos ahi avisame ver si hacemos negocios nesesito uno en la espalda y en los brazos* (‘the tattoos that you do are so good I want to get some let me know if we can set it up I need one on my back and on my arms’)

EM26: [Like] [address of tattoo parlor] [hours of tattoo parlor]

EM26 used FB’s ‘like’ function to ‘like’ Male 4’s compliment, but in his written response, he only gives the address and hours of his place of business and does not address the compliment. A more cynical interpretation of the exchange in Example (1) is that EM26 interpreted Male 4’s compliment as a hint that he wanted some sort of reduced, “mates’ rates” on a tattoo. EM26’s response ignores this possible hint, but EM26’s ‘like’ of Male 4’s compliment showed some graciousness in accepting the compliment. This interpretation is pure speculation, but it does provide a scenario in which people are required to conform to face constraints, despite personal experience imposing other constraints.

When ‘like’ occurs alongside an acceptance response, its intention leaves no doubt as to whether the recipient accepts the compliment. However, an alternative interpretation of this could be that it is a violation of modesty maxims: a written acceptance plus ‘like’ is effectively accepting the compliment twice, which may be viewed as a stealth boast on the part of the compliment recipient. ‘Liking’ the compliment but giving a written response that does not accept the compliment fulfills modesty constraints. There were no instances of ‘like’ co-occurring with the sub-strategy of deflect/request reassurance. This fits with the idea that using ‘like’ in this way goes against modesty constraints: if a participant ‘likes’ a compliment, but then requests further clarification on the compliment, the ‘like’ effectively negates the request for reassurance. If a participant misunderstands a compliment, how can he also ‘like’ it? It seems that ‘like’ is frequently used on FB almost automatically; users often ‘like’ all comments they receive as a quick way to show that they have seen it (see Placencia et al. 2016). It seems that in this one circumstance for this group of Ecuadorian male participants, there is some sense that a ‘like’ in this situation goes a little bit too far against modesty constraints, despite the entire idea of FB being to showcase oneself. Under the category of accept, Ecuadorian male users also never used ‘like’ along with a downgrade of praise, lending credibility to the idea that the use of ‘like’ is tied, whether consciously or not, to modesty constraints such as avoiding self-praise.

5.3 Compliment upgrades

Further along the point of boastful compliment acceptance, a response strategy frequently observed in the Ecuadorian male data was to upgrade the compliment as a form of acceptance. This is not a new phenomenon; Herbert (1986) included it as a response strategy in his taxonomy (‘praise upgrade’), and Maíz-Arévalo (2013) observed its use in her FB study of PenSp (‘enhance’). It is also a previously accounted for strategy among Spanish males specifically (Lorenzo-Dus 2001), though in response to compliments given by females, as remarked above (Section 2.2). Herbert (1986) describes the strategy as one in which the speaker accepts the compliment and asserts that the complimentary force is insufficient (p. 78). This idea was only partially present in the current data; in the examples of a praise upgrade here, the participants did not explicitly accept the compliment, rather simply upgraded it. Indeed, Example (2), below, seems to demonstrate a bit of disagreement through use of the word, ‘no’.

(2) Photo of EM12

Male 1: *vacanes la botas loko... yo tengo unas parecidas...* (‘cool boots, man...

I have some similar ones...’)

EM12: *no... las mias son arms chevres...* (‘no, mine are cooler...’)

I have classified this as a compliment acceptance, along with an upgrade, despite the response clearly stating 'no' and almost disputing the truth of the compliment. Example (3), below, is clearer in terms of the implied acceptance that comes along with the compliment upgrade:

- (3) Photo of EM18 holding a chicken
 Male 1: *jajajaja buen buena EM18 jajajaj vamos BOCA* ('ha ha ha, good good
 EM18 ha ha ha, let's go BOCA')
 EM18: *BUENISIMA DIRIA YO, JAJA* ('REALLY GOOD, I'D SAY, HA HA')

While both of these examples demonstrate the use of upgrade as an acceptance strategy, Example (3) is clearer both in terms of conveying acceptance and the lighthearted nature of upgrading a compliment. Example (2) appears to be an acceptance of the compliment, though in a slightly more combative way than Example (3). EM12 does not use any "response plus" factors in order to soften his disagreement with Male 1's compliment, and by asserting that his boots are better than Male 1's boots, he appears rather ungracious. That said, the two interlocutors, EM12 and Male 1, continue their exchange in a lighthearted, joking manner, which conveys that there was no offense caused by EM12's upgrade of Male 1's compliment. Indeed, Male 1's response to EM12's compliment response begins with laughter (*jajaja*) and addresses EM12 with an affectionate form (*loko* 'crazy'). I have not included the text of the exchange here because it contains no further compliments but is more like banter between friends.

5.4 Internal and external modifiers

Placencia and Lower (2013), drawing on Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), described the use of internal and external modifiers in their study of FB compliments, and Eslami et al. (2015) built on this idea for their study of compliment responses on FB. What I have deemed here as "response plus" elements encompass some of these external modifiers, as described by Eslami et al. (2015): alerters (encompassing various forms of address), extra head acts or supportive moves, and emoticons. When 'like' occurred along with a written compliment response, Eslami et al. (2015) classified it as an external modifier (p. 256). Eslami et al. (2015), however, do not mention the use of laughter as an external modifier in compliment responses in their study. They note the inclusion of laughter in comments (p. 261), but do not discuss further. I view written laughter as another external modifier, as it serves to clarify the tone of the compliment response or as mitigation mechanism.

With respect to internal modifiers, Eslami et al. (2015) list intensifying adverbials, emotional expressions, double intensifiers or intensifying adverbials, capital letters, vowel lengthening, and multiple exclamation marks among those observed

in their compliment response data (p. 253). Many of these surface in the current study, including the use of capital letters, vowel lengthening, and multiple exclamation marks. I am not completely convinced that the use of capital letters can always be categorized as an internal modifier, however, as it was often used by participants in the current study for an entire comment (see Example (3) above). This dispels slightly the idea that capital letters are always used for emphasis. If one or two words in a response are capitalized, however, it is probably more likely that the capitals are being used for emphasis. This did not occur in the current data at all. Similarly, while there were some instances of multiple exclamation marks used in a compliment response, there were also several examples of multiple question marks, multiple commas, and multiple periods. The frequent use of multiple forms of punctuation in the Ecuadorian male compliment responses leads me to suggest that rather than some form of modification, this could be just carelessness in typing (indeed, responses were infrequently capitalized, punctuated, or even spelled correctly).

6. Conclusions

This study takes the first steps towards dispelling the idea that male compliment and compliment response behavior is not as valuable to study as female behavior. This study has demonstrated that, on the SNSs of FB at least, Ecuadorian males are as active, in terms of compliment responses, as other widely studied groups, including American females and Spanish males and females (see Figure 1).

The majority of compliments receiving a response from Ecuadorian males related to appearance, which is unsurprising, given that appearance is often the most frequent topic of compliments, particularly on SNSs like FB (but see Danziger and Kamp, Pano Alamán, and Rudolf von Rohr and Locher in other social media contexts in this volume). This study also showed that, when they have the opportunity, males make frequent compliments on ability. Whether this extends to all males is uncertain, as one participant here had a disproportionately large number of photos relating to his abilities. That said, participants who shared high numbers of photographs of themselves (showcasing their appearance), did not garner such high numbers of appearance compliments. This suggests that Ecuadorian men may value abilities over appearance. Further research on this idea would explore the type of photograph posted (e.g., selfie, photo of scenery, etc.) versus the number of compliments it attracts. This would help to gain an understanding of the elements that males most value when giving and receiving compliments.

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“Pero... y las caritas esas, ¿cómo se ponen?”

Age effects on Facebook compliments in Peninsular Spanish

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Using a netnographic approach, the present study aims to find out whether age plays a role in the realization of the speech act of complimenting as performed by a Facebook community of Peninsular Spanish users. To that purpose, a corpus of a hundred compliments was collected. Fifty of these compliments were performed by users in the age range of 18–25 and the other fifty by users in the age range of 60–75. To control for the gender variable, only compliments produced by female users were gathered. Results show that age plays a role in the way compliments are produced, especially with regards to the use of non-verbal elements (e.g., emoji). Verbal realization strategies also show interesting differences in relation to age.

Keywords: Facebook, age, compliments, Peninsular Spanish, netnography

1. Introduction

Compliments have long attracted the attention of scholars given the complexity of this apparently simple speech act (see Chen (2010) for a detailed overview). More recently, interest in this speech act has shifted from the face-to-face dimension to the online sphere, where it seems to be pervasive, especially in social networking sites (SNSs henceforth) like Facebook. Most of this research on SNSs has focused on aspects such as the online-offline contrast (see, e.g., Maíz-Arévalo 2013; Placencia and Lower 2013), or the contrast between English and another language (see, e.g., Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013). However, other variables such as age have been less frequently addressed in the literature, even though “age determines the way we speak” (Coulmas 2013: 76) and though the number of senior Internet users has been steadily increasing worldwide in the last fifteen years (Smith 2014).

Furthermore, age seems to play an important role in the development of literacy in the Web 2.0 world. In fact, older Internet users have often been subject to stereotyping, as a cursory look at ordinary blogs and other online sites shows. Thus, these older users are sometimes depicted as awkward cybernauts that fail to grasp these 'new' means of communication. Figure 1 shows a parody of a grandmother trying to connect to Facebook, which helps reinforce these common beliefs that elderly users are not apt to employ Facebook correctly, either because they do not understand it (see Figure 1) or because of their comments and blunders (see Figures 2a and 2b):



Figure 1. (Parody of old users and IT)¹

1. Available at <https://www.okchicas.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Abuelas-que-hablan-sin-filtro-9.jpg> [Accessed: 06/02/2018]. Translation: 'Elias what is my Facebook password?' / 'Granny, you don't have Facebook' / 'Ok'.

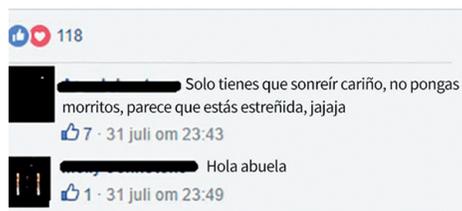


Figure 2a. (Grandparents' blunders on Facebook)²



Figure 2b. (Grandparents' blunders on Facebook)

Whilst it could be argued that some of these stereotypes might apply to some users (both older and maybe younger to a lesser extent), it is important to take into account the role played by duration of online exposure as prolonged online exposure may influence users' online behavior (see Section 3). In other words, an elderly person with years of online exposure may be apt at using emoji or such elements; whereas a younger person with relatively less online exposure may not exhibit such behaviors, even if born within the 'digital era'. In fact, the number of retired people joining Facebook is increasingly rising,³ with younger users (especially teenagers)

2. Available at: <http://www.boredpanda.es/personas-mayores-fail-redes-sociales/> [Accessed: February 2018]. Translation: Figure 2a. 'You just have to smile, sweetie. Don't pout that way, it seems you are constipated, hahaha' / 'Hello, grandma' Figure 2b. 'I've lived 21 years without you' / 'Why would I need you now?' / 'BECAUSE I AM YOUR GRANDMA AND I NEED YOU' / 'That wasn't for you' / 'I KNOW, I ONLY WANTED YOU TO KNOW I LOVE YOU AND I NEED YOU' / 'I love you too, grandma' / 'THANKS, I NEEDED TO HEAR THAT, GOOD NIGHT' / 'Good night, Grandma'

3. Statistics on the aging profile of Facebook users can be checked at <http://www.perfil.com/ciencia/facebook-se-envejece-hay-mas-abuelos-y-menos-jovenes-0131-0075.phtml> and <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/308955> [Accessed 05/02/ 2018].

opting for other platforms such as Snapchat, Instagram or Twitter, maybe as a reaction against a social networking site which they see as getting old-fashioned and hosting their parents and grandparents.

However, the study of the relationship between age and language has mostly focused on younger groups of speakers while older speakers have attracted less scholarly attention. Taking the above into account, this paper aims to redress this imbalance by contrasting the compliments performed in Peninsular Spanish on Facebook by two different age groups: users within the age ranges of 18–25 and 65–75 years old. Nonetheless, and for the reasons already mentioned, I shall only consider the complimenting behavior of highly active users, who post and respond to comments once a day or even more often. In order to do so, a netnographic approach (Kozinets 2015 [2010]) will be adopted.

As for the rest of the paper, it consists of five sections. Section 2 is divided into four sub-sections. Section 2.1 provides the reader with a brief overview of the literature on compliments on Facebook. Section 2.2 focuses on previous literature on age and language, with linguistic patterns of compliments considered in Section 2.3, before offering a summary of the main differences across age groups in Section 2.4. Section 3 describes the methodology, paying special attention to the data collection procedure, and the rationale for choosing these two age groups. Ethical issues, together with the approach adopted in the current study, are also considered in this section. Section 4 presents the analysis of the data and findings, before offering the conclusions and limitations of the study in the last section.

2. Literature review

2.1 Online compliments

Although interest in online complimenting behavior has progressively increased in the last few years, it is still an under-researched area (Placencia and Lower 2017: 637). In their paper, Placencia and Lower (2017) offer a detailed state-of-the-art of this research in social media. Their summary shows that Facebook compliments have been studied mostly in English varieties (Placencia and Lower 2013; Placencia, Lower and Powell 2016; Lorenzo-Dus and Izura 2017). The contrast between English and other languages has also received scholarly attention, together with the study of compliments in languages other than English (see, e.g., Das 2010; Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Eslami, Jabbari, and Kuo 2015) (in this volume see, e.g., Bączkowska; Hernández Toribio and Mariottini; Lower; Pano Alamán).

Most of these studies have shown that online complimenting behavior partially reflects some of the characteristics of face-to-face compliments while developing

their own patterns as a result of the characteristics of the medium, amongst other factors (Placencia and Lower 2017: 639). The use of ‘likes’ has been of special interest (see, e.g., Maíz-Arévalo 2013; Placencia and Lower 2013;) together with hybrid or multimodal compliments, where both text and emoji or other pictorial elements may be employed, as in the case of Instagram (Placencia 2019).

However, research on online compliments is still scarce and there are factors that need scholarly attention such as the apparently increasing homogeneity in complimenting behavior despite cross-cultural differences (Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013). More emphasis should also be placed on methodological issues and the socio-cultural context where compliments take place, including “the age of the participants” (Placencia and Lower 2017: 656). The current study aims to contribute to this growing body of research, by paying attention to the variable of age amongst a group of Peninsular Spanish Facebook users.

2.2 Language use and age

According to Coulmas (2013), different generations have their own language world. There are two main explanations for this: on the one hand, “in the course of time communication needs change, forcing each new generation to adjust the language to suit the changing world of their experience” (p. 62); on the other, part of our social identity is precisely to speak like our peers, rejecting the ways of others. Thus, adolescents will often reject their parents’ way of speaking as an act of rebelliousness and as an identity booster.

The study of the relationship between age and language has mostly focused on face-to-face communication and on younger groups of speakers while other ways of communication and older speakers have attracted less scholarly attention in the case of social-networking sites. For example, previous work on age variation in face-to-face communication showed that English youngsters preferred double and multiple negatives more often than adult speakers of the same social class (Holmes 1992) as well as using more words from different languages (Rampton 1995). Møller and Quist (2003) found that Danish adolescents used quotations differently as a way of dramatizing their speech. In general terms, “the language of children and adolescents has been investigated extensively, but studies of age-cohort-specific language *do not usually include a chapter about adults*” (Coulmas 2013: 70) (my emphasis) (see also Androutsopoulos and Georgakopoulou 2003).

With regard to online language use and age, most studies spring up from the area of psychology and are mainly interested in determining age and gender based on linguistic features, for example, by using automatic annotation based on sequences of stylistic features to determine users’ age, gender or personality. This is

the case of Schler et al. (2006), for instance, who collected a corpus of over 71,000 blogs and extracted style-based features (e.g., use of slang) for both age and gender prediction of the blogs' authors. Their study showed that, irrespective of gender, language use in blogs correlates with age. For example, pronouns and assent/negation become scarcer with age, while prepositions and determiners become more frequent. In a second study, Argamon et al. (2007) also found that teenage bloggers tend to use more non-dictionary words than adult bloggers do. Their results were in line with other studies on blogs, such as Goswami, Sarkar and Rustagi (2009).

Similar studies on gender and age have also been carried out on Twitter, with special attention to how linguistic features (e.g., the use of pronouns) can help automatically predict the age of the users (Nguyen et al. 2013). However, the age cohorts under consideration in their study go from 20 to 40 and 13 to 42 years old, without taking elderly users into account. Peersman, Daelemans, and Van Vaerenbergh (2011) focus on chats. These authors are interested in analyzing the kind of language employed by anonymous users to determine whether they are hiding their real identity. As in the previous studies, they also apply a text categorization approach for the prediction of age and gender.

Schwartz et al. (2013) analyzed vocabulary and topics on Facebook, on the basis of a large corpus of 700 million words, phrases, and topic instances collected from the Facebook messages of 75,000 volunteers. However, their study also focused mostly on younger users.

Within the area of linguistics, most of the studies of age and online language have also focused on teenagers (see, e.g., Merchant 2001; García-Gómez 2010). While the elderly population has received less attention, there are some exceptions such as Kanayama (2003), whose study focuses on Japanese elderly users of SNSs; Richardson, Weaver and Zorn (2005) on New Zealander elderly users or Xie (2008) on Chinese elderly users. Most of these studies, however, adopt a more sociological perspective, focusing on the difficulties many elderly users face and/or the benefits that they derive from technology-mediated communication.

The present paper intends to redress this imbalance by adopting a pragmalinguistic approach to contrast the use of online language on the social networking site Facebook by two groups of users; more specifically, by analyzing how both age groups perform compliments online. Being age variation the main focus of the study, the gender variable is beyond the scope of the paper. For this reason, only compliments performed by female users in the two age ranges under study have been considered.

2.3 Linguistic patterns of compliments

Despite the fact that compliments may be implicit (see, e.g. Maíz-Arévalo 2012), research has shown that compliments are “remarkably formulaic speech acts” (Holmes and Brown 1987: 529). In the case of English, Manes and Wolfson (1981) found that in American English three formulaic linguistic realizations accounted for 84.6% of their corpus. These findings were replicated for New Zealand English, where the same formulae accounted for 78% of the data (Holmes 1986).

This paper focuses on explicit compliments, which can be defined as those compliments that “are recognized as compliments outside of context, being realized by a small set of conventional formulae” (Boyle 2000: 18). As previous studies have shown (see, e.g., Wolfson and Manes 1980; Maíz-Arévalo 2012), explicit compliments are by far much more frequent than implicit ones. As argued by Maíz-Arévalo (2012: 981),

one reason for this preference of formulaic compliments over implicit ones might be that face-threat is considered less determining in the choice of how to pay a compliment than the risk of not being correctly understood by the interlocutor if our compliment is too indirect.

The Facebook users under scrutiny express their positive evaluation of the addressee(s) by resorting to the following linguistic patterns (see also Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013):

- i. Exclamative pronoun + (semantically positive) adjective / noun phrase + (copulative verb)

(1) (YU)

*¡Qué guapa!*⁴

‘How pretty (you are/look)!’

(2) (OU)

Qué guapísimo mi sobrino

‘How very handsome my nephew’

- ii. Declarative sentence

It is possible to distinguish two main patterns: mental processes of affection and relational processes. According to Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013: 740), these two options depend on the system of transitivity, or the way the key processes and participants are represented (Thompson 2004). They argue that speakers (or

4. All examples are preceded by YU or OU in brackets to indicate whether the example comes from the corpus of YUs or OUs, respectively. The only editing affects users’ names, which have been deleted to preserve their privacy.

Facebook users) can either represent the compliment as a *mental process of affection* (e.g., *me encantáis* ‘I love the way both of you look’) or as a *relational process*, where the main focus is on the person receiving the compliment. In the case of relational processes, Spanish also provides the speaker with a further choice between presenting the attribute as a permanent status (*ser*) or as a transient one (*estar*):

- (3) (OU)
Estás guapísima
 ‘You look so pretty’
- (4) (YU)
Eres preciosa
 ‘You are beautiful’

It is beyond the scope of this article to zero in on the complex distinction between these two Spanish verbs. However, it is important to mention that this aspectual distinction can present the compliment as a stable and intrinsic positive value of the addressee, whereas *estar* ‘to be’ suggests the positive property is just temporary but not inherent to the addressee (Leonetti Jungl 1994).

Together with these patterns, it is also possible to find a third pattern based on ellipsis, and which Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013: 743) have termed “ellipticals” (see also Placencia and Lower 2013). This construction is not sentential but phrasal, and users simply resort to an adjective or noun phrase, omitting other elements like the verbal phrase, exclamative pronouns or the subject:

- (5) (YU)
ole los guapos
 ‘Hurrah the handsome ones’

Often, users combine patterns in the same compliment. For example, in (6) the user combines a declarative presenting the compliment as a transient attribute of the addressee with an elliptical. In (7), the user also combines an attributive clause (*está preciosa* ‘she looks beautiful’) and a mental process of affection (*me gusta mucho* ‘I like it very much’).

- (6) (YU)
Te queda perfecto!!guapaa
 ‘You look great in it!! Pretty’
- (7) (OU)
Esta preciosa me gusta mucho
 ‘It [the photo] is beautiful I like it very much’

2.4 Linguistic features according to age

This section sums up the main findings reported by the studies revised in Section 2.2 with regard to age and the use of language online. Thus, it is possible to distinguish three major differences that can be summed up as typographic variation and use of emoji, lexis and prolixity.

i. Typographic variation and use of emoji

Young users (YUs henceforth) tend to employ more typographic variation and emoji than older users (OUs henceforth) (see, e.g., Krohn 2004; Rosenthal and McKeown 2011; Nishimura 2016). Typographic variation includes a myriad of aspects such as onomatopoeic interjections (i.e., laughter expressed as *haha*), abbreviations (btw. *LOL*), capitalization (*WHAT???*) and alphabetical lengthening (e.g., *niiiiice*) to express emphasis. The lengthening often applies to punctuation marks too, such as exclamation or interrogative marks.

Besides typographic variation, the use of emoji is also important in the way a digital message is conveyed, with emoji often being used to reinforce the verbal message, or to guide the receiver on how to interpret the intended illocutionary force (e.g., when dealing with irony) (Placencia and Lower 2013; Maíz-Arévalo 2014; Eslami et al. 2015).

ii. Lexical choices

Previous studies (see, e.g., Holmes 1992; Tagliamonte 2005) have shown that YUs often overuse intensifiers, which enhance the emotional meaning of words (e.g., *so*, *really* and *awful*). It is also frequent to find the use of substandard, dialectal and vernacular forms, slang and innovative expressions (often short-lived), not only in English but in other languages as well (e.g., Stenström and Jørgensen 2009).

Furthermore, it has been found out that YUs include a more frequent use of the first-person singular pronoun as opposed to first person plural pronoun for OUs. As pointed out by Nguyen et al. (2013: 446), “the usage of pronouns is one of the variables most studied in relation with age”. This result is in line with other studies such as Pennebaker and Stone (2003) and Barbieri (2008), which found out that YUs use more first-person and second person singular pronouns as an indication of interpersonal involvement while OUs use first-person plurals more often. Similar results were obtained by Schwartz et al. (2013), who found out that the use of the pronoun ‘we’ increases approximately linearly after the age of 22, whereas ‘I’ monotonically decreases. They interpret this as a sign of social integration, suggesting the increasing importance of friendships and relationships as people age. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of the present study to find out whether such a difference varies according to culture – e.g., low-context and high-context cultures – although this might be opening an interesting avenue for future research. In

the case of the study at hand, and given the fact that Spanish often opts for dropping the subject pronoun since this information is given by the verb conjugation, this difference might be observed in the use of first person singular versus first person plural verbs rather than in the use of the personal pronouns.

iii. Prolixity

OUs seem more prone to producing longer sentences than YUs. Thus, in their study of age and blogs in English, Goswami et al. (2009) found out that OUs tended to employ longer sentences in contrast to younger users, even if results were not statistically significant.

Although these three aspects often occur simultaneously, they will be analyzed individually for the sake of clarity. Section 4 will focus on each of these three parameters to analyze the compliments produced by each of the age cohorts under scrutiny.

3. Methodology

The present study falls within the field of *netnography* since technology-mediated communication is used as a source of data “to arrive at the ethnographic understanding and representation of a cultural or communal phenomenon” (Kozinets 2015 [2010]: 60). In this case, the phenomenon under study is complimenting behavior and how it may be affected by age in the case of Peninsular Spanish users. Given the size of the corpus, the approach adopted will be mostly qualitative although general tendencies will also be pointed out when observed, in a more quantitative fashion.

3.1 Participants

With regard to participants, and in the netnographic spirit of participant observation, I mainly chose my own Facebook community,⁵ to which I have had access for more than five years now. I also know the majority of the participants off-line, which provides crucial contextual information (see note 5). When the participants’ age was unknown, however, their profile was consulted (if public) to make sure they belonged to one of the two age cohorts under study. Likewise, only Spanish

5. I would like to thank my PhD student, Ms. Andrea Martínez (aged 23), for adding me to her own Facebook, which helped me widen my own Facebook community and observe also younger users. She has also helped me with off-line contextual information about these younger participants.

participants were selected, which meant discarding half of my Facebook community, since it consists of English and North American users.

In this study, six participants and their interactions on Facebook were recorded for a period of two weeks. These participants were selected because they are highly active users, who post and respond to comments once a day or even more. However, and as already mentioned, it is also important to take into account the role played by duration of online exposure. Thus, all the selected participants have been Facebook users for a period of two to three years. Regarding their age, three of the participants were YUs of 19, 23 and 24 and they form part of the 18–25 cohort, their interactions taking place with friends mostly belonging to their age range. Regarding the 65–75 cohort, the same criteria were followed. I selected the three most active members in this age group (62, 67 and 72) and entered their walls (with permission), where most of their interactions with other members within their age span take place. All the friends’ age was manually checked when unknown and compliments performed by users belonging to other age cohorts or by male users were discarded. Users below 18 were also discarded for ethical reasons, as they involve minors. Admittedly, the number of participants is limited and future research intends to widen the scope of the sample so as to validate the preliminary tendencies observed. Finally, it is important to mention that all the users belonging to the 18–25 cohort are university students while the 65–75 cohort includes women who have always been housewives or have already retired from work. It is, however, beyond the scope of the study to focus on possible effects of socioeconomic and educational background on the performance of compliments by these users, even though both factors might have a key role to play (Placencia 2011).

3.2 Data gathering procedure and corpus description

The selected participants were observed for a period of two weeks and their Facebook communications recorded for the same period. Thus, their exchanges were copied and pasted in exactly the same format in a Word document, which was afterwards edited to delete names and images so as to preserve the participants’ privacy. This rendered two sub-corpora, one belonging to the 18–25 cohort and, the other one, to the 65–75 group. To have a balanced sample of examples, I decided to gather 50 compliments from each sub-corpus, thus amounting to a total of 100 compliments. Compliments were manually retrieved until reaching fifty compliments in each group. Once this number was reached, manual collection was stopped.

Following Eslami et al. (2015), compliments were classified as verbal – i.e. realized by textual means – or non-verbal – i.e. realized by other elements like the

button Like, Facebook reactions, or emoji. Besides verbal and non-verbal compliments, it is also possible to find combinations of both, where textual elements and emoji are used simultaneously. However, in this paper I will focus on verbal and combined compliments, leaving aside other complimenting strategies such as clicking on the Like button or using a Gif, which might be studied in future research. The rationale behind this choice is that three main elements under analysis are typographic variation and emoji, lexical choice and prolixity in relation to age (see Section 2.3). Furthermore, another aspect under analysis is whether or not compliment verbal patterns also show variation according to age. For these reasons, both verbal and combined compliments are the most appropriate selection.

It is also important to mention that, when users employ more than one compliment to the addressee in the same comment, as in (5) and (6), these cases may be considered compliment intensifiers and hence one pragmatic unit: the user is emphasizing their positive evaluation of the addressee by “piling up” compliments upon them. However, and in terms of frequency of use, I preferred to count these compliments as two rather than one, since the user is employing different linguistic patterns. Hence, the corpus by YUs eventually adds to 52 compliments (two compliments out of the initial 50 are double) while the corpus by OUs consists in 56 compliments. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that each compliment was produced by a separate Facebook user. In other words, the usual pattern is as follows: one of the six selected participants posted a photograph, video, etc. and other participants commented on it, often complimenting it.

3.3 Ethical issues

As argued by Kozinets (2015 [2010]: 142) “analyzing online community or culture communications or their archives is not human subjects’ research *if the researcher does not record the identity of the communicators*” (emphasis in original). With regards to other relevant issues such as age or vulnerability, it should be pointed out that all the participants are over eighteen years old and they verbally gave their consent for the data on their Facebook wall to be used in this research. However, the participants also asked for their personal information (e.g., name, photographs) not to be public. This is why all the names or references to participants as well as photographs or any other identifying devices were carefully eliminated. The rest of the text did not suffer from any further editing (see also note 4), which explains the typos and mistakes that may be encountered in some of the instances.

4. Findings

For the sake of clarity, this section has been divided into four sub-sections. Section 4.1 focuses on the linguistic patterns of compliments in the corpus for the present study, with the aim of examining whether age plays a role in the distribution of frequencies. Following what was presented in Section 2.4, the following three sub-sections focus on typographic variation and emoji (4.2), lexical choices (4.3) and prolixity (4.4). More specifically, I will be analyzing the use of intensifiers (e.g., adverbs like *tan* ‘so’ or superlatives) and the kind of vocabulary used in compliments (e.g., more mainstream adjectives like *guapa* ‘pretty’ versus more colloquial words like *pivonazo*, which roughly translates as ‘gorgeous’). The software program AntConc⁶ was used so as to ensure a more reliable word count than a manual one.

4.1 Linguistic patterns and age

There are three main linguistic patterns users tend to prefer when expressing their compliments. Figure 3 offers an overview of the results, which are then analyzed in detail in the following paragraphs.

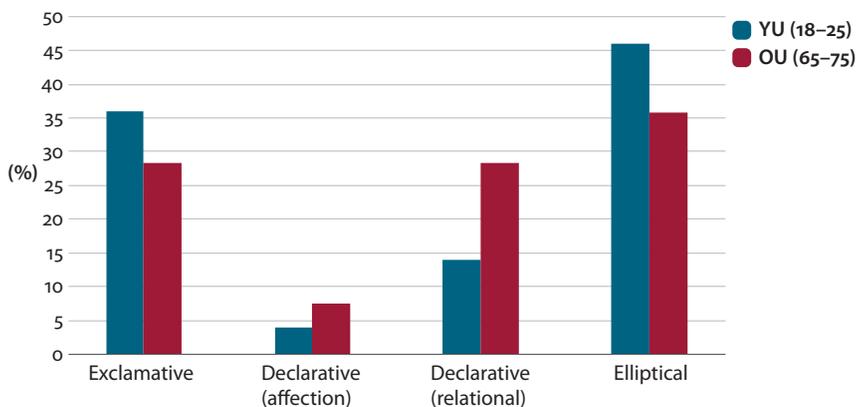


Figure 3. Linguistic patterns and age

As can be observed, the use of exclamative *qué* ‘what’ / ‘how’ seems to be slightly more favored by YUs. Thus, 15 tokens (28.3%) can be found in OUs while YUs features 18 (36%). It is difficult to determine whether this preference is related to age but it could be argued that younger users might be more willing to express

6. Available at <http://www.laurenceanthony.net/software/antconc/> [Accessed: 02/02/2018].

an emotional outburst than their older counterparts, as a way to emphasize their positive evaluation of their peers.

With regard to the use of the declarative sentence, it is interesting that neither OUs nor YUs favor *mental states of affection* (Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013). In other words, the compliment is linguistically realized by mental verbs of affection like *gustar* ‘like’ or *encantar* ‘love’:

- (8) (YU)
Me encantáis!!!!
 ‘I love the way you both look!!!!’
- (9) (OU)
me gusta mucho la foto
 ‘I really like the photo’

The number of occurrences of this pattern is remarkably low, with 4 tokens in OUs (7.5%) and 2 in YUs (4%). The justification for the absence of mental verbs of affection might be the fact that Facebook offers the possibility to compliment others just by simply clicking on Like or the reactions (see also Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013: 747).

However, when it comes to the use of declarative sentences with a copulative verb – i.e. focusing on the addressee and positively evaluating their permanent or transient qualities (e.g., *ser/estar* ‘to be’ + adjective) – there is a remarkable difference, with OUs using this strategy twice as much compared to YUs. Thus, while OUs opt for this pattern in 15 cases (28.3%), YUs employ it only on 7 occasions (14%). Interestingly, both groups opt for presenting the addressee’s positive quality as transient rather than permanent. In fact, OUs just resort to the copulative verb *estar* ‘be’ while YUs occasionally present the quality as permanent (2 tokens):

- (10) (OU)
Estas muy guapa
 ‘You look very pretty’
- (11) (YU)
Estás guapísima
 ‘You look gorgeous’
- (12) (YU)
Síii bonita eres x fuera más lo eres x dentro wapisima
 ‘If you are pretty in the outside you are even prettier in the inside gorgeous’

As already stated, it is beyond the scope of this paper to delve into the complexity of these verbs in Spanish. However, it might be argued that compliments – especially those complimenting physical appearance – tend to focus on transient aspects such

as changes of look, new clothing and so on. Moreover, Web 2.0 users are increasingly aware of the transient and fleeting nature of their communications on line, which might result in this preference for *estar* ‘be’ rather than *ser* ‘be’ when it comes to complimenting others.

Finally, ellipticals also show interesting differences and similarities between both groups (Table 1).

Table 1. Use of ellipticals by OUs and YUs

Ellipticals	OUs	35.8%	Noun phrase	25%
			Adjective phrase	75%
	YUs	46.0%	Noun phrase	29%
			Adjective phrase	71%
Other patterns		18.2%		
Total		100.0%		

As Table 1 shows, both groups seem to favor ellipticals more than the other linguistic patterns, with 19 tokens in OUs (35.8%) and 23 occurrences in YUs (46%). In both cases, they also prefer adjective phrases to noun phrases, with a very low occurrence of the latter. Thus, in the case of OUs, 25% of ellipticals are noun phrases in contrast with 75% adjectival phrases. As for YUs, noun phrases account for 29% of the occurrences while adjectival phrases amount to 71%. This preference for adjectival phrases seems to be determined by the fact that the corpus practically consists of compliments where the addressee’s physical appearance is complimented. In fact, OUs seem to reserve noun phrases to compliment objects or things related to the addressee (e.g., a video they have made) rather than their physical appearance:

- (13) (YU)
Siempre preciosa
 ‘Always beautiful’
- (14) (YU)
cara guapaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa !!!!!
 ‘Prettyyyyyyyyyy face!!!!!!’
- (15) (OU)
Guapísima como siempre
 ‘Beautiful as usual’
- (16) (OU)
Muy bonito el video
 ‘Very nice video’

The preference for ellipticals might be due to the fact that this structure is more efficient and expresses in a concise and quick way positive evaluation of the other, without the need to compose a long message (see also 4.4). As pointed out by Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013: 743),

ellipsis helps speakers (or Facebook users in this case) to avoid unnecessary repetitions and be more economical with language, stating only the necessary and new information and omitting the given part of the message that can be easily recovered by the addressee.

Furthermore, ellipsis can also be used to signal solidarity. In this respect, the use of ellipticals might be of special interest as they have been argued to be particular ways to create rapport. As proposed by Grant-Davie (1995: 461), “ellipsis can have the effect of creating a bond of respect and shared assumptions between the author and the reader. They become collaborators in the discourse.” Brown and Levinson (1987) also consider it a positive politeness device. It is also important to point out that users, however, do not always go for this ‘economical’ strategy (see Section 4.4).

4.2 Typographic variation and emoji

Typographic variation includes a myriad of aspects such as onomatopoeic interjections (laughter expressed as *haha*), abbreviations (brb, LOL), use of capitalization (WHAT???) and alphabetical lengthening (e.g., *niiiiice*) to express emphasis. The lengthening often also applies to punctuation marks such as exclamation or interrogative marks, as a way to intensify the message. Besides typographic variation, another interesting aspect of digital communication is the use of emoji. Although emoji could have been studied independently, in the case of verbal compliments they also seem to serve a supportive function, adding emphasis (see, e.g., Placencia and Lower 2013; Eslami et al. 2015), which is the main reason why they have been included in this subsection. Thus, this subsection will focus on the aforementioned features in relation to each age cohort under study, with special attention to the use of emoji and alphabetical lengthening, which are the two most common features found in the corpus under study.

Regarding the use of emoji, results show a drastic difference between the two age groups. Thus, while YUs employ emoji in 48% of the compliments they pay, there is only one occurrence of emoji by OUs, quoted below as Example (17):

- (17) (OU)
Muy guapa [Name] !! 😍😍
 ‘Very pretty !!’

In stark contrast, the use of emoji is pervasive among YUs, with a wide range of options going from kisses to even icons such as a pineapple (an endearing nickname the user employs when referring to the addressee). Examples (18) and (19) below illustrate the profusion of emoji among YUs:

(18) (YU)
 Pedazo de pivonazo no?fiu fiu!!!! 😊😘
 ‘Such a beauty, isn’t she? Woo woo!!!!’

(19) (YU)
Pero que bonita es mi piñita...deseando que estes por aqui ya 🍍👉
 ‘But how pretty my little pineapple is...can’t wait to have you back soon’

Similar results can be observed regarding lengthening of characters or exclamation marks to express emphasis. Thus, YUs lengthen their compliments in 66% of the cases, by resorting either to lengthening letters, exclamation marks or both, as in (20):

(20) (YU)
cara guapaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa !!!!! t echo de menisssssss
 ‘prettyyyyyyyyyyyyy face!!!!!! I miss youuuuuuuuuuuuu’

OUs occasionally make use of lengthening as a way to emphasize their message. However, they do so much less frequently (only 13% of their compliments include this feature). Instead, OUs seem to prefer the repetition of exclamation marks:

(21) (OU)
Guapass!!! Pasarlo bien!!!!
 ‘Pretty onessss!!! Have a good time!!!!’

With regard to onomatopoeic interjections, they are practically absent in OU, with the exception of Example (22), where the user starts her message with laughter, before mockingly commenting on an old photo another user has uploaded, depicting a group of their friends when they were youngsters. In fact, it might be argued that her compliment is jocularly ironic rather than a real compliment:

(22) (OU)
Jjjjjjjjjjj si están igual
 ‘Hahahahaha they look exactly the same’

YUs do not resort to onomatopoeic expressions as often as initially expected, with four tokens in the YU corpus, as illustrated by (23) to (25):

(23) (YU)
Seeeeeexy jajajaja
 ‘Seeeeeexy hahahaha’

(24) (YU)

No pareces tu jij ;) guapilla!

‘You don’t look yourself jij ;) little pretty one!’

(25) (YU)

😊😊😊😊😊 *me enamorado ! Quieres ser mi churry? Jajajaja bonitaaaa*

[Emoji] ‘I’ve fallen in love! Would you like to be my sweetie? Hahahahaha prettyyyyyy’

The way the compliments are framed indicates that users are resorting to jocular mockery (Maíz-Arévalo 2015). Interestingly, other typographic variations like abbreviations and capitalization are practically absent, with only one example in each dataset. This might be due to the limited size of the corpus. Future research could focus on these two features in a larger corpus, in contrast with other languages like English.

4.3 Lexical choices

The lexical choices employed in compliments tend to be rather limited (Wolfson and Manes 1980; Wolfson 1981; Manes 1983). It can also be argued that they may also be determined by what gets complimented. For example, in the corpus at hand, the adjective *guapa* ‘pretty’ is linked to compliments on physical appearance whereas *bonita* ‘nice’ often refers to photos the user has uploaded.

With respect to physical appearance, the most common adjective used in both corpora is *guapo/guapa* ‘handsome/pretty’. In fact, an automatized search with the software AntConc of the root *guap** reveals that the different variations of the adjective (*guapa* ‘pretty’, *guapísima* ‘prettiest’, *guapetona* ‘pretty’) is the seventh most frequently used word in the corpus under study. However, closer inspection of the data shows interesting differences according to age. On the one hand, YUs may alter the form of the adjective, leading to more colloquial versions such as *guapi*, using the morphological ending – i, which seems to be increasing in popularity among YUs and is in need of research (see, e.g., Placencia 2019). YUs may also choose to alter typographically the way the adjective is written, resorting to a more transgressive (English-like) spelling like *wapa*:

(26) (YU)

Wapa! 😊

‘Pretty!’

(27) (YU)

que guapiiii ^_^

‘How loveliii’

Furthermore, together with *guapa* ‘pretty’, YUs employ a wider variety of adjectives to compliment the addressee on appearance, including *bonita* ‘good-looking’, *preciosa* ‘gorgeous’, *bella* ‘beautiful’ or *hermosa* ‘lovely’. OUs, on the other hand, simply resort to *guapa* ‘pretty’ to compliment appearance while *preciosa* ‘beautiful’ and *bonita* ‘lovely’ are reserved to compliment photographs or videos shared by the user, as in (28), where the user makes a clear distinction between complimenting the photo and the people appearing in it:

- (28) (OU)
Que bonita foto y que guapos todos, besicos
 ‘What a lovely photo and how good-looking everybody is, little kisses’

As pointed out in Section 2.3, YUs tend to employ more intensifiers (e.g., superlative form) than OUs, together with slang and more innovative vocabulary. The analysis of the data, however, reflects that both age cohorts seem to be using intensifiers in the same way. For example, the superlative form of the adjective *guapísima* ‘prettiest’ is used five times in YU and six times in OU. No examples of other intensifiers like *tan* ‘so’ or *muy* ‘very’ were found in the datasets. This might be explained by the fact that intensification of the compliments is often made by other means such as the use of exclamatives or typographic variation.

However, interesting differences are found between the two groups when slang or innovative vocabulary is inspected. OUs do not employ any taboo or swear word in their compliments whilst YUs may occasionally use taboo words to boost their compliment. The frequency, however, is low and only three examples were found (6% of the total). In (29), the user initially posted that she had passed all her exams and a female friend responds with what seems to be a mixture of a compliment and a congratulating remark, employing a taboo word:

- (29) (YU)
Oleeee tu jigoo
 ‘Hurraaaaah for your c***’

According to García-Gómez (2010: 153), adolescents may use taboo words as a way to boost group solidarity, in what he describes as the “feminization of masculine expressions”. Thus, the expression in (29) parallels the colloquial and taboo expression *ole tus cojones/huevos* ‘hurrah for your balls/eggs’, referring to male genitalia. The second Example (30) also uses a colloquial, taboo address term in reference to female genitalia:

- (30) (YU)
Que guapaa erees chochiiitooo 🍆🍆🍆
 ‘You’re so prettyyyy, little pussyyyyy’

As Table 2 shows, the most frequent choice among OUs is to use three-word compliments while YUs prefer slightly shorter compliments (often ellipticals), consisting of one or two words:

- (33) (OU)
Qué guapa estás!
 ‘How pretty you look!’
- (34) (YU)
Cosa bonitaaaaa!!!
 ‘Pretty thinggggg!!!’

A qualitative approach to the data renders more interesting results. YUs do not include the name of the addressee (which reduces the number of words) whereas OUs do so on 17 occasions (34% of the compliments), so that a typical two-word compliment becomes a three-word one:

- (35) (OU)
Muy guapa [Name]
 ‘Very pretty [Name]’
- (36) (OU)
 [Name] *eres única*
 ‘[Name] you are unique’

It is hard to explain why OUs opt to include the addressee’s name in 34% of the cases. A plausible reason might be their need to explicitly mark their relationship with the addressee in a milieu where the number of interlocutors that might end up taking part in the conversational exchange is never foreseeable. It might also help give a more personal touch and create rapport, especially if a nickname or a diminutive form is used. YUs might not feel that need, being more used to the interaction on Web2.0. In this respect, it could be enlightening to carry out further research including interviews with participants of both age cohorts, to ascertain any possible reasons why they are behaving in different ways.

Another striking difference relates to the fact that YUs often produce just a compliment in their comment while OUs display a variety of speech acts under the same comments, setting up the scene or explaining why they are complimenting the addressee and disclosing personal information, as in (37), where the addressee, who has uploaded different photos of wild flowers, is referred to by name at the end:

(37) (OU)

Precioso te lo vuelvo ha decir me encanta las flores silvestres no soy de flores compradas en floristería, tengo que decir que me an regalado en alguna ocasión, pero como las silvestres son preciosas gracias por volvera a compartir un saludo NAME !!!!

‘Beautiful, let me tell you again I love wild flowers I don’t like flowers from flower shops, I must say that I’ve occasionally been given them as a gift, but nothing is as beautiful as wild flowers thanks for sharing again greetings NAME!!!’

The length of messages might also be related to the fact that OUs may see the web as a way to strengthen their links and off-line social relationships (Pennebaker and Stone 2003; Barbieri 2008; Schwartz et al. 2013). This is reflected in the fact that OUs may include more explicit facework towards the addressees, such as well-wishing, thanking, or closing their message with some sort of salutation in 17% of the cases:

(38) (OU)

NAME *estas muy guapa un beso Amiga*

‘NAME you look very pretty a kiss Friend’

(39) (OU)

Cada dia k se pasa estar MAS gnuapa besos

‘You look PRETTIER every day kisses’

However, this does not mean YUs do not employ the same kind of strategies. They can also include other speech acts (e.g., salutations, wishing well) accompanying their compliments, but they mainly employ emoji, which make their compliments shorter and more multimodal:

(40) (YU)

Qué preciosidad cari!!! Pronto nos vemos! 😘😘😘😘

‘How lovely sweetie!!! See you soon!’

Proximity might also be influenced by the type of device the user employs. In other words, checking Facebook on a smartphone or on a computer might affect the way users transmit their message, with users who employ their smartphones often resorting to more visual patterns as opposed to users who use Facebook from their computers, and for whom it might be easier to type a longer (textual) comment. Time might also be playing a role, with retired users having more time to “socialize” on Facebook and type longer messages.

5. Conclusions

This paper aimed to contrast the compliments performed by two groups of Facebook Spanish female users belonging to two different age spans: 18–25 years old (YUs) and 65–75 years old (OUs). Special attention was paid to four aspects: the linguistic pattern of compliments, typographic variation and emoji, lexical choice and prolixity. The analysis of linguistic patterns does not reveal striking quantitative differences. For example, both groups seem to favor elliptical structures (46% by YUs and 35.8% by OUs).

With regard to typographic variation and emoji, YUs were found to display a higher tendency in producing multimodal messages, with a high frequency of emoji as opposed to OUs, who tend to employ verbal messages and whose use of emoji is much more limited (48% versus 1.9% in YU and OU, respectively). Other typographic variations such as lengthening of characters or punctuation marks are also more favored by YUs. These results are in line with previous studies on the use of emoji (see, e.g., Kanayama 2003) and discourse intensifiers (Tagliamonte 2005; Nguyen et al. 2013).

Lexical choices also reflect interesting variation related to age as OUs stick to more mainstream adjectives such as *guapa* ‘pretty’ to compliment others while YUs display a wider range of adjectives; some of them are rewritings of *guapa* ‘pretty’ such as *wapa* or *guapi*. They are also more inclined to using taboo and colloquial words, which are non-existent in OU.

Finally, prolixity also seems to vary according to age. OUs tend to produce longer messages, including not only compliments but other facework such as salutations. YUs, on the other hand, are much more concise and tend to employ non-verbal means (mostly emoji) to perform these functions – e.g., greetings, etc.

Admittedly, the present paper faces some limitations like the size of the dataset. A larger corpus is indeed needed to reach more definitive conclusions. Secondly, it would be essential to carry out interviews with users themselves, who might provide insightful comments as to their communicative intentions and the ways to transmit them online. Interviewing the users might also throw light on whether the type of device used has an effect on complimenting patterns. Third, it would also be interesting to replicate the study in different languages such as English, given that age has long been neglected in the study of Facebook. Finally, the focus of the present study has been on compliments and age but other aspects such as gender and its relationship to age as well as responses to compliments could benefit from further research.

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“Tu masssss ♥ te amo”

Responding to compliments on Instagram among Ecuadorian teenage girls

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Complimenting behavior within a group of Ecuadorian teenage girls on Instagram was examined by Placencia (2019). Using the same corpus, in the present study we consider the responses to compliments offered. These responses, while short, are remarkably complex, containing both text and images (emojis) and indeed textual stand-ins for paralinguistic cues such as laughter. Responses were grouped according to Holmes's (1986) taxonomy and the data shows a distinct preference for accepting compliments given (97.7%), with fewer sub-strategies used compared to other studies. These results are considered in the context of the type of photos examined and the overall function that Instagram appears to fulfil for the group of teenagers in this study. Beyond what might be termed the basic strategies of accepting or rejecting compliments, we also look at the rich and varied sub-strategies used by the girls in this Instagram community, which they employ to express solidarity and show modesty when accepting compliments.

Keywords: compliment responses, Instagram, Ecuadorian Spanish, emojis, teenage talk, social media

1. Introduction

The present study examines compliment responses (CRs) on Instagram among a group of Ecuadorian older teenage girls. Instagram is one of the online world's more recent social media phenomenon and has, from its creation in 2010, come to be one of the most used platforms. This is perhaps on account of the multiple social functions it fulfils for its users (see, e.g., Lee et al. 2015; Placencia 2019): it is a photo-sharing, Social Networking Site (SNS) and, as such, provides users with a means of self-presentation and self-expression in addition to simply keeping them connected with one another (Bergman et al. 2011). In 2019, although Facebook still

topped the charts with 2,320 million users, Instagram recorded 1,000 million active accounts worldwide (Statista 2019a). In addition, research shows that the highest percentage of users, worldwide, are aged between 13 and 24 years old (37.4% of all users) (Statista 2019b). The clear appeal of Instagram for teens makes this study particularly pertinent.

An earlier work (Placencia 2019) examined compliments on Instagram among the same group of Ecuadorian teenage girls as in the present study. The compliments they received on the photos they posted were found to be *routine* (Sifianou 2001: 410), in the sense that they are socially expected and take place over one turn.¹ Syntactically, they were largely formulaic (Manes and Wolfson 1981), with succinctness as one of their key characteristics. Also, many were multimodal, and creativity was shown by the teenagers through their use of emojis and hashtags, as well as through lexical choices and other intensification devices through which approval was routinely exaggerated. In terms of function, Placencia's (2019) results are in line with those seen in other contexts among friends and family (see, e.g., Placencia and Lower 2013), where enhancing affiliation was their primary function. The main question addressed in this paper is how the teenagers respond (or not) to their peers' compliments, including, for example, whether they accept them or reject them; the role modesty plays in CRs in the context examined and how it is manifested, and the function of CRs.

In her classic study of CRs in US English, Pomerantz (1978) suggests that responding to a compliment in a way that maintains or enhances the rapport between speakers poses the complimentee a certain dilemma: accepting the compliment is generally regarded as the right thing to do, but modesty or avoiding self-praise is also desirable. This leads the author to suggest that speakers operate within a system of constraints and preferences: to accept or reject the compliment; to agree or disagree with it; also, there is a presumed social preference for accepting and agreeing with compliments, which stands in conflict with social pressure to avoid self-praise.

The range of CRs found in natural speech – from thanking to returning the compliment – represent a set of solutions to the conflicting constraints and preferences the speaker faces. In this paper we look at the solutions the Ecuadorian (older) teenage girls in the present study employ to address these conflicting constraints and preferences when responding to compliments on Instagram. Firstly, in Section 2 below, we consider previous studies on CRs in different languages (2.1), with a main focus on works relating to Spanish (2.2) and social media contexts (2.3). We then describe the corpus and methodology employed (Section 3), followed by the results (Section 4). Conclusions are provided in Section 5.

1. *Routine* compliments stand in contrast with *non-routine* ones. The latter “do not necessarily occur in cases in which compliments are socially expected”; also, they are “more creative and can usually occupy many turns” (Sifianou 2001: 411).

2. Background

2.1 Previous studies on compliment responses in different languages

Building on Pomerantz’s (1978) work, other authors have looked at CRs in terms of established politeness theories. Among the first, in her work on New Zealand English CRs, Holmes (1986) uses Brown and Levinson’s (1987[1978]) concept of face (needs). The constraints and preferences described by Pomerantz mean that, although offering a compliment may be intended to increase solidarity between speakers, it also constitutes something of a face-threat to the complimentee. Agreeing with the compliment would seem preferable in order to maintain solidarity with their interlocutor; however, too strong an agreement risks appearing immodest, thus threatening the speaker’s positive face. This interpretation explains the high level of agreement with and acceptance of compliments seen in studies of English CRs, such as Holmes (1986) and Herbert (1989), among others.

Comparing CRs in US English and Chinese, Chen (1993) uses Leech’s (1983) Maxims of Politeness to explain different response strategies: for instance, returning a compliment adheres to the Agreement and Approbation maxims. Chen’s findings showed that while Americans preferred to agree with compliments, indicating that they prioritize the Agreement Maxim, Chinese speakers, in contrast, tended to reject compliments suggesting that they gave priority to the Modesty Maxim. Chen’s (1993) study shows an extreme example of how culture affects the way in which compliments are perceived and, therefore, responded to, although the tendency this author identified for Chinese speakers in his (1993) study appears to have changed over the years (Chen and Yang 2010).

Other studies have also highlighted cross-cultural differences in response preference. For example, Lorenzo-Dus (2001), based on the results of her study contrasting CRs in British English and Peninsular Spanish, concludes that the acceptable degree of modesty, implied by a speaker’s chosen strategy, appears to depend upon differences in cultural expectations between Britain and Spain. That culture shapes CR behavior is a result supported by many other authors in a range of cross-cultural studies (for an overview, see Chen 2010).

More recently, it has also been demonstrated that social media platforms have an effect on CR patterns (Cirillo 2012; Eslami and Yang 2018), which is partially, although not totally, dependent upon the available means of response (Maíz-Arévalo 2013; Placencia, Lower, and Powell 2016). SNSs offer response types such as emojis and ‘likes’ which are not easily equated to any face-to-face strategies (for an overview, see Placencia and Lower 2017). Other considerations that distinguish SNSs from face-to-face encounters include the fact that communication is asynchronous. This not only gives users extra time to consider their responses – how to negotiate the dilemma of agreement versus self-praise – but also seems to make it more

acceptable to ignore some compliments completely (Placencia et al. 2016). In addition, Instagram, like Facebook and other social media sites, is an environment where photographs – particularly *solo* shots (Farquhar 2012, Section 3) – are posted explicitly seeking attention, and, thus, posters can be said to be fishing for compliments. In this way, compliments are, in some sense, expected and there is likely to be far less need for complimentees to show modesty. Indeed, as will be discussed, the second most common type of CR in this corpus was some form of a return compliment. In this manner, the compliment-response pair is a way of demonstrating mutual appreciation. As a matter of fact, the compliment and its response can be seen as what Goffman (1971) termed “supportive acts” where interlocutors are supporting one another’s images and indeed their relationship. Seen in this light, the CR becomes as much part of the process of rapport enhancement as the compliment itself and the emphasis, in terms of Pomerantz’s (1978) constraints, is far more on pleasing the other – agreeing and thanking – than needing to protect one’s self-image by appearing modest.

While there is a large body of work to draw on in this area of research, studies are often difficult to compare as authors use different ways of categorizing CRs; principal among these are Holmes’s (1986) and Herbert’s (1989) taxonomies. The major difference between the two taxonomies lies in how they rank Pomerantz’s initial constraints. Herbert (1989) chooses to take agreement/non-agreement as the primary choice for speakers with substrategies falling into one of these two categories. Holmes (1986), on the other hand, selects acceptance/rejection as the primary choice and allows speakers the additional principal category of evasion. This latter approach seems to produce a more versatile classification system which is why it is used in the present work.

2.2 Compliment response studies in Spanish

Concerning face-to-face interactions, among the earliest studies of CR behavior in the Spanish-speaking world are those of Valdés and Pino (1981) and Yáñez (1990) on Chicano Spanish. Other varieties of Spanish studied include, for example, Colombian (Lopera Medina 2015) and Mexican (Mack and Sykes 2009; Flores Salgado 2015); however, the majority of research has focused on Peninsular Spanish. The latter body of work comprises several cross-cultural studies comparing Peninsular Spanish to different varieties of English such as British (Lorenzo-Dus 2001), New Zealand (Maíz-Arévalo 2012)² and US (Mir and Cots 2017) English.

2. Maíz-Arévalo (2012) used Holmes’s (1986) results for her comparison.

These studies show many interesting patterns and certain commonalities. Firstly, in terms of the English speakers studied, the works available support the findings of other authors, notably Holmes (1986) and Herbert (1989), in that these language groups universally prefer to accept compliments, and most often do so with a simple “thanks”. Spanish speakers in these studies also favored accepting compliments; nonetheless, in contrast to the English speakers, they used a more varied range of strategies, and, responses often involved several turns. In addition, all these studies showed significant levels of disagreement and rejection among Spaniards suggesting that although, as among English speakers, disagreeing or rejecting is a dispreferred response, unlike their English counterparts, they do not find it as unacceptable.

Mir and Cots (2017) used a DCT – based on that used by Lorenzo-Dus (2001) – in combination with two open-ended survey questions, to elicit CRs in a variety of situations and to assess speakers’ attitudes to complimenting. Results from their DCT were in line with the findings of other contrastive studies (see, e.g., Lorenzo-Dus 2001; Maíz-Arévalo 2012) in that the CRs produced by Peninsular Spanish speakers in their study tended to be longer, more creative and less formulaic than those produced by the US English speakers. They explain this as being due, at least in part, to the reported (higher) orientation to solidarity politeness in Spain, compared to English-speaking cultures.

As discussed by Hickey (2005), for Peninsular Spanish speakers, replying to a compliment with a simple “thanks” is perhaps perceived as insincere due to its formulaic nature. In this way, these speakers seek to build solidarity by making lengthier and more creative responses. Mir and Cot’s (2017) survey questions also throw some light on this phenomenon in that the Peninsular Spanish speakers reported lower rates of complimenting in general than did their American English counterparts and also tended to question the sincerity of compliments more. The authors suggest that this leads Peninsular Spanish speakers to have a lower confidence level in terms of how to respond to compliments leading to less formulaic, verbose response patterns (see discussion in Section 4.1).

Lorenzo-Dus (2001) and Maíz-Arévalo (2012) examined their data for gender differences. Both authors saw a tendency for Spanish speakers to require the repetition or expansion of compliments given. However, while Lorenzo-Dus saw this across her corpus, Maíz-Arévalo observed it as a more specifically female strategy. The two authors also saw different results with respect to the preferred strategies of males: ironic upgrading of compliments was found to be a popular strategy almost exclusive to Spanish males in Lorenzo-Dus’s study while Maíz-Arévalo found that males in her corpus preferred to evade compliments by changing the topic. It has to be borne in mind though that Lorenzo-Dus’s study – based on a production questionnaire – is about perceptions of appropriate use, and not actual uses, while

Maíz-Arévalo used field notes to collect her corpus and is, therefore, perhaps more representative of natural speech patterns. As such, comparisons between the two studies are not straightforward.

Spanish has rarely been compared to languages other than English, thus Ramajo Cuesta's (2011) study on Lebanese Arabic speakers and Peninsular Spanish CRs stands out. The work used a combination of natural data collected through secret recordings³ and ethnographic interviews. The author found few differences between the two language groups with both tending to favor compliment acceptance. Nonetheless, there were some distinctions in that the Lebanese speakers tended to be more formulaic in their responses. Other differences appeared in how males and females responded to compliments since the former tended to be more succinct in both languages. Interestingly, Lebanese speakers appeared to show particular deference towards older people – even close relatives – a phenomenon which was not reflected in the Spanish corpus.

Other studies looking at Peninsular Spanish include those of Fernández-Corbacho (2011) and Lázaro Ruiz and Ramajo Cuesta (2015). The former examined how Spanish students responded to compliments in Spanish (L1) compared to English (L2), based on production questionnaires. Although Fernández-Corbacho's focus was on showing the influence of L1 on the acquisition of L2, the findings concerning patterns of response in Spanish are relevant here. Unlike the majority of studies, where acceptance was universally preferred, this author found that the most common response was evasion, specifically, explaining or expressing doubt about the compliment. Additionally, this work also showed respondents rejecting compliments with significant frequency. Lázaro Ruiz and Ramajo Cuesta, on the other hand, used secret recordings of interactions to compare speakers in four autonomous communities in Spain – Madrid, Valencia, Catalonia, Andalusia, and Castile-Leon. While the authors did not find significant differences in response patterns between groups, in common with Mir and Cots (2017), they did observe a preference for downgrading or mitigating compliments – especially among females.

Mack and Sykes (2009) study, based on e-questionnaires with supplementary notes as to participant choices, focuses on the use of irony in responding to compliments, comparing groups of speakers in Mexico and Spain. Their general results are in line with those of other studies in that they found acceptance to be the most common response. However, they did observe that while Spaniards preferred to accept using irony and humor, Mexican speakers tended to downgrade the compliment. In terms of responses to ironic compliments, when these were recognized as

3. It should be noted that secret recordings, while yielding natural data, infringe upon people's right to privacy. This may be acceptable in some academic settings but generally not in the Anglo academic world.

such, both Mexicans and Spaniards responded in kind. Spaniards did, nevertheless, use irony almost twice as often as Mexicans – which is probably a reflection of their greater tendency towards employing this strategy overall. Mack and Sykes attribute the differences in response pattern to Spaniards’ greater orientation to solidarity politeness compared to their Mexican counterparts (see also Márquez Reiter and Placencia 2005).

2.3 Compliment responses on social media

Social media offers many opportunities for the giving of and responding to compliments and research into the social norms appropriate to these platforms is a growing area of interest in pragmatics (see Placencia and Lower 2017 for an overview). Recent work includes studies investigating a variety of social media platforms in several languages, for example, in Second Life where English is the lingua-franca (Cirillo 2012); on Facebook in Spanish (Maíz-Arévalo 2013), US English (Placencia et al. 2016) and Persian (Eslami, Jabbari, and Kuo 2015); on Twitter, among male and female celebrities in Malaysia (Siti Yuhaida and Tan 2014); comparing habits on Facebook (US English) and Renren (Mandarin Chinese), China’s ‘Facebook’ (Eslami and Yang 2018; Eslami, Yang and Qian, this volume), and English (variety unknown) on Instagram (Indah and Rifana 2018).

Although Cirillo’s (2012) study does not deal with a prototypical SNS, as the first study of CRs in an online environment, it revealed some interesting phenomena which are relevant here. The most noteworthy of these is the acceptability of non-response in the online world. In fact, Cirillo (2012) found that 17.6% of compliments received no acknowledgement whatsoever – a result which strongly distinguishes these online interactions from those occurring face-to-face. For example, Holmes (1986) does not report any instances of non-response to compliments given in her study while Herbert (1989) mentions a 5% rate of non-acknowledgement. In contrast, non-response seems to be acceptable in online environments. For instance, the three Facebook studies cited above mention rates of 30% (Maíz-Arévalo 2013); 39% and 34% for Facebook and Renren, respectively (Eslami and Yang 2018); 81% (Placencia et al. 2016), and 16% (Eslami and Yang 2018).

Facebook is one of the most studied SNSs. For the purposes of comparison, it is useful that the three studies considered here all use Holmes’s (1986) taxonomy; however, they do differ slightly in how they approach the use of medium-specific phenomena such as the ‘like’ function. More specifically, while Maíz-Arévalo (2013) categorizes these responses as “non-verbal” strategies, separate from and on the same hierarchy level as the principal strategies of acceptance, evasion and rejection, Placencia et al. (2016) and Eslami and Yang (2018) on the other hand, see these

non-verbal responses as having a pragmatic value that can be ascribed to one or other of Holmes's (1986) existing strategies. These medium-specific phenomena, whether they are an affordance of the platform, such as the 'like' function, or more ubiquitous, such as emoticons and emojis, are deliberate strategies employed by users and fully interpretable within the contexts in which they occur. In this way 'like-ing' a compliment is a response uniquely available on Facebook, but it can be interpreted as a form of acceptance nonetheless (Placencia et al. 2016).

One of the most striking aspects of Eslami and Yang's (2018) comparison of Facebook and Renren is how the Chinese data replicates to some extent patterns seen in work on face-to-face CRs among Chinese speakers. Eslami and Yang (2018) took a corpus of compliments and CRs from bilingual Chinese Americans who were active users of both SNSs under investigation. A total of 150 CRs on Facebook and 170 CRs on Renren were analyzed to explore how users adapted their styles of communication according to the SNS they were using. On Facebook, users overwhelmingly favored acceptance strategies (68%) with very few instances of either evasion or rejection – as expected for speakers of American English (Herbert 1989). When using Renren, nonetheless, the same users opted for far more evasion and rejection strategies (55%). Indeed, on Renren, 17.4% of responses were rejections compared to only 7% on Facebook. For comparison, Chen's (1993) work found a 96% rejection rate. More recent work on Chinese speakers (Tang and Zhang 2009; Chen and Yang 2010) shows that Chinese speakers are increasingly following the American English preference for accepting compliments: their rejection rates were as low as 15% and 9%, respectively. In this way, while Eslami and Yang's (2018) Renren corpus shows a more traditional Chinese response pattern – a higher rejection rate – than their Facebook corpus, it is remarkably well in keeping with contemporary Chinese practice. The latter is moving towards American English patterns showing far lower rejection rates, as illustrated by Tang and Zhang's (2009) and Chen and Yang's (2010) results mentioned above.

In common with Eslami and Yang (2018), Siti Yuhaida and Tan's (2014) study deals with speakers of an East Asian language group (Malay). The corpus itself was, however, bilingual, with most users tweeting in English or a mix of Malay and English. The work examines Malaysian celebrity responses to compliments from fans on Twitter and gives an interesting insight not only into this SNS but also the particular context of a potentially very unequal relationship. The authors do not explore this aspect of the interactions and it is unclear how the social distance between interactants is perceived or indeed where the power is felt to lie. Nonetheless, they do mention that the high rate of compliment acceptance may be intrinsically linked to the celebrity-fan relationship.

As Siti Yuhaida and Tan (2014) observe, the results of their study belie the general trend for speakers of East Asian languages to prefer evasion and rejection

over the acceptance of compliments (see, among others, Daikuhara 1986; Chen 1993; Ye 1995). One explanation could be found in cultural change, specifically the influence of US culture, as Chen and Yang (2010) discuss – the high usage of English within the corpus would certainly indicate this to be a factor. Alternatively, as Siti Yuhaida and Tan (2014: 89) conjecture, it could be a deliberate strategy on the part of the celebrities: to remain popular they need to make their fans feel good and, therefore, it is seen as the right thing to do.

A further alternative explanation as to why online patterns of behavior do not always resemble those in face-to-face interactions is found in Eslami et al.’s (2015) work on Facebook. Here, the corpus comprises Persian speakers in Iran, a society renowned for its social conservatism. Citing Boori (1994) as a comparison with face-to-face CRs, the authors observe that Facebook users appeared to be very creative employing a far wider number of response strategies than are found in face-to-face interactions. Facebook users also accepted more compliments: 95% of compliments were accepted on Facebook compared to only 48% in face-to-face interactions. This pattern was observed not only between same-gender interlocutors, but also between interlocutors of different genders. The authors suggest that this shows how the Internet is enabling Iranians to breaking free of the restrictive cultural norms imposed upon them in physical-world public spaces (Eslami et al. 2015: 270).

Finally, a study by Indah and Rifana (2018) should be mentioned here as, like ours, it concerns Instagram. Unfortunately, this work is not sufficiently systematic to provide a great many comparisons; however, it does offer the insight that because Instagrammers are highly selective of their followers this may well be a further factor in increasing the frequency of acceptances. This selectivity is common to all SNSs to a greater or lesser degree – friends and followers can be accepted and also barred with a mouse click or a swipe. The authors note that followers are selected because they give positive comments and this fact may well alter users’ perceptions of appropriate behavior accentuating the need for agreement at the expense of self-praise avoidance or modesty. The generally high levels of compliment acceptance could thus reflect the purpose of these platforms, that is, mutual affirmation.

3. Methodology

The corpus for this study comprises the responses to Instagram compliments described in Placencia (2019). These were compliments on *solo shots* (Farquhar 2012), that is, “pictures that do not include other people” (p. 464), where the teenagers in the study tended to present striking images of themselves, highlighting their beauty and/or their creative style. Pictures of the teenagers as babies or young children were not included. Solo shots were chosen, as described in Placencia (2019: 98–100),

taking into consideration results from other studies that have found that women's appearance is the most frequent object of compliments (Manes and Wolfson 1981; Holmes 1995; Placencia and Lower 2013), at least among family and friends. CRs to other categories of pictures can be considered in a future study. Table 1 below shows the proportion of solo shots vis-à-vis other photos posted by the teenagers over a 12-month period. The number of compliments these pictures generated can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1. Proportion of solo shots vis-à-vis other photos posted (Placencia 2019: 99)

User	Total number of photos posted	Total number of solo shots
F1	65	16 (24.61%)
F2	73	18 (24.65%)
F3	84	27 (32.14%)
F4	84	26 (30.95%)
F5	43	7 (16.27%)
F6	27	11 (40.74%)
F7	44	10 (22.72%)
Total	420	115 (27.38%)

The data collection, as described in Placencia (2019), started with observation over three months in the spring of 2014 of the activity of one female Ecuadorian teenager, aged 17 at the time, after obtaining consent from her and her parents to observe her interactions. On the basis of the teenager's recommendations, other female participants, all Ecuadorian and all living in Quito (Metropolitan District), were approached. They were 18 at the time and had just finalized their senior year of high school. Six of them agreed to take part. As such, the present study is based on observation of the Instagram exchanges of seven girls, including the teenager whose activity was first observed. This group of teenagers, denoted as F[female]1 to F7, was largely homogenous with respect to age and social class (see Placencia 2019 for further details).

In order to (dis)confirm our interpretation of some unclear responses, we sought one of the participants' perception of those responses. This was useful as it helped clarify, for example, the fact that frequently employed utterances such as *te amo* 'I love you', while expressing affection, were ways of saying thank you among the teenagers rather than avoidance strategies.

Following institutional and Association of Internet Researchers (AOIR) (<https://aoir.org/ethics/>) ethics guidelines, and in order to guarantee complete anonymity for the participants in this study, all names within the interactions were replaced by pseudonyms; also, details that may reveal the identity of the participants, such as locations, were changed or removed.

Table 2. Compliments and compliment responses by user

User	Number of compliments received	CRs	
		Number of compliments responded to	Number of CRs
F1	45	18 (40%)	12
F2	46	40 (87%)	25
F3	80	15 (19%)	15
F4	56	50 (89%)	48
F5	31	28 (90%)	18
F6	94	2 (2%)	2
F7	59	9 (15%)	9
Total	411	162	129

Table 2 shows the number of compliments received by each participant and the responses made. The majority of compliments did not receive any response (61%); of those that were responded to, 12% were sent to more than one individual at the same time (up to four people in some cases). These group responses were, nevertheless, counted only once since they only contained one unique CR which gave us a total number of 129 CRs. This explains why, in most cases, the figures for CRs in Table 2 are lower than those for number of compliments responded to.

As Table 2 shows, in common with the majority of studies of CRs online, the response rate is fairly low. This is probably down to two factors. The asynchronicity of the medium makes it possible to ignore compliments without appearing overtly impolite – users do not expect immediate responses and accept that others may be offline. In addition, the sheer number of compliments makes it less realistic that they should all be answered (see Placencia et al. 2016). However, there is variation in response rate which shows that users have very different tolerances for how responsive they feel they should be. Indeed, individual response rates vary widely: from 90% to 2%.

4. Results

4.1 Main strategies

As indicated in Section 2.1, Holmes’s (1986) taxonomy was used to classify the CRs and the results are shown in Table 3. CRs fell into two main categories: accept and evade. Four substrategies of acceptance were identified. As discussed in Section 2.1, previous studies of Spanish speakers in face-to-face contexts showed significant levels of compliment rejection, and, where compliments were accepted, downgrading

or seeking reassurance were favored. It is striking then that the corpus in the present study shows such an extremely high level of compliment acceptance (97.7%), with only a small number of evasions (2.3%) and a complete absence of rejections.

Table 3. CR strategies (based on Holmes 1986) with examples from the Instagram corpus

Main category	Subcategory	Example	Number of instances	
Strong Agreement	ACCEPT	Agree (explicit)	(1) F1's photo 3 C:* <i>uuu fancy</i> 'ooooh fancy' R:** <i>jajajajajaja si si</i> ♥ 'hahahahahaha yes yes'	11 (8.5%)
		Show appreciation (thank; express happiness or affection or another positive emotion)	(2) F2's photo 12 C: <i>espectacular</i> 'spectacular' R: <i>te amooo</i> 'I love youuu'	51 (39.5%)
		Return the compliment	(3) F2's photo 10 C: <i>Guapisima</i> 'Beautiful ^{sup} '*** R: <i>tu mas prima</i> 'you more cuzzzz [cousin]'	46 (35.7%)
		Show false modesty	(4) F4's photo 21 C: <i>Marga por que eres tan guapa?</i> 'Marga why are you so beautiful?' R: <i>Jajaa shhh guapa? Tu!</i> 'HaHaa shhh beautiful? You [are]!'	18 (14.0%)
Weak Agreement	EVADÉ	Shift credit	(5) F4's photo 5 C: <i>hermosa primi</i> ♥ 'gorgeous cuz [cousin]' R: <i>Aprendiendo de ti pues! Jaja</i> ♥♥ 'Learning from you of course! Haha'	3 (2.3%)

* C stands for compliment;

** R stands for response;

*** 'sup' stands for superlative and 'dim' for diminutive.

The most preferred CR was to show appreciation (51 instances, 39.5%), primarily using the appreciation token (AT) *gracias* ‘thanks’ (33% of the 51 instances) or an expression of some positive emotion such as affection as in (2) above. Returning the compliment, as in (3), was the second most favored response (46 instances, 35.7%).⁴ Explicit agreement, as in (1), was rare (11 instances, 8.5%) although not as rare as shifting credit (three instances, 2.3%), as in (5) – the only non-acceptance category present in this study. Cases like (5), however, do not constitute entirely clear-cut instances of evasion in that there is an element of compliment return too. We classified it as a shifting credit strategy though because the complimentee in this example seems to suggest that her beauty has nothing to do with her, that she learned it all from someone else – the complimenter.

The third most popular strategy – show false modesty – is one that appears to be unique to this corpus. Example (4) illustrates one such response. This type of strategy contains an element of rejection out of modesty, in that the speaker seems to be disagreeing with the compliment by questioning it (... *guapa?* ‘beautiful?’) but uses humor (*HaHaa shhh* ...) to imply acceptance. In this way the speaker tacitly agrees with the compliment showing that the modest rejection of the compliment is not really felt – hence the categorization of this type of CR as “false modesty.”

The high level of acceptance and agreement in this corpus must partly be explained by the nature of the corpus. Many authors (see, e.g., Siti Yuhaida and Tan 2014; Eslami et al. 2015; Indah and Rifana 2018) have noted that online patterns show higher compliment acceptance rates than in comparable face-to-face studies, citing factors such as the relaxation of social norms online allowing greater freedom of expression (Eslami et al. 2015) and the expectation of positivity which particular features of SNSs encourage (Indah and Rifana 2018), as remarked above.

Over half of CRs used a single strategy (57%).⁵ However, there was a significant number of responses where more than one response strategy was employed. Specifically, appreciation tokens (ATs) were extremely common throughout the corpus and in 55 instances (43%) these appeared with other strategies. For the purposes of analysis, then, it was necessary to choose a main strategy in these cases (see Figure 1), regarding the other strategy as a supportive move (see, e.g., Placencia et al. 2016).

4. This is unlike other studies such as Ruiz-Tada, Fernández-Villanueva, and Tragant in the present volume where returning the compliment is the least frequently employed strategy.

5. This includes those responses where the speaker repeated the same strategy twice – two distinct forms of AT were common.

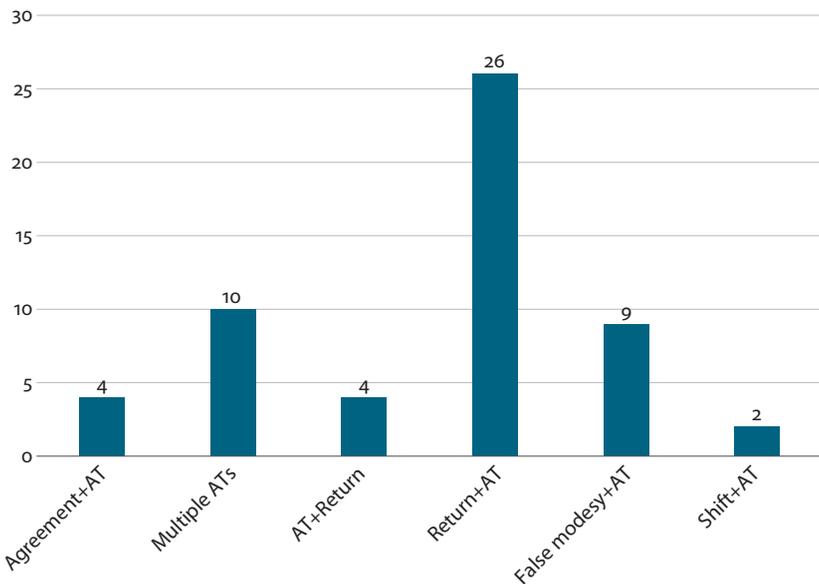


Figure 1. Combinations of CR strategies

As Figure 1 shows, returning a compliment with some form of AT – either in non-verbal (6) or verbal form, or both, as in (7) – was particularly common, occurring in 47% of all combination strategies.

- (6) F1's photo 11
 C: *hermosa h ha valeria.*
 'gorgeous h ha valeria.'
 R: *tu tu maasss* ♥♥♥♥♥
 'you you mooooore'
- (7) F4's photo 3
 C: *Pero que guapaaaa*
 'But how beautifuuuul'
 R: *Igualita a ti. Te amo* ♥
 'Same_{dim} as you. Love you'

In (6), the AT expresses affection in the form of emojis and, as these appear at the end of the response and not on their own, this strategy seems subordinate to the return compliment strategy. Cases were not always so simple, however, and choosing the main strategy is somewhat subjective. Thus, a set of criteria was developed such that verbal strategies that came before non-verbal were considered the main strategies. In instances of multiple verbal strategies, those showing

stronger agreement were taken as main strategies over weaker ones; likewise, in cases where the speaker appeared to have made particular effort to construct one element of their response compared to another, the former overruled the latter as the main strategy, as in (7).

In (7), although the final AT could count as having a higher degree of agreement and is also expressed partly verbally, it is an afterthought. Therefore, returning a compliment was considered the main strategy. Indeed, the ubiquity of ATs throughout the corpus means that these were considered sub-strategies in the majority of cases since they appear to constitute something of a reflex response (see following discussion).

The fact that the majority of CRs do not only constitute acceptances but often are or include ATs shows a surprisingly low level of variety in these responses (unlike the compliments themselves, as can be seen in Placencia 2019). As explored in the introduction, other studies of Spanish CRs seem to show greater diversity and creativity in response strategy (see, e.g., Lorenzo-Dus 2001; Ramajo Cuesta 2011; Maíz-Arévalo 2012; Lázaro Ruiz and Ramajo Cuesta 2015; Mir and Cots 2017). This is particularly highlighted by Mir and Cots (2017) in comparing the wide range of strategies present in their Peninsular Spanish corpus (nine distinct strategies) with the smaller set used in their American English corpus (seven strategies).

Mir and Cots (2017: 139–140) note that, among the Peninsular Spanish speakers in their study, complimenting in face-to-face contexts is reported as being rare; this may mean that these speakers are less confident in how to respond. This uncertainty can lead to more questions and explanations and in general, a very varied range of CRs. American English speakers in their study, on the other hand, received compliments more frequently and had a more “reflex” response – which is possibly why thanking was so common among this group. In the present study, the number of strategies was five (see Table 3), which is even lower than that observed for Mir and Cot’s (2017) American English corpus. This suggests that, given the relatively large number of compliments that each one of the participants received (see Table 2), the result could be that they give less thought to their responses, necessitating reliance on a reflex response – in this case, showing appreciation and returning the compliment.

A further consideration is the selectivity of the group (Indah and Rifana 2018). These teenagers are part of a self-selected online circle which is paralleled in the physical world. A key reason that this group post on Instagram and make comments on each other’s photographs must be to build and maintain solidarity; as such, negative posts, criticism, rejecting compliments would break the cycle of mutual affirmation. Thus, compliments require acceptance and to do otherwise might be seen as poor etiquette.

In addition, we need to consider the particular context of this study: that of solo shots of participants. This context could perhaps best be described as a scenario in which compliments are expected – fished for, indeed. This phenomenon is discussed by Lopera Medina (2017) as a strategy for maintaining equilibrium in social interaction. The author identifies several strategies for eliciting compliments, which include invoking feelings of what he terms *compromiso social* ‘social obligation’⁶ in one’s audience and also *alardeo* ‘boasting’, both of which seem relevant here. Solo shots are undoubtedly taken and uploaded when Instagrammers feel they look good and they post to show off (boasting), therefore, forcing other users to compliment the photo or user out of social obligation. Compliments fished for in this way cannot really be rejected as this would unsettle the balance of the interaction.

4.2 Modification strategies

4.2.1 *Emojis and other technology-mediated phenomena*

When responding to compliments, users were very creative in their choices of modification strategies. The use of emojis and other medium-specific features was extremely common and varied. Indeed, 58% of responses employed emojis although only 3% of all responses used emojis alone, as in (8):

- (8) F5’s photo 2
 C: *Hermosa* 😊
 ‘Gorgeous’
 R: ❤️❤️❤️

There were 99 instances of emoji use. Hearts were used most frequently (58 instances) with faces showing various expressions being second most used (21 instances). As in (8), emojis were often repeated – perhaps as an intensification mechanism.

Modified orthography or the use of what Androutsopoulos (2000) calls prosodic orthography (e.g., vowel or consonant prolongations, multiple exclamation marks, etc.) were also common (see (6)), as was laughter. Concerning the former, it was found in 26% of the responses, and, with respect to the latter, in 20%. Example (9) shows several medium-specific features and from their context it is possible to make some broad-brush interpretations:

6. Lopera Medina’s (2017) notion of *compromiso social* ‘social obligation’ behind the production of compliments in certain situations is along the lines of Sifianou’s (2001: 410) characterization of routine compliments as being socially expected. For this notion see also Placencia (2008) in another context.

(9) F4’s photo 13

A: *Jajajaja eres tan sexy vales!!!!* ♥♥♥♥ 😊😊😊

‘Hahahaha you’re so sexy Vales [modified from Valeria]’

F4: *Jajaj (sexy) dice! Jajaj eso solo lo aprendi de ti* ♥ 😊

‘Hahah (sexy) she says! Hahaa that’s only something I learned from you’

A: *A si bueno tienes razón* 🧚🧚

‘Oh yes okay you are right’

Focusing on the second and third turns which both respond to compliments, we can see that first, F4 shifts praise back to her interlocutor (implicitly complimenting A) and uses laughter and a smirk face emoji to suggest a sense of irony in her response showing both false modesty and also inviting her interlocutor to share the joke. In response, A takes up the joke by indulging in a somewhat self-praising agreement with F4’s compliment. A’s inclusion of emojis at the end of her utterance shows solidarity and, therefore, mitigates the self-praise – suggesting it is meant humorously. In addition, the specific use of princess emojis, while not completely unambiguous, could reasonably be said to show appreciation and possibly even constitute a return compliment, implying that F4 is like a princess.

As a researcher, however, one must be careful not to attach too much meaning to these features. In at least one instance the appearance of laughter in a CR was described by the participant-informant as “word vomit,” i.e. something having no meaning! In this way, for the most part it would seem appropriate to see these features largely as solidarity markers. Having said this, as Example (9) above shows, it is possible that they do play a more complex role in modifying the meanings found in verbal responses.

4.2.2 Self-praise versus modesty

Employing medium-specific strategies was not the only way in which users modified their responses. There were elements within the data that could be identified as purposeful strategies used to modify the basic CR. These strategies appear to address the two sides of Pomerantz’s (1978) CR dilemma but in totally opposite regards. On one side, users seemed to make attempts to show genuine modesty, while, on the other, some opted to violate the avoidance of self-praise altogether. Interestingly, these strategies appeared almost exclusively with returning the compliment (37% contained additional modesty) and agreeing with it (64% involved a form of self-praise). There were also single instances of agreeing with modesty and showing appreciation with self-praise.

A variety of self-praising comments were recorded including, for example, claiming to be *la más guapa de toditas* ‘the most beautiful of all_{DIM}’ (from F4) or agreeing wholeheartedly that their photo had indeed come out well. Showing

modesty, on the other hand, involved an almost stereotyped response where a compliment was returned (Section 4.1), but also augmented:

- (10) F1's photo 11
 C: *estas guapa*
 'You look beautiful'
 R: ♥ *tu 😊 más siempre, siempre*
 'You more, always, always'

Here, by implying that her interlocutor looks even more beautiful than she is, F1 has not only returned the compliment but, by augmenting it in this way, she has, at the same time partly denigrated herself – a show of modesty. Other shows of modesty involved responses containing jokes that are somewhat at the speakers' expense. One such example is (11) where F1 agrees with the compliment – a rather stereotyped *piropo* or compliment with an amorous or sexual tone (Achugar 2001: 127, 2002: 176) – but conjures a ridiculous picture with her response:

- (11) F1's photo 13
 C: *curvas peligrosas wraw*
 'dangerous curves roar'
 R: *cuidado te chocas.*
 'Careful you may get knocked'

The presence of such a large number of solidarity markers and the joking feel of many of the responses demonstrate how this platform is, for these participants, almost wholly about enhancing rapport. In this environment, the emphasis is on agreement and, although rare, explicit self-praise appears to be entirely tolerated.⁷

Holmes (1986: 500) talks of the face-threatening aspect of compliments as being behind speakers need to respond by evading or rejecting. These strategies are almost totally shunned by these participants suggesting that they see little or no face-threat in the compliments offered. The modesty modifications seen, do, however, show that these participants are perhaps aware of a certain social expectation to be somewhat self-effacing when offered a compliment.

7. See Rudolf von Rohr and Locher in this volume for another context where self-praise is tolerated.

5. Conclusions

The CR pairs in this study show that within this group of teenagers, the purpose of the exercise with solo shots is mutual affirmation. Virtually all compliments are accepted; there are shows of modesty and self-praise, but this is essentially a mutual adoration society! If you post your photos you expect compliments, and thus doing anything other than accepting them would probably be considered inappropriate. Even shifting credit and downgrading (categories of response identified in other studies) are rare or non-existent.

Nonetheless, the fact that there are CRs that have elements of rejection shows Pomerantz’s (1978) constraints still seem to be in evidence despite the expectations of the site. To say “yes, I know” in response to a compliment is still somewhat outrageous – although this corpus does show a few instances of exactly such self-praise. The laughs surrounding a great many of the responses also suggest that the participants are aware of these constraints and that their posts, the expectation of compliments and the acceptance of them is a game. It all lacks modesty, and, in some sense, it can be seen as a form of teenage rebellion against social norms – the process is moderately subversive (as is their grammar!).

In a future study, it would be interesting to explore how Ecuadorian teenage girls respond to compliments on other types of photos that they post on Instagram, and also, how females within other age groups or from other socioeconomic backgrounds respond (see, e.g., Maíz-Arévalo’s Facebook study in this volume concerning age variation in compliment realization). Likewise, it would be interesting to examine teenage CR behavior in other varieties of Spanish and other languages to see the extent to which the ‘mutual adoration’ approach revealed in the present study is a wider (teenage) phenomenon online.

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Compliment response behavior among Japanese-English bilinguals on Facebook

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This study examines compliment responses on Facebook produced by Japanese-English bilingual women who post photos of their manicures and pedicures – the objects of praise. It is based on a total of 178 responses directed towards Japanese monolinguals, (American) English monolinguals, and Japanese-English bilingual audiences. The responses were coded according to Holmes (1986) and Placencia, Lower, and Powell's (2016) taxonomies of compliment response strategies. Results indicated that acceptance of compliments was the most common strategy used by the Japanese-English bilingual women in the study, followed by evasion, rejection, and no acknowledgement. The study also highlights the importance of further examining the online practices of bilinguals who interact with multilingual audiences in compliment response research.

Keywords: compliment responses, Japanese-English bilinguals, Facebook, emoticons, technology mediated-communication; computer-mediated communication

1. Introduction

While past research on Japanese politeness has claimed that rejecting is the most appropriate way to respond to a compliment (Daikuhara 1986), more recent work has challenged this by demonstrating the more complex ways in which East Asians respond to compliments (Chen 2010; Chen and Yang 2010; Liu and Allen 2014). Furthermore, although new practices may be emerging in face-to-face contexts, recent research in digital contexts has shown that the affordances provided by the medium of interaction – such as the 'like' function – may influence the ways in which compliment responses (CRs) are realized (see, e.g., Placencia, Lower, and Powell 2016). Facebook (FB), a virtual environment that still attracts a wide, multilingual user-base, provides a rich context to study speech acts, such as compliments and CRs (see also Eslami, Yang and Qian's, and Lower's studies on FB in this volume).

However, research on complimenting behavior has tended to focus on the language of monolinguals interacting with monolingual audiences. It is important, therefore, that research on CRs examines both face-to-face and online practices not only of monolinguals, but also of bilinguals and multilinguals who interact with multilingual audiences. That is precisely the kind of context that FB offers and that is the setting for our study which focuses on CRs used by Japanese-English bilingual women. The CRs were produced following a Status Update (SU) composed by Japanese-English bilinguals in our study, which was then commented upon by a user in their network (typically in the form of a compliment), prompting a response from the Japanese-English bilingual.

The research questions addressed are the following:

- RQ1: How do Japanese-English bilingual women respond to compliments from their multilingual audience in the digital context of Facebook?
- RQ2: What verbal compliment response strategies are used (acceptance, rejection, or evasion)?
- RQ3: What non-verbal features such as 'likes' and emoticons are used?

The chapter is organized as follows: Section 2 offers a brief overview of the seminal literature on face-to-face CRs, studies on CRs in Japanese, and in online settings; Section 3 describes the corpus examined and the methodology employed; and Section 4 outlines the results. Conclusions are provided in Section 5.

2. Previous studies

CRs have been extensively studied across various languages and cultures with respect to social (e.g., gender) and situational (e.g., topic of compliments) variables (see, e.g., Daikuhara 1986; Holmes 1986; Wolfson and Manes 1980). In this section we look at seminal works on face-to-face CRs, followed by studies on compliments and CRs in Japanese in face-to-face contexts, and finally, studies of CRs in online settings.

2.1 Seminal works on face-to-face compliment responses

Responding to compliments may pose a problem for complimentees since rejecting a compliment, a speech act typically used to strengthen rapport, may be considered rude; however, agreeing may be considered arrogant (Pomerantz 1978). With reference to Leech's (1983) politeness maxims of agreement and modesty, accepting a compliment adheres to the Agreement Maxim of minimizing disagreement and maximizing agreement; rejection, on the other hand, can represent an observance

of the Modesty Maxim through the minimization of self-praise, and the maximization of dispraise of self.

A wide range of CR strategies to handle these dilemmas in face-to-face conversations have been identified by researchers like Pomerantz (1978) and Holmes (1986, 1995), with respect to English-speaking contexts. These CR strategies are largely divided into three categories: (a) acceptance, with appreciation tokens like thanking, and agreeing; (b) rejection, by disagreeing, or downgrading the compliment; and (c) deflection/evasion, which are strategies such as shifting credit or giving an informative comment.

Early research on CR strategies in English varieties yielded varying results in terms of the ratio of compliment acceptance to rejection, and indicated that, broadly speaking, acceptance is favored in Western cultures (Pomerantz 1978; Wolfson and Manes 1980; Holmes 1986), while rejection is favored most frequently in Eastern cultures (Daikuhara 1986; Saito and Beecken 1997). This might be because rejection of compliments may be seen as a problem of low self-esteem in Western cultures (Pomerantz 1978). These preliminary studies on face-to-face complimenting behavior in English-speaking communities/cultures inspired the study of compliments and CRs in various cultures and languages like Japanese (Barnlund and Araki 1985; Daikuhara 1986; Matsuura 2004), which are discussed in the next section.

2.2 Previous studies of compliments and CRs in Japanese contexts

In Eastern cultures such as the Japanese, as remarked above, it is traditionally thought that rejection is the most common strategy to respond to compliments (Daikuhara 1986; Saito and Beecken 1997). To account for why this politeness norm emerges in CR behavior seen in Eastern cultures, Leech (1983) suggests that in these cultures, the Modesty Maxim is more powerful than in English-speaking cultures. In Daikuhara's (1986) study of Japanese speakers, discourse completion tasks (DCTs) were used among Japanese speakers in the United States, and it was found that only 5% of compliments were responded to with acceptance, while 95% of compliments were responded to with rejection. Daikuhara concluded that Japanese speakers used compliments to show respect and deference, rather than solidarity and friendliness, asserting that

the distance created by the person who compliments has to be denied by the recipient in order to return politeness to the giver; this denial of the compliment serves to sustain harmony between the parties and to emphasize their commonality.

(p. 195)

However, in Saito and Beecken's (1997) study of compliments using role-plays, it was found that 57% of compliments were accepted by Japanese speakers, while

only 15% of compliments were rejected, and 28% were deflected or evaded. As compared to Daikuhara (1986), the compliment rejection rate was much lower, and that of compliment acceptance was higher. This suggests that there is some variation in the manner in which compliments may be responded to amongst Japanese speakers, although it must be pointed out that the methodology employed differed from Daikuhara's study. Additionally, Matsuura's (2004) study, using interviews and a multiple-choice questionnaire of CR patterns among Japanese speakers, found that CR patterns were different based on the topic of the compliment (appearance, ability), and based on how emotionally close the interlocutors were to each other. The questionnaire included four options, with the answers categorized as: "Appreciation" (e.g., Thanks), "Agreement" (e.g., I think so too), "Disagreement" (e.g., I don't think it's nice), and "Question" (e.g., Really?). The results showed that CR strategies were highly dependent on the relationship between the interlocutors: appreciation was preferred if the response was addressed to professors, rather than to friends, while the question option was used more frequently when replying to compliments from friends. Matsuura (2004: 151) notes a key difference in CR patterns among American English and Japanese speakers: the Japanese "tended to use wider varieties of responses in [...] appearance-related situations, which suggests that they had a tendency to take compliments on appearance a little more seriously than their American counterparts."

In a similar vein, Ide's (2006) contrastive study of speech acts in Japanese and American English in face-to-face business settings – using DCTs – shows that positive politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson 1987) such as complimenting in American English, are thought to form, foster, and maintain interpersonal relationships. This is so since 'politeness' and 'friendliness' are closely interrelated concepts, and expressing friendliness, such as joking, or complimenting, helps to promote social rapport. However, in Ide's study, Japanese speakers rarely used positive politeness strategies, such as complimenting and joking, and these strategies were only employed among those that were emotionally close.

By comparing politeness norms between the East and West, researchers have been able to situate their studies at different positions on the similarity versus difference continuum (Chen 2010; Ide 2006). Leech (2007) has called this the East-West divide, with politeness dichotomies between the East and West explained through comparing Eastern and Western cultures in terms of collectivism vs. individualism (Chen 2010: 79). The oversimplification and vagueness of these distinctions have been criticized in more recent studies (Liu and Allen 2014) and, in order to avoid overgeneralizations, there has been a call to examine the emerging practices and norms within specific communities. For example, in Liu and Allen's (2014) research focusing on interactions taken from Japanese television shows, Japanese speakers were found to use both positive and negative politeness strategies.

Furthermore, current literature suggests that different communities may develop their own cultural and linguistic practices, especially as online communities. For instance, Kavanagh's (2015) comparative study of Japanese and American English blog writers found that Japanese users (particularly females) were more likely to use emoticons in order to enhance positive politeness, arguably reflecting the technology from which these emoticons stemmed.

2.3 Compliment responses in online settings

Among studies of CR strategies in online contexts, works by Cirillo (2012) on English in the gaming world of Second Life, Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) on Peninsular Spanish on FB, Eslami, Jabbari and Kuo (2015) on Persian speakers on FB, Placencia et al. (2016) on American English on FB, and Eslami and Yang (2018) on Chinese-English bilingual speakers on FB and Renren – a Chinese SNS – are especially relevant to gain insight into the particular manners in which CR strategies are employed with the multimodal affordances that are available for users (see Placencia and Lower 2017 for an overview of CRs in digital settings). All five studies use either Holmes's (1986) or Herbert's (1989) taxonomies of CRs, with modifications according to the platform examined. However, the categories in which the modifications are placed are slightly different among studies. Within Holmes's (1986) categorization scheme, ignoring a compliment is classified under the strategy of evasion, and is hardly used due to its markedness. Nonetheless, the above studies of online CRs discuss the common occurrence or even prevalence of compliments that are ignored within technology mediated-communication due to its asynchronous nature.

In Cirillo's (2012) study, 17.6% of compliments in Second Life were not given any form of acknowledgement indicating that users may have gone offline in the gaming environment. Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) also found that 30% of the Spanish compliments on FB received no CRs. In Eslami et al.'s (2015) study, 16% of the Persian compliments on FB were ignored. In Placencia et al.'s (2016) study, 81% of American English compliments on FB did not have a response. In Eslami and Yang's (2018) work, 33.8% and 35.9% of compliments on FB and Renren, respectively, were not acknowledged. Nevertheless, among the available online CRs in the five studies listed above, acceptance with an appreciation token was the most common strategy employed, followed by evasion, and rejection. However, in Eslami and Yang's (2018) contrastive study of the same Chinese-English bilinguals on FB and Renren, it was found that the acceptance strategy was more commonly used on FB (68%), compared to Renren (40.37%) by the same bilingual users. The use of evasion was 37.61% on Renren vs. 21% on FB and rejection strategies aligned more with values of modesty on Renren (17.43%), than on FB (7%). Hence, their

results showed that Chinese-English bilinguals responded according to the cultural context, and were able to shift and (re)align based on the cultural norms adhered to by users of these sites (see also Eslami, Yang, and Qian, this volume).

An important difference between the studies was the way in which the medium-specific CRs – such as those using the ‘like’ function or positive emoticons – were categorized. Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) considered these features as non-verbal responses, and categorized them as implicit CRs whereas they categorized verbal strategies as explicit CRs. The current study adopts Placencia et al.’s (2016) position on this matter, by placing the relevant medium-specific features under “Acceptance”, given that this category more accurately reflects how the use of positive emoticons and the ‘like’ function are received (see also: Lower; Placencia and Powell, this volume). Since pressing the ‘like’ function indicates appreciation or a thumbs-up gesture, it can be interpreted as an appreciation token, which conveniently and swiftly allows the user to avoid the complex conundrum of Pomerantz’s constraints (1978) while still showing appreciation (Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013). Additionally, positive emoticons (such as heart marks and smiley faces) used on their own were also counted as a separate category of acceptance, as in Placencia et al. (2016). When the emoticons were used with text, these non-verbal features were categorized as modifiers that enhance the acceptance strategy and help avoid a response that might seem too brief.

While there has been research on CRs by Japanese users in face-to-face contexts, no research so far has examined CRs of Japanese speakers online. Furthermore, research remains to be conducted with regards to multilingual communities, such as the online Japanese-English bilingual communities. As Placencia and Lower’s (2017) recent review of compliments and CRs in digital contexts indicates, it is an exciting time for linguists to study these pragmatic occurrences within a rapidly changing multimodal context.

3. Data and method

3.1 Participants

The primary contributors (PCs) in this study were recruited from the first author’s own FB contacts. The first author is a Japanese-English bilingual female, in her early 30s, and has been an active Facebook user since 2006. The interactions for analysis were obtained between January 2012 and March 2017. From the 750 FB ‘friends’ the first author had at the time of data collection, 281 were Japanese-English bilingual women. The status updates (SUs) of these 281 Japanese-English bilingual women were carefully followed, and the topic of manicures was chosen since compliments

on appearance seem to be taken more seriously by Japanese interactants than American ones (Matsuura 2004). Furthermore, for the selection of participants, only those women who had two or more photos of manicures on their SUs were chosen for this study.

Unlike other studies on SUs where the sample of participants was selected randomly (see, e.g., Bolander and Locher 2010), a convenience sample (Herring 2004) was chosen because the focus of this study is narrower (in terms of the language background of the photo initiators and the topic of the photos). The 18 selected PCs were Japanese nationals, specifically, Japanese-English bilingual women who had lived in Japan for at least 18 years, ranged in age from 25–33 (the age in which the SUs were written), and had a bachelor's degree. Selecting only women as PCs was to control for gender as a variable. The data also involves 289 commenters, or secondary contributors (SCs). Biographical information on each of the SCs (i.e., language background) was obtained through collaboration with the PCs and the first author of the present study. With regards to gender, 268 SCs were female, and 21 were male, pointing to the largely female space of the responses. Out of the 289 SCs, there were 80 Japanese monolinguals, 131 Japanese-English bilinguals, and 78 English monolinguals, pointing to a mix of monolingual and bilingual language users, according to the PCs.

As Placencia and Lower (2013: 625) observe, focusing on one's own social network can be problematic since the researcher may be accused of bias in interpreting the data. In this case, the first author did not contribute any online posts. Additionally, a potential advantage of choosing participants from the researcher's own social networks can be that the researcher is aware of the sociocultural identities of the participants. In the case of SCs, it must be noted that SCs were outside the author's social networks. In terms of ethical issues, this study followed the ethical guidelines of the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR), which addresses potential privacy concerns. As a first step, informed consent was obtained from the PCs. In order to protect the participants' privacy, numbers were allocated to PCs and SCs (e.g., PC1, SC2) (see, e.g., Placencia and Lower 2013) and only descriptions of their photos are provided.

3.2 Data collection

Data collection for this study was conducted through capturing screenshots of selected photo-initiated status updates (SUs). SUs in this study were initiated by the multimodal visual form of photos and sometimes accompanied by short texts as cues for conversation.

SUs were studied and evaluative language was analyzed. It should be noted that since the PCs – as well as some of the SCs – are Japanese-English bilinguals, the SUs and the responses are written in Japanese and English. The data includes both English text, and Japanese in the standard Japanese writing system, including *hiragana*, *katakana*, and *kanji*,¹ as well as in Romanized Japanese. All Japanese examples are presented here in Romanized Japanese for the sake of readability, as in (1) below.

- (1) (PC13_SU4) (A photo of white nails with black tiger stripes)
 PC13_SU4: tiger stripes
 SC188: cute!
 PC13: *jibun de yatta, umaku nai kedo*
 self SB did good not though
 ‘I did it myself, even though it’s not very good’

In this example, PC13 posts a picture of her nails which includes tiger stripes. SC188 compliments the manicures, eliciting a response from PC13.

3.3 Corpus and analytical approach employed

The corpus contains 219 SUs, 365 responses to the SUs from SCs, out of which 284 were compliments, and 178 responses from the PCs (which include 178 CRs). Our corpus is much smaller in number than Placencia and Lower’s (2013) study of FB compliments.² Unlike Placencia et al.’s (2016) study, which includes CRs from the photo albums of their randomly selected participants, the corpus of the present study is more focused, as previously remarked, including only SUs on the topics of manicures and pedicures. Our corpus is comparable, or in some cases larger in size to other corpus-based studies, such as Das (2010), Cirillo (2012), and Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez’s (2013) works on online compliments and compliment responses.

The CRs written by PCs were coded according to Holmes’s (1986) CR taxonomy, which was then further developed and adjusted by Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) and Placencia et al. (2016) to include medium specific strategies. A further category of “Humor” was added under the “Evasion” strategy following Chen and Yang (2010) to better account for the corpus of the current study.

1. *Hiragana* is used primarily to indicate native Japanese words, while *katakana* is used to indicate foreign, or loan words. *Kanji* are logographic Chinese characters.

2. The study included 4,784 photos and 1,899 comments (RSUs), out of which 1,057 were compliments, and 205 were CRs (Placencia et al. 2016).

The interactions were also analyzed qualitatively, with a focus on the initiators of the FB conversations as well as the SCs, that is, the commenters or responders to those conversations.

In order to classify the content of the postings, the data were segmented as follows: the SUs and RSUs were classified as positionings of either initiative (SUs), or reactive (RSUs and responses by PCs). These SUs and RSUs were seen as adjacency pairs, where the production of SUs were seen as the first pair part, or a summons, and the RSUs were seen as the second pair part, or an answer (Placencia and Lower 2013). This allowed for a conversational and qualitative analytic framework.

3.4 Participation roles

The types of activities that emerged from the PCs, including the number of SUs, SCs, RSUs, and responses by the PCs were analyzed with reference to the concept of participation roles in social-digital environments (Li et al. 2007; Berhoff 2010) – a framework used to describe and classify engagement levels of online participants – which was conceived in the form of a metaphorical participation ladder (see also Placencia and Lower 2013). According to Li et al. (2007: 3–4), users’ roles, which can be placed on a ladder, range from “creators” at the top and “inactives” at the bottom. In the middle, “joiners,” are users who join social networking sites (SNSs); “critics/ inactives” are those who post comments, but contribute little else; “collectors” are users who post links to other sites, and “spectators/ lurkers,” those who check posts but contribute little or nothing. “Conversationalists” is a more recent addition to the participation ladder, and refers to users who update their profile status to “converse” (Bernhoff 2010).

3.5 Taxonomy of CRs

Compliments were examined as a feature of evaluative language, and then tallied according to gender and language background. As pointed out in Section 2.3, CRs were coded according to Holmes’s (1986) CR taxonomy, as well as Placencia et al.’s (2016). The final taxonomy included four categories of acceptance (appreciation token, agreement token, ‘like’ with no further comment, and return compliment), one category of rejection, three categories of evasion, which include “humor” as one of the strategies identified, and a “no acknowledgement” category.

The RSUs written by the PCs to the SCs were examined to check if they were responding to the content of the compliment. Fitting the ‘like’ function under the acceptance category is not without controversy, as discussed in Placencia et al.

(2016). However, as the ‘like’ function typically indicates approval or appreciation, it can be reasonably regarded as an acceptance, as discussed above. All these categories were present in Placencia et al. (2016). As mentioned in Section 3.4, the CR strategy of “humor” was added under the subcategory of “evasion”, since this was seen in the current corpus, but not in Placencia et al. (2016). Table 1 provides the adapted taxonomy with examples from our FB corpus.

Table 1. Taxonomy of CRs based on Holmes (1986) and Placencia et al. (2016)

Type of response	Strategy	Examples taken from the present study
Acceptance	1. Appreciation token:	(2) (PC3_SU31): (A photo of French manicures)
	– Thanks	PC3_SU31: august 2014
	– ‘Like’ + further comment	SC39: you are so talented PC3: Thank you
	– Positive emoticon (such as smiley faces and heart marks)	
	2. Agreement token/utterance:	(3) (PC11_SU11): (A photo of dark nails)
– Yes	PC11_SU11: black SC151: <i>sugeee</i>	
– I think so too	PC11: <i>sugoi yone!</i> I’m loving it! amazing IP <i>‘It’s amazing alright!’</i>	
3. ‘Like’ with no further comment	(4) (PC12_SU6): (A photo of white nails with snowflakes)	
	PC12_SU6: winter nails SC178: loooove it! PC12: (‘like’)	
4. Return compliment: acceptance indicated through agreement or appreciation with an additional comment complimenting the other party	(5) (PC4_SU7): (A photo of green nails)	
	PC4_SU7: Spring theme SC70: these are cute, are they wraps? PC4: they’re gel nails. My nail artist drew them, but yours are always so nice too!	
Rejection	1. Disagreement utterance:	See Example (1)(Section 3.2)
	– I don’t think so – I don’t like it	

Table 1. (continued)

Type of response	Strategy	Examples taken from the present study
Evasion	1. Shift credit: passing the compliment on to a third party	(6) (PC4_SU12): (A photo of French nails) PC4_SU12: French nails SC69: your nails are always so pretty PC4: thanks ♥ It's because I have a great nail artist!
	2. Informative comment: making a comment as to the nature of that which is being complimented	(7) (PC15_SU4): (A photo of nails with flower patterns) PC15_SU4: spring nails SC243: OMG these are amazing I need them PC15: it's work with a tiny brush
	3. Humor tokens: the complimentee is indicating humor	(8) (PC6_SU1): (A photo of pink nails) PC6_SU1: Another gel nail done by (name of nail artist)! One of the things that make me happy! #girlsthing #nails #flowery #art SC81: <i>Osharedana.</i> Fashionable 'How fashionable (you are)' <i>Onnanokowa tanoshi souda (warai)</i> Girl fun seems (laugh) 'It seems fun to be a girl (laughter)' PC6: <i>Anata mo ikaga? (warai)</i> you too try (laughter) 'Why don't you try it too? (laughter)'
No acknowledgement	No response: the compliment is not replied to either explicitly or implicitly.	

4. Results

This section starts with the activity profiles of the PCs, and considers response rates (acknowledged and unacknowledged), as well as individual variations among the PCs, followed by an analysis of response types.

4.1 Activity profiles and frequency of compliment responses (CRs)

In order to examine the kinds of participant activities and profiles that emerged related to CR behavior, a tally was taken for the number of times the PCs responded to the compliments they received, as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of CRs by participant

Participant	Compliments	Written CRs	'Likes' (only) as CR	Total number of CRs
PC1	8	2	2	4
PC2	15	3	6	9
PC3	52	13	32	45
PC4	18	8	10	18
PC5	1	0	1	1
PC6	2	2	0	2
PC7	22	1	9	10
PC8	3	1	0	1
PC9	8	0	1	1
PC10	7	1	0	1
PC11	15	9	6	15
PC12	29	9	6	15
PC13	14	3	2	5
PC14	34	6	5	11
PC15	7	4	3	7
PC16	14	4	4	8
PC17	12	2	5	7
PC18	23	7	11	18
Total	284	75	103	178

Out of the 284 compliments, 178, or 62.68%, received a response. The remainder of the compliments (106, or 37.32%) received no acknowledgement. Of the 178 compliments which did obtain a response, 'like' with no further comment was a more frequent form of response (103, or 57.87%) than a written one (75, or 42.13%).

4.2 Acknowledged and unacknowledged CRs

As mentioned above, out of the 178 CRs, only 75 written CRs (42.13%) were given in total by the PCs. This means that, out of the 284 compliments in total, 209 compliments (73.59%) did not receive any written CRs, which is a common feature of asynchronous settings (Placencia et al. 2016). Placencia et al. (2016: 57) also suggest that it can be regarded as an unreasonable expectation to provide a written response for each of the compliments one receives if there are several in a row (p. 57). However, ‘likes’ were used a total of 132 times as CRs, out of which 103 ‘likes’ were employed without a written response. The combination of a written response and the ‘like’ function was used 29 times. Hence, only 37.32% of the compliments received no acknowledgement whatsoever. This is much less in comparison to Placencia et al.’s (2016) study of CRs in American English, in which 81% of the compliments received no acknowledgement, and more in line with Cirillo’s (2012) study, in which only 17.6% of the compliments received no acknowledgement, and Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez’s (2013), in which 30% of the compliments received no acknowledgement. This also roughly corresponds with Eslami et al.’s (2015) work on Persian CRs, in which 16% of the compliments received no response, and Eslami and Yang’s (2018) study of Chinese-English bilingual users on Facebook and Renren, in which 33.8% of compliments on Facebook and 35.9% of compliments on Renren were not acknowledged. This is interesting in that, while Placencia et al. (2016) comment that these varying numbers may be partly due to the language or genre, the data of the present study (like theirs) also includes (American) English female users on FB. However, the participants in this current study of CR-givers are Japanese-English bilinguals, and the CR receivers are of a mixed background. In Placencia et al.’s (2016) study, the interactions are among monolinguals and the corpus is larger and broader than that of the present study. This suggests that digital data could be quite sensitive to the profile of the users.

4.3 Style and frequency of response amongst participants

It is interesting to explore compliment response frequencies of each PC since there is variability. Figure 1 shows the results based on each participant and demonstrates highly varied CR rates. This variation can be explained using Li et al.’s (2007) concept of users’ roles. For example, taking the term “conversationalist”, employed to describe those who use social environments to participate in conversation (see Section 3.4), in the present study, we can see that PC9 and PC10 (Figure 1) give hardly any responses to any of their SCs; therefore, they cannot be considered conversationalists: they use social media to post content, rather than engage with their SCs. However, PC4, PC6, PC11, and PC15, for example, respond to all compliments that are addressed to them, and, therefore, the label “conversationalist” can be applied to them.

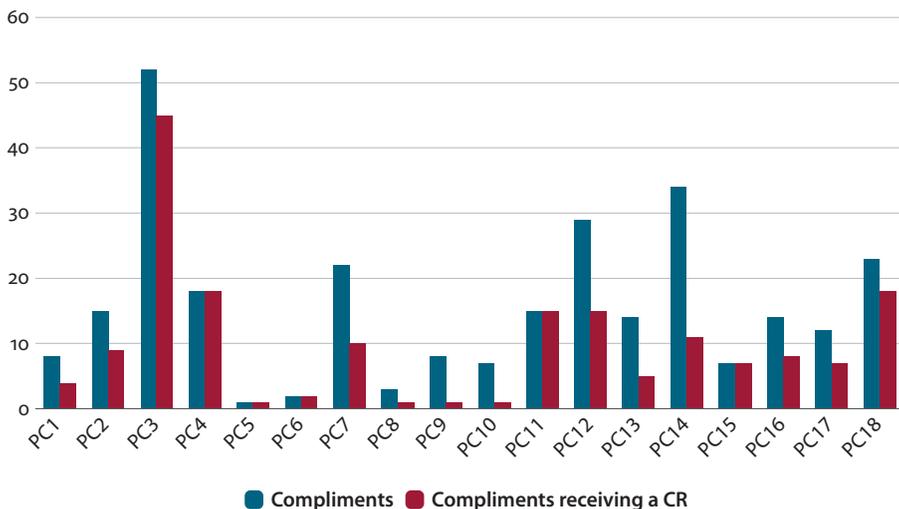


Figure 1. A comparison of compliments given and responses received by participant

4.4 Patterns of acceptance, rejection, and evasion

As mentioned in Section 4.1, from the corpus of 284 compliments, only 178 compliments received a response (62.68%), as illustrated in Figure 2, while the rest of the compliments received no acknowledgement.

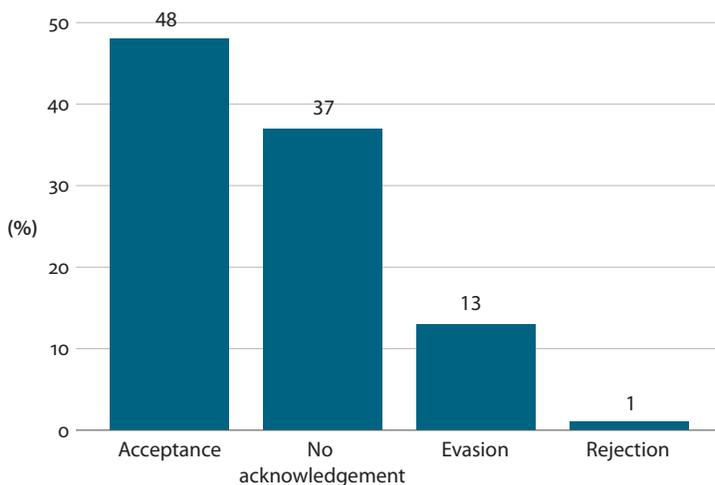


Figure 2. Responses to compliments on FB (284 compliments)

Out of the 178 compliments which received a response, acceptance was the most frequent form of response (77%), followed by evasion (21%), with rejection making up the smallest number of responses (2%), as can be seen in Figure 3.

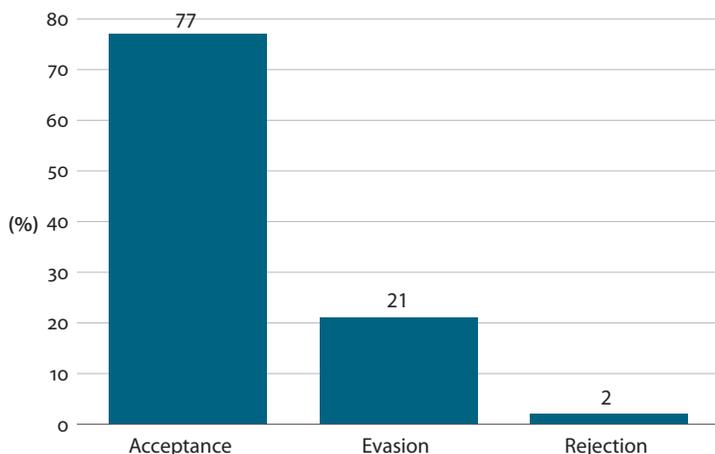


Figure 3. Compliment response strategies excluding no-acknowledgement (178 CRs)

Like previous research on CR strategies (Holmes 1986; Herbert 1989; Cirillo 2012; Placencia et al. 2016), the results were consistent in that acceptance (77%) was the most common CR strategy employed within the data set, followed by evasion (21%), and finally rejection (2%).

Certain patterns emerge upon close examination of the CRs written by PCs. As can be seen in Figure 4, within the responses classified as acceptance, the sole use of ‘like’ was the most common (75.18%), probably due to its convenience. This affordance of the FB technology appears to enable users to acknowledge compliments without spending too much time on their response. This usage also shows some adherence to Leech’s (1983) Modesty Maxim by not verbally addressing or thanking the complimenter. Following the ‘like’ function, appreciation tokens (18.25%), agreement tokens/utterances (5.84%), and returning compliments (0.73%) were the most common, in that order. For example, appreciation tokens in both English (e.g., “Thanks :)” – PC1), and Japanese (e.g., “*Arigato!* ♥” – PC4), were used a total of 25 times. Eighteen appreciation tokens were employed with another CR strategy, especially the evasion strategy of “informative comment.” Therefore, the majority of appreciation tokens/utterances were accompanied by multiple strategies (counted separately), perhaps in order to avoid brief responses, as well as to avoid appearing conceited. Agreement tokens/utterances were also used infrequently, perhaps in adherence with Leech’s (1983) Modesty Maxim.

The least common acceptance strategy was returning the compliment, as can be seen in Figure 4. This was also the case in Placencia et al.'s (2016) study of CR strategies in American English (but see Placencia and Powell in this volume for a different result in a different language and sociocultural context).

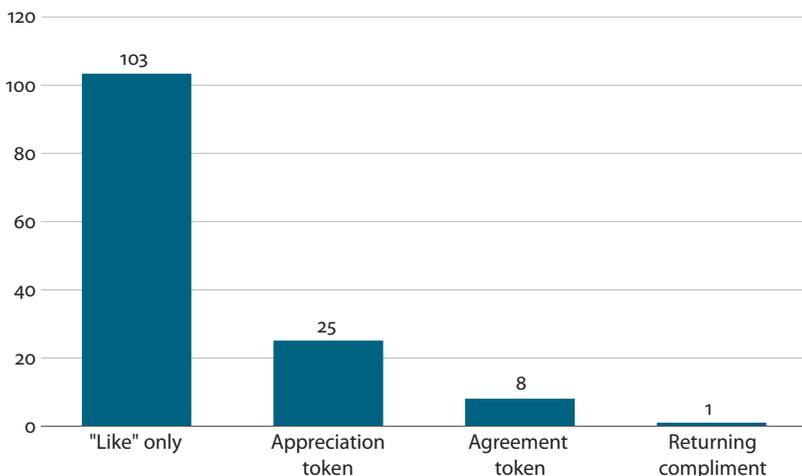


Figure 4. Sub-categories of acceptance strategies

After acceptance, evasion was the most common CR strategy. Of the three available evasion strategies, two were particularly dominant: informative comment (56.76%), followed by shifting credit (32.43%), and finally, humor, the least employed (10.81%). Evasion strategies were used by women to give information to other women on nail salons, nail brands, why they chose their nails, or how they did their nails, as can be seen in (9):

(9) (PC10_SU5) (A photo of pink manicures, and a manicure bottle)

PC10_SU4: gel nails

SC128: I love that

PC10: This brand XXX has the cutest little things!

As such, the topic of manicures is used among women in the present study to enhance rapport, and to position themselves as authoritative fashionistas. Through an informative comment, such as the brand name of the manicure, PC10 in (9), for example, positions herself as an expert who knows about fashionable manicure brands, and cements her gender identity as a woman who is knowledgeable on the topic of feminine technology (Eckert 1996).

Another evasion strategy employed was shifting credit, with an incidence of 32.43%, as mentioned above, but it was only used when the manicures are done by a 'friend' on their FB group. An instance of this can be found in (10):

(10) (PC4_SU8): (A photo of pink nails with moons and stars)

PC4_SU8: winter nails

SC68: You have beautiful nails!

PC4: Thanks, it's because my nail artist, XXX is very good!

Here, PC4 first accepts the compliment by thanking SC68, but then shifts credit to her nail artist. In fact, this CR strategy can be seen as a compliment towards her nail artist's abilities, and is used to build rapport among all the women involved in this feminine space, by introducing those who are interested in manicures, and those who are skilled at it, to each other.

Humor, the least used evasion strategy (10.81%), was consistently displayed by typing out "lol" (signifying 'laugh out loud'), as can be seen in SC229's response in (11). When compliments by the SCs indexed humor, the PCs responded with a similar tone, as can also be seen in PC14's response in (11):

(11) (PC14_SU11): (A photo of pink nails with rhinestones)

PC14_SU11: pink nails

SC229: I want it too. lol

PC14: You'd be the most popular guy around, do it. lol

The CR and the humorous tone of PC14 clearly indicate that her suggestion is not serious and that it should be interpreted as such. In two other cases, the PCs encourage their male SCs to get a manicure or pedicure, and the utterances index humor through the use of "lol", or the Japanese *kanji* which indexes laughter: "笑", read as *warai*.

Rejections made up a small proportion of the sample, as there were only two cases in the whole data set. For instance, in (1) above (Section 3.2), after being complimented by SC188 as "cuute!", PC13 states in Japanese, "*jibun de yatta, uma-kunaikedo*", 'I did it myself, even though it's not very good'. As can be seen, PC13 explains that the manicure was done by herself, and declines to accept the compliment by describing the aesthetic result as not being very good.

These results are interesting because they appear contrary to previous research on CR strategies among Japanese speakers (Barnlund and Araki 1985; Daikuhara 1986; Ye 1995; Saito and Beecken 1997). Although rates of rejection were not uniform among the various face-to-face studies of Japanese speakers (see Section 2.2) these studies all show acceptance to be the least used CR strategy, with rejection, considered the most "polite" strategy, being the most frequent.

The results of the present study could also be attributed to reasons similar to those stated in Chen and Yang's work (2010), which shows that Chinese speakers accept compliments more than reject them, refuting previous research (Chen 1993; Ye 1995). Chen and Yang explain that this change of CR behaviour could be due to the fact that the Chinese speakers in their 2010 study were influenced by English

norms since they were bilingual, and the increased dominance of English as a lingua franca. Likewise, since the CR strategies employed in the present study are produced by Japanese-English bilinguals, it is likely that they have been influenced by American English norms, as displayed by their readiness to employ acceptance strategies. Similarly, in Eslami and Yang's (2018) study of Chinese-English bilinguals, the PCs accepted 68% of the compliments on FB, while accepting only 40.37% of the compliments on Renren, a Chinese SNS. As in Eslami and Yang's (2018) study, the Japanese-English bilinguals in the present study may be aligning their choice of CR strategies to the dominant online culture associated with FB (see also Eslami, Yang, and Qian, this volume).

5. Summary and conclusions

In contrast with previous studies focusing on monolingual populations of Japanese speakers (Section 3.2), this is the first study to look at the compliment response behavior of a group of Japanese-English bilinguals interacting with a mixed background audience.

With regards to overall CR behavior, the results of the present study are in line with results from previous research in other online settings (see, e.g., Cirillo 2012; Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Eslami et al. 2015; Eslami and Yang 2018). Only 62.68% of the compliments in the corpus examined received a response. In other words, this study also shows that non-acknowledgement of compliments in SNSs such as FB, which involves asynchronous interactions, is not necessarily deemed offensive (see also Placencia et al. 2016).

Concerning the distribution of compliment responses, the results indicated that acceptance was the most common strategy used by the Japanese-English bilingual women in the study, a finding which is also in line with previous studies in digital contexts (Section 3.3). Acceptance was followed by evasion, rejection, and no acknowledgement, in order of frequency. PCs chose to respond through acceptance – performed through verbal and non-verbal (e.g., 'likes' and emoticons) means. As in Eslami and Yang's (2018) study of Chinese-English bilinguals, the Japanese-English bilinguals in the current study appeared to adhere to the dominant online cultural values operating in FB interactions by accepting, rather than rejecting compliments. This is in contrast with CR behavior identified in previous research among Japanese monolingual speakers in face-to-face settings where rejection was common (Section 3.2). As suggested by Chen and Yang (2010) globalization and the increased dominance of English as a lingua franca may be behind changes in the use of pragmatic strategies, including complimenting responses, among East Asians (see also Eslami and Yang 2018; Eslami, Yang and Qian, this volume).

It is worth considering the possibility that the PCs in our study may be adhering to Leech's (1983) Modesty Maxim through their high use of the 'like' function. These technological affordances allow a space for the emergence of new norms and practices, and for negotiating the tricky conundrum of agreeing and showing modesty at the same time.

The study centered on the topic of manicures where the Japanese-English bilingual women were focusing on evaluations of a part of their body – their nails – as a detached part of the self. In the future, it would be interesting to examine the gendered and cultural identities of these bilingual populations when responding to compliments, expanding the area of research into more diverse topics and online cultural contexts.

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PART II

Complimenting behavior and praise in the political domain

Complimenting behavior in Spanish political discourse on Twitter

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This study explores complimenting behavior in interactions between Spanish politicians and citizens on Twitter. It adopts a corpus-based methodology, using both quantitative and qualitative analysis to identify the topics which give rise to compliments being paid, the linguistic strategies adopted by users in their complimentary replies to politicians, and the functions of such compliments. The results show that users frequently pay compliments on the basis of performance and ability, and combine explicit and implicit compliments with congratulatory messages, requests, and advice. Finally, in terms of social functions, compliments in this context appear to enhance both the affiliative and the autonomy face of the interactants.

Keywords: compliments, Twitter, political discourse, facework, politeness, sociopragmatics

1. Introduction

While compliments in face-to-face interaction have been studied from a range of perspectives and in many different languages and sociocultural contexts (see Chen 2010 for an overview), less attention has been paid to complimenting behavior in technology-mediated communication (Placencia and Lower 2017). However, in recent years, research on complimenting behavior in social media – including platforms such as Orkut (Das 2010), Facebook (Eslami, Jabbari, and Kuo 2015; Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Placencia and Lower 2013; Placencia, Lower, and Powell 2016), and Twitter (Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán 2013; Siti Yuhaida and Tan 2014) – has shown that compliments, as positive politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987) acts, are also frequent in these environments.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to our understanding of compliment behavior in social media through an analysis of interactions between Spanish political

actors and Spanish citizens on Twitter, drawing evidence from a corpus of tweets focusing on the 2017 Catalan crisis debate. Previous research among Hispanists on political discourse on Twitter has focused predominantly on impoliteness strategies (see, e.g., Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán 2013; Kaul de Marlangeon and Cordisco 2014). By contrast, this study aims to explore complimenting behavior as a politeness phenomenon through an analysis of the main topics of compliments, their linguistic forms, and their main functions in the microblog, as well as the face implications of this speech act for complimentees.

The approach adopted is that of computer-mediated discourse analysis (CMDA) (Herring 2004, 2010), described as “as language-focused content analysis supplemented by a toolkit of discourse analysis methods” (Herring 2010: 238). It takes into account the technological (medium) and the socio-situational (communicative context) parameters involved in the interaction.

The chapter begins with an overview of theoretical issues (Section 2), followed by a description (Section 3) and analysis (Section 4) of the data. Since this is an exploratory study, findings are considered a testing ground for further inquiry.

2. Theoretical framework and background

According to pioneering studies (Manes and Wolfson 1981; Manes 1983; Wolfson 1983; Holmes 1995), compliments are speech acts that attribute credit to someone for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill), which is usually positively valued by both speaker and listener. They may be used as “social lubricants” (Wolfson 1983: 89) and serve both ideational (or referential) and interpersonal (or social affective) functions (Johnson and Roen 1992). They may be seen either as assessment actions, in contexts where compliments express approval, or as an offer of solidarity, depending on the relationship between interlocutors (Holmes 1995: 118). In addition, compliments may often serve a host of other functions, appearing alongside messages of congratulations, requests, greetings, and offers of advice (Wolfson 1983; Jaworski 1995).

2.1 Compliments in face-to-face interaction

From the perspective of the linguistic structure of compliments – possibly the most extensive line of enquiry in this area – Manes and Wolfson’s (1981) conclusion was that compliments in American English made by men and women of different social and educational backgrounds had “a total lack of originality” (see also Lorenzo-Dus and Izura 2017). Manes and Wolfson argued that the formulaic nature

of these compliments was evident in both the syntactic constructions and the lexical items used to carry the positive evaluation.¹ Works on compliments in English and other languages (Wolfson 1983; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 1987; Herbert 1991; Jaworski 1995; Lorenzo-Dus 2001; Golato 2005; Siebold 2008), as well as in Peninsular and American varieties of Spanish (Placencia and Yépez Lasso 1999; Placencia and Fuentes Rodríguez 2013; Hernández Toribio and Deltell Escolar 2017) have confirmed the highly formulaic nature of compliments.

Compliments are typically classified into two categories: direct and indirect,² or explicit and implicit. Explicit compliments appear in utterances that carry at least one positive semantic value, while implicit compliments are those in which the positive value is presupposed and/or implied, being inferred from what is said in a given situation. As suggested by Maíz-Arévalo (2012: 981), explicit compliments in English and Spanish avoid ambiguity and entail directness on the speaker's part. Implicit strategies, which have an ambiguous nature, may threaten the hearer's face if the relationship between interlocutors is socially distant, though they may be also seen as mechanisms contributing fun and novelty to social interactions, as Sifianou (2001: 21) shows in her study of compliments in Greek.

Explicit compliments in English and Spanish often take the form of declarative, affirmative or exclamative sentences (Maíz-Arévalo 2010), and elliptical structures (Maíz-Arévalo 2012). In Maíz-Arévalo's (2012: 983) corpus of Peninsular Spanish, the most frequent lexico-grammatical patterns were: (1) an exclamative clause with an adjective group modifying the complimented item (*¡Qué preciosidad de pulsera!* 'What a beautiful bracelet!'); (2) a declarative clause with the complimentee in the subject position, followed by a copulative verb and a positive adjective (*Eres un bellezón* 'You are a real beauty'); (3) a declarative clause with the complimenter in the subject position, followed by a verb indicating the mental process of 'liking', and the complimented item in the direct object position (*Me encanta tu camisa* 'I love your shirt'). Siebold (2008: 322) had previously discussed these patterns in Peninsular Spanish compliments, pointing out that there is also a recurrent use of intensifiers, such as superlatives, adverbs, modal particles, interjections, and interpersonal markers.

1. Manes and Wolfson's (1981: 120) data fall into three syntactic patterns: (1) NP is/looks (really) ADJ; (2) I (really) like/ love NP; (3) PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP. At the semantic level, their study shows that two-thirds of all adjectival compliments make use of the same five adjectives: 'nice', 'good', 'beautiful', 'pretty' and 'great', while 86% of the semantically positive verbs used are accompanied by 'like' and 'love'.

2. Nonetheless, as Placencia and Lower (2017: 653) state, there is little agreement concerning the analytical categories 'direct' and 'indirect'.

Implicit compliments, on the contrary, do not follow a fixed linguistic form. Boyle's (2000: 28) example: "I wish I could manage my work like you do" is an implicit compliment but, as Maíz-Arévalo rightly states (2012: 983), it is also a relatively formulaic one. This leads her to argue "for a cline of explicitness" within compliment behavior ranging from the most formulaic compliments to the ones based on conversational implicatures, although there are no clear criteria for determining the degree of explicitness or implicitness in each case. Bustos's (2007) classification of compliments in Peninsular Spanish provides some useful pointers in this direction. The author suggests that the structure and function of these acts are linked to the degree of involvement of the speaker in the interaction: compliments are, thus, 'affective' and less formulaic when the speaker is totally involved in the statement (2007: 6), or 'conventional' when there is little or no involvement (Bustos 2007: 9).

As for the 'goods' or topics being positively evaluated, studies on face-to-face interaction (Manes 1983; Holmes 1988) show that appearance, ability, performance, skills, possessions, and personality are the most frequent objects of compliments.

2.2 Complimenting behavior in social media

In recent years, the development of computer-mediated communication technologies and the 2.0 web paradigm have encouraged the study of compliments and compliment responses online (Placencia and Lower 2017). Research in this field investigates, among other issues, the ways in which complimenting behavior adapts itself to online media exchanges on the basis of technological affordances (Hutchby 2001) and multimodality (Kress and Leeuwen 2001). For instance, recent studies have focused on the linguistic expressions of positive evaluation and other ways in which compliments may be expressed online, such as the 'like' on Facebook (Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Placencia and Lower 2013), and emojis on Instagram (Placencia 2019).

Placencia and Lower's (2013: 637) study reveals that most compliments on Facebook, in a network of family and friends in the United States, are connected to the recipients' appearance, and in a minor way to their possessions, abilities, personality, and friendship. Siti Yuhaida and Tan's (2014) analysis of interactions between Malaysian celebrities and their followers on Twitter shows that, although performance, ability and skills are relevant topics in their corpus, compliments are mainly used to express admiration in the form of praise for celebrities' artistic performances (Siti Yuhaida and Tan 2014: 83). Moreover, Lorenzo-Dus and Izura (2017: 70) note that the frequency of topics "varies according to non-linguistic variables such as gender, age, power status of the complimenter vis-à-vis the complimentee, as well as the setting in which the compliment is being paid."

As for the linguistic structures employed, these studies indicate that on social networking sites, explicit compliments are often phrased as declarative sentences, both affirmative and exclamative, although other possibilities, such as elliptical formulations, also exist. Placencia and Lower's (2013: 641) research confirms that compliments are often formulaic and present syntactic patterns similar to those found by Manes and Wolfson (1981), with some slight variations. For instance, Placencia and Lower's (2013) analysis indicates that Manes and Wolfson's (1981) pattern (8) (ADJ NP!) is more frequent on Facebook, a variation that is "possibly linked to the Facebook online environment and its informality" (Placencia and Lower 2013: 642).

Placencia (2015, 2019) employs another classification in her analysis of compliment behavior among Ecuadorian teenage girls on Instagram. She identifies six verbal compliment categories: a first group of explicit or direct instances of positive evaluations such as exclamations with *qué*, declaratives with an evaluative noun/verb/adjective, elliptical formulations, interjections, and semi-fixed expressions; and a second group of indirect or implicit compliments with no fixed syntactic structure. She also proposes two additional types of compliments: those realized through emojis and hashtags expressing positive evaluation. The results show that elliptical forms are the most frequently employed category and that exclamatives with *qué* and declaratives are also frequent, probably because of the age profile of Instagram users. Placencia (2015, 2019) underlines the use of internal modification through prosodic spelling, as well as external modification through the use of supportive moves such as interjections and emojis that appear to function as intensifiers.

Focusing on explicit and implicit categories, Masoumzadeh and Ghanadi (2016) scrutinize the differences between English and Persian compliment behavior in Iranian and English foreign ministers' Facebook pages. Their analysis reveals that on the British foreign minister's page, users frequently adopt an explicit formula. They positively evaluate what the foreign minister says or does; however, while paying a compliment, they also give advice (Masoumzadeh and Ghanadi 2016: 87). By contrast, the study shows that implicit compliments predominate on the Iranian foreign minister's page and that they usually contain expressions of gratitude and wishes for success (Masoumzadeh and Ghanadi 2016: 89).

Compliments on social media have a wide range of discourse and social functions. For example, Placencia and Lower (2013: 618) suggest that when a user posts a photograph in Facebook, it acts as a sort of summons to elicit a reply. In this context, the function of compliments seems to be that of "keeping the communication channel open" and "affirming and strengthening relationships" (2013: 639). In Twitter interaction between celebrities and their followers, the main functions of compliments are expressing admiration, establishing solidarity, and reinforcing desired behaviors (Siti Yuhaida and Tan 2014: 85).

2.3 Politics, social media and Twitter

Research on political discourse and political discussions in English and Spanish online (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2010; Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán 2013; Mauney and Jeon 2014, among others) shows that in social media (im)politeness strategies may have several functions and relational consequences. For instance, Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010) and Kaul de Marlangeon and Cordisco's (2014) studies concerning US and Argentinian politics, respectively, underline the fact that flaming can be understood as a face-enhancing strategy used to reinforce the personal bonds within a discourse community. Garcés-Conejos Blitvich (2010) analysis confirms that the polarisation of public opinion on YouTube is related to an increase in strategies of positive impoliteness that, among other things, contribute to creating bonds of solidarity between users who share the same opinions and views on the candidates. Complimenting in this context is generally intended to make others feel accepted and supported. Indeed, findings in Mauney and Jeon's (2014: 6) study of discourse about politics on Facebook show that speakers appeal to their addressees' positive face by issuing compliments.

3. Methodology and data analysis

The present study was conducted adopting an interactional perspective, which considers each tweet as an intervention (either initiative or reactive) in relation to another tweet in a profile's timeline (Pano Alamán and Mancera Rueda 2014); and a sociopragmatic approach based on the facework categories of 'autonomy' and 'affiliation' (Bravo 2002, 2008; Hernández-Flores 2013). According to Bravo (2002: 144), 'autonomy' is intended as a category that includes all those behaviors related to how a person wishes to see him/herself and be seen by others as a distinct and identifiable individual within the group; 'affiliation' includes all those behaviors through which a person manifests how he/she wishes to see him/herself within a given group. Both categories are "void of socio-cultural content, but they may be filled with contents stemming from the analysis of pertinent corpora" (Bravo 2008: 566).

The corpus consists of 210 tweets containing at least one positive evaluation of the recipient. These tweets were sent on October 27th 2017 to twelve Twitter profiles of Spanish political parties and leaders, as 'replies' to twelve tweets (one per profile) concerning the 2017 Catalan crisis and the application of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, which interrupted the autonomous status of the region on that date. The profiles were classified into two groups: the first contains the four main political parties with representation in the Spanish Parliament; the second groups the Twitter profiles of eight political leaders of these same parties, active at a national and a regional (Catalan) level. This distinction may be important if one

considers the characteristics of the complimentee (individual vs. organization) as a possible factor of variation in complimenting behavior in this context.

Table 1 displays the public profiles selected, and the number of ‘likes’, ‘retweets’, and ‘replies’ sent by users to each profile. The column ‘Compliments’ records the number of tweets extracted from ‘replies’ containing at least one compliment. ‘Retweets’ and ‘likes’ have been included in the table since they are medium affordances that may function as expressions of approval of the hearer, his/her comments, or his/her skills, like in Facebook (Placencia and Lower 2013: 633). They may also provide a context for the analysis of verbal compliments; however, space constraints only allow for a brief comment on the tendencies of these two affordances.

Table 1. Profiles and number of ‘likes’, ‘retweets’, ‘replies’ and compliments received by each profile

Profile	Likes	Retweets	Replies	Compliments
@PPopular	882	630	107	30
@PSOE	1007	590	246	9
@ahorapodemos	1003	837	437	15
@CiudadanosCs	1046	376	138	12
@marianorajoy	3259	1515	543	10
@sanchezcastejon	1194	719	319	24
@Pablo_Iglesias_	2656	1504	1348	9
@Albert_Rivera	8417	3052	755	11
@Albiol_XG	2487	1086	513	9
@miqueliceta	2682	1572	572	35
@AlbanoDante76	4879	2837	325	12
@InesArrimadas	16210	7804	1106	34
TOTAL	45722	14268	6409	210

The following steps and criteria guided data gathering and analysis: (1) the corpus was extracted from a minimum of 100 messages published by Twitter users as ‘replies’ to twelve tweets (one per profile), concerning the application of Article 155 of the Spanish Constitution, and commenting on the controversial decision approved that day by the Spanish Senate; (2) the ‘replies’ sent to the messages and published by the parties and the politicians in their profiles that were displayed on October 27th from 3 pm – approval of the decision – until 10 pm, when the data were collected; (3) the ‘replies’ containing at least one compliment (total 210) addressed to a political party (65 occurrences, 30.96%) or a political leader’s profile (145 occurrences, 69.04%) were manually identified;³ (4) metadata, such as

3. The analysis pays attention to the context of the interaction, the nature of the activity in which the compliment is embedded, and the co-text (see Placencia and Lower 2017: 636).

user identity, were omitted for privacy purposes; (5) the sample of compliments was coded using previous taxonomies of compliment topics (Holmes 1986), and syntactic patterns of compliments in social media, in particular, Placencia's (2015, 2019) verbal compliment categories from her study on Instagram (Section 2.1.). Table 2 provides a definition of each compliment topic considered, and an example extracted from the corpus.

Table 2. Classification of compliment topics

Compliment topic	Definition	Examples from the corpus
Appearance	The compliment is attributed to the physical appearance of the addressee.	<i>estás como un tren</i> 'you are gorgeous'
Possessions	The compliment is attributed to something that belongs to the addressee.	<i>Bravo @x tenéis un gran político</i> 'Bravo @x you have a great politician'
Personality	The compliment is attributed to one or more personal (non-physical) traits of the addressee.	<i>Gran político mejor persona</i> 'A great politician, a better person'
Ability	The compliment is attributed to the quality of being able to do something well.	<i>Sabes trabajar</i> 'You know how to work'
Skills	The compliment is attributed to the addressee's proficiencies, developed through experience or training.	<i>Vaya formalidad y qué manera de trabajar</i> 'You are so serious and work so hard'
Performance	The compliment is attributed to the accurate or successful achievement of a given task by the addressee.	<i>Has sabido estar a la altura en unos momentos difíciles</i> 'You've been up to the task in difficult circumstances'

Data were collected manually through Twitter Search, an improved search utility that enables users to search for tweets by date within a defined range. Although time-consuming, a manual search of relevant tweets in Twitter's database allowed for better monitoring of the data by excluding irrelevant content and duplicates. The criteria followed are closely linked to the research objective, the medium-specific affordances, and the situational context of the interaction described in previous research on Spanish politics in Twitter (Pano Alamán and Mancera Rueda 2014).

4. Results and discussion

4.1 Compliment topics

Figure 1 below displays the frequency of compliment topics (occurrences out of 65) addressed to the political parties:

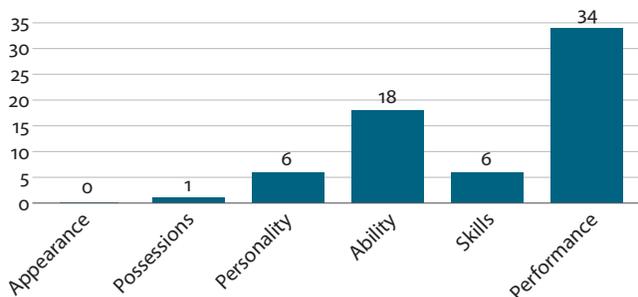


Figure 1. Topic of compliments addressed to political parties

As can be seen in this figure, performance (34, 52.3%), followed by ability (18, 27.69%), emerge as the most frequent topics in the political parties' subcorpus, while compliments about personality (6, 9.23%) and skills (6, 9.23%), which are addressed to the leaders through the party profile, are less frequent.

Results show the same trend for the political leaders' group (see Figure 2), with performance (63, 43.45%) and ability (40, 27.58%) being the most frequent categories. However, the incidence of compliments on personality (21, 14.48%) and skills (20, 13.79%) is not negligible, while there is only 1 occurrence (0.68%) of a compliment on appearance.

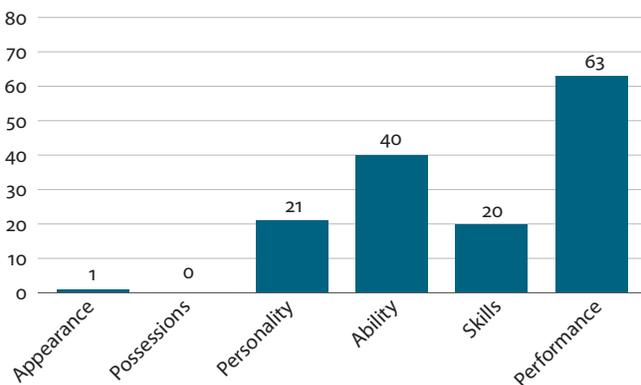


Figure 2. Topic of compliments addressed to political leaders

Performance and ability compliments combined total 155 occurrences out of 210 (73.81%). This is not surprising given that compliments appear in replies to tweets sent by parties and leaders to comment on the decision approved by the Senate on that day, to try to resolve the Catalan crisis. They are addressed to recipients principally to praise this decision – considered a (positive) result of the recipients' ability to manage the crisis – and their performance, that is, what they have said or done in dealing with said crisis. Therefore, the topic of the compliments is connected to the sociopolitical context of the tweets.

On the other hand, personality and skills are essentially personal characteristics, so their use in relation to the political parties is rare. When compliments on these features appear in replies to parties, the content of the tweet indicates that these are actually addressed to a member of that party and not to the party itself (e.g., *Que vuelva E. y B., gente sensata* 'I want E. and B. to come back, they are sensible people', which is included in a tweet sent to @Podemos).

Finally, the presence in the corpus of compliments on appearance and possessions is minimal in both groups. The only tweet that positively evaluates the physical appearance of a politician, through the Spanish colloquial expression *estás como un tren* 'you are gorgeous' (see Table 2 above), is addressed to the only female political leader among the profiles selected (@InesArrimadas, leader of Ciudadanos in Catalonia). This could suggest that there is a certain degree of variation according to the complimentee's gender, as proposed, for example, by Siti Yuhaida and Tan's (2014). On the other hand, the only compliment on possession found in the corpus is addressed instead to one party's profile (@PSOE) in order to praise the politicians that this party 'possesses'; thus, this is an indirect compliment addressed to the party members.

Unlike research on Facebook interaction (Placencia and Lower 2013; Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013), and at some variance with other research on Twitter exchanges (Siti Yuhaida and Tan 2014), this analysis shows that in political discussions on Twitter, compliment behavior is mostly oriented towards the recipients' performance and abilities. These results are, however, consistent with those of Masoumzadeh and Ghanadi's (2016) analysis of interactions on Facebook among citizens and the British and the Iranian foreign ministers, which highlights the positive evaluations of ministers' achievements. Therefore, these findings corroborate that the frequency of topics and the topics themselves vary according to non-linguistic factors (Lorenzo-Dus and Izura 2017: 70), such as the social role of the recipient (political parties and leaders), the setting in which the compliment is being paid (a political discussion on Twitter), and, particularly, the topic being discussed (the adoption of a controversial solution to the Catalan institutional crisis in the present study).

4.2 Linguistic structures

The occurrence of explicit and implicit compliments in the corpus was examined in relation to each type of profile and the results are summarized in Figure 3.

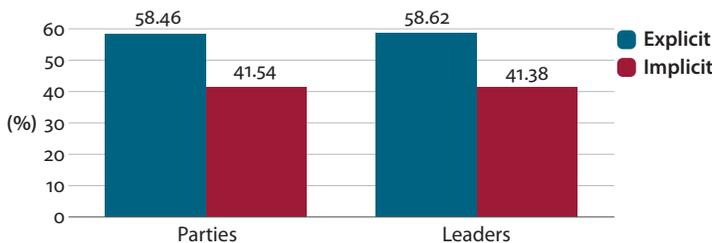


Figure 3. Implicit and explicit compliments according to type of addressee

As can be seen, the results show a similar pattern independently of the type of complimentee. Explicit compliments such as *Lo has hecho muy bien* ‘You have done it very well’, sent to political parties (38 occurrences out of 65, 58.46%) and political leaders (85 occurrences out of 145, 58.62%), predominate. Nonetheless, implicit compliments are also recurrent, with 27 (41.54%) and 60 occurrences (41.38%), respectively. Compliments of this type include the following, for example: *Ojalá hubiera más gente que pensara en ciudadanos como tú* ‘I wish there were more people who thought about citizens like you do’, *La izquierda siempre en defensa de la legalidad* ‘The left is always on the side of legality’, and *Luego dirán que no hablas claro* ‘They will then say that you don’t speak clearly’. These patterns lend support to the view that compliments in social media are largely explicit, but also show a varying degree of formulaicity (Placencia and Lower 2013; Maíz Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Siti Yuhaida and Tan 2014).

The speed with which messages accumulate within the parties’ and political leaders’ Twitter timelines, as well as the brevity of the messages, may explain the preference in the corpus for explicit compliments. Another possible explanation for this preference is that choosing implicit forms entails a certain risk of incomprehension (Maíz-Arévalo 2012: 981). For instance, an utterance like *La razón está siempre de parte de la inteligencia* ‘Reason is always on the side of intelligence’, which is addressed to a political leader, might not be or may not sound genuine. In this context, explicit compliments avoid ambiguity and contribute to expressing positive evaluation in a straightforward and clear way. In some cases (e.g., *Lo ha hecho muy bien [...] pero muy bien* ‘You have done it very well [...] really well’), repetition makes the positive evaluation even more explicit.

On the other hand, implicit compliments based on conversational implicatures appear to have a more significant role on Twitter than on Facebook, where conventional formulae abound (Placencia and Lower 2013), probably due to the fact that in the microblog users are not dealing with routine matters like appearance or possessions. Moreover, on Twitter one may see implicit structures as devices contributing originality to social interaction (Sifianou 2001: 21). Users may try to catch the attention of the recipient and that of their ‘imagined audience’ (boyd et al. 2010: 7) by purposefully elaborating less formulaic compliments.

Figure 4 displays the frequency of explicit compliments distributed according to their linguistic structure:

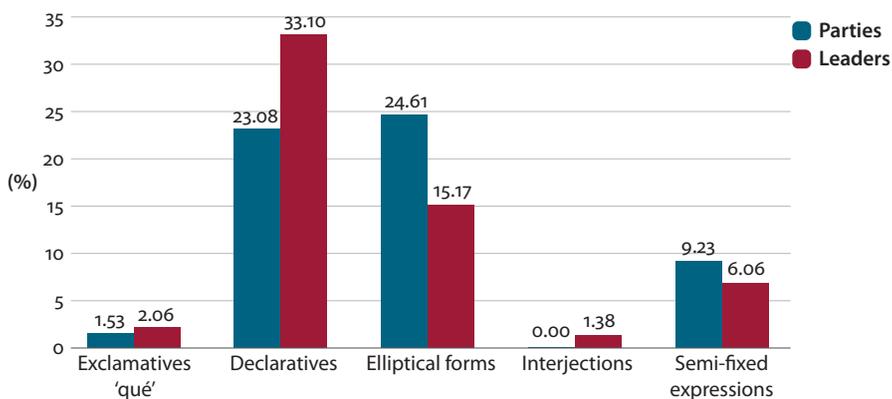


Figure 4. Distribution of explicit compliments according to their linguistic realisation

As shown in this figure, two trends emerge from the analysis. Firstly, declarative and elliptical forms are the most frequent structures in the corpus with a combined total of 31 occurrences out of 65 (47.69%) in the political parties’ corpus, with declarative and elliptical forms being present in roughly equal measure (23.08% and 24.61%, respectively); in the politicians’ corpus, these two forms again predominate with a combined total of 70 occurrences out of 145 (48.27%), with declaratives (33.10%) here more common than elliptical structures (15.17%). Some examples of these forms are *Lo has hecho bien* ‘You have done it well’, *Eres extraordinario* ‘You are extraordinary’, and *Ideas claras y decisión* ‘Clear ideas and determination’. Semi-fixed structures such as *Bravo Presidente* ‘Bravo Mr President’ or *Bien hecho* ‘Well done’ are present as well, though with a lower frequency (six out of 65, 9.23% and 10 out of 145, 6.06%, respectively). The second clear trend emerging from the data is that exclamative sentences with *qué* (*Qué grande* ‘You are so great’) and interjections (*Olé*) are very rare in the complimentary tweets sent to both groups: exclamatives with *qué* and interjections add up to only four (3.59%) and two occurrences (1.38%), respectively.

Thus, the main syntactic realizations seen in the replies to parties and leaders cluster around: (1) explicit compliments in declarative sentences, as in *eres un político muy profundo* ‘you are a politician with in-depth knowledge’, and *tú sabes hacer bien las cosas* ‘you know how to do things well’; and (2) elliptical forms in sentences where the verb is elided, as in *Respuesta inesperada, valiente y arriesgada* ‘Unexpected, courageous and risky response’, and *espectacular tu discurso* ‘a spectacular speech’. It should be noted, though, that declarative and elliptical forms in the parties’ subcorpus show a similar distribution while in the leaders’ subcorpus, declarative sentences with verbs like *ser* and *hacer* are more frequent than the elliptical forms.

In addition, the analysis corroborates previous observations that abbreviated and elliptical sentences, together with expressive and familiar lexis – *eres un puto amo* ‘you are a fucking boss’, *eres una máquina* ‘you’re a machine’, and prosodic spelling: *GRANDEEEEEEEEE ‘AYYYYYYYYY!’* or *Ole, ole y ole!!!!* – are characteristic of social media discourse, and of complimenting behavior in social media (Placencia and Lower 2013; Placencia 2015, 2019). The brevity of messages and the communicative immediacy of Twitter may explain in part why interaction on this medium follows linguistic patterns similar to those of familiar conversation (Pano Alamán and Mancera Rueda 2014), an aspect which is also facilitated by the use of @ as a marker of addressivity (Zappavigna 2012).

The results indicate that the users in our corpus employ a great variety of lexical choices, a finding that counters claims that there is a lack of originality in complimenting behavior, in line with Sifianou’s (2001: 21) and Placencia and Fuentes Rodríguez’s (2013) assertions that speakers may use different complimenting formulas to display originality and novelty. Nouns (*genio* ‘genius’, *altura política* ‘political sight set high’), adverbs (*gratamente* ‘pleasantly’), and verbs (*saber trabajar* ‘to know how to work’) are frequent, even though the most recurrent devices are adjectives (*brillante* ‘brilliant’, *claro* ‘clear’, *impecable* ‘impeccable’). A number of nouns and adjectives found in the corpus do not have an intrinsic positive meaning, but acquire a positive connotation within their co-text. This is the case of *partido de Estado* ‘institutional party’, *ser directo* ‘to be direct’, and *hablar (claro)* ‘to speak (clearly)’. In addition, two metaphors, *joya a preservar* ‘a jewel to be preserved’ and *verso salvaje* ‘wild verse’, paid to a female politician and a male politician, respectively, were found in the political leaders’ subcorpus. These represent indirect forms of complimenting that tend to reduce the social distance between the complimenters and the complimentee. In this case, it is interesting to note the different meanings that can be attributed to these metaphors according to the complimentees’ gender; the first one could be considered a *piropo*, traditionally, a compliment with an amorous or sexual tone (Achugar 2001: 127; see also Placencia and Powell, this volume). Achugar (2001: 135) observes that, as recipients of *piropos*, women are generally seen as passive or non-agentive participants and this appears to be the case here – *joya a preservar* ‘jewel to be preserved’ –, implying that the female

leader, like a jewel, must be protected. In contrast, the second metaphor – *verso salvaje* ‘wild verse’ –, which seems to quote a fragment of Percy B. Shelley’s poem ‘Ghastly, or the Avenging Demon’ (1810), suggests, through the adjective ‘wild’, that the complimentee (a male) is a free and active leader.

Finally, ‘retweets’ and ‘likes’ abound in the corpus, particularly in tweets addressed to political leaders. ‘Likes’ are expressions of approval and may reinforce interpersonal bonds, as in Facebook interactions (Placencia and Lower 2013: 633). In Twitter exchanges between citizens and political parties and leaders, ‘likes’ and ‘retweets’ allow users to send their endorsement to politicians quickly and easily, usually from a mobile phone. Unlike in other social media examined in the literature (Instagram, Facebook), hashtags and emojis do not have a significant presence in the corpus. Hashtags, such as #21D, #VivaEspaña, #ahorademocracia, and #catalunyasomostodos allow users to tie a tweet into the stream conversation about the Catalan crisis and to home in on a particular topic; however, they are not used as complimenting devices. Emojis have an even minor presence in the corpus (two ‘occurrences’ of ♥). Nonetheless, they deserve some attention since they appear in two replies sent to the same recipient, the female political leader. This could suggest that gender has some influence in the use of this multimodal affordance. The very few occurrences found in the corpus also confirm that social distance and the political and ideological orientation of the exchanges among politicians and citizens on Twitter may exclude the use of emoticons in this context.

4.3 Functions and face implications

Most compliments directed to both types of profiles contribute to establishing what Jaworski (1995) calls ‘procedural solidarity’. Procedural compliments are used when the complimenter aims to elicit desired information or wants to reinforce desired behavior, rather than to convey a genuine positive evaluation (1995: 90). Compliments in the corpus examined frame a number of other processes, such as congratulations for the action undertaken in trying to resolve the crisis, as in examples (1) and (2) below, but the majority reinforce utterances that aim to support the party or the leader in relation to their position towards the crisis (3), as well as to encourage further action to resolve it and work for the elections on December 21st 2017 (4):

- (1) *Usted ha actuado bien. Ha estado muy a la altura*
‘You have done very well. You have certainly been up to the task’
- (2) *GRACIAS Sr. Presidente. Largo proceso pero necesario, y diseñado y ejecutado de forma brillante. Ahora firmeza y determinación*
‘THANK YOU Mr. President. It has been a long but necessary process, and it has been designed and executed brilliantly. Now it’s time to show firmness and determination’

- (3) *IMPECABLE en cuanto antes se ponga el orden democrático antes se sale de esta incertidumbre*
 ‘IMPECCABLE the sooner democratic order is re-established the sooner we will get rid of this uncertainty’
- (4) *Eres increíble. Vamos a ganar. A trabajar duro hasta el 21D*
 ‘You are amazing. We are going to win. You have to work hard until the 21st of Dec.’

Many compliments in the corpus are addressed to the recipient as supportive actions, conveying a genuine sentiment of approval, as in the following examples:

- (5) *No me había dado cuenta que eres un político muy profundo*
 ‘I had not realized that you are a politician with in-depth knowledge’
- (6) *Tengo que reconocer que me has sorprendido muy positivamente*
 ‘I have to admit that you have surprised me very positively’
- (7) *Tengo q decir que @x y su líder @x me han sorprendido gratamente*
 ‘I must say that @x and its leader @x have pleasantly surprised me’

These results are in line with Johnson and Roen’s (1992) claim that compliments may serve both ideational (referential) and interpersonal (social affective) functions. In our corpus, they also appear as reinforcing mechanisms of requests and advice-giving (Wolfson 1983; Jaworski 1995), being both supportive and assessment actions. Indeed, some of them precede or follow a negative assessment of what the political party or the leader had/had not said or done at the beginning of the crisis. These compliments serve to mitigate a criticism or an expression of disappointment as in (8):

- (8) [...] *debía hacerse el próximo año si Dios quiere pero tú sabes hacer bien las cosas*
 ‘[...] it should have been done next year God willing but you know how to do things well’

Also, as can be seen in examples (9) and (10) below, utterances with the surface form of a compliment may express criticism through verbal irony, which is a productive strategy in Twitter exchanges among politicians and citizens in Peninsular Spanish (Pano Alamán 2015):

- (9) *Le felicito es un buen socialista nos ha vuelto a decepcionar*
 ‘Congratulations you are a good socialist, you have disappointed us again’
- (10) *Bien hecho, ahora a meter a vuestros corruptos tb*
 ‘Well done, now you can put your dodgy friends [in the government] too’

Even though these messages adopt the prototypical structure of explicit compliments, they are indirect ways of expressing criticism, rather than ways of conveying genuine praise; thus, they cannot be considered compliments in this context.

All in all, complimenting in the corpus examined is mostly a face-enhancing activity. Both the explicit and implicit compliments found enhance the complimentees' positive self-image and their social role as politicians and parties in the government or in the opposition, who decide and act suitably. Compliments function mainly as praise and supportive acts of what the recipients say and do, reinforcing the complimenter's ideologically-oriented support to a party or a political leader. They serve to strengthen affiliation, to show what has been termed *exacerbated affiliation*⁴ on the part of the complimenter who wishes to see him/herself as a proud member of his/her own political and ideological group (Kaul de Marlangeon and Cordisco 2014). On the other hand, when users pay procedural compliments in order to request something, give advice, or assess the recipients' actions, the effects of compliments on the interlocutors' face are multidirectional (Hernández Flores 2013). In these cases, while affiliation of the complimenter towards the complimentee is preserved through the expression of endorsement or admiration, the complimenter primarily seeks to enhance his/her autonomy (Section 3), providing guidance to the parties and their leaders about taking further action in a given direction: either maintaining the interruption of the autonomous status of the region and refusing to negotiate with the separatist parties, or stopping the suspension and encouraging a dialogue.

5. Concluding remarks

The aim of this paper was to contribute to a broader understanding of complimenting behavior in social media, specifically, in the interaction between Spanish politicians and citizens on Twitter. The corpus-based analysis carried out corroborates previous findings on compliments both in face-to-face interaction and in social media. Compliments on Twitter are mostly explicit. Explicit and more formulaic linguistic structures appear in tweets where praise, thanks and congratulations may be easily understood by the recipient as an act of loyalty. As for implicit forms, they have a significant presence in tweets that aim to catch the attention of

4. According to this category, the speaker sees him/herself as a strong adherent to a group with a specific political ideology. The adherent assumes his/her membership with full conscience and pride, since he/she shares the same ideas of the group. Some compliments in political debates on Twitter may be indicators of a speaker's 'exacerbated affiliation' to the endogroup (Kaul de Marlangeon and Cordisco 2014: 159).

the recipient and that of the tweeter's imagined audience through more original formulations. However, since they may entail a certain risk of incomprehension, users prefer explicit (with declarative and elliptical forms), rather than implicit compliments.

At the same time, a good number of both explicit and implicit compliments precede or follow other speech acts, such as requests and advice, which may reduce their intrinsic positive evaluation. Compliments serve primarily to praise the recipients' performance and abilities and to support their decisions and actions. As direct expressions of endorsement, they contribute to strengthening group relational solidarity and to enhancing affiliation on the basis of a shared ideological and political stance. When compliments occur alongside assessments of the parties' and leaders' achievements, requests for specific actions, and recommendations for future decisions, they boost both the affiliative and the autonomy faces of the complimenter. Indeed, they are positive evaluation speech acts that underpin instrumental solidarity relationships between political parties, politicians and the potential voter(s). These speech acts allow Twitter users to express their own opinions, and establish and manage their online political and ideological identity (Mauney and Jeon 2014: 2; Pano Alamán 2015: 84).

Finally, the study also shows that in this microblog, users tend to praise their interlocutors' performance, abilities and skills, rather than their personality, possessions or appearance. By contrast, these topics are frequent in Facebook interactions among friends and relatives in American English (Placencia and Lower 2013), for example, and in Twitter exchanges between Malaysian celebrities and their 'followers' (Siti Yuhaida and Tan 2014). This is consistent with Placencia and Lower's (2017: 646) claim that variables such as social role, the debates around which people interact, and social distance are influential factors that merit further exploration in the study of compliment behavior online.

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#Lovely country, #wonderful people

Diplomatic compliments and praise on Twitter

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Considering the popularity of Twitter in digital diplomacy, this paper explores how international politicians enhance sociability by performing online compliments and praise. Drawing on 480 amicable actions collected from 14 accounts of foreign-affair actors, we analyze the prevalence, content, form, and functions of diplomatic expressions of positive evaluation. Our findings indicate that although having important functions on interpersonal, national, and international levels, compliments and praise are uncommon actions in digital diplomacy. We suggest that the lack of diplomatic “approbation protocol” and the perils of context collapse on Twitter encourage international actors to perform solidarity by other means. We also propose that the mediated and diplomatic contexts extend the traditional definition of compliments and blur differences in cultural speaking styles.

Keywords: digital diplomacy, political discourse, public speech acts, compliments, praise, twitter, context collapse

1. Introduction

In a very short period of time, social media have become pervasive in our everyday lives. Scholarly response to the rapid pace of change and innovation of new communication technologies has resulted in a plethora of studies that have focused on the creative social use of technologies (Shifman 2014; John 2016), the ever-growing prevalence of social media in everyday practices (e.g., Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs 2006; boyd 2007; Weller, Bruns, Burgess, Mahrt, and Puschmann 2014), and their role in extraordinary social events like civil uprisings (e.g., Lotan, Graeff, Ananny, Gaffney, and Pearce 2011; Wolfsfeld, Segev, and Sheaffer 2013). Although hardly known for being tech-savvy or quickly adapting to change, institutional actors could not lag far behind. The prevalence of social media in everyday life encouraged political actors, who wish to influence public opinion, to adapt and adopt the new

media logic (Strömbäck 2008; Couldry 2012). Castells (2007: 242) suggests that “politics is dependent on media politics” and social media seems to be a direct extension of traditional mass media, where a political actor can gain political power by designing and distributing messages. The rise of social media primarily allowed politicians to communicate directly with their audiences over the heads of the traditional mediators of information – journalists (Wolfsfeld 2018). Consequently, social media allowed politicians to better control their messages and to efficiently manage their impression by interacting directly with voters, journalists, and peers (Klinger 2013; Hoffmann and Suphan 2017).

Their adaption to the ever-growing presence of media technologies is perhaps the reason why politicians are the dominant actors of social media, as evident in the number of followers or subscribed-to users (Gainous and Wagner 2014: 11). Twitter has especially emerged as a favorite social network site among political actors (Sandre 2013). According to the Digital Policy Council,¹ in 2015, 83% of the world’s heads of state were active on Twitter. In 2013, the official Twitter blog announced that all US senators were active users, as well as 90% of the House of Representatives.² Even in countries where Twitter is not popular, such as Israel, where it ranks as only the 29th most-used website (alexa.com, 2017), it is heavily used by journalists and politicians.³ Out of 120 Knesset (Parliament) members, 85 are registered users of Twitter,⁴ which is 70.8%, compared to 11.6% in the general population (statista.com 2016).

Previous studies have focused mainly on political uses of Twitter during election campaigns (e.g., Larsson and Moe 2012, 2013; Vergeer, Hermans, and Sams 2013), but Twitter and other social media are not used solely during extraordinary political events. They are intertwined in everyday offline political practices or expand traditional political practices, such as diplomacy. Indeed, digital diplomacy (Bjola 2015), also known as ediplomacy (Hocking 2012), cyber-diplomacy (Barston 2014), Diplomacy 2.0 (Harris 2013), and Twiplomacy (Sandre 2013), have been described as “nothing less than revolutionary” and a “game changer” (Bjola 2015: 4)

1. The Digital Policy Council (DPC) is an international, non-partisan think tank whose objective is the advancement of open discourse on issues of inclusive government. The DPC is the research and policy arm of Digital Day, a strategic consultancy that provides advisory services to corporate and government leaders regarding digital media. Available at: <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/world-leaders-on-twitter--adoption-stagnates-even-as-follower-base-explodes-300208802.html> [Accessed: 07.09.2017].

2. Available at: https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/a/2013/100-senators-and-the-57th-inauguration.html [Accessed: 07.09.2017].

3. Available at: <http://www.globes.co.il/en/article-1000879396> [Accessed: 07.09.2017].

4. Available at: <https://github.com/hasadna/standalone-tasks/issues/10> [Accessed: 14.11.2017].

for the practice of diplomacy. The working definition of digital diplomacy is the use of social media to carry out diplomatic objectives (Hanson 2012), to manage state image (Kampf, Manor, and Segev 2015), and foster dialogue with foreign audiences (Adesina 2017). According to Bjola (2015), digital diplomacy could change the ways in which diplomats engage in information management, public diplomacy, strategy planning, international negotiations, or even crisis management.

One major way to accomplish these goals is to use digital diplomacy as a means to form and maintain cooperation with other political actors. Thus far, only a few studies in political discourse analysis have analyzed how public figures initiate, maintain, or establish solidarity (Kampf and Danziger 2019). These studies examined offline use of solidarity-enhancing devices on both domestic and international political discourse, focusing on speech acts, such as congratulating (Young 2000; Kampf 2016), apologizing (Kampf and Löwenheim 2012), and various practices of friendship (Roshchin 2006). Online political speech acts that fulfill such relational functions within the purview of both diplomacy and digital diplomacy have remained untouched.

In this chapter we adopt the premise that exploring the routinized use of politicians on Twitter will help us address the practices, logics, and vernacular of online everyday politics (Highfield 2016). Taking into account the popularity of Twitter among politicians and the emerging practice of digital diplomacy, we explore how political actors enhance sociability in the international arena by using online compliments and praise. Considering Twitter as a powerful resource for managing relationships and its seemingly perfect conditions for speech act performance, the study of online compliments and praise will enhance our understanding of how diplomatic actors manage amicable relationships via speech acts in social media.

In what follows we conceptualize language and sociability in the context of foreign affairs, explain how studies of everyday and public compliments and praise are an integral part of sociability, and discuss the challenges social media pose to the management of international relations. Following the data and method section, we answer the following questions: How do diplomatic actors enhance sociability in the international arena by using online compliments and praise? How do they confront the specific challenges of the digital media environment? And how, when, and why do they resort to positive evaluations of other international actors on Twitter?

2. The language of sociability in international relations

The close ties between international politics and language is evident in the actual making of policy and diplomacy (Graber 1981; Fairclough 1989; Campbell and Jamieson 1990; Chilton 1990; Wilson 1990). Diplomacy, for instance, is frequently

defined in terms of language and communication. According to Jönsson and Hall (2003: 201), “[i]n diplomatic communication ‘saying is doing’ and ‘doing is saying.’” Others have gone further in conditioning relations in global affairs with communication. Accordingly, when it ceases to exist, “the body of international politics, the process of diplomacy, is dead, and the result is violent conflict or atrophy” (Tran 1987: 8).

In order to maintain good relations in the international arena, rituals of sociability and friendship need to be enacted (Kampf 2016). Indeed, in recent years, the concept of “friendship” has become prominent in the literature of international relations (Roshchin 2006; Berenskoetter 2007; Onuf 2009; Oelsner and Vion 2011). It is regularly mentioned in official statements made by government representatives and political commentators (Berenskoetter 2007) and performed in various contexts to initiate, maintain, or advance interstate relations (henceforth “IR”). The actual enactment of sociability and friendship in international political discourse is achieved by performing solidarity and deference in language (Chilton 1990; Kampf 2016). Solidarity – the manifestation of involvement and concern – and deference – the manifestation of respect for another actor’s sovereignty (Scollon, Scollon, and Jones 2011) – underline the guiding logic of diplomatic communication (Chilton 1990). They are enacted by both positive and negative politeness strategies, such as sharing the same concerns with a hearer, expressing a compatible stance, or minimizing imposition and paying respect (Brown and Levinson 1987).

One of the most prominent tools for constructing sociability in global affairs is public speech acts. Specifically, expressive speech acts that express feeling or attitude about the state of affairs represented by the propositional content (Searle and Vanderveken 1985) allow political actors to shape relationships with others (Clark 1996) by, for example, recognizing the suffering of victims through apologizing for past wrongs (Augoustinos, Hastie, and Wright 2011) or building bridges of trust with opponents through greeting them (Young 2000). The transformative nature of acts such as complimenting, thanking, and condoling can be seen first and foremost in consolidating relationships that are based on feelings of concern and involvement (Fenton-Smith 2007). When expressive speech acts are realized, the public is meant to bear witness to the appropriate feelings one should express (and feel) in a specific time (Clark and Carlson 1982). Through the act of informing about what a political actor feels, feelings-based community is meant to be constructed.

In this study we take the example of compliments and praise in order to understand how sociability is enacted in international relations. In the following section we explain why compliments and praise are efficient tools for studying this issue and what types of communicative challenges they pose for political actors who choose Twitter as the platform to manage relations.

3. Everyday and public compliments and praise

Compliments and praise are speech acts that express a positive evaluation of another person with an overall goal of pleasing the addressee (Wierzbicka 1987: 201) and increasing the sense of commonality between interlocutors (Wolfson and Manes 1980; Holmes 1986; Jaworski 1995). Compliments and praise can be distinguished by the ways in which they address the hearer. Compliments directly attribute credit to a present addressee, while praise can do so indirectly (Wierzbicka 1987) by way of targeting a third party (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1989). Nevertheless, in this study we treat compliments and praise as sharing the same ‘pragmatic space’ (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000), as both express a positive affective stance of the speaker toward the positively evaluated party with an overall goal to “oil social wheels, to increase or consolidate solidarity” (Holmes 1986: 500). Thus, in this study we adopt a broad definition of compliments and praise as expressions of positive evaluation (Manes and Wolfson 1981; Placencia and Lower 2017) that are interchangeably realized in online diplomatic discourse.

The expression of positive evaluation is defined in the literature as triggered by “some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer” (Holmes 1986: 485). Performing positive evaluations of another person for being or doing “good” has led scholars to identify the main function of compliments as verbal tools for creating solidarity (Holmes 1986), maintaining rapport by means of “social lubricants” (Wolfson 1983: 86), and encouraging desired behavior (Manes 1983; Wolfson 1984). Seminal works have demonstrated that compliments in varieties of English are incredibly formulaic (Manes and Wolfson 1981; Holmes 1986) and focus on common topics such as appearance, ability, performance, possessions, or some aspects of personality and friendliness (Herbert 1990). The literature on compliments and compliment responses⁵ in everyday discourse has focused on culture-specific performance (Sifianou 2001; Chen and Yang 2010; Danziger 2018), cross-cultural comparisons (Chen 1993; Maíz-Arévalo 2010), and gender differences in compliments patterns (Wolfson 1984; Holmes 1988; Rees-Miller 2011). Recent studies have targeted online everyday compliments and compliment responses (Maíz-Arévalo 2013; Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Eslami, Jabbari and Kuo 2015), pointing to the nature of online platforms – disembodiment, a-synchronicity, and the relative lack of privacy – as reasons for adapting verbal strategies of evaluation and their respective responses to the digital environment. Thus, for example, it was found that appearance is the most complimented topic in both offline and online

5. For an overview of compliment response literature see Chen (2010).

communication (Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013), but, online positive evaluations tend to be more elliptical and to frequently function as means for “keeping the communication channel open” (Placencia and Lower 2013: 639).⁶

Despite the benefits of compliments in smoothening human interaction, they can cause a negative effect or aggravate relationships when they are seen as non-politic (Watts 2003; Locher and Watts 2005), for example, when the “good” object is not seen as good by both parties or when the compliment is perceived as too intimate for the relationship between the speakers. In contexts where power relations are at the core, like politics, compliments are always at risk of being perceived as flattery or sweet talk (Kampf and Danziger 2019).

Studies on political speech acts have found that the public context in which compliments are realized change their logic (the reasons for complimenting), performativity (their consequences), and structure of participation (Kampf 2013). While compliments and compliment responses in everyday discourse had been studied as an “adjacency pair,” two sequential, non-interchangeable speech acts produced by different speakers (Levinson 1983: 332–364), public compliments were found to be monologic speech acts, where a compliment response is usually not expected (Kampf and Danziger 2019). This makes them very often speaker- as well as hearer-oriented.⁷ Another difference between political and everyday compliments is the limited number of “good” objects speakers evaluate; the object of political commendation is largely limited to performance, talent, and personality traits, excluding the very common appearance and possession compliments in private discourse (Kampf and Danziger 2019). Lastly, whereas everyday compliment studies have adopted the one-on-one interaction as the paradigm of communication, public compliments involve different structures of participation (i.e. one to many, many to many, many to one), which include various audiences with diverse worldviews and stances (Kampf 2013). The compliments paid to other actors, thus, may become objects for evaluation, discussion, and even an issue of controversy.

6. For a state-of-the-art overview of compliments and compliments responses studies on social media, see Placencia and Lower (2017).

7. For example, following the announcement that Waze (an Israeli commercial GPS software company) was acquired by Google in 2013, Israeli Minister of Economy Naftali Bennett addressed its founders at an industry event and said: “This is what being Israeli is all about: being modest, attuned to their customers, hard workers, and knowing how to recalculate the route when necessary” (Ynet, 11 June, 2013). While directing his positive evaluation to the addressees (the founders of Waze) Bennett is also associating himself with their success. By complimenting the company’s performance using language borrowed from the business world (customers, workers) and GPS-applications technological discourse (recalculating route), Bennett signals his acquaintance with the hi-tech sector, thus proving his own suitability to fill his ministerial position.

The publicity of complimenting behavior poses a communicative dilemma for political speakers because their evaluative words may be perceived as insincere or inappropriate. Such a communicative challenge is further enhanced in the age of social media, where political actors may better control the design of their message, but have almost no control over the process of its dissemination and interpretation.

4. The communicative challenge of complimenting in social media

The challenge of addressing conflicting audiences on Twitter is known by the term “context collapse” (Marwick and boyd 2011; Davis and Jurgenson 2014). While face-to-face conversations include an identified audience and therefore a relatively defined context, Twitter only allows for an imagined audience according to which users make their linguistic choices (Hoffmann and Suphan 2017). Defined as a microblogging site, Twitter is primarily a textual environment constructed around 280-character tweets, @tags, and #hashtags. Additionally, Twitter allows for “followers” who can subscribe to users and see their tweets featured in a unified feed. Tweets are visible to anyone with access to the site, whether a follower or not. Consequently, Twitter affords a “dynamic and interactive identity presentation to unknown audiences” (Marwick and boyd 2011: 116). The potentially infinite readership leads multiple contexts to collapse into one, hindering successful self-presentation and impression management. Context collapse often causes Twitter users to imagine their audience as the worst possible reader, leading them to use limited and “safe” discourse (pp. 125–126). Marwick and boyd additionally argue that Twitter culture has created an expectation for authenticity, despite, or perhaps due, to the aforementioned consequence of context collapse. This expectation “implies an ongoing front stage performance [which] balances the desire to maintain positive impressions with the need to seem true or authentic to others” (p. 123).

Although Marwick and boyd (2011) refer to private users when describing this shared Twitter value, public discourse does not exist in a vacuum and political actors are subject to the same social norms and evaluation as all users of social media. The characteristics of Twitter thus jeopardize political actors’ complimenting behavior as their positive evaluations may be subjected to unknown users’ criticism and be misinterpreted.

5. Data and method

This study is part of a broader research project titled “Performing Peace: Understanding the Conditions for Achieving the (Re-)conciliatory Consequences of Discursive Actions.”⁸ Within the broader research framework, we collected 2,180 amicable speech acts performed by state representatives and diplomats in a variety of communicative contexts. Amicable actions were defined as verbal acts that signal the addressor’s intentions to secure solidarity (or at least to form an appearance of concern to others’ needs for involvement and appreciation) or to express deference by means of recognition and respect for the others’ sovereignty and autonomy, with an overall aim to initiate, maintain, reinforce, or restore relations between states.

The speech acts were collected from three different data sets, each of which represents a specific mode of communication in public international relations, ranging from official to mediated interactions: (1) official statements and press releases published in the official Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, (2) traditional media outlets – the Israeli newspapers *Haaretz* and *Yedioth Ahronoth*, (3) Twitter or Facebook accounts of state representatives (speakers, heads of state, and ministers of foreign affairs) from Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the United States.

For this specific study we mainly used the online data consisting of 480 amicable actions in English, Hebrew, and Arabic.⁹ The posts were collected from 14 different Twitter and Facebook accounts¹⁰ between February and July of 2017: six accounts in English and Arabic were part of the Israeli foreign affairs communication system (236 messages); seven accounts in English and Arabic were operated

8. This research is supported by the Israel Science Foundation (Grant No. 987/61). We would like to extend our gratitude to Mia Schreiber, Sapir Cohen, Lee Aldar, and Yossi David for assisting in the data collection and analysis.

9. Data in Hebrew and Arabic was translated into English by the authors. We resorted to speech acts dictionaries and comparative studies of Hebrew and English to identify the equivalents of compliments and praise in the three languages (Weirzbicka 1987; Kampf 2016; Kampf and Danziger 2019).

10. PM Benjamin Netanyahu (Facebook, 84); Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Tzipi Hotovely (Twitter, 26); President Reuven Rivlin (Twitter, 35); Israeli Ambassador to the UN Danny Dannon (Twitter, 22); Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Facebook, 31; Twitter, 38). FA Minister of Qatar, Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani (Twitter, 40); King of Saudi Arabia Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud (Twitter, 4); FA Minister of Saudi Arabia, Adel bin Ahmed Al-Jubeir (Twitter, 20); President of Egypt Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (Twitter, 12); Spokesperson of the Ministry of FA of Egypt Ahmed Abu Zeid (Twitter, 40); president of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas (Facebook, 40); and FA Minister of Bahrain, Khalid bin Ahmed Al Khalifa (Twitter, 40).

by senior Arab leaders (184 messages); and the remaining Twitter account was operated by the US president, Donald Trump (34 messages).

In order to map the types of actions, we coded them, first on the basis of their communicative goals (solidarity-oriented versus deference-oriented actions) and second on the basis of their illocutionary force. An inter-coder reliability test was conducted by two trained research students on 200 coding units (9.2%). The test resulted in Krippendorff's alpha reliability scores ranging between 0.97 for the types of the communicative actions and 0.96 for their communicative goal. The wide collection process of all amicable speech acts allowed us to manually identify and code utterances as compliments and praise, as we could not search for them in the data. As conventionally indirect speech acts (Searle 1969; Maíz-Arévalo 2012), compliments and praise usually lack a performative verb and, therefore, we looked for expressions in which the positive evaluation was manifested implicitly or explicitly at the content level. On the basis of Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000: 92) notion of "multidimensional pragmatic space", that provides a framework of speech act analysis "in relation to neighboring speech acts", compliments and praise were treated as a unified functional category of expressions of positive evaluation.

When reviewing our corpora of amicable actions (both online and offline; $N = 2180$, online only; $n = 480$), we found that compliments and praise are uncommon speech acts in diplomatic discourse. Whereas in the broader corpus we identified 78 compliments and praise (3.6%), in the online corpus we found only 9 instances (1.9%; 7 tweets and 2 Facebook posts). Since our corpus of compliments and praise was too small, we manually searched for more items from the Twitter accounts of international actors (Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu; Israeli President, Reuven Rivlin; Emir of Qatar, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani). This resulted in 18 political compliments that were further analyzed to identify their form, function, and content. In what follows we offer a comparative quantitative analysis of offline and online amicable actions and a qualitative analysis focusing on the content, form, and functions of diplomatic compliments.

6. Doing sociability in IR via compliments and other amicable actions

Our first question was how political actors enhance sociability with others in the digital international arena. Table 1 indicates that diplomatic compliments are less prevalent than other amicable actions. International actors in our corpus performed speech acts to assert friendship (9.9%), express gratitude (9.4%), and to support other actors (7.9%) more frequently than they paid compliments and praised (3.6%). Additionally, the table shows that offline compliments and praise are twice as common as the online ones, at 4% (69/1700) and 1.9% (9/480), respectively.

Table 1. Online and offline diplomatic compliments compared to prevalent amicable actions

Action type	Offline	Online
Praise, compliment (78; 3.6%)	69; 88.4%	9; 11.5%
<i>Prevalent offline and online actions</i>		
Thank, express gratitude (204; 9.4%)	174; 85.3%	30; 14.7%
Assert friendship (215; 9.9%)	156; 72.6%	59; 27.4%
Support, empathize with (173; 7.9%)	125; 72.3%	48; 27.7%
<i>Prevalent offline actions</i>		
Recognize (22; 1%)	22; 100%	0
Apologize (12; 0.6%)	12; 100%	0
Request (11; 0.5%)	11; 100%	0
<i>Prevalent online actions</i>		
Assert cooperation (113; 5.2%)	63; 55.8%	50; 44.2%
Send holiday greeting (31; 1.4%)	18; 58.1%	13; 41.9%
Describe (72; 3.3%)	31; 43%	41; 57%

Notes: (1) *N* of entire corpus = 2,180; *n* of offline actions = 1700; *n* of online actions = 480.

(2) The frequency of each action type is in parentheses (the absolute number of occurrences are on the left; the relative frequency of the action type out of the entire corpus is on the right).

Table 1 also demonstrates that some actions were performed exclusively offline, among them recognize, apologize, and request. Refraining from these actions in digital diplomacy can be explained by the inappropriateness of performing them in a mundane platform like Twitter. The media ideology (Gershon 2010) that informs their realizations demands the use of a more a formal medium for their acknowledgement as “serious” actions. At the other end, we found amicable actions that are more prevalent than others in the digital arena: describing, asserting cooperation, and sending holiday greetings. The prevalence of these actions may be explained by their compliance with the ephemeral logic of Twitter. They all respond to current events (as in “Happy Easter from Jerusalem to all our Christian friends around the world!” Israeli PM, Benjamin Netanyahu, 15 April 2017) or include sharing of daily experiences (as in US President Trump’s tweet: “After two days of very productive talks, Prime Minister Abe is heading back to Japan,” 12 February 2017).

In respect to frequencies, compliments were found to be closer to the group of offline actions (69/78; 88.5%), with only 11.5% of online positive evaluations of others. How can we explain the relative scarcity of online compliments? Why do international actors avoid complimenting their peers on social media? We suggest two complementary explanations to these questions.

First, in contrast to actions that are absent from digital diplomacy, we can still find international actors complimenting each other online. This means that,

although rare, positive evaluations on Twitter adhere to the media ideology of the platform. In other words, it is appropriate to lavish compliments online. Nevertheless, as compliments and praise include a form of judgment, they entail potential “face threatening acts” (FTA) (Brown and Levinson 1987) and thus pose a risk to the complimenting actor. Their threatening potential arises from at least three factors: one is the implication that the evaluating party has more social power than the complimented party (Yu 2003). Moreover, an evaluation in the form of praise runs the risk of cross-cultural or socio-pragmatic failures, for example when the object of a compliment is not perceived as commendable, or when the relationship between the speakers is not appropriate for a compliment (Nelson, Al-Batal, and Echols 1996; Golato 2005). The risk is further enhanced in social media discourse, especially on Twitter, where a context collapse may hinder successful self-presentation (Marwick and boyd 2011). Both actions involve evaluative language that may lead to attribution of untoward interpretations by audiences to the complimenting actors.

One strategy employed by international actors to confront this potential risk, is to mitigate the level of evaluation encoded in their compliments by avoiding explicit manifestations of affective stances. According to Maíz-Arévalo (2012: 983), compliments are conventionally performed by either exclamative sentences (e.g., “what a beautiful shirt!”) or by declarative sentences that are formulated as affective facts (e.g., “I love your shirt”) or as facts (“You have a beautiful shirt”). Our data shows that all online international compliments were formulated as facts. By avoiding the formulation of affective facts, (which involve clear evaluation of others), international actors mitigated the potential FTA arising from misinterpreting their words (examples of compliments formulated as facts appear below).

A second explanation may be grounded in the conventions of diplomatic discourse. In contrast to conventionalized verbal actions in international relations, compliments and praise have no clear protocol for their performance. The realization of seasonal greetings, for example, is highly scripted (Young 2000; Kampf 2016) and expected in specific occasions (i.e. holidays).¹¹ The decision to compliment others in IR, on the other hand, is much more dependent on personal preferences and considerations. Because there are no diplomatic conventions for “attributing credit” when political actors decide to express their favorable judgment on Twitter, they risk a misfire or being misinterpreted. Thus, it is the inherent characteristics of public, online compliments as a form of (positive) public judgment, the lack of “approbation protocol” in diplomatic discourse, and the perils of context collapse

11. For example, “Happy Lá Fheile Phadraig to all of my great Irish friends!” (US President Donald Trump, 17 March, 2017).

on Twitter that encourage international actors to perform solidarity by other means. Nevertheless, as our data indicates, political actors do express their approbation from time to time. In the following section we will discuss how they compliment and praise each other in spite of the lack a clear protocol and the risk of failure.

7. Tweeting diplomatic compliments: Content, form and functions

Online compliments and praise in our corpus were addressed to peoples and states (i.e. Kenya, Saudi Arabia, the people of Australia) as part of the practice of public diplomacy, or to specific political institutions (i.e. the Czech Parliament) and individual actors in the international arena (i.e. presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, ambassadors and one UN general secretary). In line with our findings on political compliments between peer politicians (Kampf and Danziger 2019), international actors completely excluded appearance and possessions as objects of compliments and praise, limiting appropriate evaluations in the diplomatic discourse to three topics:

1. Impressive actions and performances, i.e. the successful application of a policy, achievements, and decisions, as in the following tweet by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin after the 2017 Shayrat missile strike by US forces into Syria: “The clear action by US and @POTUS are a *fitting* response to such unthinkable brutality, & an *example to the entire free world*” (6 April, 2017).
2. Various aspects of personality, i.e. the personal and social traits of a public figure, such as friendliness, as in a tweet by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo: “I met this evening with the governor of New York, @NYGovCuomo –*a true friend of Israel!*” (5 March, 2017).
3. Ability, talent, or skills, i.e. the competencies and leadership traits owned by a public actor that make her/him competent for a political position, as in the following tweet by US President Donald Trump to the prime minister of Japan: “Played golf today with Prime Minister Abe of Japan and @TheBig_Easy, Ernie Els, and had a great time. *Japan is very well represented!*” (11 February, 2017).

As aforementioned, tweets containing compliments and praise were compliant with the ephemeral logic of Twitter; just like “ordinary” Twitter users, international figures adopted the logic of the platform by responding to current affairs (as in Rivlin’s tweet regarding the US airstrike demonstrated above) and sharing their daily experiences, as in “Beautiful day, *lovely country, wonderful people*. I am very happy to be in Australia, and I look forward to hosting you in Israel” (Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, 22 February, 2017). The tweeting actors were reporting their

daily activities (i.e. following a meeting between two international actors) and expressing their feelings towards others while trying to manage face and relationships. The most common complimenting strategy was adding positive adjectives when describing an action, as in “Saw the latest innovations from Israeli & Indian companies. There are *tremendously talented people in Israel and India*. Together we can achieve more!” (Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, 6 July, 2017, followed by a picture of PM Netanyahu and Indian PM Narendra Modi).

At the structure level, most items of compliments and praise in our data (14/18) were realized in line with one of three American English formulas identified by Manes and Wolfson (1981) or in variations of them; four items correlated to type (1) NP {be/V} (really) ADJ, e.g. “She is strong”; five correlated type (3) PRO/expletive is (really) (a) ADJ NP, e.g. “he is a great friend of Israel”; and five in the ellipsis form correlating types 7/8: (a) (ADV) ADJ NP(!), e.g. “a thoroughly good man”. An additional ellipsis form had no ADJ but the NP carried a positive semantic load (“Godspeed, @SenJohnMcCain. A hero. A fighter. A friend. Israel is with you.”). The final three were either implicit (“...I am sure he will do an excellent job...”), performative (“We commend...”) or contained a speech act verb in reported speech (“I praised...”).

Our analysis indicates that diplomatic compliments can function at the interpersonal level, the national level, and the international level.

The interpersonal level: Praise and compliments can serve as material for consolidating friendly relationships between the complimenting party and her/his addressee. Thus, they can be regarded as solidarity-oriented devices available in the toolbox of international actors for building or strengthening interpersonal relationships, as in “Melania and I are hosting Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Mrs. Abe at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Fla. *They are a wonderful couple!*” (US President Donald Trump, 11 February, 2017). By positively evaluating the marital relations between Japanese PM and his wife, President Trump centers his evaluation on the personal level (as opposed to the professional), thus enhancing rapport with the Japanese leader. In this tweet, he projects an image of thick relationship with his Japanese counterpart by enhancing PM Shinzo Abe’s personal and political face.

The national level: Compliments and praise may effectively address the national community of both parties involved in the interaction. In this case, the complimenting actor can praise her/his peer for the efforts invested in promoting the national interests or for being well suited for the position of leadership, as in “Japan is very well represented!” in the tweet by US President Donald Trump, after playing golf with Prime Minister Abe. In this tweet President Trump informs his audiences of both the good interpersonal relations with Japan’s prime minister and commends his peer for being an excellent representative of his country. By explicitly

mentioning Japan, he is drawing the attention of the Japanese people to their leader's skills, thus enhancing the face of the Japanese PM in front of his people while informing the American people of the level of friendship between the two countries.

The international level: Like other communicative actions, such as condolences in the international arena (Fenton-Smith 2007), compliments and praise serve as means for participation in constructing the international community and for proposing models of normative behavior for international actors. As such, they may strengthen both bilateral and multilateral relations, as in the foreign Minister of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani's praise for the role of Saudi Arabia in promoting the interest of the Arab world: "We commend the role Kingdom of #SaudiArabia takes in reviving Arab-Islamic solidarity and renewing openness to the world" (originally in Arabic, 21 May, 2017). Compliments and praise can also underline the values that should instruct the conduct of the global community at large. This function is the result of the role of praise and compliments in Epideictic Rhetoric (Aristotle I, 9, 1367b27). As argued by scholars of rhetoric, in assigning nobility or baseness to public actors and their actions, epideictic rhetoric constructs models for proper behavior and contributes to the consolidation of shared values (Hauser 1999). This normative function is apparent, for example, in the tweet by Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, after the 2017 Shayrat missile strike by US forces into Syria where he explicitly defines the praise-worthy actions as an "example to the entire free world." This tweet shows that the international community should be bound by normative scripts that are constructed by common values – freedom, in this case. These values allow members of the international community to understand which appropriate actions need to be taken in order to achieve common goals (Kampf 2013).

The approbation of specific decisions and policies of one actor toward a specific country is done to promote national interests, not just expected international normative scripts. Thus, for example, following the Czech Parliament's decision to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and reject anti-Israel resolutions made by UNESCO, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu tweeted the following approbation: "thanks the Czech Parliament for deciding to oppose UNESCO's decision... *This is the correct, worthy and courageous decision that others should copy*" (24 May, 2017, accompanied by a longer statement in the form of an embedded image). Here Netanyahu is explicitly calling all international actors to adopt the same policy as the one endorsed by the Czech parliament. By praising its decision, PM Netanyahu is using Twitter to send a direct message that advances the Israeli stance in the international arena.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter we analyzed compliments and praise on Twitter as a mediated discursive means in the diplomatic digital toolbox utilized by political actors to enhance sociability in the international arena. On the basis of 480 solidarity-oriented posts in Hebrew, Arabic, and English collected from the accounts of political and foreign-policy actors, our findings suggest that although diplomatic compliments in social media hold great potential for managing international relations, they are not as common as other solidarity-oriented actions, such as congratulations, holiday greetings, and assertions of cooperation.

We suggested several reasons for their relative scarcity, including the greater potential threat for self and other's face entailed in publicly evaluating others, the lack of "approbation protocol" in diplomatic discourse, and the perils of context collapse on Twitter. Nevertheless, political actors do manifest positive evaluations occasionally, despite the risk of failure. We have suggested that communicative challenges on Twitter lead them to prefer a "safe discourse" in the form and content of online compliments and praise. Political actors limited their object of approbation to quality of performance, high skills, and friendly personality of their peers, while omitting the object of appearance and possession. Moreover, they formulated their positive evaluations as facts rather than affective judgments.

We have further identified three levels in which online diplomatic compliments and praise function: interpersonal (consolidating friendly relationships and enhancing rapport between international actors), national (enhancing sociability between peoples and states), and international (participating in constructing the international community and proposing models of normative behavior). Within all of these contexts, the main function of diplomatic compliments is to inform social media users of what the complimenter thinks or feels about the complimented party (see Clark and Carlson 1982; Kampf 2013). Such performance of public evaluation extends the traditional definition of compliments. In contrast to private compliments, which focus on the management of dyadic relationships, online diplomatic compliments are aimed at signaling audiences of the thick relationships between the interacting actors and, and by extension, of how their respective publics should think or feel about each other. In that sense, diplomatic compliments are metonymic symbols for interstate friendship, not just interpersonal ones.

In line with studies indicating that online interaction between global users decreases cultural differences (Shifman and Thelwall 2009; Shifman, Levy and Thelwall 2014), our findings further suggest that both the diplomatic context and the digital platform in which the communicative process unfolds blur differences in cultural speaking styles of the international actors. The compliments and praise

we analyzed in interstate online communication underlined the universal patterns of diplomatic language (Cohen 1987), marking international actors as members of a diplomatic community of practice (Wenger 1998). Traditionally, studies in linguistic pragmatics have shown that speech acts such as compliments are “cultural mirrors” (Manes 1983: 96) reflecting and constructing normative scripts and conventions of a specific speech community (Blum-Kulka 1992; Chen and Yang 2010). These studies have shown the specific linguistic choices made by different cultures stemming from their different beliefs and values. These discursive styles are also manifested in political discourse. We have shown elsewhere (Kampf and Danziger 2019) how the distinctive style of the Israeli speech community and the distinctive patterns of political speech are conflated in creating a distinct type of complimenting and praising discourse.¹² These cultural references, however, were missing from the tweets published by Israeli political actors when communicating in the international domain.

Down the road, we suggest that future studies explore other popular amicable speech acts in digital diplomacy, such as greetings, congratulating, and welcoming, all of which were found to be more prevalent and thus conventional and medium appropriate. We further suggest that future studies focus on the reception of political and diplomatic compliments among social media users. This will allow us to better understand under what conditions evaluative language can achieve its communicative goals. Finally, in line with our argument that online compliments are guided by the logic of the media, that is, are primarily made in order to inform various audiences about political stances and feelings, it is worth considering how online performance of speech acts extends traditional definitions formulated in the context of dyadic, offline interactions in the private domain. Praise to those who have reached this point in the chapter.

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12. One example that points to the specific values of the Israeli *dugri* code – honesty and sincerity – can be seen in Ehud Barak’s, the retiring Minister of Defense, compliment to his successor in office, Moshe (Bogie) Ya’alon: ‘Bogie is a person who in or out of uniform knows where he stands; he’s stable, doesn’t vacillate, says what he thinks, and does what he says’ (*Haaretz*, 19 March 2013).

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PART III

Complimenting behavior and self-praise in health, sports and fitness domains

The interpersonal effects of complimenting others and self-praise in online health settings

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This article investigates the pragmatic functions of complimenting and self-praise in two UK social media forums about smoking cessation, and responses to these speech acts. We compare these insights with other related e-health contexts (advice column, anti-smoking websites). Adopting an interpersonal pragmatics perspective, we focus on how these speech acts are employed for relationship creation. Our findings suggest that complimenting and self-praise are pivotal discourse practices in the forums. The status of the posting quitter – as new, or as successfully quitting – appears to affect the topic of compliments, the functions of third-party compliments and the order in which it is acceptable for initial posters to use self-praise; additional interpersonal effects relate to the overarching purpose of improving one's lifestyle. In comparison to the peer-to-peer forum context, we find the number of compliments drastically reduced in the professional e-health contexts, which may be attributed to the set-up of practices. This paper adds to previous studies by exploring complimenting and self-praise in (e-health) social media.

Keywords: interpersonal pragmatics, compliments, self-praise, forum, e-health

1. Introduction

Complimenting has been extensively studied in face-to-face settings and research into its use, pragmatic function, and form in social-media contexts has also gained traction (see Placencia and Lower 2017; this collection). Positive self-presentation has been shown to be a remarkable feature of technology-mediated communication (TMC) in one-to-many settings (Dayter 2018: 188). The specific pragmatic functions of self-praise in TMC (as a vehicle of self-disclosure), however, have not been researched in-depth yet (see Dayter 2018 for an overview of research so far). Dayter (2018: 189) puts forward that the positions on the acceptability and functions of

self-praise appear to be a matter of debate and are often controversial across different disciplines, which warrants further research. In this chapter, we explore how complimenting and self-praise are used in social media dealing with smoking cessation and how participants react to these speech acts. We analyze a corpus of 30 threads from two forums which are set in the UK and compare insights from this corpus with other related e-health contexts (an advice column and anti-smoking websites). We are especially interested in how the interpersonal dimension of complimenting and self-praise comes into effect in the online health context of smoking cessation – where talk about improving the self and encouraging each other to become smoke-free may be the glue holding the community together.

Our study is positioned within the research on health online or digital health (see Locher and Thurnherr 2017) and adopts an interpersonal pragmatics perspective since how complimenting and self-praise are employed for relationship creation is our main focus. We wish to explore whether and how the peer-to-peer interactions in the forums differ from the professional health practices observed in the health advice column and the health websites run by professional health experts in our corpus with respect to the speech acts of complimenting and self-praise.

In what follows, we will first position our study within the research literature (Section 2) and then introduce our data and methodology (Section 3). The presentation of the results (Section 4) is followed by a discussion and conclusion (Section 5).

2. Literature review

In our approach to the topic of compliments and self-praise, we adopt an interpersonal pragmatics perspective, which designates “examinations of the relational aspect of interactions between people that both affect and are affected by their understandings of culture, society, and their own and others’ interpretations” (Locher and Graham 2010: 2). This means that we focus on the relational and interpersonal side of communication of the observed interaction, while acknowledging that the relational side complements the transactional and content side of communication and these cannot be separated.¹ Within this area of research, pragmatic variation is explored with the concept of relational work, defined as “the work people invest in negotiating their relationships in interaction” (Locher and Watts 2008: 78).

Taking such an approach lends itself to the study of compliments and self-praise since at the heart of these speech acts lies the negotiation of face, and ultimately

1. In this chapter we use the adjectives interpersonal and relational interchangeably. We follow Watzlawick, Beavin Bavelas, and Jackson (1967: 54) in that “[e]very communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore a metacommunication.”

relationship and identity negotiation (see Locher 2008 for the link between these concepts). We agree with Scollon and Scollon (2001) that there is no interaction where face, or the relational side of communication, is not involved; nonetheless, compliments and self-praise highlight this interpersonal side exceptionally well. As many compliment scholars have pointed out (e.g., Placencia and Lower 2017) and in Brown and Levinson's (1987: 39) view, compliments enhance the positive face of the addressee. However, since they also typically constitute the first-pair part of an adjacency pair, the addressee is positioned to respond by accepting or declining the compliment (Brown and Levinson 1987: 39, 68; Pomerantz 1984). Therefore, compliments and self-praise (as well as responses to them) are risky as regards face negotiation. This restriction of the addressee's action-environment (see Locher 2004) is more pronounced in face-to-face than in technology-mediated encounters where it is easier not to respond at all, a finding reported for example in the context of status updates in social media sites such as Facebook (see, e.g., Bolander and Locher 2015: 116; in this volume: Eslami, Yang and Qian; Lower; Ruiz-Tada, Fernández-Villanueva and Tragant) and Instagram (Placencia and Powell, this volume).

With respect to compliments in general, we follow Placencia and Lower (2017: 635), who argue for a broad definition of compliments "as expressions of positive evaluation (Wolfson 1981: 120) that attribute credit to the addressee (Holmes 1986: 492)". In order to allow explicitly for the fact that non-present people can be complimented, Sawadogo (2018: 152) adds "which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the addresser". Furthermore, Placencia and Lower (2017) highlight the fact that complimenting is embedded in social interaction in that

careful attention needs to be paid to the local context of the interaction, the nature of the activity in which the compliment is embedded, and the co-text. The socio-cultural context needs to be taken into account too since what is positive for one group may not be for another (see also below), and there may even be variation across socio-cultural groups in terms of 'what counts as a compliment' (Wolfson 1981: 117).
(Placencia and Lower 2017: 636–637)

Turning to a discussion of self-praise, we first wish to clarify that we treat compliments and praise as near-synonyms and will use them interchangeably. They share a pragmatic space (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2000) and one can connect both to congratulations (Bach and Harnish 1979 classify compliments as a subset of congratulations) and to assessments (Strubel-Burgdorf 2018). We prefer the expression self-praise rather than the less current self-compliment for compliments addressed to oneself. Making a concrete link to previous studies on compliments, Dayter (2016), who works on Twitter posts by a group of (lay) ballet dancers, defines

self-praise ... as a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to the speaker for some 'good' (possession, accomplishment, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the potential audience. As such, self-praise includes announcements of accomplishments as well as explicit positive evaluations of some aspect of the self. (Dayter 2016: 65)

Compliments and self-praise are thus closely related but differ in whom is being complimented (see also Luo and Hancock in this volume). There are several key politeness theories which report constraints on speech acts of self-praise. In his 1983 work, Leech talks about self-praise in connection with the Modesty Maxim, which entails "minimize praise to S [speaker], [and maximize dispraise to S]" (Leech 2014: 35).² In his 2007 version, he adapts the maxims to constraints and describes the modesty constraint as follows: "place a low value on S's qualities" with self-devaluation as a typical speech act. Brown and Levinson (1987: 67) also speak of self-praise as a face-threatening act. In her review of the literature, Dayter (2016: 65) points out that most politeness scholars "converge in considering self-praise a potentially problematic social activity". In this light, it is especially interesting to see how self-praise is reacted to in our data.

There are several research interests that have been pursued in the literature on compliments, which are also relevant for the study of self-praise: the forms of compliments, the topics of compliments, the functions of compliments and the responses to compliments (see, e.g., Golato 2005; Jucker 2009; Placencia and Lower 2017). While we cannot give a comprehensive review here, we will point out a few important issues for our analysis.

First, it is evident that considerable work has been conducted on the linguistic forms of compliments. Manes and Wolfson (1981: 120–121) report on the distribution of formulaic patterns found in an American English corpus:

1. NP {is/looks} (really) ADJ (53.6%)
2. I (really) {like/love} NP (16.1%)
3. PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP (14.9%)
4. You V (a) (really) ADJ NP (3.3%)
5. You V (NP) (really) ADV (2.7%)
6. You have (a) (really) ADJ NP (2.4%)
7. What (a) ADJ NP! (1.6%)
8. ADJ NP! (1.6%)
9. Isn't NP ADJ! (1.0%) (Placencia and Lower 2017: 639, as adapted from Manes and Wolfson 1981: 120–121)

2. The Approbation Maxim entails "minimize dispraise of O [other], [and maximize praise of O]" (Leech 2014: 35).

Placencia and Lower (2017: 639) report that these patterns also surface in TMC contexts in varying degrees (e.g., Hoffmann 2013 on blogs; Placencia and Lower 2013 on Facebook). Other studies have differentiated between *exclamative*, *declarative*, and *elliptical* compliments (Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013: 743; Strubel-Burgdorf 2018: 95). However, these surface structures are not exclusive to compliments and we concur with Placencia and Lower (2017: 636) that they bring forth problems in identifying compliments in a reliable way (see also Strubel-Burgdorf 2018: 14 on the overlap between assessments and compliments). We will return to this point in the methodology section.

When referring to what people compliment others about, the literature report *appearance*, *possessions*, and *ability/skills* (Wolfson 1983; Holmes 1986), or *appearance*, *personality and skills*, and *possession* (Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013).

In their literature review, Placencia and Lower (2017: 646) report that most studies have adopted and adapted Holmes' categories "*accept*, *reject*, *evade/deflect*" as responses to compliments. With respect to social media, they highlight "emojicons/emoji and the 'like' function" as potential forms of response categories (Placencia and Lower 2017: 650; on the 'like' function, see also Maíz-Arévalo 2013: 57; Eslami, Jabbari and Kuo 2015: 254).

The literature reports on two main functions of compliments, which, as we argue, can overlap: discourse and social functions of compliments (Wolfson and Manes 1980: 391; Placencia and Lower 2017: 643). The discourse functions highlight boundaries within talk, such as "to initiate a conversation or to change the topic of a conversation" (Wolfson and Manes 1980: 391). In terms of social functions, compliments have been described as "social lubricants" (Wolfson 1983: 89), in that they can function as conversation starters and attention getters (Placencia and Lower 2017: 643), "keeping the communication channel open' and 'affirming and strengthening relationships'" (Placencia and Lower 2013: 639). In addition, Hudak et al. (2010: 779) stress that when compliments are looked at in longer stretches of talk, they can fulfill varied functions. For example, "Golato [2005] found that a speaker may place a compliment in a particular location in the stream of talk to reproach or criticize a recipient, to perform a hedging pre-request or to provide an account" (Hudak et al. 2010: 779, emphasis removed). To give one example from a health context, Hudak et al. (2010: 779) report a study by Gill (2005), which, building on Maynard's (1998) work, shows how compliments of a third absent party are used to criticize the present person's behavior. In this case, the patient used praise of a different doctor's compliance with the patient's wish for particular tests in order to imply that the present doctor should also perform the same tests. Compliments thus have clear primary functions but are ultimately multifunctional in nature and used in versatile ways.

The functions of compliments are of particular interest to our study since the creation of expertise within identity construction and interpersonal pragmatics is of great importance in e-health contexts due to the connection between expertise and trust; this is central in health relationships (Locher and Schnurr 2017; Locher and Thurnherr 2017). The creation of an expert identity in health encounters can be achieved in manifold ways and is not restricted to health professionals. In Thurnherr, Rudolf von Rohr and Locher (2016) we report on the functions of narrative passages in different TMC contexts³ and how these functions are linked to identity construction. As in the case of compliments, the functions of narrative passages are many and overlapping. We found instances of “seeking advice, giving advice, indicating/seeking agreement, supporting a claim, [and] showing compliance with advice given to reporting on progress and success” (Thurnherr, Rudolf von Rohr and Locher 2016: 450); when linking these functions to identity construction, identities “as authentic advice-seekers, active self-helpers, successful quitters and advice-givers” emerged (p. 450). Narratives were employed by peers to both create legitimacy and display expertise on one’s own life in help-seeking moves as well as in advice-giving moves. In contrast to the peers, the professional advisors on public Internet health sites and an American advice column in our corpus rarely employed narratives. We argue that compliments (and self-praise) to display expertise may have an important function in e-health communication as well, which we will explore further below.

The e-health forums studied in this article are of a public nature. Therefore, the technology-mediated feature of the persistency of transcript (Herring 2007) is particularly important to highlight. Interactants perform their speech acts not just by directly responding to each other, but their interactions are available to be read by others. Although, Gill (2005: 466) does not talk about a TMC context, her observations on the “public” dimension of compliments are also relevant for forum data: “Giving compliments and praise to one person can implicate others in complex ways. For example, praising a person who is not present can work to criticize a *copresent* participant who is in the same membership category.” This co-presence is a given in forum interaction. Similarly, complimenting others publicly or engaging in self-praise creates complex interpersonal effects beyond the interactional dyad (see also Sawadogo 2018: 145).

Having reviewed aspects of the literature on compliments and self-praise and having shown its relevance for studies on e-health, we wish to pursue the following research questions in the remainder of this chapter:

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3. The TMC contexts were “(1) email counseling at a UK university, (2) online forums providing peer support for quitters of smoking, and (3) anti-smoking websites by UK governmental, commercial and charitable institutions” (Thurnherr, Rudolf von Rohr and Locher 2016: 450).

1. What functions do the instances of compliments and self-praise fulfill in their context?
2. How are these speech acts linguistically realized?
3. How can these instances be linked to the creation of an expert identity?

3. Data and methodology

The data for this paper can be situated in online health discourse and consist of three parts: (1) interactions from two online forums providing peer support to quit smoking in the UK, (2) seven anti-smoking websites hosted by governmental, commercial and charitable institutions in the UK, and (3) contributions to an online advice health column hosted by an American university. The data have been analyzed in the context of larger projects which focused on different aspects of the interpersonal variation of language, such as the persuasive dimension or the discursive move advice (e.g., Locher 2006; Rudolf von Rohr 2018).

The forum data were collected in March and April 2012 from two sources which both have ceased to exist in the meantime (2015/2016): (a) *SmokingIsBad* and (b) *nosmokingday.co.uk*. These two support groups were originally selected because of their participants' focus on giving mutual help and encouragement as well as on motivating each other to become smoke-free. To detect typical patterns in these practices, data were collected over a period of two months. The threads were all dealing with the beginning of a quit smoking journey – in other words, thread initiators were in their first two weeks of quitting according to the sub-forums to which they contributed. Moreover, only threads that featured between 10–20 posts were included in the analysis in an effort to concentrate on interactions of typical length in both forums. The original corpus consisted of 80 threads, whereby a thematic analysis indicated that there were seven main topics (see Rudolf von Rohr 2018).

For this study, the topics (1) announcing new attempts at quitting, and (2) progress and success stories were picked as they promised to feature explicit compliments on how initiating posters were faring in their quitting journey.⁴ Progress and success stories could feature an explicit exclamation of joy or pride at the beginning of a thread by the quitters in question. Finally, the sub-corpus consisted of 30 threads of which nine were about new quitting journeys (a1-a3; b1-b6), and 21 were progress and success stories (a4-a14; b7- b17). In numerical terms, the corpus featured 38,981 words.

4. This, however, does not mean that there are no compliments in the other threads (see Rudolf von Rohr 2018).

Regarding the ethical dimension of data collection, the heuristic principles by the Association of Internet Researchers were followed (Ess et al. 2002; Markham and Buchanan 2012). The forums were publicly available and interactants displayed awareness of the public nature of their posts as they sometimes explicitly referred to the personal message system. In addition, the contributions were mainly of positive and affirming character without containing sensitive information. Therefore, seeking informed consent was not deemed necessary. Nevertheless, to uphold the confidentiality of participants, location markers were deleted, and nicknames were adapted. Further, for forum (a), *Smokingisbad*, a pseudonym was employed while the other forum is mentioned with its original name due to copyright reasons (it is linked to the British Heart Foundation).

Given the focus of this collection, our main attention is on the forum sites due to the peer-to-peer interactive nature of the data. We also briefly draw on seven publicly available anti-smoking websites which are maintained by professional institutions and which are not interactive (i.e. they provide information but no space for interaction in the sense of social media). In addition, previous work by Locher (2006) on an American Internet health advice column *Lucy Answers*,⁵ run by a professional team of health experts at an American higher education institution, is used for comparison. This advice column is public in nature and publishes a question by an anonymous advice-seeker and an answer by a team of health professionals. There is no interaction beyond this exchange. The corpus consists of 280 such exchanges from seven different health-related topic categories.

Combining our analysis of particular speech acts such as compliments and self-praise with an interpersonal pragmatics lens means that we are fundamentally engaged in qualitative analysis. Both the recognition of a compliment/self-praise and the decision as to what function the identified compliment fulfils cannot be established in an automated way. Instead, compliments need to be identified and discussed within their context. In Locher and Thurnherr (2017: 17–21), we explain in detail how we combine four research steps in our methodology: (1) Content/thematic analysis; (2) Discursive moves analysis; (3) Zooming in on linguistic form and function of linguistic expressions in context; (4) Widening the scope: Interviews, techniques from corpus linguistics, etc. In due brevity, the first step refers to contextualization in general since we believe that what is being talked about has repercussions on how it is being talked about (e.g., taboo versus non-taboo health issues). The second step employs the notion of “discursive move”, which is defined as “the kind of contribution that the entry made to the ongoing interchange” (Miller and Gergen 1998: 192). It allows us to move beyond the sentence level when analyzing the composition of texts. Step 3 and 4 permit us to focus on linguistic

5. The name has been changed at the request of the institution.

points of interest (e.g., how compliments are formulated). In the present study, we have refrained from quantifying our analysis of the forum data and, hence, have not established coder-agreement. The categories and examples presented below have been jointly discussed. Our aim is thus to answer our research questions by giving a general overview of observed instances of compliments and self-praise including their functions.

4. Analysis

First, the analysis of the forum data is presented. Secondly, our findings will be complemented with our insights from the e-health advice column and the smoking cessation websites.

4.1 The forum data

The forums provide members support and encouragement on their way to becoming non-smokers. In other words, motivating each other to reach the common goal stands at the forefront. In the dataset in question, both self-praise and compliments are salient speech acts. Complimenting each other on or praising oneself for embarking on the quitting journey or persevering in being smoke-free are ingrained communal discourse practices, which are firmly pointing to the overarching purpose of self-improvement. Moreover, and related to this last observation, cheering for oneself or for each other by (self-) praise appear to be core motivational strategies in the dataset. We found distinctive patterns with respect to the different types of threads depending on the status of initial quitting posters (as new or immersed in the quitting journey). Variation can be found for the following three aspects: (1) the topic of compliments, (2) the use and function of compliments addressed to third parties (including who utters them) as well as (3) when self-praise is used by initiators. These three aspects will be illustrated subsequently before looking at responses to self-praise and compliments and the linguistic form of the compliments.

4.1.1 *The topic and function of compliments and self-praise*

First, turning to the topic of compliments, we found that new quitters receive compliments on their *decisions* to stop smoking (which can be *great, good, fantastic*) and attitudes (*you sound positive, sounds like you good and prepared, great attitude*). In contrast, initiators who share updates may be complimented on achieving a certain day in their quitting journey (*week 2, already; congratulations on reaching double figures!*), their methods of quitting (*and going cold Turkey!*), and their achievement in

a more general way (*WTG, You're doing great, so pumped for you; etc.*). These results may indicate how crucial encouraging each other is to participants since *taking the plunge* appears to be valued as highly as having reached a certain number of days.

Second, third-party compliments refer to praise which is directed at the community as an entity. The pragmatic function and the source of said speech acts vary according to whether we consider threads which announce new quitting journeys or threads which share success/progress stories. In the threads with new quitters, respondents praise the forum for its help and advice used to initiate newcomers into the group, thereby encouraging their membership, which has a clearly face-enhancing function (see Rudolf von Rohr 2018: 325). Examples (1) and (2) illustrate these points.

- (1) [...] Huge welcome to the forum, you'll find plenty of help here. Lots to read and as others have said, we're all doing the same thing so please do yell if you need help and we'll be here.⁶ (new quitting journey; a3; respondent)
- (2) You've come to the right place for finding support. We all have our own set of pom poms and a nice line in motivational t-shirts. (new quitting journey; b6; respondent)

In both examples, respondents start by praising the forum indirectly for its usefulness (*plenty of help, lots to read; right place*) before they use the collective *we* to establish similarity with the initiators (in order to bond with the latter) and to offer their help. On a secondary level, in doing so, respondents also index their own established identity of belonging to the group.

The forum or the collective group appear to be less often the object of compliments once the quitting journey has started. In contrast to threads announcing new quitting journeys, it is initiators who praise the community for its help and support in success/progress stories, as shown in Examples (3) and (4).

- (3) well the start of day 12 and I am still here. [...] I havent had any major craves for a good few days now, but I do have the "right where's my ciggies" thought every now and then and it confuses me a little. It takes me a second or two to realise that I dont have any and dont need them either. Thank you all again for the support you have given me over the last 12 days, this forum is a Godsend. (success/progress; b9; initiator)
- (4) Today went well I thought. No super severe cravings, no anxiety, quite productive at work. [...] Anyway, so on it goes and thank guys for being here. I think I could go without the patches sooner than I could go without the forum. (success/progress; a7; initiator)

6. All examples appear in their original spelling and form.

The fact that it is mainly initiators who praise the forum in progress threads can be interpreted two-fold on an interpersonal dimension. On the one hand, it is a way of mitigating self-praise – or what Dayter (2016: 141) has categorized as “Self-praise plus shift of focus” – whereby initiators credit the forum for a large part of their success and improved self. On the other hand, by praising the help of the community, initiators not only show their appreciation but cast themselves as firmly entrenched members who are aligning with community ideals, pursuing their common goal together, which strengthens their ties with the group.

It is interesting that there are no reprimands for self-praise in the threads – which may have to do with the fact that they are cases of positive self-disclosure (Dayter 2016: 66).⁷ We interpret this as indicating that self-praise seems to be an acceptable discourse practice in this forum. In fact, respondents appear to react positively to initiators’ self-praise, as the use of compliments in response to self-praise is noteworthy (see Examples (5) and (6) below). Nonetheless, our third finding is that in the data sets there appear to be unspoken rules about when and where it is acceptable to praise oneself: it is notable that new quitters’ thread titles and first posts seem to be praise-free, while, in progress/success threads, initiators may make use of titles and initial posts to update their peers on achievements in a straightforward, bald-on-record manner. We will illustrate the use of self-praise in both contexts in more detail in what follows.

4.1.2 *Responses to self-praise and compliments*

In the threads dealing with new quitting journeys, initiators may post updates announcing (mini-)milestones they have reached (e.g., how they wanted to smoke but resisted on the same day). These posts occur on the same day, as normally a thread is used per day of the quitting smoking journey. Examples (5) and (6) illustrate two such cases.

(5) Update by initiator:

Nearly finished day 1.

Well so far, so good, no smokeys and I’m nearly finished day 1 (its 11.15pm at the moment). Whoopee! 🎉

[...]

7. We find that Dayter (2016: 66) has usefully and succinctly summarized the distinction between bragging and positive self-disclosure based on previous research. While bragging can be linked to exaggerations and understating one’s effort to achieve an aim, and is negatively connoted, positive self-disclosure is more hedged and may consist of giving credit to others, stressing the work that has been invested, or of expressing gratitude.

Dayter's (2016: 138) observations on her ballet Twitter corpus, self-praise appears to perform a "solidarity by inclusivity" function as it contributes to the virtue of undertaking the journey to becoming a non-smoker. In fact, after initial posters have indulged in self-praise, respondents may join in and report their own, similar success, all in an effort to construct a positive, motivational discourse, where the writers create a sense of self-efficacy and are collaboratively praising their progress. Example (9) is a case in point, where an initiator just *had to share [her] accomplishment [...]*.

(9) Initiator:

Two weeks today!!!!!!

Just had to share my accomplishment with all you lovely people...

Today is exactly 14 days for me that I have been a non smoker and I feel good!

No cravings and I dont miss it, Never felt better!!!

[Several responses]

Respondent 5:

Well done – super achievement and so glad you are feeling so positive.

I reach the giddy heights of two weeks tomorrow and am so proud of myself.

I have generally been in good spirits although this week has tested me at work but I have overcome the challenges without having to smoke [...]

Respondent 6:

Me too!

I'm right with there with you guys! Isn't it a great feeling? 🍷

(progress/success; b13 [the titles of a post are in italics])

Respondent 5 starts by complimenting the initiator on the steps achieved before drawing parallels between both of their progress. Respondent 6 positions himself as equally successful, which is emphasized from the get-go by using a sub-title for his post *Me too!*, praising their collective advancement. In addition, if respondents use self-praise in their answers, it can contribute to creating expert personas, as demonstrated in (10).

- (10) Being quit for a long period is amazing. It is definitely recommended by those of us who are there. We felt lost and like we'd had tons of quit attempts too.. in fact for me they may as well of had one of them movie clapperboard 'TAKE 27!' all told (progress/success; a13; respondent)

In (10), the respondent reacts to the initiator's wish to remain smoke-free for a long time, by indexing his own experience (his use of *us* may indicate his belonging to the group, but could simultaneously mitigate his self-praise), whereby he seems attempting to inspire the initiator.

In (11), the respondent practices indirect self-praise since he positions himself as knowledgeable of the quit smoking path and as currently still being smoke-free without explicitly mentioning his achievements.

(11) I'm really pleased to see you here. 🥰

Well done, week 2 is where all the goodies are!!



(progress/success; a12; respondent)

Initiators' responses to compliments can be categorized as accepting, showing appreciation by thanking, or as, what Holmes (1995: 141) has called, ignoring. Of course, initiators may deflect compliments to a certain extent when they express their gratitude to the group (e.g., *I am sooooooooooooo glad I found this forum [...]; a12*). Initiators may also not react to individual compliments, but choose to address several well-meaning respondents at once, as in (12).

(12) Thanks everyone for all of your positivity!!!!

(progress/success; b4; respondent)

Alternatively, in an avalanche of praises, they may cherry-pick to which specific compliments they respond using addressing strategies, as in (13).

(13) Oh Thank you H, yes I think I have got my mind around it now.

(progress/success; b17 respondent)

In (13), the initiator had received two compliments (a generic *well done*; and a reinforcing, positive evaluation *sounds like you really have your head in the right place...*) choosing only to answer to the more specific compliment.

4.1.3 *The linguistic form of the compliments*

Possibly due to the overall frame of these threads, which centers on inciting each other to keep going with their quitting attempts, the linguistic form which compliments take tends to be fairly formulaic, including a range of several medium-specific features. The patterns found here do not correspond to the three most frequent ones observed for American English (see Manes and Wolfson 1981), which are compliments featuring *like, love, be, looks*). This is not surprising if we consider that the objects of praise are overwhelmingly achievements instead of the most common topics that have been described for American English: appearance and possession (Placencia and Lower 2017: 642). Examples (14) and (15) show the patterns of *You V (NP) (really) ADV and ADJ NP*.

(14) M, you are doing really well and cold turkey? (progress/success; a4; respondent)

(15) Great job! (progress/success; b7; respondent)

However, the most salient pattern respondents draw on is the formulaic *adv + v* phrase *well done*. In fact, it occurs 85⁸ times in the corpus; the distribution across the threads varies from at least one up to seven *well done*'s in the threads. This verbal tip-of-the-hat may stand on its own, be nominalized (16), and further be accompanied by a prepositional phrase or a clause (17).

- (16) hello,, and a masive well done to you
 (progress/success; a6; respondent)
- (17) Hi K, massive well done on making it through the first week, sounds like your head is in the right place. 😊 (progress/success; a13; respondent)

Both Examples (16) and (17) already hint at the influence of the technology-mediated context where emojis supplement formulaic, succinct expressions of praise. In the data set, grinning, laughing and cheering emojis are mostly used, indexing the overwhelmingly positive frame of interactions. While emojis occasionally occur on their own, as what Placencia (2015: 7) calls pictorial compliments” (cited from Placencia and Lower 2017: 640.), they are more often employed as extra boosting devices highlighting just how happy participants are. This use of emojis as “intensifiers” seems to be common practice in SNS (Placencia and Lower 2017: 644). In the case of compliments, such as in (16) and (17), thus, emojis underline the positive, face-enhancing stance the respondent has adopted.

Otherwise the multi-modal dimension is only brought into effect sparingly, using pictures/cartoons (e.g., cheering Mini Mouse); this may be attributed to the fact that these forums were active at an earlier stage of social network sites in 2012. As a last point in terms of form, participants adorn their compliments playfully with orthographic means or punctuation – such as duplicating letters or exclamations marks, using capitals – which have been practices in TMC that have been well-established by research (see Androutsopoulos 2000; Crystal 2006: 90–98), as can be seen in Examples (18) and (19).

- (18) Two weeks today!!!! (progress/success; b13; initiator)
- (19) and its not the champix that got you there that is just an aid [...] its YOU YOU YOU that is doing this so stand tall big smile 😊 (progress/success; b10; respondent)

Both examples are cases in point, with (18) appealing to respondents to participate in celebrating, and (19) reinforcing the positive message by the respondent.

8. There are 102 instances if we include *doing/ done really well*, or *doing so well*.

As can be seen, these orthographic means help boost compliments and self-praise. Thereby, they have a face-enhancing effect in these contexts, giving either oneself or one's interactant a written pat on the back.

All in all, if we link our findings back to its e-health context, the importance of compliments can be interpreted in the following ways. Firstly, the speech act of complimenting may be a crucial tool to strengthen community bonds; compliments are a means of participants' showing each other that they care. Furthermore, engaging in self-praise appears to be a normal, even expected, community discourse practice. Self-praise and compliments can be linked with the overall project of self-improvement when stopping smoking; there seems to be a motivational effect to praising oneself and others.

4.2 Other e-health practices in our corpus

With respect to complimenting and self-praise, the most striking finding about the American health column *Lucy Answers* is that self-praise was entirely absent in the 280 question and response letters. Both 'conversational partners' thus adhere to the constraint on self-praise in this professional health practice.

Compliments were coded as a separate discursive move in the problem letters and found to be present but quite rare with 8 occurrences only (out of 1033 discursive moves). Examples (20) and (21) illustrate this usage:

(20) Your site is very helpful.

(problem letter, LA 1532, drugs, "Friends say, 'Smoke!'")

(21) Thanks so much, your service is awesome! (problem letter, LA 1251, sexuality, "Partner pleasuring through delaying orgasm")

In the case of the response letters, praise of the problem letter writer was included in the analysis of relational work.⁹ With 65 occurrences in the response letters (within 2705 discursive moves and out of 1351 tagged relational work strategies), praise is much more frequent than in the problem letters, but still a rather rare strategy of relational work. For comparison, hedging, empathizing, boosting, and bonding were used considerably more frequently; only criticizing was used less often (Locher 2006: 126). Examples (22) and (23) are two cases in point:

9. In retrospect, it would have been more elegant to tag the compliments in the response letters as relational work strategies as well. However, due to the scarcity of the discursive move, this mismatch between problem and response letter analysis is not much of a problem.

- (22) *Kudos to you for seeking help.* It's a shame that your first therapist isn't a good match, but that's not unusual. People say that finding a therapist is like shopping for clothes, the first, second or even third outfit doesn't always fit quite right. That's not a reflection on you or the therapist; you and s/he just aren't a good match. (response letter, LA 253, emotional health, "Disappointed with therapist?", italics added)
- (23) Although the way you feel about your body is valid, sometimes it is helpful to remember that we are harder on ourselves than we need to be. *You are smart for not wanting to "diet."* (response letter, LA 384, fitness and nutrition, "Eating poorly, no exercise", italics added)

In both cases, the compliment to the problem letter writer occurs within the discursive move of assessment, i.e. within a passage that creates a link to the problem letter writer and which does not yet contain the actual piece of advice. 59 out of the 65 instances of praise occurred within such assessment passages.

Turning to the functions of these compliments, one can argue that they are face-enhancing in all cases, either for *Lucy* or for the problem letter writer, in that they "provide a positive critical evaluation of a selected aspect of the addressee's behavior or appearance, or whatever, which in some contexts may carry some communicative weight" (Holmes 1995: 118). However, the public nature of the response, which is written as if it was a personalized response to an individual problem letter writer, should be highlighted. The expert *Lucy* explicitly points to commendable behavior and thus highlights behavior for the benefit of the wider readership. In combination with the other relational work moves (hedging, empathizing, boosting expertise, bonding, the use of humor and criticizing), *Lucy* develops a well-rounded advisor identity (see also Locher and Hoffmann 2006).

In terms of the website corpus on smoking cessation, the speech acts complimenting and self-praise are, perhaps unsurprisingly, nearly absent. Thus, as observed for *Lucy Answers*, the website authors adhere to the constraints on self-praise in a professional health context. Examples (24) and (25) illustrate two of the rare compliments we found on two of the seven websites.

- (24) The decision to quit smoking *is an achievement in itself.* (Italics added; netdoctor.co.uk)
- (25) NiQuitin QuitMasters has the tools and advice you'll need. It's tailored to *meet your individual needs, so it's a perfect partner for anyone on a journey towards becoming smoke-free.* (Italics added; niquitin.co.uk)

Example (24) occurs under the header *Focus on the positive*; it is face-enhancing as it essentially aims to motivate readers by looking on the bright side. Example (25) could be regarded as indirect self-praise since the tools have been developed by

the organization behind the website. There is again a persuasive aspect to the use of the speech act because readers need to be convinced to engage with the tools.

One website of the corpus – the UK governmental quit smoking site – stood out with respect to its use of complimenting and self-praise. Website authors are, however, careful in not violating the constraints imposed by the professional health context. Instead, websites play with the polyphony possible in this multi-modal setting; in other words, they weave the voices of real-life quitters into their texts to enhance the persuasive function of the source and to establish an interpersonal connection to the readers.¹⁰

Examples (26) and (27) are set against the background of photographs of people, who, presumably, are the sources of the quotes, which appear in quotation marks. The reader is required to infer the connection between photograph and quote as there are no names given and there are no other explanations provided.

(26) “Finally, someone got me to quit.” (smokefree.nhs.uk)

(27) “It becomes so much easier with the *right* information”
(emphasis in the original, smokefree.nhs.uk)

Example (26), in the context of the website, is a compliment of the services offered but it is also indirect self-praise. It works to encourage readers to become smoke-free and to entice them to try out the services themselves. Example (27) is under the tab *advice and information* and indicates that the *right information* can actually be found on the site.

Example (28) is a case of self-praise, which also attempts to convince readers of the benefits of quitting.

(28) “After several failed attempts I’ve finally stopped, using the patches and determination. A fantastic incentive is to save up the money I used to waste on cigarettes – it’s going towards a holiday”. Dan 32 (smokefree.nhs.uk)

The quote appears framed by quotation marks (but no other visual means) to enhance the content of the particular sub-page. Dan, presumably a regular person, serves as someone with whom readers could potentially identify.

Our findings show that the professional health websites mainly abstain from using compliments or self-praise in order to maintain their identity as trustworthy health expert sites. One source found a method to exploit the potential of compliments and self-praise on an interpersonal dimension without infringing such constraints by including multiple voices/perspectives on their websites.

10. See Thurnherr, Rudolf von Rohr and Locher (2016) for a detailed discussion of the functions of testimonials.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of compliments in the forums on smoking cessation has shown that the compliments fulfil an important supportive and motivating function which initiate the new members into the community and which encourage more advanced members to stay on track with respect to the smoking journey. As regards identity construction, the compliments (as well as the self-praise) position both the complimenter and the complimentee as experts of their own quitting journey.

The analysis has also shown that, in the forum context, compliments need to be seen in connection with self-praise since the two speech acts are (a) closely connected and (b) self-praise often triggers compliments. Thus, compliments may come in second turn position. In a context where the in-group knows about and shares the struggle to become or remain smoke-free, self-praise is not reprimanded and branded as an immodest speech act but welcomed. This finding is in line with Dayter (2018: 189), who has argued that there seems to be a relaxation of “the self-praise constraint” in many contexts and has pointed to a lack of research with naturally-occurring data in face-to-face and online interaction. The act which triggered the self-praise (making it a couple of more hours without cravings, resisting cravings, etc.) is thus validated.

Finally, we find the number of compliments drastically reduced in the professional health contexts of our corpus. Therefore, it seems that the Western modesty maxim to forego self-praise is more prominent in the professional contexts; where self-praise is avoided, and compliments are sparingly given. This may have to do with the aimed-for relationship between the interactants. Within the forums, group creation and solidarity are key, whereas the professional practices appear to orient towards more factually motivated expert creation. In order to pursue this line of research further, one could look for more occurrences of compliments in (online and offline) patient-health professional contexts to see whether the strategic use of compliments to highlight good behavior by the addressee (as in the case of the health advice column reported here), to present examples of good behavior to the addressed readers (as in the smoking cessation websites) or to indicate a contrast with the good behavior of a third party (as reported in Gill (2005), see Section 2) in order to express criticism dominates over primarily solidarity inducing functions (as reported in the forums).

This paper has added to previous studies by shedding light on the interpersonal dimension of forums, particularly by exploring how compliments and self-praise are crucial speech acts in these online health groups. Clearly, there is more work to be done. For example, it would be of interest to delve more deeply into those forum threads where contributors admit to having relapsed into smoking – that is,

not having followed the desired behavior – and to explore whether compliments about having tried in the first place are strategically placed to entice the relapsers to try quitting again.

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Healthy lifestyle, dieting, fitness and bodybuilding

Compliments in the context of Polish online discussion forums and message boards

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This paper studies compliments that occur in selected Polish online discussion forums devoted to topics related to a healthy lifestyle, dieting, fitness and bodybuilding. The aim of the investigation is to find out which syntactic structures, topics and functions are prevalent, and whether the Corpus Query Language is an adequate tool to analyze compliments in data retrieved from Internet forums. The study has shown that (1) the most frequent structures differ from those identified in previous studies, (2) the predominant topics identified in this study only partially overlap with previous studies, and (3) the most common function is expressing solidarity and establishing rapport. The corpus-based methodology and CQL, with some limitations, proved useful and allowed effective examination of a large database of ca. six million words.

Keywords: corpus linguistics, corpus-based analysis, new media, online forums, message boards, compliments, computer-mediated communication, healthy lifestyle, fitness, Polish

1. Introduction

This paper examines compliments expressed in Polish that occur in selected online discussion forums and message boards devoted to topics related to a healthy lifestyle, dieting, fitness and bodybuilding. The aim of the investigation is to find out which compliment structures are used most often as well as which topics and functions are prevalent. Unlike most studies on compliments that are based on observation, questionnaires or manual data collection from online sources, this paper applies a corpus-assisted methodology and explores its usefulness and limitations in the study of technology-mediated communication (TMC) (see also Lower this volume).

Web-based corpora have the advantage over traditional sources of data collection, such as notes from observation and questionnaires, in that they offer a gateway to a sea of data that grow exponentially. However, at the same time, this may be a source of vexation for researchers, as it is not easy to search through a vast amount of text. Regular expressions and corpus languages based on them, such as the Corpus Query Language (CQL)¹ in the Sketch Engine (SK), come in handy. One of the aims of this paper is to find out whether analyzing data teased from the Internet is manageable in the case of compliment retrieval, and if so, whether regex and CQL are adequate tools to achieve this goal in studies based on purpose-built self-designed corpora.

In what follows, compliments will be analyzed at the speech act level in terms of the frequency of specific syntactic structures (Sections 5.1 to 5.4), the frequency and types of adjectives and adverbs used in these compliments (Section 5.5), internal and external modification of compliments (Section 5.6), the topics they touch upon (Section 5.7), as well as the functions they perform (Section 5.8). Before the analysis, however, the background to the study will be provided, including a brief consideration of social media (Section 2), and previous studies on complimenting behavior (Section 3). The corpus and data collection methodology employed will be presented in Section 4.

2. Social media and online forums

The essence of social media is the fact that Internet users are involved in collaborative creation of online content. They are expected to be active participants (readers and authors) of online communities by sharing their thoughts, expressing comments and opinions, as experts or non-experts, disseminating self-selected digital content (pictures, videos), and by getting involved in online participatory tools, such as opinion polls, surveys, retweets, etc. (Hoffmann 2017: 5). The key concepts in social media are thus participation, content generation, networking and collaboration. Social media, as characterized by Hoffmann (2017: 6), encompass, *inter alia*, Internet platforms (message boards, discussion forums), microblogs (e.g., Twitter), social network sites (e.g., Facebook), media sharing sites (e.g., YouTube or Instagram) as well as some less obvious media, such as Skype, WhatsApp and SMSs, i.e. instant messaging services.

1. The CQL used in the Sketch Engine is a special code, which allows searching for a large amount of data (both grammatical structures and lexical patterns). Partially, it is based on the so-called regex (regular expressions), which is a special searching algorithm (a sequence of characters) used in computational linguistics and programing that allows the retrieval of previously defined patterns of characters.

The main feature of social network sites (SNSs) is the linking of multiple users through the creation of profiles (Georgalou 2010: 41, 61). This feature distinguishes SNSs from forums; in the latter, users' account information is very skimpy (typically a nickname, age, gender, date of opening an account, a profile picture or avatar), and the possibility of making links to other users essentially relies on adding links to posts rather than on establishing multiple networks.

Online discussion forums (DF) arose relatively early, well before the development of Instagram (2010), Facebook (2006 for the general public), Twitter (2006), and the World Wide Web (1989) itself. The history of web forums can be traced back to the creation of the discussion system known as Usenet, originally a bulletin board (BB) developed at the University of North Carolina in 1979. Usenet was invented as a reaction to government-funded ARPANET, the former made easily accessible for everybody, while the latter was provided only to a narrow circle of Internet users (Herring 2001: 616), mainly from academia and NASA. Usenet allowed subscribed users to post and read messages (called posts) transferred directly to newsgroups (which were thematic categories), without the requirement to have any central administrator, and with no need for personal registration. The user sent a message (news) that was transmitted to the user's server and then re-transmitted to other servers (newsfeeds). Usenet was the precursor of today's message bulletin boards (M/BBs) and online forums. With the peak of popularity in the late nineties, it is now on the decline as discussion forums have started to prevail (Yus 2011: 223).

Unlike other forms of TMC, in particular Facebook, Internet forums have gained only peripheral attention in linguistics and thus they remain largely uninvestigated. DFs and M/BBs have been examined *inter alia* by Anderson and Kanuka (1997), Morrow (2006), Taiwo (2010), and Arendholz (2017). The three main research strands concerning forums and message boards are (im)politeness and conflict, identity construction, as well as giving advice and expressing authority (Arendholz 2017).

The characteristic features of DFs/BBs include their non-simultaneity, having primarily a text-based format, and usually the presence of a moderator. Compared with SNSs, forums are marked for longer texts and more elaborate posts, richer language and often a greater number of participants involved in one thread/theme, thematic diversity and more in-depth discussions. Typically, they also span a wider timeline during which a discussion pans out. This form of TMC is thus usually a long-running, self-sustaining, and productive source of information on specific topics.

The language used in TMC is commonly assessed as being midway between spoken and written discourse (Yates 1996), yet it is close to the written form of language, at least in terms of lexical variation, measured by a type token ratio (TTP), and lexical density (Yates 1996). To compensate for the lack of face-to-face interaction, features of spoken discourse are often added to the text-based posts, which

create an informal style, including what Yus (2011: 19) refers to as textual deformations. The language used in TMC is not only informal but also straightforward and often quite emotional. Sentences tend to be shorter (rarely are subordinate clauses used) and words may be truncated (e.g., ‘you are v beautiful’). There are more exclamation marks and unconventional spelling is used to express emotions informally. Further, it is notorious for misspelt words, lack of capitalization, omission of punctuation and diacritics. These common practices, which intend to mirror the spoken discourse, are sometimes referred to as examples of what Yus (2011: 19) calls “oralized written text”. Many of these deformations are deliberate, to economize on time, to purposefully imitate spontaneity of spoken discourse and to stress informality in communication, or even to demonstrate creativity (Herring 2001: 617). Moreover, some thematically profiled online virtual groups, such as newsgroups, are marked by the use of abbreviations and acronyms that lower the comprehensibility level for non-members (Yus 2011: 24). As a lean medium (i.e. available only via written words), it requires an almost complete reliance on words, and sometimes also on emoticons (and other external modifications). Emoticons, however, are not visible in a language corpus as it processes only letters and digits. Lean media also rely on internal word modifications, such as replicating a single letter, usually involving vowel lengthening (*soooo nice*) and unconventional capitalization of selected words, which Androutsopoulos (2000) calls prosodic spelling, as well as using intensifying adverbials, etc. (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989; Placencia and Lower 2013).

3. Studying complimenting behavior

Complimenting behavior is a topic that has received interest from a number of scholars since the early 1980s. In line with widely adopted definitions of compliments proposed by many scholars, a compliment in the present study is taken as a speech act which “explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker,” and which is “positively valued by the speaker and the hearer” (Holmes 1988: 446). In some taxonomies, compliments also involve congratulations, which are seen as related speech acts (Herbert 1991; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008; see Section 5.4), appreciatory sounds (e.g., *mmh* to compliment on food) (Golato 2005: 80), and ‘likes’ on Facebook (Placencia and Lower 2017: 635). Complimenting behavior has been studied from structural and functional perspectives. Typical structures used to encode compliments were proposed by Wolfson and Manes (1980) as well as Manes and Wolfson (1981), who identified nine syntactic formulae, also adopted in the present study. The two widely-recognized types of compliments are direct (explicit) and indirect (implicit). Direct compliments employ sentences which involve straightforward praising of the interlocutor, while indirect compliments entail making indirect reference to the addressee (Pomerantz 1978; Kerbrat-Orecchioni

1987; Boyle 2000; Golato 2002; Yuan 2002). The most-often reported compliment topics include appearance, personal belongings, personal traits, skills and knowledge, etc. Functions of compliments have been frequently discussed in the context of establishing, maintaining and re-affirming solidarity between interlocutors, creating common ground, building rapport, and expressing admiration. Wolfson (1981: 23) also proposed less typical functions, such as expressing apologies or thanking.

With respect to Polish, studies on complimenting behavior include research reported by Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989), Herbert (1991), Jaworski (1995) and Bączkowska (2015). Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989: 77) noticed some similarities between Manes and Wolfson's (1981) formulae and some of their Polish equivalents, and focused on several strategies of expressing in/direct compliments in Polish. She also distinguished between praising and complimenting.

Herbert (1991) used Manes and Wolfson's (1981) classification scheme, with some modifications, to analyze Polish compliments in a set of 400 examples of compliments and compliment responses. Herbert (1991) also identified six common adjectives in the Polish compliments he studied that account for three quarters of all his data (*ładny* 'nice', *fajny* 'first-rate', 'cool', *świetny* 'great', *śliczny* 'lovely', *piękny* 'beautiful', *wspaniały* 'wonderful') (p. 384), which, however, have weak semantic load (see Section 5.5). As for syntactic formulae, Herbert identified three patterns, which cover over 70% of all patterns encoding compliments: "(intensifier) ADJ have NP" (35.75%), "(*Jak* 'how' ADV V (NP))" (24.5%), and "(*Co za, ale, jaki* 'what a') ADJ NP" (13.75) (p. 384). To compare, Manes and Wolfson (1981) identified the following most frequent structures for American English: "NP {is/looks} (really) ADJ", "I (really) {like/love} NP", and "PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP". Finally, Herbert noticed that the topics of possessions (49.25%), appearance (35.25%), and ability/performance (11.75%) had the highest incidence in Polish compliments. On the other hand, Jaworski (1995: 76) focused on compliment functions in Polish, in particular, on the expression of solidarity. He claimed that Polish compliments tended to be used in order to praise, tease, elicit information (about prices, sources of objects) and to congratulate. Finally, Bączkowska (2015) studied compliments in film translation (subtitles) in line with the theoretical framework of cognitive linguistics. She noticed that the translation of compliments can entail a change in the type of compliment (e.g., an indirect compliment in the source language may be changed into a direct compliment in the target language), depending on the construal operations the subtitle adopts.

As the interest in technology-mediated communication in pragmatic research steadily grows, one of the more recent research areas, still rather underexplored, is the use of compliments in social media (see, e.g., Das 2010; Placencia and Lower 2013, 2017; Androutopoulos 2015; Eslami, Jabbari, and Kuo 2015; Arendholz 2017).

The present study aims to contribute to the under-investigated area of complimenting behavior in online forums. The key research questions addressed are:

1. How prevalent are compliments in the selected Polish forums devoted to fitness, bodybuilding, dieting and a healthy lifestyle?
2. What types of compliment formulae are used most frequently, as well as what topics and functions of compliments are most often encountered?

Two secondary aims of this paper are to offer a corpus-based methodology for social media research and to check the effectiveness of Corpus Query Language in compliment retrieval from a purpose-built corpus (see Section 4).

4. Corpus and data collection methodology

Analyzing Internet-based data is increasingly popular among scholars, yet forums seem to be particularly difficult to search through due to the amount of data available and the non-linear character of data organization in the form of threads; the latter results in multiple repetitions of the same messages in replies. However, putting restrictions on data retrieval will limit the amount to be analyzed; it will also profile the data according to the researcher's needs. In order to prepare such custom-made text collections, it is useful to compile one's own corpus of texts using automatic data extraction tools.

The corpus used in the present study, henceforth the FIT corpus, was created using a WebBootCat method of data acquisition from the Internet (Baroni, Kilgarriff, Pomikálek, and Rychlý 2006). The minimum number of occurrences of triplets in one document was set at five. The websites were not random but limited to preselected seed words (e.g., *dieta* 'diet', *fitness* 'fitness', *ćwiczyć* 'exercise', *chudnąć* 'lose weight', *pośladki* 'buttocks', *brzuch* 'belly', *zdrowie* 'health') and fitness-related forums run in Polish (e.g., fit.pl; kfd.pl; sfd.pl). Figure 1 (generated by WordSmith, v. 7) and Table 1 below clearly show that the corpus is thematically homogeneous as the dispersion values for the seed words are high. The WebBootCat method of corpus collection thus seems to be capable of compiling a consistent and reliable database profiled according to pre-set criteria, which makes the corpus a good source of information for our study.



Figure 1. Dispersion plot for the word *fit* in the FIT Corpus

The FIT corpus is rich in terms of the language used, drawing on the type token ratio (TTR) value totaling 45,66 (calculated by WordSmith Tools, v. 7) after standardization per 1000 running words. This is a high value for Internet discourse considering the fact that, for written discourse, the value typically oscillates around 45, while in the case of spoken discourse, around 32 (Baker 2006: 52).

Table 1. Dispersion values and words per thousand (wpt) for selected seed words in the FIT Corpus

	<i>Fit</i>	<i>Fitness</i>	<i>Dieta</i>	<i>Ćwiczyć</i>	<i>Chudnąć</i>	<i>Pośladki</i>	<i>Brzuch</i>	<i>Zdrowie</i>
Dispersion	0,85	0,63	0,83	0,8	0,8	0,7	0,8	0,9
Wpt	0,15	0,19	0,39	0,08	0,01	0,02	0,5	0,08

N	
text file	Overall
file size	83 626 112
tokens (running words) in text	6 499 945
tokens used for word list	5 752 217
sum of entries	
types (distinct words)	233 371
type/token ratio (TTR)	4,06
standardised TTR	45,66
SSTR std.dev.	54,17
SSTR basis	1 000
mean word length (in characters)	4,88
word length std.dev.	2,95
sentences	329 041
mean (in words)	193,42
std.dev.	18 438,54
paragraphs	1
mean (in words)	5 752 217,00
std.dev.	
headings	
mean (in words)	
std.dev.	

Figure 2. Standardized TTR for the FIT corpus

While examining the automatic extraction of corpus data, a number of technical problems were encountered. For example, some of the retrieved threads showed mismatched content, and there were messages that contained compliments directed at third parties, which were not considered in the present study.² These undesired posts had to be deleted manually. Apart from that, duplicated content was occasionally a problem. Oftentimes, semantic disambiguation had to follow

2. In line with Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989: 74), “complimenting always involves a *human addressee*, typically in a *direct interaction*”, as in “You have a very handsome son”. The author further distinguishes between complimenting and praising by saying that “[m]ore *depersonalized* cases however, such as (...) ‘This girl has beautiful hair’, where the interlocutor is not connected with the girl in any sense, are instances of *praising* but will not be called *compliments* unless they are meant to be heard by the person complimented.” “*Pochwała* ‘praising’ is understood most frequently as a wider term than *komplement* ‘compliment’ in Polish” (p. 73). Therefore, in the present paper, only instances which express compliments towards the addressee of a post were considered.

the primary search; for example, *wyglądasz* may convey the meaning of ‘to seem’ and ‘to look’. Cases which expressed non-facts (e.g., wishes) or hypothetical situations (e.g., through conditionals) were excluded from the study. Finally, words with Polish diacritics were often replaced by their “plain” version. For instance, *ą* is often substituted by *a*, as in *wygladasz*, instead of *wyglądasz* (‘you look’). To circumvent this orthographic problem, CQL was employed, as it allows retrieving categories of data using search strings (based on regular expressions).

Since the corpus takes up over 14 thousand pages in a Word file, it was impossible to analyze it by reading the text and manually choosing examples of compliments. Even though the CQL was used, further manual selection of data had to follow this automatic data retrieval as it is hardly feasible to design a CQL query that would tease out exactly the desired structures. This problem results from morphosyntactic limitations stemming from the tagging (part of speech analysis) and parsing (syntactic analysis) systems employed. Thus, the CQL queries did not perfectly match the compliment formulae and, as a result, they generated incomplete recalls that were only crude approximations of the target combinations. Similar problems have been reported by Jucker, Schneider, Taavitsainen, and Breustedt (2008), who used CQP (corpus query processor) (Hoffmann and Evert 2006) to analyze compliments in the British National Corpus (BNC).

As already mentioned, in the present study, which illustrates a corpus-based method of analysis rather than a corpus-driven study (see Tognini-Bonelli 2001), I adopted the already existing taxonomy of compliment structures proposed by Manes and Wolfson (1981). However, while analyzing the FIT corpus, due to the specifics of the Polish language, some new structures were added.

The structures proposed by Manes and Wolfson (1981) are as follows:

1. NP {is/looks} (really) ADJ
2. I (really) {like/love} NP
3. PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP
4. You V (a) (really) ADJ NP
5. You V (NP) (really) ADV
6. You have (a) (really) ADJ NP
7. What (a) ADJ NP
8. ADJ NP!
9. Isn't NP ADJ?

The order of these patterns reflects their frequency of occurrence in Manes and Wolfson's data. The first pattern is the most frequent one (53.6%), the second is much less frequent (only 16.1%), while the last one is rare (1%). The word “really”, which occurs in the first six patterns, is, in fact, a stand-in for any intensifier, not just the one mentioned in the patterns.

5. Data analysis

The analysis of compliment structures, in line with Manes and Wolfson's (1981) template, has revealed that, unsurprisingly, not all structures from their original proposal are represented in the FIT corpus. In this corpus, structures 7 ("What (a) ADJ NP!") and 9 ("Isn't NP ADJ") were not found. The pattern occurring most often, on the other hand, is structure 6 ("You have (a) (really) ADJ NP"). Structures 4 ("You V (a) (really) ADJ NP") and 1 ("NP {is/looks} (really) ADJ") are also relatively frequent. Interestingly, the frequency of the structures in the FIT corpus does not align with the frequency of these patterns in Manes and Wolfson's (1981) work where structures 6 and 4 were found to be relatively rare.

5.1 Direct compliments

Structure 1 ("NP {is/looks} (really) ADJ")

This structure was searched separately for *wygląda* ('looks'; structure 1a) and for *jest* ('is'; structure 1b). Structure 1a elicited 116 hits, but there were no occurrences illustrating compliments. CQL for structure 1b retrieved 2,318 contexts of which one constitutes a compliment, which is, however, rather unusual (*masz piękną czołó* 'you have a beautiful forehead').

Structure 2 ("I (really) {like/love} NP")

This structure may be encoded in Polish by the following six options: *podoba mi się*, which can be roughly translated as "I like it"/"I like"+NP [+3rd per. sing.] (structure 2a), *podobasz mi się*, with the rough equivalent of "I like you" in the second person singular (structure 2b), *podobają mi się*, i.e. "I like them"/"I like"+NP [+3rd pers. pl.] in the plural (structure 2c),³ *lubię* (structure 2d) to represent 'I like NP', and *uwielbiam* (structure 2e) or *kocham* (structure 2f) to render "I adore/love NP". The last structure (2f) yielded 193 contexts yet none of them constitutes a compliment. The structure with *podobać* in the second person singular (*podobasz się*, structure 2b) allowed me to extract only one example of a direct compliment. Most examples were found with the third person singular (*podoba (mi) się*, structure 2a), which yielded 262 contexts, of which five exemplify (direct) compliments. The search with the word *podobać* in the third person plural (*podobają się*, structure 2c), with variations stemming from the presence or absence of diacritics in *podobają* and in *się*, yielded 47 examples of which only one was a compliment. The structure

3. Structures 2a, 2b and 2c cannot be literally translated into English. There are equivalents of these structures in other languages, e.g., in Spanish *me gusta(n)*, in Italian *mi piace/piacciono*, and in Russian (это/они) мне нравится.

I love + NP (*uwielbiam*, structure 2e) retrieved 349 contexts, but only two compliments (‘I love reading your stories’ and ‘I like the theories of yours’). The structure with *lubię* (structure 2d) retrieved 205 concordances, none of which constituted a direct compliment. Likewise, the structure 1f, with the alternative *kocham* (‘love’) yielded no contexts with compliments.

Structure 3 (“PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP”)

This structure involves the third person singular pronoun followed by the verb *jest* ‘is’, with zero or one word (intensifiers) between *jest* ‘is’ and an adjective which follows it, and with a noun phrase after the adjective. Over 6,000 concordance lines were found in the corpus, yet only 14 proved to be compliments; all of them are direct compliments, making reference to results (of dieting or exercising). The nouns involved the following (cf. concordances below for Polish equivalents): *wynik* (‘outcome’), *informacja* (‘information’), *sygnaturka* (‘posting’); and the adjectives are as follows: *niezły* (‘not bad’), *świetny* (‘fine’, ‘first-rate’), *doskonały* (‘excellent’), *super* (‘super’), *piękny* (‘beautiful’), *fantastyczny* (‘fantastic’), *dobry* (‘good’), *ładny* (‘nice’), *obłędny* (‘awesome’). *Piękny* (‘beautiful’) appears the most frequently (5 times), and *dobry* (‘good’), twice; other adjectives appear only once, which makes the repertoire of adjectives rather varied, contrary to the number of nouns, which are more repetitive.

tygodnie nad morzem... ale ci zazdroscze :))) wydaje mi sie ze te 2.5 kg fajnie nastepna wiza 17 listopada :) Wov! Super wynik! Pięc kg w dół	to niezły wynik	. biorąc pod uwagę te wakacje w trakcie, a jak chodzilas te 20 km to przed
przodu : D Sorkiu, 1,6 do tyłu , waga w ciągu dnia, trzy tygodnie diety dla Wszystkich. Witajcie Dziewczyny nadal Wam kibicuje, Aniu 9	to świetna informacja	. Oby tak dalej, gratuluje! Ja odchudzam się od 24. 06, niedługo pyknie 4
mąż i moja mama lini dowiedzą się jak zobaczą serduško na usg Natka, no	to doskonały wynik	. kobieto. Znaszcasz, że w ciągu dnia różnica bywa nawet do trzech kg na
. W przyszłym roku to będą razem szcic na placu zabaw, miła 13 jajek	to super wynik	. Mala nawet gdyby byly tylko 2 Jajeczka to i Tak masz szanse. Na Twolin
. Jednak teraz jest bezsilna. Gratuluję sukcesu i samozaparcia - 30kg	to piękny wynik	. U nas też było ICS!! Trzymam kciuki, nie puszczam lka, ja też teraz ze
ale nie gazowana jeszcze raz powodzenia moje gratulacje!!! 18 kilo	to piękny wynik	. Zaciśkam więc kciuki za randeczke żeby była bardzo owocna. Ja dziś
wody uwieżonej czipsami. A potem na spokojnie. Kilogram na tydzień	to fantastyczny wynik	.! W trakcie odchudzania zdarzają się fazy stagnacji - są nawet
dalszej pracy, odpuszczyć teraz to byłby największy błąd. Sabat77 - 25 kg	to dobry wynik	. Powiedz mi tylko jak wygląda twoje ciało jeśli schudles tyle nic nie
:)) będzie sie dzielic spostrzezeniami!!! pozdrawiam!!!! :o) 10 kg	to ładny wynik	na początek. Potem pół kilograma na tydzień. A jak już dojdiesz do wagi
niz baba w ciąży -- Sofik Sorki, ale mi się ciot przyblokowało, no ale za	to obłędny wynik	. bardzo ładny, zajeblisty! Suchaj nie plisz ze sie tak strasznie
więcej podjadiesz albo więcej słonego i Ci wodę zatrzymało. 1-2cm	to jaka sygnaturka	. moje gratulacje!!!! :)))))) Ale jedno pytanie - dbasz o skórę? Jeśli
ale czy ty przypadkiem nie wykanczasz sobie organizmu 21kg w 2 miesiace	to dobry wynik	piękną. Mala Wronka Jesteś wietlak -- Lileczka Eh... moja mama też
	to piety wynik	. Nie musi lecieć nie wiadomo ile Jeśli waga idzie w górę a obwody z pasa
		mam tylko nadzieje ze nie kosztem twojego zdrowia pozdrawiam i buziaki

Figure 3. Concordances illustrating structure 3

Structure 4 (You V (really) ADJ NP)

The system retrieved 5,062 concordance lines illustrating structure 4. To limit undesired concordances, the contexts with *jeśli* or *jeżeli* (‘if’) were excluded from the search. There were, however, words (adverbs) wedged between the verb and the adjective as the CQL expression was set to seek any word in this position, including intensifiers. The CQL expression used to elicit this structure involved both structures which contained all elements in the Manes and Wolfson’s (1981) formula as well as its modification, which reduces it to “You (really) ADJ”, i.e. with no noun phrase postmodifying the adjective. The search retrieved 14 direct compliments illustrating structure 4. In Polish adjectives may act as both pre- and post-modifiers

of a noun; thus, the original structure proposed by Manes and Wolfson was extended to encompass this language-specific option, as in *wyglądasz ślicznie* ('you look lovely') vs. *ślicznie wyglądasz* (*'lovely you look').

. Farz - 50 g chudego twarogu +50 g serka Danio. Smacznego. Verty, od	dziś jesteś moim dietowym guru	:D Co do tego juturu to się jeszcze Pani Majke dopytam jednak, bo nie
aż tak. Teraz idzie zima i zamierzam ziów chwycić aż do włosów. super.	że masz takie zacięcie	, tak się przyzwyczaiłam do jedzenia, że nogi same mnie ciągną do niegół
. Dziewczyny, po prostu nie mogę wyjść z podziwów... Enka, jak dia	mi nie jesteś wielka duchem	...))) To po prostu niebývále - taka samodyscyplina. Trochę sobie
, miłamił Miłynie się ładnie podreśliły, a jednocześnie nieczyknie	kobieco wyglądasz i te osiągi	. Graty. Pierwszy rok:
I minie dopinguje :). Ja 11 dzieci na "500". Robię krótki protokół.	Ty dokonałaś prawdziwego cudu	. Prawie 50 kg. Szok. Ale i startowałaś z wysokiej półki. Podziwiam Cię
bije rekordy. Cud! - www.wroan.bobany.pl Monika, popieram Wroan,	masz wyglądasz na tym zdjęciu	, a Weronika to poprostu śliczna dziewczynka (rezerwuję ją dla swojego
to ona fik, i już na piedekach. Nie będzie jej nikt mówił jak ma lezeć!!!	Monika jesteś bardzo ładną kobietką	i masz śliczną córunię :))) Myśla ale Sofia nabrała kształtów :)))

Figure 4. Concordances illustrating structure 4

Structure 5 ("You V (NP) (really) ADJ")

For this structure, 1,417 hits were elicited, and yet only six exemplified compliments, three of which were direct compliments, and three indirect. The context presented below illustrates a direct compliment encoded by structure 5, which in addition discloses support (seen in *współczuję*, 'I sympathize with her'; the pronoun 'her' is most probably an error, as the two women in the example exchange information about their diabetes symptoms and how the disease affects their lives). Along with support, it clearly shows in-group membership indicated by the use of *nas* ('us'), *musimy* ('we have to') and *razem damy radę* ('together we will manage').

- (1) *Witaj Niuska_19, współczuję jej, to okropne, jesteś mega dzielna, 5 lat już dajesz radę. Smutne, to co nas spotkało, wierzę, że wyjdziemy z tego. Razem damy radę. Musimy.*

'Hi Niuska_19, I sympathise with her, it's awful, *you are extremely brave*, you have managed somehow for 5 years now. It's sad, what happened to us, I believe that we will get out of it. Together we will manage. We have to.'

Within structure 5, there are also eight examples of "You look (really) ADJ" and 14 examples of "You are (really) ADJ". In the former structure, the following intensifiers were found: *wyjątkowo* ('exceptionally'), *bardzo* ('very'), *strasznie* ('awfully'), and *super* ('super'). The use of intensifiers is thus rather formulaic and general. Similarly, in the latter structure (with *jesteś*, the Polish equivalent of *are*), there is some variety in the choice of intensifiers. However, the intensifiers are rather standard and unoriginal: *super*, *dobrze* ('well'), *lepiej* ('better'), *fajnie* ('great'), *bosko* ('divine'), *ok*, etc.

Structure 6 ("You have (a) (really) ADJ NP")

The most frequently occurring compliments correspond to structure 6: of 792 contexts gleaned from the corpus, 56 exemplify compliments, of which one is indirect, while the rest represent direct compliments. The following examples illustrate sample combinations retrieved from the corpus: *Masz czaderską fryzurę* ('you have a funky hairstyle'), *masz super/świetną/piękną/fajną/fantastyczną/wspaniałą figurę* ('you have a superb/excellent-2x/beautiful-4x/great/fantastic/great shape').

As observed with the previous structures, here, again, the variety of adjectives and nouns is very wide and only a small number of words are repeated (twice or three times). They involve general evaluations of weak semantic load (e.g., *bardzo* ('very'), *dobry* ('good'), *duży* ('big'), *świetny* ('great')), topic-specific adjectives (e.g., *długie włosy* ('long hair'), *wąska talia* ('narrow waist')), as well as strong expressions of positive evaluations (e.g., *fantastyczny* ('fantastic'), *niesamowity* ('incredible'), *rewelacyjny* ('sensational')), which are very frequent. This shows that compliments expressed on the fitness- and health-related forums under inspection are varied, rich, and can be quite original. The majority of these combinations, however, are rather conventional.

Structure 7 ("What (a) ADJ NP!") and structure 9 ("Isn't NP ADJ?")

For this structure, 39 contexts were elicited, and, for structure 9, only five, of which none was a compliment.

Structure 8 ("ADJ NP!")

Among 2,351 constructions containing an adjective, followed by a noun phrase and an exclamation mark, only 17 are illustrative of compliments, 15 of which are direct compliments and two are indirect. The examples include: *kobieca sylwetka/figura* ('feminine silhouette/shape'), *zgrabne nóżki* ('shapely legs'), *kapitałna wypowiedź* ('terrific message'), *fajny brzuch* ('great belly'). As many as 10 adjectives can be found in the concordances illustrating structure 8, and 14 nouns, one of which is a proper noun. The contexts thus present a variety of adjectives and nouns.

5.2 Indirect compliments

Indirect compliments are also known as implicit compliments (Placencia and Lower 2013). "Implicit compliments imply praise but do not actually state the value of the person or act praised – e.g., 'I'd hate to lose you' implies 'You're invaluable to me', but says it indirectly" (Knapp, Hopper, and Bell 1984: 19). In this paper, I will use the term indirect compliments to talk about machine-retrievable structures containing the preposition *jak* ('like') (as in *Wyglądasz jak*, 'You look like a model'), and implicit compliments to refer to cases in which a compliment is veiled, ambiguous and requires some mental effort to be understood as it is only implied or suggested (through a number of unpredictable structures), but it is still retrievable by the addressee from indexicals and situational clues.

Given the size of the FIT corpus, it proved impossible to search through the data manually looking for implicit compliments, and it is also impossible to retrieve implicit compliments automatically, as they do not have any set structure; thus, CQL could not be used to glean relevant data. Therefore, the indirect compliments

based on the structure *wyglądać/być jak* ('look/be like') will be the main concern in the discussion that follows.

Structure 1 ("You look like NP")

This context was broadened to encompass up to two words allowed between *wyglądać* ('look') and *jak* ('like') as well as between *jak* ('like') and the NP, which yielded only five contexts. The construction *wyglądasz jak* ('you look like') expressing indirect compliments is more often than not used to express a negative evaluation. Some of the positive comments with *wyglądasz jak* ('look + like') include: *kaloryfer* (a Polish equivalent of a radiator, which is a colloquial word for a six-pack in Polish), and *19, a nie 29...* ('19 rather than 29'), as in (1) below. As already mentioned, the language used by forum users is rather informal and slang is often employed, as illustrated by (2) below:

- (2) *Winiu, naj naj najlepsze życzonka Na zdjęciach wyglądasz jakbyś miała 19, a nie 29...*
 'Winiu, best best wishes (diminutive) In the pictures you look like (as if you were) 19 rather than 29...'

Structure 2 ("You are like NP")

Of the 17 contexts automatically elicited from the corpus, none exemplify compliments. In fact, all concordances illustrate insults.

5.3 Implicit compliments

There were 19 implicit compliments observed while searching through direct compliments, such as: *jestes moją inspiracją/idolem/dietetycznym guru* ('you are my inspiration/idol/dietary guru'), *wprowadzasz nowe kanonoy piękna* ('you introduce new canons of beauty'), etc. Two examples of implicit compliments are shown in (3) and (4):

- (3) *Czy Ty na pewno jestes mezczyzna? Super podejście do butow i zakupow.*
 'Are you sure you're a man? A super attitude towards shoes and shopping.'
- (4) *-Powinnaś bloga zalożyc bo jakos tak umiesz zmotywować dzięki pozdro.*
 'You should start a blog because you somehow can motivate thanks and bye.'
-Dziękuję miło mi:)
 'Thank you, nice to hear that :)'

5.4 Other compliments

Another way to retrieve compliments was to key in a query word around which compliments are likely to appear. Two words were selected for this procedure: *gratulacje* ('congratulations') and *szacun* (slang for 'respect', a word used in Polish to express adoration and congratulations on some achievement). For *szacun*, eight contexts were found; *gratulacje* occurred in 65 contexts that illustrate compliments. Except for four cases, the contexts in this group are direct compliments, and they take varying structures, but only a small number of them involve the formulae proposed by Manes and Wolfson (1981). Most of these contexts, however, use structures that are difficult to group under one heading.

It must be noted, nonetheless, that complimenting and congratulating tended to merge and sometimes it was problematic to distinguish between the act of complimenting and that of congratulating. Moreover, probably due to the succinct nature of the language used in TMC, a number of examples express compliments by making reference to what previous interlocutors have mentioned in their posts. This is probably to avoid repeating the same words; hence there is no further elaboration of the reasons for complimenting the recipient. Still, the very words *szacun* ('respect') and *gratulacje* ('congratulations') can be seen as speech acts encoding compliments themselves (Examples 5 and 6). In line with Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk's (1989) definition of what she calls a Prototypical Compliment Act, these are definitely "positive assessment utterances" (p. 79), which involve a positive evaluation of some property of the addressee; they express appreciation in order to "stimulate A [addressee] to maintain the property *a*, or to stimulate X [a third party] to follow A with respect to property *a*" (p. 80). It seems that *szacun* ('respect') and *gratulacje* ('congratulations') function in a similar way as clicking 'likes' on Facebook.

- (5) *Gratulacje za wytrwałość.*
'Congratulations on your tenacity.'
- (6) *Ogromne gratulacje !!! I wielkie dzięki za to, że jesteś żywym przykładem, że da się.*
'Enormous congratulations !!! And many thanks for showing that you are a living example that it is possible.'

Problems with the distinction between compliments and congratulations have already been an object of discussion (Placencia and Lower 2017: 636). Taavitsainen and Jucker (2008: 202) notice that, historically and in a wider sense, congratulations are speech acts that are included in compliments: "Speech acts like greetings and farewells, congratulations and condolences, and even requests and thanks, are included in compliments". They provide the following example of a compliment gleaned from their corpus (containing Early Modern English to the 20th century):

“permit me to congratulate you on your excellent looks this morning” (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 215). For Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000), complimenting and congratulating share a *pragmatic space* and thus they are related speech acts, both illustrating expressives (Searle 1976). Interestingly enough, as noted by Placencia and Lower (2017: 636), for Bach and Harnish (1979) complimenting is a subtype of congratulating, which in turn is a subtype of acknowledgements. Acknowledgements are “communicative illocutionary acts” that express the feelings of the speaker, for example, “gladness” that the hearer has “done or received something noteworthy” (Bach and Harnish 1979: 50–51). As can be seen, the distinction between congratulations and compliments is blurred; they tend to be merged in one utterance and, taxonomy-wise, one can be included in the other one.

Finally, congratulations were also analyzed in the context of compliments by Herbert (1991: 381), who noticed that “the speech act of complimenting in Polish bears some important relationship to the act of congratulating, which relationship is not apparent in English.” They share some features: for example, the fact that both refer to accomplishments (performance, achievements) and to the acquisition of possessions (as well as to the good taste of the owner). The same conclusions about using compliments in Polish in order to congratulate (on newly acquired possessions) were drawn by Jaworski (1995). Given all the arguments, the samples of congratulating used for complimenting were included in the present study.

5.5 Intensifying adjectives and adverbs

The use of adjectives and adverbs, as already noted, is not as repetitive as one could expect. In fact, in the present study, the range of adjectives and adverbs is quite wide. There are 97 instances of adjectives and 20 instances of adverbs. The TTR for adjectives totals 37 and for adverbs 65, which speaks for a high variety in lexical choices. The most commonly used adjectives are: *piękny* (‘beautiful’, 12.4%), *fajny* (‘great/cool’, 12%), *świetny* (‘excellent’, 9.3%) and *ładny* (‘nice’, 8.3%). The most common adverbs are: *super* (25%), *dobrze* (‘well’, 10%), *kobięco* (‘feminine-like’, 10%), and *wyjątkowo* (‘exceptionally’, 10%). Adverbial compliments are more common in English (i.e., as in Manes and Wolfson’s (1981) data) due to the fact that in English verbs of senses are followed by adverbial modifiers, and, in Polish, by adjectival modifiers.

Following Manes and Wolfson (1981), adjectives may be divided into three categories: topic-specific, expressing a general evaluation, and expressing a strong, positive evaluation. The incidence of these categories in the FIT corpus is 7.2%, 52.6% and 2.1% respectively. Topic-specific adjectives concerning appearance and skills include the following: *zgrabny* (‘shapely’), *profesjonalny* (‘professional’) and *kobięcy* (‘feminine’). General-evaluation adjectives include: *fajny* (‘cool’), *świetny* (‘great’), *dobry* (‘good’) and *ładny* (‘nice’). Finally, strong, positive-evaluation adjectives include

the following: *niesamowity* ('incredible'), *ogromny* ('huge'), *fantastyczny* ('fantastic'), and *doskonały* ('perfect'). Likewise, adverbs representing a general evaluation (35%) include: *super* ('super'), *dobrze* ('well'), and *fajnie* ('cool'). Topic specific adverbs (10%) include: *kobieco* ('feminine-like') and *szczuplej* ('more slender'). Adverbs expressing strong positive evaluation (20%) comprise: *bosko* ('divinely'), *wyjątkowo* ('specially'), *strasznie* ('awfully'), and *niesamowicie* ('incredibly').

In sum, a large variety of adjectives are used in the compliments examined, many of which are rather conventional, yet there are also adjectives expressing strong positive evaluation, which are inventive and original. Of the set of adjectives found, 85% represent general, conventional compliment type formulae, and they are expressed by means of 15 words. Remarkably, in the study conducted by Manes and Wolfson (1981: 117), two thirds of adjectival compliments were expressed using only five adjectives. Overall, most adjectival compliments and adverbs used in compliments in the FIT corpus are formulaic and general, yet, unlike in Manes and Wolfson's study, some of them are also varied and innovative.

5.6 Internal and external modification

Interestingly, unlike the case of Facebook (Placencia and Lower 2013), not much internal modification can be observed in the FIT corpus. A small number of cases involve prosodic spelling such as the repetition of letters in exclamations (AAAA) or word-internal iterations (*baardzo*, 'veery'), as well as a repetition of the right parenthesis to express a smiley "(:))))))", or other examples of repetitions of external modification. Series of repeated question marks or exclamation marks are not too frequent, yet they occur more often than vowel lengthening.

5.7 Topics

In relation to previous studies into the topic of compliments, seven main topics were identified in the FIT corpus: appearance (as in 7), possessions, achievements (often combined with appearance), skills (as in 8), knowledge, attitude, and character (see Table 2).

- (7) *Masz fajną figurę i na pewno nie masz się czego wstydzić.*
'You have a nice figure and for sure there is nothing you could be ashamed of.'
- (8) *Nota bene szyje Pani świetne staniki. Mam i bardzo lubię :)). I życzę Pani dużego sukcesu w biznesie.*
'Nota bene, you sew great bras. I have one and like it very much :)). I wish you a great success in business.'

Table 2. Percentage of topics in compliments

Topic	No of direct compliments
<i>Appearance</i>	113 (49.6%)
<i>Achievement</i>	86 (37.7%)
<i>Attitude</i>	15 (6.6%)
<i>Character</i>	7 (3.1%)
<i>Skills</i>	5 (2.2%)
<i>Knowledge</i>	3 (1.3%)
<i>Possessions</i>	2 (0.9%)

A general observation is that an overwhelming number of compliments in the FIT corpus are about appearance. This is not surprising, given the themes around which the data revolve, as a result of the seed words employed and the choice of primary websites devoted to healthy lifestyles, fitness, bodybuilding and dieting. Appearance is also the topic most often chosen for compliments in general (Herbert 1991: 393, Coates 2013: 99) (but see chapters 7 and 8 in this volume), and, especially, in cases where women compliment women (Coates 2013: 51–52). The second most popular topic of compliments is connected with achievements, which are linked to appearance in the case of the FIT corpus. Achievements are most typical of structure 3 (“PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP”), and most of them make reference to the outcomes of dieting or training. These two topics – appearance and achievements – are of noticeable high frequency in the FIT corpus, with statistical significance (checked by the *loglikelihood* parameter) higher than the critical value of 10.83 for $p < 0.001$. In other words, these two topics clearly stand out in the corpus of compliments in terms of frequency. The differences among the other topics identified are below statistical significance.

Of least importance for the forum users seem to be knowledge, skills and character. The category of possessions, highlighted by Manes and Wolfson (1981) and other scholars, is tightly connected with appearance (e.g., *masz ładne bicepsy* ‘you have nice biceps’) in the FIT corpus. There are also single cases which make reference to people other than the addressee, such as *mąż* (‘husband’) and *dziecko* (‘baby’; *masz fajnego męża* ‘you have a great husband’, *masz ładne dziecko* ‘you have a nice baby’), and only these cases were counted as examples of the category of possessions. Due to the thematic profile of the FIT corpus, it seems that both women and men receive and pay compliments. The nature of the data (forum-driven) does not allow me to fully confirm other observations, such as those resulting from the study conducted by Knapp et al. (1984: 25), that compliments on appearance are not common among women, because in the case of the data at hand gender identification is often based on guesswork rather than a forum user declaration.

5.8 Functions

Although a number of functions have been distinguished by scholars so far (e.g., Wolfson and Manes 1980; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1989; Herbert 1991), three main functions were identified in the FIT data: (1) support/expressing solidarity or establishing rapport (64.2%), (2) assessment (18.9%), and (3) expressing admiration (17%). These functions, at least to some extent, tend to overlap, and so the decisions regarding compliment classification in terms of their function relied on the following criteria: support/solidarity and/or rapport needed to include expressions stressing common ground (the use of the pronouns *my* 'we' and *nas* 'us', expressions like *czuję to samo* 'I feel the same', *jestem w tej samej sytuacji* 'I'm in the same situation', etc.), familiarity, social bonding, comforting or cheering on results; assessment assumed relatively neutral and not emphatic yet positive judgement, often expressed by a more experienced or knowledgeable interlocutor (trainers, doctors, paramedics); admiration required emphatic expressions (e.g., exclamations, congratulations, strong appreciation). The functions of support/solidarity/rapport and admiration represent a more general phatic function of compliments whose main aim is to maintain contact, while assessment is more often used to exchange information. Within direct compliments, structure 1 is most often used to encode the function of assessment and support/rapport, while structures 4, 6, and 8 are largely used to express support/rapport. For the sake of illustration, Example (9) below exemplifies support, (10) encodes assessment, and (11) clearly shows admiration.

- (9) *Wierzę, że podejmiesz słuszną decyzję, bo jesteś super dziewczyna.*
'I believe that you will make the right decision because you are a super girl.'
- (10) *Surikou, 1,6 do tyłu, waga w ciągu dnia, trzy tygodnie diety to doskonały wyniki kobieto. Zwłaszcza, że w ciągu dnia różnica bywa nawet do trzech kg na plusie.*
'Surikou, 1.6 less, weight during the day, three weeks of diet is a perfect result woman. Especially that during the day the difference may be even up to three kg more.'
- (11) *Jestes moja bohaterka. mam nadzieje, ze uda mi sie powtorzyc twój sukces Ja schudlam 19 kg (z 74 na 55) w ciągu 3 m-cy.*
'You are my hero. I hope that I will replicate your success. I lost 19 kg (from 74 to 55) in 3 months.'

5.9 Summary

In summary, in a corpus of ca. six million words, 251 examples of compliments were identified (after normalisation ca. 42 compliments per one million words), 23 of which are indirect (19 of them illustrate implicit compliments), and 228 constitute direct compliments. This does not necessarily mean that there are fewer indirect compliments than direct ones; it was simply very difficult to retrieve indirect compliments from the corpus with the use of automatic data extraction through regex and CQL.

The types and frequency of direct compliments in the FIT corpus are tabulated in Table 3. Because the number of compliments representing the group of other structures, i.e. classified beyond Manes and Wolfson's structures, is very high, the data tabulated and illustrated graphically in Figure 5 are shown both with structure 10 and without it, so that the data are more comparable to previous studies.

Table 3. Incidence of syntactic structures of direct compliments in the FIT corpus

Structure	% of direct compliments	% of direct compliments without structure 10
1 NP {is/looks} (really) ADJ	1.2	2.3
2 I (really) {like/love} NP	2	3.9
3 PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP	6.4	12.5
4 You V (really) ADJ NP	6	11.7
5 You V (NP) (really) ADJ	13.2	25.8
6 You have (a) (really) ADJ NP	22.7	43.8
7 What (a) ADJ NP!	0	0
8 ADJ NP!	8.2	13.3
9 Isn't NP ADJ?	0	0
10 others	35.3	n/a

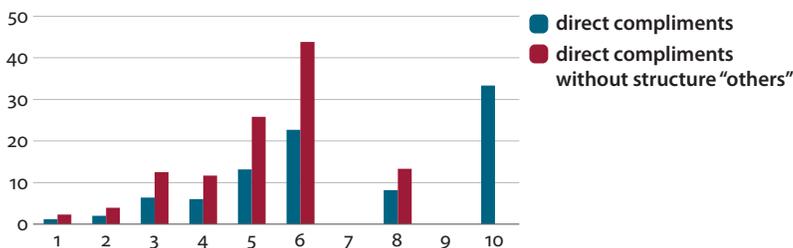


Figure 5. Syntactic structures of direct compliments in percentages

6. Discussion

The results of the study presented above will now be compared to some previous research devoted to compliments in varying contexts. Firstly, similar to Placencia and Lower (2013), in the present study there were no instances observed to illustrate structure 9. Contrary to their research, however, the highest number of (direct) compliments in my data is represented by type 6, which does not occur at all in Placencia and Lower's data. The 10th type of compliment recognized by the two researchers, namely "How ADJ", was not found in the FIT corpus.

Secondly, two structures (5 and 6) occurred most frequently and they describe almost 70% of all compliments. In the study by Manes and Wolfson (1981) three structures (1, 2, 3) cover 85% of all compliments found in their data. Moreover, in Manes and Wolfson's data, over half (53.6%) of the compliments were encoded by only one structure (structure 1), while in the FIT corpus the most frequent structure (6) reached the value slightly below half of all the compliments (43.8%, excluding structure 10). It seems that the compliments in the FIT corpus show greater variety than those found in face-to-face data in the study mentioned above. The sources of the differences may be sought in the type of data (face-to-face vs. TMC) or linguistic typology (English vs. Polish).

Thirdly, of the three most common syntactic structures in Polish presented by Herbert (1991), the most frequent structure found in Herbert overlaps with the most frequent one in the FIT corpus (allowing for the relatively free word order in Polish), which is "(intensifier) ADJ have NP".

Interestingly, the choice of adjectives in compliments in the FIT corpus is almost identical to the adjectives identified by Herbert (1991: 387). The most common adjectives in Herbert's data are *ładny* ('nice', 'pretty'), *fajny* ('first rate', 'cool'), *sliczny* ('lovely'), *piękny* ('beautiful'), *światny* ('great'), and *wspaniały* ('wonderful'), and they correspond to more than 70% of the data. In the FIT corpus, on the other hand, the most frequent adjectives are *piękny* (12.4%), *fajny* (12%), *światny* (9.3%), *ładny* (8.3%), *super* ('super', 5.2%), and *fantastyczny* ('fantastic', 4.2%), which account for over 50% of the data. Adverbs used in Herbert's data, however, are different from those found in the FIT corpus, apart from *dobrze* ('well'), which occurred in both studies with high frequency. On the other hand, the five most frequent adjectives in compliments found in a series of studies conducted by Wolfson and Manes (1980) and Manes and Wolfson (1981) and Wolfson and Manes (1981) are *nice*, *good*, *beautiful*, *pretty*, *great*, four of which are present in the FIT corpus.

The most frequent topic identified by Herbert (1991) is possessions (49.25%), while in the FIT corpus it is appearance (49.6%). However, appearance is the second most popular topic in Herbert's data (35.25%). In the FIT corpus, compliments on achievements are the second most popular. They roughly correspond to Herbert's

category of ability/performance (11.75%). The topic of possessions is not popular in the FIT corpus (0.9%). Nonetheless, the differences in the incidence of possessions and appearance as compliment topics may be biased by the general theme of the FIT corpus (bodybuilding and losing weight certainly prompt compliments on appearance).

The scope of the current study, which is a corpus-assisted and web-based study of compliments in Internet forums, is not free from limitations. They include, for example, the inability to examine emoticons and other mechanisms of internal modification that cannot be retrieved. It is also very difficult to assess the gender and social distance between the interlocutors (encoded, for example, by the formal address terms used in Polish *Pan* 'sir' or *Pani* 'madam' to mark formality, which are rarely used in the compliments found in the FIT corpus). Finally, only conventional syntactic patterns can be retrieved. In other words, indirect compliments cannot be automatically extracted with CQL.

7. Conclusions

The aim of this paper was to analyze compliments used in Polish discussion forums devoted to health- and fitness-related issues on the one hand, and to assess a corpus-based method of online discourse analysis on the other. The overall number of compliments in the data is relatively small: only 42 compliments per one million words were identified. In terms of their structure, in line with Manes and Wolfson's (1981) observations, the compliments in the present study are rather schematic and formulaic with regards to syntactic structures and the most frequently used adjectives. However, unlike Manes and Wolfson's (1981) results, in the FIT corpus, the intensifiers are quite varied, as is the distribution of syntactic patterns of compliments. There are also other differences between the results from this study and those obtained both by Manes and Wolfson (1981), based on face-to-face data, as well as Placencia and Lower's (2013), based on digital data. The differences reside in the prevalent syntactic structures: while in both studies mentioned above the most frequent structure is the same (structure 1), in the forum data it is structure 6 that prevails. As such, the discrepancies in results found in the use of compliments in the FIT corpus vis à vis previous studies, i.e., compliments in face-to-face interaction on the one hand, and social network sites on the other, may be sought in language typology (Polish vs. English) and in modes of communication (face-to-face vs. computer-mediated communication, and social media vs. online text-based forums/boards). The most common topics in the FIT corpus are connected with appearance and achievements, while the most frequent functions are expressing assessment and conveying support.

The corpus-based methodology employed to analyze the data proved useful and allowed effective examination of a large dataset. Without the software tools offered by corpus linguistics it would be impossible to search through such an amount of data (ca. six million words). The corpus-based methodology, however, also has some limitations: firstly, it allows one to retrieve essentially only direct compliments; secondly, graphical communication is not captured; thirdly, even though a great deal of work is done automatically, and very rapidly the final job of finding compliments and ignoring other contexts which happen to have the syntactic structure of compliments but are not compliments, needs to be done manually by the researcher. This is a time-consuming challenge. Nevertheless, corpus-based pragmatic studies are worth the effort as they represent the only way to examine such large data pools.

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“I want your brain”

Complimenting behavior in online Over by Over cricket commentary

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This chapter examines complimenting behavior in Over by Over cricket commentary (OBO), a hybrid online genre with a conspicuous level of audience participation. The genre is defined and described and its social media credentials are assessed. The resulting picture is of an asymmetrical and time-bound virtual grouping in which simulated interactions between journalists and readers are increasingly to the fore.

A significant presence of compliments was noted in preliminary readings. For insights into their forms and function, a corpus of commentary on two days' play in separate international cricket matches was analyzed for complimenting content. Contrary to findings in previous studies for other social media, although direct explicit compliments comprised the majority, most occurred in non-formulaic patterns. A number of explanations for this are proposed.

Keywords: sports discourse, Over by Over commentary, social media, webpage assemblies, non-formulaic compliments, male talk, infotainment

1. Introduction

It is commonplace to find scholarly writing on aspects of Internet use that begin with similar observations as “the Internet is under constant evolution and development” (Yus 2011: 93) and that, as it grows, “it continues to spawn new varieties of discourse that call out for analysis and classification” (Herring 2007: 26). Moreover, we are frequently reminded that the Internet is not just a conglomeration of technology-mediated communication systems, but is comprised of the “social and cultural practices that have arisen around their use” (Herring 2007: 3) which have, in turn, “changed the way we communicate and socialize online” (Placencia and Lower 2013: 617).

Taking its cue from these broad observations, the initial aims of this chapter are to define and describe Over by Over cricket commentary (OBO), one of the new 'beasts' spawned by the Internet, and then to outline the extent of social activity within this internet genre. Having assessed its social media 'credentials', the study will proceed to consider the role of compliments in consolidating relations between the participants and in bolstering the collective identity of this imagined virtual congregation (see Yus 2011: 22).

The chapter is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a brief outline of the main characteristics of sports journalism before the advent of the web 2.0; Section 3 offers a detailed description of the main features of OBO as an expression of sports journalism in this era, including a consideration of its social dimension (3.1), the kind of virtual community that has evolved around OBO (3.2), and the types of interaction that occur in this web genre (3.3); Section 4 consists of a review of the relevant literature on complimenting behavior in both face-to-face and online contexts, while Section 5 describes the corpus employed and the criteria used to select the complimenting data from OBOs on the online version of *The Guardian*. A description of how the data were coded into compliment types and coding issues is also provided in this section. Section 6 focuses on the results in relation to compliment givers and receivers (6.1), the compliment types identified (6.2.1 to 6.2.4) and their respective prominence within the sample (6.2.5), the compliment topics present in the data (6.3), as well as the function of compliments within this form of social network (6.4). Finally, Section 7 offers a summary of the main findings and considers prospects for the future in the study of online sports commentary from both a cross-cultural and a gender perspective.

2. Sports discourse pre-web 2.0

Pre-2.0 era sports commentary was largely one-to-many, monologic and devoid of feedback. The sports commentator or correspondent was a lone, privileged, institutionalized participant at a sports event, describing the progress of play to a mass media audience. This predominantly male figure possessed specialist knowledge and was proficient in the frequently arcane language and terminology pertaining to the particular sport being covered. In spoken television or radio commentary, the reporting journalist also needs to be a master of different kinds of delivery. Television commentators, for instance, combine economy of expression and language that conveys color and drama to the viewer, along with an understanding of when to allow the pictures on the screen to do the talking (Beard 1998). Radio commentators, on the other hand, have to be masters of almost continuous talk.

Written sports journalism is most commonly found in both online and traditional newspapers. The archetypical genre is the match report, in which we find specialized knowledge and terminology couched in a noticeably narrative framework, interspersed with analysis. Nonetheless, as Beard (1998: 85) points out, sports print journalism ever more frequently performs an entertainment role in the shape of gossip and speculation about sportsmen's lives. At the other extreme, a number of sports writers enjoy authoritative status, penning op-eds on current issues in sport rather than merely reporting on matches (Heaney 2016: 188). This is particularly true of the game of cricket. Gillen (2014: 126) notes that the tradition of cricket coverage "could be described a literary, for in style and content many relatively 'highbrow' writers have been concerned with cricket over the centuries". A sport so closely associated with prestigious quasi-literary journalism seems a good place to begin considering the changes ushered in by the transition to web 2.0 sports reporting.

3. Over by Over cricket commentary

As Heaney (2016: 189) states, "the advent of the Internet has ushered in radically new forms of sports journalism, of which live sports event commentary is a notable example". Although Jucker (2010: 75) defines live text commentaries as an exciting new form of communication, deserving of further study, they have attracted relatively little attention from the academic community, despite claims that they are widely used and followed by significant numbers of sports fans (see Adamson et al. 2005: 1). OBO is an offshoot of an Internet genre known variously as Live Text Commentary (LTC) or Minute-by-Minute commentary (MBM). The prototypical MBM is football commentary and most scholarly work on the genre has been on football MBMs (see Jucker 2010; Chovanec 2006, 2008, 2009, 2011).

The most rudimentary MBMs take the form of minute-by-minute written updates on the progress of a sporting event which are produced and published incrementally on the Internet as play unfolds (Jucker 2010: 58). The entries themselves are brief, ranging from one to six lines of text, sometimes in full sentences, sometimes using only key words (Jucker 2010: 60). The main structural difference between OBO and football MBMs lies in the basic division of play in the game of cricket. This is called an 'over' and it comprises six deliveries of a ball to a batsman, after which there is a change of bowler until the next over is completed. In the course of an International test match there are at least 90 overs, with their corresponding updates and comments.

This division also structures various other formats of modern cricket: the version of the game known as 20–20, in which both teams bowl twenty overs at each

other; one day or limited over cricket, in which each team is allowed to bowl 50 overs at their opponent; county cricket, which lasts four days, and International test cricket which can last up to five days. As an ‘over’ takes well over a minute, the time lapse between one comment and another is greater than in football MBMs, and this perhaps allows scope for the introduction of other kinds of discourse that go beyond the mere reporting component of the service. Indeed, the basic monologic updating format has steadily given way to a much more interactive kind of sports commentary that exploits the affordances of the Internet, with the result, as Chovanec (2009: 110) notes, “the live text commentary becomes interactive and heteroglossic, i.e. consisting of other voices.”

3.1 The social credentials of OBO

In 2005 the journalists who managed *The Guardian’s* OBO coverage of the test series between the English and Australian national cricket teams (known as ‘the Ashes’) published their OBO for the *Guardian Unlimited* website in book form (Adamson et al. 2005). Their preamble contains the following revealing observation:

Every Ashes commentary attracted hundreds of email contributions – some witty and erudite, others unsuitable for family reading – covering everything from the migration of cricket coverage to satellite TV to the rather alarming regularity of Rob Smyth’s headaches. At Guardian Unlimited we were all indebted to the reader power that enlivened our summer [...]. (Adamson et al. 2005: 2)

This appears to confirm Crystal’s (2006[2001]: 216) contention that in the context of the Internet “the distinction between creator and receiver [...] becomes blurred”. What is more, it is evidence of the widely acknowledged hybrid and overlapping nature of Internet genres, discourses and interactions (see Yus 2011: 34). When the nature of this correspondence is examined more closely, it is found to be significantly interactive and social (see Herring 2013: 4). Chovanec (2009: 110) makes a distinction in MBMs between a primary level of narrative, which corresponds to the commentary of the game itself, and a secondary layer, which he calls the “the gossip layer”, that may be unrelated to the game and even become fragmented into several parallel thematic lines pursuing quite different topics. Further, Chovanec (2006: 32) describes how the sports event theme often plays a secondary role to the gossip sharing function, merely providing a background for communication with a social and interpersonal orientation rather than a referential one, as is evident in the following example of OBO, taken from Adamson et al. (2005: 93):

19th over: Australia 68–2 (Hayden 21, Martyn 15)

Flintoff bowls very well. I write lots about it. Computer crashes. I can't be arsed to write it again. "Hey mate, sorry you're lonely out there," says Giorgio Gaglia, "If that's of any comfort, your commentary is wicked, I'm Italian and I hated cricket but you got me addicted."

The narrative line is concentrated in the section in italics, which tells us that the Australian team have accumulated 68 points (runs) but have had two men eliminated by the English bowlers. It also shows that their two present batsmen have scored 21 and 15 runs against England's bowlers and have not lost their wickets, i.e. have not been eliminated. We are also informed that one of the English bowlers, Flintoff, has performed well. This line is exhausted very quickly and overtaken by the interactive gossip element. The heteroglossia (Chovanec 2008: 259) is accompanied by the journalist's and contributor's simulation of orality (ellipsis, bathetic grammar, slang, vulgar expressions, direct informal address and the shorthand place deixis), combining to approximate face-to-face communication. This effect is consolidated because it elicits commiseration for the journalist's loneliness, a compliment on his performance and also the claim that the interactants share an interest and are implicitly part of a virtual community.

3.2 OBO as virtual congregation

Chovanec (2006: 26) claims that MBMs provide "a forum of mutual interaction by means of pseudo-dialogical conversational exchanges." However, he observes that the medium can be regarded as only semi-open. While access to other voices is provided, it is carefully controlled by the commentator who is both a gatekeeper and agenda setter. This may look like a heavily asymmetrical arrangement. The journalists managing the MBM choose the contributions and, as is clear from Example (1), even apply a degree of censorship. Yet, (1) also indicates that the OBO format quickly developed a social dimension much appreciated by the journalists themselves, as the following segment suggests:

21st over: Australia 72–2 (Hayden 23-Maryn 15)

It's all gone a bit quiet: this is Flintoff's fifth over, and I think the Aussies are happy to just to see him off. "It's 4.40 in the afternoon and you are still hung over" frowns Mike Landers. You must be getting old, fella". In my twenties. Next. "Why not quit the lager and try something a bit more suitable for your ageing frame? Like Sherry."

(Adamson et al. 2005: 93–94)

This is hardly the kind of exchange expected in asymmetrical, institutional communication. In a previous segment, the journalist Rob Smyth, has confessed to having

a hangover. In so doing, he abandons his professional standing and places himself on a much more symmetrical footing with the OBO readers, one of whom responds with what could be interpreted as a threat to Smyth's face (Goffman 1967), because it indicates he is not able to take his drink, which also brands him as being too old for certain alcoholic beverages. The fact that Rob Smyth invites a second comment suggests that the journalist relishes the interaction as much as the contributors do. This kind of banter (Goatly 2012: 244), which Chovanec (2006) defines, with reference to Benwell's (2001) concept of "male gossip", is the kind of verbal attack which, in Norrick's (1993: 75) words, can

signal solidarity, because it implies a relationship where distance, respect and power count for little. If we can do without the overt trappings of positive politeness, and freely poke fun at each other, we must enjoy a good rapport.

Although OBO conserves residual elements of what Yus (2011) calls the typical "pyramidal media communication pattern" based on "an authority that unidirectionally filters and delivers Internet content to the mass of users" (p. 93), it is clear that it has also evolved in the direction of "interactions and content sharing" (p. 93). If we were to follow Yus's (2011: 111) recommendation that we "distinguish between social networks on the Internet, which can be developed and sustained in different ways and in different environments [...] and [...] *social networking sites*" (his emphasis), OBO would be located in the former, broader category.

Despite the traditional unidirectional elements concentrated in the event level narrative, Chovanec (2009: 113) claims that, in live text commentary, the readers are treated and behave as members of a virtual group of sports fans with a common identity based on shared cultural and linguistic contexts and background knowledge.

Whatever the precise blend, interface and extent of the social activity occurring in the course of OBO, reader-contributors and journalists in the corpus of data for the present study actually seem to imagine this institutional service as a community space frequented by people drawn together by a shared interest. One of the journalists refers to the "OBO family," for instance, while a contributor describes the change from the basic live text commentary of the early days to a service with a more social function:

But there's been a broader shift, too, from the OBO as a means for people in offices furtively to keep in touch with the score, to people who use it as an extended sitting room or bar, to chat about the cricket while they watch it.

(Lucas and Smyth 2016)

This quote, along with the earlier reference to 'the reader power' behind OBO acknowledges the partial evolution of OBO readers from passive consumers of

content into sporadic co-creators of it (see Page et al. 2014: 6). As will be seen, other OBO commentary segments feature jokes and contributions to word games, in which the social element appears to be more prominent than the sports commentary itself. It is true that as social media go, OBOs are still noticeably asymmetrical and fall well short of Hoffmann's (2017: 5) observation that in social media content is chosen by the many (readers) and not by the few (journalists). Nevertheless, there is a high ratio of social to goal-oriented content and there is every sign that this is increasingly important to both the officiating journalists and the reader-contributors.

3.3 Social relations in OBO

Just as it is difficult to neatly pigeonhole OBOs as social media, it is challenging to categorize the nature of the social relations they promote and to provide a broad label for the kind of users that gravitate towards them. Terms like 'online' or 'virtual community' (Herring 2004) or 'community of practice' (Meyerhoff and Strycharz 2002) are problematic. In terms of duration alone, it is difficult to place OBOs within either of these categories. The first criterion Herring (2004: 355) selects to identify an online community is "active, self-sustaining participation; a core of *regular* participants" (my emphasis). Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002: 4) see communities of practice as groups of people who share interests or passions about a subject and deepen reciprocal understanding or appreciation of it "by interacting on an *ongoing* basis" (my emphasis). OBOs, instead, are transitory and sporadic. Yet, if this goes to prove Herring's (2004: 346) claim that "not all online groups constitute virtual communities," OBOs encourage, to an ever more noticeable degree, expressions of shared purpose, solidarity (including complimenting behavior), reciprocity, and self-awareness of the group as an entity, all of which Herring (2004: 335) takes as indexes of virtual community status.

For want of a better term, this kind of online behavior might be described as a webpage muster or assembly, in which a group of users congregate for an event before they disperse at the end of it. For its duration they are coordinated by and establish a rapport and collaborate with the coordinator, aligning themselves with and furthering his mainstream media agenda in a significantly cohesive fashion. At the end of play they are thanked and saluted until the next time. If we accept this dynamic, it is possible to see compliments not only as a means to foster group solidarity, but also as a way of recognizing and rewarding compliance with this media agenda (see, e.g., Eslami, Jabbari, and Kuo 2019: 70).

4. Relevant literature

As Placencia and Lower (2013: 617–624) point out, “compliments and compliment responses have been a popular topic of research for the last three decades.” Seminal research in the 1980s (see, e.g., Manes and Wolfson 1981) was notable for establishing a narrow and predictable repertoire of formulaic compliments in face-to-face communication and a taxonomy of the object of compliments (Knapp, Hopper, and Bell 1984: 17). Such compliments are observed to be highly predictable and formulaic on the whole (Wolfson and Manes 1980: 392) and accepted as a strategy whose main social function is that of establishing and/or maintaining solidarity (Wolfson and Manes 1980: 395) and also of reflecting shared cultural and societal values (Manes 1983: 98; Knapp et al. 1984: 17).

More recent studies propose a less categorical, more fluid account. Working with conversational data from video and audio material, Boyle (2000) challenges the neglect of implicit compliments, which can only be understood by drawing on “interactants’ indexical knowledge of the circumstances” (p. 28), in which they “rely on the interpretative procedures for their constitution and effect” (p. 35). Boyle’s data is taken from the sphere of entertainment, between non-intimates who, following Wolfson’s (1988) ‘bulge theory’, are more likely to produce compliments because their relationships “are subject to greater negotiation than are the established relationships among intimates” (Boyle 2000: 31).

The study described in this chapter considers complimenting behavior within an online genre in which information and entertainment overlap with aspects of social interaction. Sifianou (2001: 412) observes of Greek complimenting behavior that formulaic compliments exist alongside both covert expressions of admiration which cannot be interpreted as compliments outside the contexts in which they occur, and also cases of very creative complimenting behavior that increases the fun of interactions. OBO performs an entertainment function and often features play and humor in a wide variety of forms (Heaney 2016; Chapman 2012). Much more recently, Eslami et al. (2019) indicate that this tendency is actually prevalent in the context of Facebook, where implicit compliments have become more common than in face-to-face encounters, encouraging significant creativity that strengthens in-group identity among users who draw on their knowledge of shared views and values to decode them. Such observations about the role of creative, non-formulaic and playful compliments in establishing solidarity are highly relevant to the branch of the infotainment industry studied here.

Chen (2010: 81) notes that the work of J. Manes and N. Wolfson, referred to above, made English the baseline language for cross-cultural pragmatics studies in the decades to come. Herbert (1989) compares compliment responses in a white American speech community with those elicited in a white South African one,

observing that, even though speech communities share the same or similar linguistic resources, they may differ significantly in the allocation of those resources and that culturally appropriate behavior can depend on knowledge of the prevailing socio-cultural norms for language use (p. 22). His observation of the lower frequency of compliments in South Africa compared with the United States raises the question of general cultural attitudes to compliments and of how awareness of this may account for their frequency in different cultures or groups, the form they take, and the kind of response elicited within a predominantly British English speech community as the OBO.

Other scholars have stressed gender differences in complimenting behavior. Knapp et al. (1984) had already noted differences between the sexes, indicating that "men reported difficulty in giving compliments to other men, because it didn't seem to be appropriate conduct" (p. 25) and that males "were less likely to receive non-formulaic responses" (p. 26). Taken together with Herbert's observations about cultural differences within the same language, this may open up a revealing perspective from which to view the conventions found within OBO.

Holmes (1988) draws attention to the way women use compliments as part of positive politeness, therefore, as a rapport-building strategy, while men respond to them as face-threatening acts, which would appear to confirm the relevance of a gendered perspective. Rees-Miller (2011) offers further distinctions between male and female complimenting behavior, both in unstructured and goal-oriented settings. She notes that men are far more inclined to compliment on performance, whether the addressee is male or female (p. 2682), and that the performance compliments on sports for men can reinforce shared values and concepts of masculinity (p. 2687). Such gender-oriented accounts offer a useful perspective for viewing complimenting practices within OBO.

Holmes (1988: 463) noted that research into complimenting behavior would be advanced by the use of naturally occurring tape-recorded data. Boyle (2000: 29) championed the analysis of naturally occurring data, because it "is capable of producing a much less formulaic collection of compliments". Although the digital environment is an easily accessed resource of naturally occurring data, "the use of compliments in social digital environments [...] is an area that has not received much attention yet" (Placencia and Lower 2013: 623). Nevertheless, Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) have already outlined deep-seated cultural differences in complimenting behavior between Spanish and English Facebook users. Eslami, Jabbari and Kuo (2015) extend this cross-cultural perspective in a study of Iranian complimenting behavior on the Facebook SNS; while Eslami and Yang (2018) trace variations in the complimenting behavior of Chinese-English bilinguals depending on the cultural origin of the SNS they are using. Placencia and Lower (2013) have identified and defined the patterns of complimenting behavior in response to

photographs posted on Facebook, and have widened the scope of their investigation to include the ‘like’ function. Interestingly, Placencia and Lower (2013: 642) note that formulaic compliments persist in this environment, probably for reasons of “clarity and expediency”, while the topics of compliments “fall into the same categories as those seen in face-to-face interactions” as revealed by Manes and Wolfson (1981).

The present study of a hybrid form of social media will show certain continuities with the face-to-face complimenting behavior and compliment objects described in the seminal literature, but it will also present significantly less formulaic compliments that are presumably attributable to the entertainment function of OBO, the imagined space it unfolds in, as well as to the gendered nature of the online community that revolves around it.

5. Data selection and coding issues

The compliments data set used for analysis here was constructed from a corpus of OBO commentaries available on the *Guardian Unlimited* site. The commentary data covered two whole days in different five-day matches during the 2016 summer test series between the England and Pakistan national cricket teams: the first in Manchester on 22 July 2016 (Smyth and de Lisle), and, the second, at the Oval cricket ground in London on 11 August 2016 (Lucas and Smyth) – the former match won by the England team, the latter by Pakistan. Together, these supplied 150 commentary segments, amounting to a total of 53,856 words. These data were then analyzed to identify compliments, yielding 38 instances in total; this was a far from simple procedure, as discussed in the next section.

5.1 Data selection issues

Use of and access to the data entailed no significant difficulties: the OBO commentary stored on the *Guardian Unlimited* online can be freely accessed. Nor is privacy an issue in this arena. Far from it; reader-contributors actually vie for inclusion and mention in the OBO, as Adamson et al. (2005: 327) make clear in their ‘postamble’: “goons writing in saying they had nothing to say except COME ON ENGLAND and could we please publish theirs”. Thus, mention of contributors’ names is highly desirable, possibly an implicit compliment in itself. Accessing data from this kind of source also reduces the risk of bias or unintentional influence stemming from the analyst’s own involvement in the particular social media under investigation (see, e.g., Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Placencia and Lower 2013). Placencia

and Lower (2013: 625) claim that there are advantages to being a member of the SNS under study because it enhances the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the socio-cultural identity of the group being analyzed. Nevertheless, I feel the data for the present study provide significant pointers to the socio-cultural grouping that revolves around OBO, as in the following instance:

73rd over: England 272–5 (Flintoff 30, G Jones 8)

I am currently watching the cricket via Sky Satellite, listening via digital radio and reading your page on my laptop, via my Wi-Fi broadband connection" says Oliver Bridges. "Can anyone beat this! I am also currently (ahem), working from home.

That is not to say that there are no obstacles to understanding the socio-cultural profile of users. As the journalists themselves admit, they do not publish "the rubbish ones" (Adamson et al. 2005: 327). Therefore, there is no way of knowing the true spectrum of would-be contributors.

In terms of data selection, as pointed out above, identifying compliments was not a straightforward matter. Firstly, it was difficult to apply neatly Holmes's (1986: 485) definition of compliments as "a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed for some good (possessions, characteristic accomplishment, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer."

The principal difficulty lies in the fact that it is by no means certain that all the complimenting behavior takes place along the journalist-reader/contributor axis. As Chovanec (2006: 28) points out, "MBMs are a parasitic text type – that is they depend on a TV broadcast – they also incorporate intertextual references to the verbal commentary of TV commentators." Just as the OBO commentators depend on the work of peers in other media sources, digital technology makes it equally likely that their fellow journalists and pundits can follow OBOs from their television or radio commentary posts. What is more, if that is feasible for audio or visual sports journalists, it is even possible that players themselves consult the commentary as they wait in the pavilion for their turn to bat.

It would seem that technology has fostered a complex and fluid "participation framework" (Goffman 1981: 137) that possibly renders the traditional emphasis on the face-to-face dynamic too narrow for a social situation like OBOs. Compliments may be made about third parties because it is expected they will be 'overheard' by them (see Goffman 1981: 137), be they professional peers or possibly the very sportsmen who are the topic of the commentary. This suggests that the solidarity work being performed during OBOs is potentially multidirectional: (a) reporter-contributor; (b) contributor-reporter; (c) contributor-contributor (d) reporter-peer; (e) reporter-sportsman.

These permutations have a direct bearing on the size of the final data set used for analysis. When data selection is based on all five possible scenarios, the corpus amounts to 4,406 words of complimenting behavior, accounting for 8.1% of the total data. However, axis (e) is to some extent a matter of conjecture: praising players' skills and prowess may be interpreted as merely a standard form of journalistic description rather than an unambiguous compliment. Bearing in mind this ambiguity, it has been decided to select compliments along axes (a)–(d). This leaves a compliment corpus of 3,080 words that accounts for 5.7% of the total corpus, a significant incidence, especially bearing in mind that complimenting behavior occurs largely at the gossip level of each comment segment, often accounting for half, if not more of each OBO segment.

5.2 Data coding issues

Establishing the exact type of a compliment in this virtual environment was far from simple. Placencia and Lower (2017: 636) remind us that it is not always easy to distinguish compliments from other related communicative actions sharing the same pragmatic space. While help may be available in the shape of compliment responses, these are in short supply in the present corpus, which numbered only five of them. Therefore, the codification procedure takes its cue from Placencia and Lower (2017: 636–637), who agree with Jucker et al.'s (2008) acceptance of a subjective element in compliment codification, especially bearing in mind that the socio-cultural context can have a bearing on what one group or another considers a compliment (in this regard see also Cirillo 2012: 44). Thus, codification has proceeded by taking into consideration factors like competition for inclusion in the OBO feed, the fact that these are male-to-male interactions, prone to certain degree of banter and self-irony and also a certain comradely bluntness rather than unambiguous positive linguistic politeness. The inclusion of some utterances as compliments may seem questionable, but when these contextual factors were taken into account it was felt that they fell within this category, and anyway their number is so low that they do not alter the overall profile of complimenting behavior presented.

6. Complimenting behavior in OBOs: Results

Of the 150 total comment segments examined, 38 contained at least one compliment, that is, in 25.3% of the sample segments, a ratio that is indicative of a considerable social orientation, especially considering this is ostensibly an institutional sports reporting service.

6.1 Compliment givers and receivers

As mentioned previously, this is a highly gendered context: all the moderating journalist are male, as are the contributors, who can be identified as such by their names. Only when OBO readers-contributors are addressed *en masse* (three times) is there no indication of their gender.

The data set revealed a surprising variation of compliment givers and receivers within this online network. In 24 out of 45 instances (53.3%), the moderating journalist compliments individual contributors, while in just three cases he compliments them *en masse* (6.6%). The next highest compliment giver-receiver pairing is contributors to journalists, with eight occurrences (17.7%). Outside these relatively predictable combinations, the data indicates that the social web spun by this genre has the potential to develop in the direction of compliments from contributor to contributor (2) and journalist to peers (4), jointly accounting for a further 14.1% of instances. Less expected were the instances of self-complimenting behavior from contributors to themselves (2) and even from journalists to themselves (2) (a further 4.4% each).

These divisions are not as clear-cut as they first appear. For instance, the selection of a flattering comment about OBO sent in by a contributor could be seen as an instance both of a compliment to the contributor, in so far as the contribution has been chosen, but also as an implicit compliment paid by the journalist to himself. This could be viewed as an act of self-praise (see Rudolf von Rohr and Locher and Luo and Hancock, this volume) by virtue of the fact that it is the journalist who actually has the last word on which contributions are chosen for inclusion in the OBO, including those that are complimentary about him. To some extent, there is an overlap between the self-praising contributions and those from contributors who compliment the OBO journalists for their work.

6.2 Compliment types

6.2.1 *Direct and indirect vs. explicit and implicit compliments*

The definition of compliment types is not a straightforward matter, not least because of the different ways in which the basic terms (*direct* and *indirect*, *explicit* and *implicit*) are used in the literature. Placencia and Lower (2017: 653) provide a valuable review of these variations. They illustrate how *direct* and *indirect*, are used in at least two ways that seem to depend on whether the complimenting behavior is viewed from a pragmatic-semantic perspective or from the point of view of participation framework. In the former case (see Boyle 2000; Placencia and Lower 2013) *direct* and *indirect* are broadly used as synonyms for *implicit* or *explicit*, respectively. In

the second account, embodied by Kerbrat-Orecchioni (1994) (quoted in Placencia and Lower 2017: 653) the terms indicate whether a compliment is made directly to a hearer or whether it is meant for an ‘overhearer’. Certain constraints of the online format of OBO have made it necessary to introduce further distinctions in how these terms are used in this chapter.

Many compliments are dispensed directly to the contributor. The pattern is for the OBO journalist to include a contribution, quoting it as direct speech and to introduce it or follow it with a complimentary expression to the sender, as in this example:

- (1) “England win by a Joe Root and 5 runs.” Well put, Nicky Scott

Others occur outside simulated face-to-face situations. They are indirect, in the sense that the object of the compliment is favorably described and commented on, principally to the other viewers, among whom we find the lucky contributor too, as follows:

- (2) Norval Scott makes a really good point here “Why declare in the first innings? If England needed more runs and/or more time, surely they should have just battled on?”

This manner of making compliments publicly to an overlooking (the visual equivalent of Goffman’s concept of “overhearing”) participant necessitates the use of appropriate terms. Because of their long association to kinds of speech, ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ seem useful for referring to simulated face-to-face compliments (direct) and compliments that are made indirectly because they are described to the OBO readership as a whole (indirect). Direct compliments account for 61.5%, while indirect compliments make up the remainder. It is possible to ascribe these different channels of complimenting to the overall social orientation of OBO. Direct compliments allow the journalist to simulate face-to-face interaction with individuals; indirect compliments conceivably allow the journalist to encompass both the individual and the group and also to establish a sense of community between the contributors, whose only way of communicating is through him.

6.2.2 *Direct explicit and implicit compliments*

Maíz-Arévalo (2012: 981) recognizes that explicit formulaic compliments are the most frequently used in general and refers to a gamut of studies that prove their dominance, not only in the English language, but in the main Western and Eastern European and Oriental ones. She accounts for the prevalence of explicit over implicit compliments with reference to the former’s reduced capacity for face threat, while the latter are more likely to be misconstrued by the interlocutor. In their state-of-the art review of complimenting behavior research, Placencia and

Lower (2017: 639) note that the results of Manes and Wolfson's (1981) or Holmes's (1986) classic studies on complimenting behavior patterns have provided the baseline results for all further analysis. In their Facebook data, Placencia and Lower (2013: 631) find that compliments fall within six of the nine categories identified by Manes and Wolfson (1981). Referring to the same baseline, this study reveals a different situation in OBO, in which compliments are used to secure solidarity in a less routine and automatic fashion.

6.2.2.1 *Direct explicit compliment patterns*

Examination of the data set against Manes and Wolfson's (1981) seminal taxonomy of explicit complimenting formulas revealed that even in the category of explicit compliments relatively few of them take the routine forms. For example, in the category of direct compliments, there are over three times as many explicit compliments (22) as implicit ones (6). However, only 10 correspond (loosely) to one of the nine basic patterns of formulaic compliments established by Manes and Wolfson:

1. (x2) NP {is/looks} (really) ADJ, e.g., "We're damned efficient here at the Guardian"
2. (x1) I (really) {like/love} NP, e.g., "I like the idea of avant-garde batting"
3. (x5) PRO is really (a) ADJ NP, e.g., "That is a mighty statgasm"
4. (x2) ADJ NP, e.g., "Genius Tim"

Note that the first of these is also a self-compliment, so it is highly unconventional. A significant proportion of direct explicit compliments take non-routine forms that can be defined and ranked as follows:

1. (x3) ADV+V+ S elliptical praise, e.g., "well played, sir"
2. (x2) YOU + NP, e.g., "you prince"
3. (x1) NEVER+V+SUBJECT: e.g., "never have I inspired the OBO family quite like this"
4. (x1) V+ S Imperative, e.g. "take a bow, Harry Axon"
5. (x1) YOUR+ADJ+NOUN, e.g., "your mind-boggling numbers and theoretical arguments"
6. (x1) I +V+ADV+ADJ: e.g., "I feel unimpeachably qualified"
7. (x1) How+ ADJ+ NP+V; e.g., "how lovely you lot are"
8. (x1) V+ADJ+NP, e.g., "there have been some real gems over the years"
9. (x1) OH + YES, e.g., "oh yes, yes, oh yes. A thousand times, yes".

A high proportion of these are unconventional in a number of ways. While types 1 and 4 serve as personal compliments to a contributor, they also enact that praise in the public rather than personal sphere, the former (1) impersonating the kind of compliment shouted to a player during a cricket match, the latter (4) implying that

the performance is worthy of collective applause from the contributor's peers. In both cases, the compliment is expressed in a non-conventional way so as to involve the whole community and not just the two participants. Types 5 and 7 are also addressed to the collective readers. In addition, the first person, self-compliments are highly marked and obviously offered in an ironical, self-mocking spirit meant to strengthen the bond within the group. Type 8 is the most neutral and conventional, because even type 7 is marked due to the use of the exclamation "how lovely" together with the "you lot", which is a somewhat derogatory form of address, and here, is probably used to secure male solidarity by deliberately offsetting the effusively expressive beginning to the compliment. The profuse repetition of "yes" is also non-conventional: it both imitates enthusiastic speech and seems to mock it at the same time.

6.2.2.2 *Direct implicit compliment patterns*

Predictably, the proportion of direct implicit compliments falling within one of Manes and Wolfson's nine categories is much lower: only five out of seven are structurally near to just two of their patterns:

2. (x1) I (really) {like/love} NP, e.g., "I want your brain"
3. (x4) PRO is really (a) ADJ NP, e.g., "That's a fair enough point"

The two remaining cases are: "A thesis in that" and "I'm with you". It is true that these might be taken as instances of straightforward agreement; however, especially if the prosodic potential is taken into account, each gradates, albeit indirectly, into an expression of approval or admiration ('a thesis' no less) and co-alignment ('I'm with you') that can be interpreted as doing more than merely signaling a shared perspective or opinion. Apart from the case of 'I want your brain', the implicit direct compliments are more conventional than the explicit ones.

6.2.3 *Indirect explicit compliments*

As with the direct comments, explicit compliments outnumber implicit ones and number 11 in all. They take the following syntactic structures:

1. (x3) S+V+NP, e.g., "Bill Hargreaves says nice things about the OBO today"
2. (x3) V+S (+QUOTE), e.g., "writes Stephen Brown's impressive memory"
3. (x2) S+V+ NP+ADV, e.g., Edmund King knitting together today's earlier debate quite beautifully"
4. (x1) PR+V+NP+PP, e.g., "This is a typically good statspot from Tom Botwell"
5. (x1) I (really) {like/love} NP, e.g., "I liked Richard Smyth's shameless plug"
6. (x1) ADV+V+ADJ+NP +PP, e.g., "Here's a lovely piece from Mike Selvey"

As can be seen, there is considerably less variation in indirect explicit compliments. The most obvious reason for this is the limited reporting structures needed to introduce and praise contributors; this is a constraint on the inventiveness of the journalist, who has less scope for exploiting the resources available for simulating face-to-face interaction. Nevertheless, indirect complimenting appears to work in various directions within the group: from journalist to contributor (2; 3); from journalist to peer (4; 6); from contributor to host (1); from contributor to contributor (5). This extends the dyadic dimension of the direct compliments, while the presence of deixis also contributes to creating the impression of a physical space shared and occupied by the participants.

6.2.4 *Indirect implicit compliments*

Indirect implicit compliments account for five instances, that is, just under 30% of indirect compliments. They are syntactically framed similarly to the indirect explicit sample, and add only slightly to that repertoire:

1. (x3) NP/PRO+PREP, e.g., "Not a bad one for a cricket lover"
2. (x1) S+V+ADV, e.g., "David Jarman is getting way out there for a Monday morning"
3. (x1) S+V+ NP, e.g., "we do have a Kabbadi Haiku from Michael Stobes"

Overall, there is greater non-conventionality in indirect implicit compliments than in the direct implicit formulations.

6.2.5 *Distribution of routine and non-routine compliments*

Sifianou (2001) makes a useful distinction between "routine" and "non-routine" compliments. The former are defined as "more or less automatic compliments" that take the form of "rather formulaic positive evaluations exchanged between acquaintances who feel socially obliged to make a positive comment" and who, as a consequence, "turn to rather fixed recurrent expressions for ease and convenience" (p. 410). The latter, on the contrary are described as more creative, not necessarily occurring in cases in which compliments are socially expected and possibly leading to verbal play (p. 411). Table 1 shows the four main categories of compliments and the ratio of non-routine compliments for each one.

Table 1. Distribution of routine and non-routine compliments across compliment types

type	Number	%	Routine	Non-routine
Direct explicit	24	53.3%	16	8
Direct implicit	8	15.5%	4	4
Indirect explicit	10	22.2%	9	1
Indirect implicit	4	8.8%	–	4

Among direct explicit compliments, 33% are comprised of non-routine expressions. In many cases, these are conveyed largely by simulating aspects of an oral repertoire, such as the use of directives like “Take a bow” or marked expressions using inversion, as in “Never have I inspired the OBO family quite like this,” or exaggerated exclamations like “Yes, yes, oh yes. A thousand times, yes.”

Probably because of the constraints of reporting, indirect explicit compliments have a lower ratio of non-routine compliments. In the only case identified, the compliment is achieved by a metaphor, as in “For now, Edmund King knitting together today’s earlier debate quite beautifully”. In contrast, non-routine expressions form a higher proportion of both direct and indirect implicit compliments. The former make use of figurative language, as in “I want your brain”, and formulations like “The 58th over wasn’t the same without you”, but also of quite complex self-irony, as in the following “self-compliment”:

- (3) You’re wrong Rob, and twice as ugly,” says Felix Wood. “I think Woakes’ improvement can only be put down to taking note of the criticism and responding to it by trying to prove every one wrong. I myself have written some extremely abusive and hurtful things about him, and despite his improvement he’s yet to bother to thank me, which I think just goes to show the character of the man.

In the final category – indirect implicit – figurative language is used twice: “David Jarman is getting way out there for a Monday morning” (that is, the contributor is excelling himself) and the following *tour de force* in indirect praise – Example (4) – in which the journalist explains the delay in referring to a contribution by effectively comparing the contributor to a bright student sitting at the front of a class, who must wait while the teacher attends to other less gifted pupils:

- (4) Gary Naylor spotted it too, but sometimes we teachers have to see the hand raised at the front of the class and simply ignore it.

Of the two remaining instances in this category, one involves a play on the alphanumeric username of a contributor, reminiscent of a cricket score and thus warranting a compliment:

- (5) An email from Vivek, whose surname seems to be 334 – not a bad one for a cricket lover.

The remaining one is a highly ironic accolade for the winner of a word game, based on the name of the Asian contact sport Kabbadi, which had been running through many segments of the commentary. The introduction of the winning entry is built up with the emphatic auxiliary used to ironical effect considering the sublime silliness of the contribution:

- (6) But, we do have a Kabbadi haiku from Michael Stones:
 Kabbadi Kabba,
 Di Kabbadi Kabbadi
 Kabadi Kabba

The variety of complimenting patterns used and the high ratio of non-routine compliments suggests a deliberate intention to avoid predictable responses in this context. Whatever compliment type they indulge in, journalists and, to a lesser extent, contributors regularly and deliberately exploit a range of registers and tropes to maintain an entertaining atmosphere and collective spirit of fun.

6.3 Topics of compliments

To understand the distribution of compliment topics in OBO, it is necessary to describe some of the main activities that are carried out within the communal "gossip" narrative of the comment segments. Chapman (2012: 147) observes that "the main function of the contributions is largely to entertain, to display linguistic skill and sports knowledge and to enjoy the strong social bond that an important fixture can generate." Describing MBMs, Chovanec (2006: 25) notes that this "fictitious community is marked by textual practices connected with the construction of male friendship for the purpose of social bonding: the use of humor, male gossip, and language play". There is also a competitive edge to these activities because there is invisible competition between readers to 'get quoted' by the commentator, who selects contributions over others (Chovanec 2006: 30). The gossip narrative in OBOs is, therefore, significantly goal-oriented (Rees-Miller 2011), because contributors vie to outdo each other either in terms of their knowledge of the considerable lore surrounding the game of cricket, ability at playing many of the word games initiated to fill up the "gossip" narrative, or by displays of wit and humor that add to the overall entertainment value.

The main topic of compliments is ability. In fact, 80% are compliments for ability (36), with personality accounting for 11.1% (5), possession 6.6% (3) and quality 2.2% (1). This data, confirms Rees-Miller's (2011: 2782) findings that "Men are far more likely to compliment an addressee on performance", although it has to be allowed that appearance is not an option in the context of OBO.

6.4 The function of compliments in OBO

Compliments in OBOs appear to perform different, interrelated functions. Their basic use is that of ‘recognition’ awarded by the mediating journalist to contributions from readers whose performance is appreciated, because it is especially witty, skillfully written, or particularly cogent. According to mediating journalists themselves, many contributions are not included in OBO, so inclusion, let alone a compliment, is a considerable accolade. Additionally, by being so selective, the journalists spur contributors to more bravura displays of humor, memory, ingenuity or linguistic skill, in the process ensuring the level of entertainment, so key to the “gossip” narrative, remains high. The variety of compliment patterns and the high proportion of non-conventional, novel and marked compliments not only act as an incentive to other contributors but they also add to the fun generated in OBO.

The participation in various goal-oriented activities set in motion by the journalist is also one way of securing the closer involvement of sections of the online participants as they play to the specific rules of a game, or try to better each other in the various challenges thrown down by the journalist or other competitors. Despite the competitive edge underlying OBO compliments, they establish and maintain solidarity between a predominantly male group of participants, providing recognition and appreciation for their contributions and giving a communal sense to the activity.

Also, it would seem that the kinds and forms of compliments elicited in the course of OBO are instrumental in the discursive creation and maintenance of a distinct online grouping with a shared ethos and conventions (see Benwell and Stokoe 2006: 243–279). Chovanec (2006: 26) notes that within the context of football MBMs, there are many occasions of “staged verbal conflict and mutual negativity between males who compete for verbal supremacy in minute-by-minute commentaries”. He identifies “male bravado and good-natured staged conflict” in football MBMs (p. 28), in which the journalists often indulge in asymmetrical “open and harsh criticism” of contributions (p. 29). This possibly reflects certain stereotypes surrounding football supporters, typically viewed as hailing from a working-class background, less given to social niceties and more prone to confrontational masculine behavior. In contrast, cricket is often described as a more gentlemanly, middle-class game, followed in a gentler spirit, while many of the sport’s finest journalists are accorded quasi-literary status (Gillen 2014: 126). The regular occurrence of compliments in OBOs could be seen as one of the ways whereby the existence of a distinct, more genteel, group of online cricket fans is simulated. That is not to say, however, that compliments are examples of uncomplicated positive politeness strategies. As can be seen from the following example, simulated confrontational language can occur, though here it combines with complex

written style which expresses a self-compliment tinged with irony, self-mockery and mock-seriousness.

- (7) You're wrong Rob, and twice as ugly," says Felix Wood. I think Woakes' improvement can only be put down to taking note of the criticism and by trying to prove everyone wrong. I myself have written some extremely abusive and hurtful things about him, and despite his improvement he's yet to bother to thank me, which I think just goes to show the character of the man".

This all points in the direction of male discourse that is self-ironizing (Benwell 2001: 21), but which is distinct from the kind of simulated conflict in exchanges Chovanec observes in football MBMs.

7. Concluding remarks

This study has provided a review of complimenting behavior in OBOs, a relatively new hybrid form of online sports journalism, in which contributions from journalists and readers "become intrinsically part of this unique discourse" (Chapman 2012: 136–137). In line with Chovanec's (2009) findings, it has also been shown that this genre is increasingly comprised of two layers: a primary layer, in which the sporting events are narrated and a "gossip" layer, which is where interaction between the journalists and readers, between readers and other readers and between professional sports writers and their peers takes place. The communal aspect is underlined by various frequently competitive, yet entertaining, activities that unfold within the second interactive layer.

The social credentials of these web pages are fairly rudimentary and one-sided. While there is considerable evidence of vertical interaction between the commentator and readers, there is no direct, autonomous horizontal communication between reader-contributors. Autonomy is further limited because these forms of participation are tied to the duration and times of play. Nevertheless, this does not appear to discourage contributions from readers.

In the context of Twitter, Bruns and Burgess (2015) have proposed the idea of publics that are formed, re-formed and coordinated around issues or events. OBO readerships could be defined as a public that is coordinated around an event and in which the coordination includes and encourages various simulations of "digital intimacy" (Rambukkana 2015: 1). Terms like webpage 'musters' or 'assemblies' have been suggested in order to characterize the kind of digital environment promoted by this branch of mass media communication.

It was found that compliments occurred in just over 25% of the commentary segments comprising this data set. The majority of these were made by the journalist

to individual contributors and only occasionally to the mass of OBO readers. There were also less frequent cases of compliments passing from readers to journalists and from the journalists to media peers. Whoever the compliment givers and receivers, the main topic of compliments within this community is ability or performance, with much smaller percentages of compliments on personality or possessions.

The manner in which interaction is achieved in OBOs has made it necessary to make a distinction between direct and indirect compliments. In the former the journalist simulates a face-to-face response to a contributor, while in the latter the compliment is indirect because it is made while addressing principally the other readers, so that it is 'overheard' by the contributor. This feature conceivably acts as a social cement.

While indirect compliments showed less variety in the syntactic patterns used to form them, only 10 of the direct compliments loosely corresponded to four of the formulaic compliment types established by Manes and Wolfson (1981). The majority of direct compliments took non-formulaic or non-routine forms, including self-compliments. This adds to the entertainment value of the text under construction, further spurring participants to emulate these feats of inventiveness. OBOs are an environment in which the onus to be original, arresting, and entertaining spills over into complimenting behavior, too.

Finally, it has been suggested that the group discursively created and sustained in OBOs is quite likely to be distinct from those of MBM football reports, and that the frequency of compliments in the former is an indication of that. This reveals possible future avenues of research. The spread of this LTC-type reporting to other sports and other nations opens the enticing prospect of adopting a more extended cross-cultural approach to investigate complimenting behavior between different Anglophone settings within this kind of socially involving sports discourse. Also, the growing popularity of LTC formats to cover women's sporting events promises to provide researchers with a mass of easily accessed complimenting material that may now lend itself to analysis from a gender perspective.

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Compliments in congratulatory tweets to Spanish Olympic athletes

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In this chapter we examine the form and function of compliments in congratulatory tweets sent to Spanish athletes during the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. The study is based on a corpus of 500 tweets taken from the profiles of 14 Spanish athletes (5–21 August 2016). Compliments play an important role in congratulatory remarks as they serve to either realize congratulations or to support them. Findings show that congratulatory acts supported by compliments or stand-alone compliments acting as congratulatory acts exceed tweets of congratulatory remarks alone. The use of direct compliments is found more frequently within the corpus than indirect ones, with elliptical and vocative constructions being the most prominent. It is suggested that this may be a consequence of the tendency to conciseness of Twitter and other social networks.

Keywords: congratulations, compliments, Twitter, social media, Peninsular Spanish

1. Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) are abuzz with talk of sporting events, including mega events such as the Olympic Games. Immediate reactions (e.g., likes, comments, compliments, etc.) pour in when athletes win medals. Fans also reach out to their favorite stars by sending individual congratulatory messages/tweets. It is interesting to note that the language being used in such messages is often effectively determined by the nature of the sporting event (see also Heaney in this volume). Together with conventional congratulatory messages/tweets and expressions of gratitude, it is also common to find compliments about specific qualities, skills, or personalities of the athletes (e.g., *otra medalla de oro para uno de los mejores* ‘another gold medal for one of the greatest’, or *te lo mereces* ‘you deserve it’). These are commonly known as positive evaluative acts that authors like Norrick (1978: 286) classify under “congratulating”.

Often found within these acts of congratulating are compliments (e.g., *eres genial* ‘you are great’). The compliments that co-occur with congratulatory acts could be considered as supportive moves or external modifications (Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper 1989). They serve to enhance the effect of the congratulatory head act, that is, when the latter is explicitly performed through an “illocutionary force indicating device” (IFID) (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989) (e.g., *enhorabuena* ‘congratulations’). However, a congratulatory act may also be made exclusively through one or more compliments, that is, through a “multiple” head act (Mulo Farenkia 2011: 10), without any stereotypical congratulatory formulae.

The aim of this study is to contribute to the examination of compliments and investigate the strategies used to formulate them on Twitter as part of congratulatory messages in the sports domain. A distinction will be made between *explicit* congratulations (i.e., those given through conventional congratulatory formulae) and *implicit* ones (i.e., those formulated through other speech acts like compliments). Regarding compliments as implicit congratulations would be in line with Elwood’s (2004) suggestion that compliments are, precisely, one of the strategies employed to realize congratulations (see also Pishghadam and Morady Moghaddam 2011) (see Section 2.1).

Additionally, characteristics such as concision, spoken-written hybridisms, immediacy, and spontaneity contributing to determining dominant types of compliments on Twitter will be considered, as well as syntactic structures, lexical items, and multimodal resources that are commonly employed for the formulation of congratulatory acts.

2. Background

Most of the literature on congratulatory acts and compliments focuses on face-to-face interactions (Brown and Levinson 1987; Holmes 1988; Haverkate 1994; Lorenzo-Dus 2001; Sifianou 2001; Choi 2008; Maíz-Arévalo 2010, 2012; Barros García 2011; Placencia 2011; Placencia and Fuentes Rodríguez 2013). However, analyzing compliments on social media has recently been gaining traction. Salient in the research are studies on Facebook (see, e.g., Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013; Placencia and Lower 2013; Eslami, Jabbari and Kuo 2015) and Twitter (Siti Yuhaida and Tan 2014). Also, there is a growing literature on linguistic studies on Twitter that include a consideration of compliments even if they do not constitute the main focus of analysis (see, e.g., Dayter 2014; Scott 2015; Sifianou 2015).

Before proceeding, some clarification about the relationship between compliments and congratulations is necessary. There is indeed a close link between these

two speech acts (Norrick 1978; Lewandowska-Tomaszczy 1989; Haverkate 1994; Makri-Tsilipakou 2001; Sifianou 2001; Alfonzetti 2013), and the dividing line between the two has seemingly become blurred in contexts in which they essentially fulfil the same functions. Both congratulations and compliments are classified as “expressive speech acts” (Searle and Vanderveken 1985; Haverkate 1994), whose aim is “to express the psychological state specified in the sincerity conditions about a state of affairs specified in the prepositional content” (Searle 1969: 15). However, when one congratulates, one expresses happiness or pleasure in some good fortune or for something that is beneficial to the listener (Norrick 1978; Searle and Vanderveken 1985; Vanderveken 1990), or, using Wierzbicka’s (1987: 229) words, “[w]e congratulate people because something good happens to them.” For this reason, among the various strategies used to congratulate, we find compliments acting as positive evaluative acts “which explicitly or implicitly attribute credit to someone” (Holmes 1988: 446). Compliments that tend to refer to personal qualities or possessions enable speakers to specify and strengthen the admiration and emotion that they feel for the achiever or the listener (Norrick 1978). However, one must note that the act of congratulating, in itself, formulated explicitly is sufficient to specify an achievement (Norrick 1980).

Compliments, as proposed in this study, can constitute supportive moves, but also acts of congratulating in themselves. Indeed, Sifianou (2001: 393) refers to the flexibility of the compliment to be used together “with” or “instead of” other speech acts (thanks, greetings, congratulations). This is possible because both compliments and congratulations share what Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000: 68) call a “multi-dimensional pragmatic space in which speech acts can be analyzed in relation to neighboring speech acts.” In some contexts, these two acts may be interchangeable. For instance, as Norrick (1978: 286) states,

I can pay a compliment to or congratulate someone on his victory in a game of tennis, but only compliment him on his improved backhand. I can congratulate but not compliment someone on his having reached the age of eighty.

Thus, the act of congratulating, seen in isolation, implies a positive evaluation, which could be made explicit through a compliment; however, a compliment seen in isolation does not always have the illocutionary force of congratulations. Nonetheless, we think that context is paramount in deciding whether compliments function as congratulations. In post-victory tweets in our corpus, the climate of enthusiasm and appreciation for the victory prevails. In this respect, congratulations are expected and compliments can play the same function. Below, we outline some theoretical considerations for both compliments and congratulations.

2.1 Congratulations

According to Searle (1969: 67), congratulations fulfil the following adequacy rules:

1. There is some event or act that is related to the hearer (propositional content rule);
2. The event is in the hearer's interest, and the speaker believes that the event is in the hearer's interest (preparatory rule);
3. The speaker is pleased about an event (sincerity rule);
4. It counts as an expression of pleasure about the event.

Congratulations have been described as “normative” (Albeda Marco and Briz Gómez 2010), “ritual” (Bernal 2007), and “conventional” (Haverkate 1994). They are acts which are almost compulsory if one wants to adhere to rules of good conduct, as they are expected in certain situations. They are polite acts, too, because they support or reinforce the positive image of both the interlocutor and the person performing the speech act (Haverkate 1994; Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2010). Thus, congratulations have also been classified as “convivial acts” (Leech 1983: 106), as they are used to satisfy a social expectation (Dastjerdi and Nasri 2012). As an example of “ostensible congratulations,” Isaacs and Clark (1990: 506) cite those cases in which the loser in a sports competition ‘congratulates’ the winner because it is a social norm that they feel obligated to adhere to.

Different classifications have been proposed to categorize the strategies used to express congratulations. For example, Pishghadam and Morady-Moghaddam (2011) identify the categories of offering congratulations, mentioning the occasion, blessing, expressing feeling, and complimenting as the dominant moves in the conceptualisation of congratulations. In this study, we build on the classification proposed by Elwood (2004: 358–359) that includes the use of the following strategies:

1. Illocutionary force indicating devices (IFIDs);
2. Expressions of happiness: a. Expressions of personal happiness; b. Statements assessing the situation positively;
3. Requests for information: a. Specific questions; b. General requests for information;
4. Expressions of validation: a. Statements indicating the situation was warranted; b. Praise; c. Statements of prior certainty.

The tweets selected for our study comprise congratulatory macro-speech acts, whereby expressions such as ‘congratulations’ or ‘well-done’ would normally be sufficient for the speaker to express his/her happiness for the feat performed, implicitly attributing positive qualities to the athlete. The evaluative and emphatic nature of tweets of this type accounts for the presence of evaluative speech acts such

as compliments. As Norrick (1980) points out, compliments specify and intensify the admiration and excitement felt by the speaker. This is true in the two types of congratulations that we consider in this study: (a) explicit congratulations – those carried out through IFIDs in which the compliment is a supportive move –, and (b) Implicit congratulations – those that are formulated through other speech acts, such as compliments.

2.2 Compliments

Holmes (1988: 446) defines complimenting as:

A speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some good (possessions, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.

Compliments are positive politeness strategies (Brown and Levinson 1987), or “face flattering acts” (FFAs) (Kerbrat-Orecchioni 2005), which aim to establish or maintain good relations, thereby creating solidarity between interlocutors (Manes and Wolfson 1981; Holmes 1988; Herbert 1989; Haverkate 1994). Studies on politeness in different languages and cultures have identified several functions for compliments:

- a. Compliments are an example of “productionist or free politeness” (Albelda Marco and Briz Gómez 2010, our translation) since they are not necessarily produced by the need to compensate the hearer for a FTA, or by any risk or threat to the hearer’s social face (Brown and Levinson 1987).
- b. Compliments may be considered acts of “strategic politeness,” since they may transcend mere spontaneous observations, thereby acquiring a strategic value. Compliments may also be used to reinforce or encourage the desired behavior of a listener in order to mitigate criticism (Wolfson 1983), reject offers, express disagreement, request information (Choi 2008), transmit a desire to have someone else’s possessions (Brown and Levinson 1987; Holmes 1995), flirt, thank, cheer, or win the favor of the interlocutor him/herself (Placencia and Yépez Lasso 1999).
- c. Additionally, compliments could be classified as “ceremonious, seasonal and free gifts” (Jucker 2009: 1613–1615), which tend to be “routine” and “automatic” (Sifianou 2001: 410), “politic or appropriate” (Locher and Watts 2005: 26), “ritualized” (Barros García 2011: 72), and/or even “standard” or “conventional” (Bravo 2005: 47; Albelda Marco and Briz Gómez 2010: 6).
- d. Finally, compliments may be considered deliberately impolite acts or “formally polite acts with an impolite purpose” (Kaul de Marlangeon and Alba-Juez 2012: 87).

Considering all these functions of compliments, it may be stated that in the congratulatory messages sent to winning athletes, it is more than justified to include compliments as evaluative acts, which effectively serve “to increase or consolidate the solidarity between the speaker and addressee” (Holmes 1988: 447), and also “to reinforce the links of affiliation to the group or of mutual friendship” (Rodríguez and Jiménez 2010: 142). It should also be noted that, while compliments in the context of our study are assumed to be spontaneous and sincere manifestations of appreciation, implying true admiration for the athlete by the person tweeting, they also at times constitute acts of strategic politeness. Their purpose can be to win our interlocutor’s favor (Placencia and Yépez Lasso 1999), as remarked above, or the favor of the community around the complimentee. This may include other athletes (who may even be participating in the same event and are, therefore, rivals) and celebrities from all walks of life. The latter formulate congratulations strategically, conditioned by the need to protect their social image. Their tweets are often retweeted and often attract the attention of mass media channels, which is why celebrities active on social media try to protect their image when engaging in self-facework. However, as mentioned earlier, compliments could be used to “reinforce desired behaviour” (Manes 1983: 97) too, and, in this sense, they “may also have the social function of encouraging the addressee to continue his efforts” (Norrick 1978: 286).

The distinction between direct/indirect and explicit/implicit compliments has been addressed by Holmes (1995), Herbert (1997), Boyle (2000), Bruti (2006), Maíz-Arévalo (2012) and Mulo Farenkia (2011), among others. Direct compliments are those that explicitly refer to the qualities being evaluated (e.g., physical appearance, personality, interlocutor’s belongings, etc.), so they do not require inferences to be recognized (Boyle 2000; Herbert 1997). As different studies have shown, direct compliments are generated employing fixed formulae realized through certain syntactic structures. According to Maíz-Arévalo (2012: 983), these include the use of “exclamative clause[s] with an adjective group modifying the complimented item” (*¡Qué preciosidad de pulsera!* ‘what a beautiful bracelet!’), “declarative clause[s] with the complimentee in the subject position, followed by a copulative verb and a positive adjective (*eres un bellezón* ‘you are a real beauty’); and “declarative clause[s] with the complemter in the subject position, followed by a mental process of ‘liking’ and the complimented item in the direct object position” (*Me encanta tu camisa* ‘I love your shirt’).

Constructions identified by Placencia and Fuentes Rodríguez (2013: 111–114) include the following, among others: exclamative structures with an intensifier such as *qué* or *vaya* (e.g., *¡Qué bien cocinas!*, literally ‘How well you cook’, or *¡Vaya melena bonita*, ‘What lovely hair’), assertive sentences with an evaluative adjective

or an adverb (*Te queda muy bien* ‘It looks very good on you’), assertive structures in which the appreciation is expressed in the lexical content of the verb (*Me gusta tu nuevo corte de pelo* ‘I like your new haircut’), and elliptical constructions (*Delicioso* ‘delicious’).

Indirect compliments, on the other hand, require making inferences in order to be recognized by the listener. There are some classifications of pragmatic strategies used to perform this type of compliment. Maíz-Arévalo (2012), examining audio-recorded, naturally-occurring conversations in Peninsular Spanish, distinguished implicit compliments based on (a) whether they involve comparison with a third entity or omission of the second term of comparison); (b) the implicit relationship between the listener and a third entity; (c) irrelevant questions; and (d) reference to the speaker’s feelings and emotions. Choi (2008), on the other hand, proposed that a range of actions such as asking questions, giving a personal opinion or some type of evaluation, adding explanations, making jokes, etc. could be strategies for indirect compliments in face-to-face interactions in Spanish.

Building on the above work, we shall examine whether the compliments that appear in tweets are generated following the same formulae or if there are other pragmatic strategies being used, compared with face-to-face interactions in Spanish.

2.3 Twitter and congratulations

According to the company’s directives, Twitter’s aim is “to provide everyone with the capacity to generate and share ideas instantaneously and without barriers” (<https://about.twitter.com/es/company.html>). There are a number of slogans on its promotional page, such as “begin a global conversation” or “find out what’s happening...in real time” (<https://about.twitter.com/es.html>). Hence, big sporting events such as the Olympic Games are events to which these SNSs respond, thus achieving a global coverage.

In our study, we specifically paid close attention to situational factors (see below) and Twitter’s technical parameters in order to analyze compliments in tweets. It is now known that microblogging platforms like Twitter enable users to establish and maintain personal or professional relationships. As Honeycutt and Herring (2009: 1) state, “one potentially important role for person-to-person interaction via Twitter is collaboration.”

Tweets have a phatic function where what matters is the connection/contact with others and, in the process, a validation of the fact that the medium is important and not just the message (Menna 2012). This results in the formation of what Zappavigna (2011: 800–801) has termed an “affiliation environment,” which goes beyond a simple connection. For example, when we see the Olympic Games, we

feel spontaneous joy although we have no direct connection to the Games in an individual capacity. This same joy then creates an association among the Twitterati, a term associated with frequent users of the platform, across the globe tweeting about the same event, although there is no ‘connection’ between them. For example, when Roger Federer plays at the Olympics, Tweeters around the world associate with one another, with him as the focal point. In this context, feelings and emotions are manifested through different strategies, which in turn could have “an affiliate function” (Zappavigna 2011: 795).

Among the strategies employed are expressive speech acts such as congratulations and compliments. Additionally, if we take into account situational factors such as the *tone* of the interaction that concerns the way in which acts are performed (Hymes 1974; Herring 2007), we see that the tone in the context examined is emphatic, determining the constant use of intensifying (para)linguistic procedures in congratulatory tweets (e.g., *bravooooooooo* ‘well dooooooooooone’).

In addition, Twitter’s hashtags enable the topic of the tweet to be identified and tracked (Menna 2012; Page 2012; Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán 2015). This promotes “ambient affiliation” (Page 2012: 184), which enables “users to temporarily join a community sharing their opinions about a topic that evolves over time” (Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán 2013: 65, our translation). We thereby propose to examine whether it is normal for compliments to be presented with a hashtag.

Moreover, Twitter allows communication “with a potentially large, geographically and temporally disperse, audience” (Coesemans and De Cook 2017: 39). Although this communication can be private, it is more commonly public (Sifianou 2015: 26). Twitter facilitates one-to-many asynchronous communication, which turns into some kind of conversational exchange. However, this conversation does not produce “dialogic exchanges” (Page 2012: 184) because it adopts the form of a collective discourse in which a sum of voices, rather than a synchronous dialogue between two people, is heard around shared themes (Mancera Rueda and Pano Alamán 2013). This, in turn, determines the appearance of formulae that are typical of a personal and intimate style of communication in a medium that is public, and strategies that are typical of face-to-face interaction (Zappavigna 2012; Scott 2015). Further, like other contemporary SNSs, Twitter is hybrid in nature. Hybridity typically refers to a combination of communicative features found primarily in spoken communication (mostly in informal registers), but in their written form (Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013). As this type of discourse combines both the oral and the written, it can be described as “interactive written discourse” (Ferrara, Brunner, and Whittermore 1991: 8). There is, thus, a need to understand whether formulating compliments on Twitter has any similarities with their formulation in face-to-face interactions and also in other SNSs such as Facebook.

Furthermore, despite the relatively recent increase to the number of characters permitted per tweet (from 140 to 280), conciseness seems to be the main tendency among users. This leads to the use of certain strategies and an optimization of space and significance (Menna 2012; Scott 2015). In this regard, “the size of message buffer” (Herring 2007) can actually determine the use of shorter messages, whereby the language is structurally abbreviated through omissions and ellipsis, “through implicatures or through links to longer messages” (Coeseemans and De Cook 2017: 42), and even through the hashtag itself, which saves space by saying more with less.

Therefore, we examine whether the Twitter ‘medium’ plays a part in selecting the format of congratulatory messages, or the formulation of compliments as head acts or as multi-head acts in lieu of the congratulatory messages themselves. We also examine whether this may determine the types of compliments produced and the selection of syntactic structures, which are employed to make the compliments in the first place.

3. Methodology and corpus of analysis

This study analyzed a corpus of 500 congratulatory tweets that were sent to Spanish medal-winners at the Rio Olympic Games (5–21 August 2016) either in an individual capacity, or in pairs or groups. We specifically followed the profiles of 14 athletes (6 women and 8 men).¹ The “advanced search” feature in Twitter was utilized to build the corpus of analysis, allowing for past tweets of the athletes to be recovered. Searches were conducted for tweets where the athletes’ Twitter handle was mentioned, both on the day when the Olympic medal was won and the following day. The resulting corpus was analyzed for types of direct and indirect compliments, which were classified according to pragmatic characteristics and syntactic structures.

1.

- Gold medal: Mireia Belmonte (Swimming 200 m. butterfly), Maialen Chourraut (Canoe slalom K1), Rafael Nadal and Marc López (doubles tennis), Marcus Cooper Walz (Canoe sprint K1 1000 m.), Saúl Craviotto and Cristian Toro (Canoe sprint K2 200 m.), Carolina Marín (individual badminton), Ruth Beitia (High Jump Athletics).
- Silver medal: Rolando Ortega (Athletics 110 m.), Eva Calvo (Taekwondo, 57 kg.).
- Bronze medal: Mireia Belmonte (Swimming 400 m. freestyle), Lidia Valentín (Weightlifting 75 kg.), Joel González (Taekwondo 68 kg.), Saúl Craviotto (Canoe sprint K1 200 m.), Carlos Coloma (Mountain Bike).

4. Analysis

We start this section with an analysis of the congratulatory formula in terms of the sub-types used it in our corpus. We then look at how this type of positive evaluative act is manifested on Twitter, focusing on how Twitter's specific features condition compliment formulations.

4.1 Formulae employed in congratulatory tweets

Within the corpus examined, we recorded three formulae for congratulatory tweets: (a) explicit congratulations manifested exclusively through IFIDs, (b) explicit congratulations in which compliments are used as supportive moves, and (c) implicit congratulations given exclusively through other speech acts such as compliments, replacing the stereotypical formulae of congratulations. As shown in Table 1, the quantitative analysis of these three formulae highlights the important role of compliments within congratulatory tweets. The most widely used congratulatory formulae, as can also be seen in Table 1, are those in which the compliment appears, either as a supportive move in addition to the IFID of congratulation or as head or multi-head act. The compliment not only reinforces the force of congratulations as a head act (45%) but may, in fact, replace it in a number of cases (37.8%), even in the form of multi-head acts with an emphatic nature (17%).

Table 1. Distribution of sub-categories of congratulations

Congratulatory act	Occurrences ($N = 500$)	Percentage
IFID	86	17.2%
IFID + Compliment(s)	225	45%
Compliment(s)	189	37.8%

Typically, congratulatory acts that are comprised of only IFIDs are tweets limited to formulaic expressions such as *felicidades* 'congratulations', *bravo* and *olé* 'well done', as in (1) below. Sometimes the reason for the congratulations is also expressed explicitly, as shown in (2).

- (1) @Ruthypeich *Una felicitación más MUCHAS FELICIDADES*
'@Ruthypeich Congratulations once again and MANY CONGRATULATIONS'
- (2) #Halterofilia ¡AQUÍ LA TENEMOS! Nuestra @lydikit ya saborea su merecida medalla olímpica de #Rio 2016. ¡BRAVOOOO!
'#Weightlifting THERE WE HAVE IT! Our @lydikit is already enjoying her well-deserved Olympic medal from #Rio 2016. BRAVOOOO!'

These formulae are usually intensified by means of quantifiers (e.g., *muchas* ‘many’ as in (1), the lengthening of phonemes (e.g., *bravooooo* ‘well doooooone’) as in (2), evaluative adjectives in the superlative form (e.g., *mis más sinceras felicitaciones* ‘my most sincere congratulations’) or repetitions.

As can also be seen in Examples (1) and (2) above, many users resort to typographical highlighting by means of capital letters, which is a way of transcribing a phonic strategy – the emphatic accent – as an intensification device in oral interactions. Intensification, as Placencia and Fuentes Rodríguez (2013: 122) point out, makes the evaluation stronger, thereby expressing a degree of excitement and involvement on the part of the tweeter.

The second category – explicit congratulations in which compliments are used as supportive moves – as we saw in Table 1, was found to be the most frequent congratulatory formula in the corpus examined. Example (3) illustrates this category, with the IFID (*enhorabuena* ‘congratulations’) followed by three compliments that enhance the congratulatory act.

- (3) *Enhorabuena Rafael Nadal!! Eres grande. Un gran luchador y todo un campeón.*
‘Well done Rafael Nadal!! You are great. A great fighter and a true champion.’

Finally, the third type of formula found in the corpus (Table 1) corresponds to implicit congratulations. These are often given exclusively through other speech acts, such as compliments, thus replacing the stereotypical formulae of congratulations. This can be seen in (4): the congratulatory formula involves multi-head complimenting acts.

- (4) *Q grande eres @RafaelNadal Muy crack dentro y fuera de la pista. siempre. merecidísimo el Oro*
‘How good you are @RafaelNadal A real ace on and off the court. always. a well-deserved gold’

4.2 Direct and indirect compliments

Given that compliments in themselves appear in 414 of the 500 tweets that make up the corpus (i.e., 82.8%), with multiple compliments occasionally appearing within a single tweet, we will now turn toward an analysis of the types of compliments used. We will first broadly examine the presence of direct and indirect compliments in tweets and go on to explore the syntactic structures within each group.

As shown in Table 2, direct compliments are more common than indirect ones within the corpus.

Table 2. Direct and indirect compliments

Congratulatory act	Occurrences (<i>N</i> = 500)	Percentage
Direct	351	70.2%
Indirect	149	29.8%

The quantitative analysis above on direct/indirect compliments is consistent with general trends highlighted in extant literature on everyday interactions (Choi 2008; Maíz-Arévalo 2012; Placencia and Fuentes Rodríguez 2013). However, of interest in this study is the extent to which characteristics of Twitter determine the preference for direct compliments, especially those with a high degree of conventionality, not requiring a recipient's inferential process in order to be interpreted. To further explore the use and nature of both direct and indirect compliments within tweets, we will examine the syntactic structures of these compliment types.

4.2.1 *Syntactic structures of direct compliments*

The syntactic structures through which direct compliments (70.2%) in our corpus are expressed were classified into six groups: (1) partial exclamatives; (2) ascriptive attributive structures; (3) elliptical constructions; (4) vocatives; (5) prepositional clauses as circumstantial complements of cause; (6) syntactic structures with the verb *merecer* 'to deserve', as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Syntactic structures of direct compliments

Syntactic structure	Occurrences (<i>N</i> = 351)	Percentage
Partial exclamatives	36	10.25%
Ascriptive attributive structures	56	15.95%
Elliptical constructions	156	44.44%
Vocatives	73	20.79%
Prepositional clauses as circumstantial complements of cause	21	5.98%
Syntactic structures with the verb <i>merecer</i> 'to deserve'	9	2.56%

1. Partial exclamative structures

Partial exclamative structures comprise 10.25% of the direct compliments recorded. In the corpus, the quantified adjective is mostly *gran* 'great' or its derivatives, appearing as the head of the compliment in 55.55% of the examples. Our analysis revealed the following types of partial exclamative structures within the corpus:

- a. Exclamative clauses with the quantifier *qué*
'how/what'+adjective and/or noun+verb (copulative):

- (5) *qué gran tipo parece @marclopeztarres*
‘what a great guy you seem to be @marclopeztarres’
- b. Adjective and noun exclamative clauses: quantifier *qué*
‘how/what’+adjective (*grande* ‘great’), and/or noun (*grandeza* ‘greatness’).
- (6) *La medalla más bonita y emocionante por su significado para mi gusto la de @Ruthypeich QUE GRANDE!!!#oro #JuegosOlimpicos #ESP*
‘Because of its importance in my opinion the best and most exciting medal is that of @Ruthypeich HOW GREAT!!!#gold #OlympicGames #ESP’

At the same time, some formulae are used to intensify the exclamative structure itself – (6), (7) – or the quantified adjective or noun – (9) – as internal modification mechanisms for complimenting head acts. These, as mentioned previously, are the same processes seen in face-to-face communication.

- a. Duplication of exclamation marks in the sentence or with the adjective or noun clause as an exaggeration of the exclamative intonation that allows for the display of enthusiasm or happiness:
- (7) *@RafaelNadal @marclopeztarres que grandes!!!*
‘@RafaelNadal @marclopeztarres how great!!!’
- b. The use of capital letters for transcribing emphatic stress in oral conversations reflecting a raised tone of voice (Mancera Rueda 2014: 171)
- (8) *QUÉ GRANDE ERES @lidykit*
‘HOW GREAT YOU ARE’ @lidykit
- c. Intensification through morphological procedures such as suffixation. In (9), the noun *grandeza* ‘greatness’ is used; its derivative suffix *-eza* ‘-ness’ forms abstract nouns alluding to aesthetic, intellectual, moral or personal qualities.
- (9) *@Saul_Craviotto pero qué grandeza por favor!!!*
‘@Saul_Craviotto but what greatness, please!!!’
- d. Intensification of the noun (in itself evaluative) by an adjective (*auténtica* ‘true’).
- (10) *QUÉ AUTÉNTICA BENDICIÓN DE MUJER @miss_belmont*
‘WHAT A TRUE BLESSING OF A WOMAN’ @miss_belmont

2. Ascriptive attributive structures

Ascriptive attributive structures, appearing in 15.95% of direct compliments and following the form of (*subject*)+*copulative verb*+(*adverb*) *adjective/noun*, may be presented as enunciative sentences (11), occurring in 75% of the 56 registered occurrences (Table 3), and also as full exclamatives (25%), as in (12).

- (11) *Olé por @miss_belmont eres muy grande*
‘Olé for @miss_belmont you are really great’
- (12) *@colomacarlos no te conocia de nada pero tio...Eres muy grande!! Me has emocionado con tus lagrimas!!!! Te mereces esa medalla!!! Grande*
‘@colomacarlosI didn’t know you at all but man, ... You are great!! Your tears have really moved me!!!! You deserve this medal!!! Brilliant’

Within these structures, evaluative nouns are often used (e.g., *campeón* ‘champion’, *estrella* ‘star player’, *crack* ‘ace’, *número uno* ‘number one’, *ejemplo* ‘example’, *protagonista* ‘protagonist’, *modelo a seguir* ‘model’) to ascribe the highest degree of praise to an athlete; above all, these are adjectives denote gradable or quantifiable qualities (e.g., *grande* ‘big’, *fuerte* ‘strong’, *dulce* ‘sweet’, *bueno* ‘good’, *enorme* ‘huge’, *espectacular* ‘spectacular’). It is more frequent for the core of the compliment within these structures to be adjectives (occurring in 60.71% of the total of 56 occurrences) rather than nouns (39.28%). Several other procedures are also used to intensify the head of the compliment. They include the following, among others:

- a. Intensification of the adjective by means of internal modification mechanisms, including the use of the adverb *muy* ‘really’, as in (11).
- b. Intensification of the adjective by constructing it with a relative superlative, with or without a second term of comparison:

(13) *Enhorabuena por esa medalla de ORO @CarolinaMarin eres la mejor!!!!*
‘Congratulations for that GOLD medal @CarolinaMarin you’re the best!!!!’
- c. Listing adjectives and/or nouns of an intensifying nature, in many cases with multiple head acts:

(14) *@marclopeztarres es amor, pedazo de entrevista, sincero, humilde, crack*
‘@marclopeztarres is love, what a great interview, sincere, humble, an ace’
- d. Intensification of the noun by means of internal modification mechanisms, for example, an evaluative adjective (*grande* ‘great’), or the quantifier *toda una*, literally, ‘a total...’, as in (15).

(15) *@evusa91 Grande esa medalla de Plata!!! Felicidades, Eres toda una campeona. Haciendo grande el deporte y a España en el. Bravo.*
‘@evusa91 Great that silver medal!!! Congratulations, You’re a total champion. Making sport and Spain great. Bravo.’
- e. A noun found in a definite noun phrase (article and noun) in which the article itself acquires an emphatic value:

- (16) @MChourraut *El sueño olímpico ya es otro y tú eres la protagonista del mismo ya eres historia viva del deporte Enhorabuena crack*
 ‘@MChourraut The Olympic dream is different now and you are the only star you already are a living sports legend. Congratulations number one’

3. Elliptical constructions

In elliptical constructions, which occur in 44.44% of the compliments examined, only the evaluative element is found: a noun (e.g., *campeón* ‘champion’) or an adjective (e.g., *grande* ‘great’). Of the 156 occurrences of elliptical constructions (see Table 3), adjectives appear in 80.76% of the examples. In the case of nouns, their incidence is 19.23%. Moreover, the adjectives with the highest frequency of use are *grande* ‘great’ (comprising 42.06%), *merecido* ‘well-deserved’ (11.11%), *enorme* ‘huge’ (9.52%), *espectacular* ‘spectacular’ (5.55%), *impresionante* ‘impressive’ (3.96%), *brillante* ‘brilliant’ (3.96%), and *increíble* ‘incredible’ (3.17%). The remaining 20.67% reflect isolated occurrences of other evaluative adjectives (e.g., *genial* ‘genial’, *bárbaro*, literally, ‘barbaric’, *superior* ‘superior’, *brillante* ‘brilliant’, etc.). These elements have to be considered taking into account the discursive contexts in which they appear, as it is the context that makes the occurrence of the various structures discussed (i.e., total or partial exclamative clauses, ascriptive attributive clauses, and noun or adjective exclamative clauses) possible.

In elliptical tweets, it is common to resort to multiple head acts as an intensification procedure, wherein the adjective or noun is usually intensified through the following means:

a. Repetition of the adjective:

- (17) *GRANDES, GRANDES y MÁS GRANDES. ¡¡¡¡Enhorabuena!!!!*
 ‘GREAT, GREAT and GREATER. Congratulations!!!!’

b. Use of capital letters as formulae for the transcription of emphatic stress:

- (18) *He visto unas 20 veces como ayer @miss_belmont se hacía con el oro olímpico, y las 20 veces el vello de punta. ¡GRANDE! #Rio2016*
 ‘I watched around 20 times yesterday how @miss_belmont won the Olympic gold, and each time it made my hair stand on end. GREAT! #Rio2016’

c. Transcription of the lengthening of vowel sounds typical of oral interactions in order to reproduce the intonational exaggerations of conversational interactions, enabling the expression of emotions:

- (19) *@Saul_Craviotto pero qué grandeza por favor!!! El orgullo de un país y su deporte!!!Enormeeeee!!!!*
 ‘@Saul_Craviotto but what greatness!!! The pride of a country and its sport!!!Enormooooooooous!!!!’

- d. Presence of the evaluative adjective or noun in the form of a hashtag as an intensification strategy in multimodal discourse: limiting the number of characters for tweets “means that there is often no space to provide contextual information explicitly in the tweet itself” (Scott 2015: 9–10). Tweets, like any other statement, require some inferencing, but due to the restrictions of characters, that is not always possible (Yus Ramos 2010: 164–165). This is why hashtags (*#campeón* ‘#champion’) are used. They not only allow the topic of the tweet to be identified, but also serve “to activate certain contextual assumptions, thus guiding the reader’s inferential processes” (Scott 2015: 19).

4. Vocatives

After the congratulatory formula, an appellative vocative referring to the athlete may sometimes be found (20.79%). It could be a noun (e.g., *campeón* ‘champion’) or an adjective (e.g., *guapo* ‘handsome’). Typically, this is an axiological vocative in which, added to its appellative values, expressive values prevail, endowing the tweet with a degree of colloquialism.

In such cases, the core of the compliment is usually a noun (accounting for 89.04% of the 73 occurrences) rather than an adjective (10.95%). It seems to involve a highly frequent use of the noun *campeón* ‘champion’, in particular, as it appears in 79.45% of the examples.

- (20) @joelgonzaleztkd Nuestra más efusiva enhorabuena, campeón
 ‘@joelgonzaleztkd Our most heartfelt congratulations, champion’

The strong presence of the vocative in the corpus analyzed (making up 20.79% of the direct compliments) can be explained in the same way as in the case of elliptic constructions. However, a distinctive feature of vocatives in this corpus is that they usually co-occur with congratulatory IFIDs. In fact, of the three alternative ways congratulatory tweets are expressed, vocatives are found in two of them: (a) and (b). As in the case of the elliptical constructions, the noun and the adjective can also be intensified through the following means:

- a. Lengthening of vowel sounds typical of oral interactions:

- (21) @joelgonzaleztkd oleee tuu guapooooo
 ‘@joelgonzaleztkd oleee youu beauuuuuty’

- b. Capitalization to indicate the emphatic stress typically employed in spoken interactions:

- (22) @lydikit FELICIDADES GUAPAAAA DESDE NOJA, UNA PUCELANAY
 UNA SEVILLANA
 ‘@lydikit CONGRATULATIONS BEAUTIFUL FROM NOJA, A
 PUCELAN AND A SEVILLIAN [WOMAN]’

5. Prepositional clauses as circumstantial complements of cause

These are evaluative acts that are found when the object or the cause of the congratulations is made explicit, as in *por el merecidísimo oro!!!* ‘for the well-deserved gold!!!’ in (23). Although the percentage of these acts is lower (5.98%) than the strategies analyzed before, it is worth highlighting.

- (23) @joelgonzaleztkd *Felicitaciones por el merecidísimo oro!!!*
 ‘@joelgonzaleztkd Congratulations for the well-deserved gold!!!’

In our corpus, the most frequent intensification procedures are the following:

- a. Evaluative adjectives such as *grandes* ‘great’ that convey the intensifying trait, which allows the object of the congratulation to be evaluated and explicitly praised:

- (24) @evusa91 *¡MUCHAS FELICIDADES DESDE GRAN CANARIA!!!!*
Enhorabuena por tus grandes combates y tu lucha diaria hasta llegar a Río!
 ‘@evusa91 MANY CONGRATULATIONS FROM GRAN CANARIA!!!!
 Congratulations for your great fights and your daily struggle to reach Río!’

- b. Augmentative suffixes:

In (25) we can see the use of two augmentative suffixes: *-azo* and *-ón*.

- (25) @MarcusWalz *Gracias por el momento y el carrerón Marcus, he disfrutado muchísimo junto a mis hijos, enhorabuena campeón!!!!*
 ‘@MarcusWalz Thank you Marcus for that amazing moment and that great race, I enjoyed it so much with my children, congratulations champion!’

6. Syntactic structures with the verb *merecer* ‘to deserve’

In the realization of direct compliments, this is the least frequently employed syntactic strategy (only 2.56% of the compliments). The following example illustrates its use:

- (26) @MChourraut *enhorabuena!! Te lo mereces*
 ‘@MChourraut congratulations! You deserve it’

As can be seen in this example, the exclamatory structure, normally achieved by the duplication of exclamation marks, is commonly used as an intensification device within this structure.

4.2.2 Syntactic structures of indirect compliments

Unlike the direct compliments reported above, indirect compliments (29.8%) are not expressed in fixed formulae. Therefore, categorizing the syntactic structures comprising them is a complex task. However, from those appearing in our corpus, we have found the following pragmatic strategies and their corresponding linguistic structures (Table 4): (1) impersonal formulations (2) rhetorical figures: metaphors

Table 4. Syntactic structures of indirect compliments

Syntactic structure	Occurrences (N = 149)	Percentage
Impersonal structures	20	13.42%
Rhetorical figures	47	31.54%
Expressions of feelings	57	38.25%
Questions	5	3.35%
Others	20	13.42%

and similes, (3) Expressions of feelings, (4) questions, and (5) others. Under others (5), we have placed cases that occurred less than five times.

We will examine each of these syntactic structures below.

1. Impersonal compliments

Impersonal compliments using judgmental phrases, whose meaning is unquestionable, account for 13.42% of the total number of indirect compliments. Though one of the principal characteristics of a compliment is its praise for the interlocutor, who is presumed to be present, it may, however, also allude to someone in general terms. Example (27) illustrates this type of compliment:

(27) *El #esfuerzo siempre tiene premio. Qué grandes!! @marclopeztarres @RafaelNadal*

'#Hard work is always rewarded. How great!! @marclopeztarres @RafaelNadal'

Further, it is also common to find attributive structures in tweets that establish an equivalence between two abstract elements (28) and even tautologies (29), making use of the emphatic nature of this resource:

(28) *La humildad es el primer paso para llegar al éxito. Enhorabuena @miss_belmont por ese oro y ese detalle.*

'Humility is the first step towards success. Congratulations @miss_belmont for that gold and that gesture'

(29) *@colomacarlos Los grandes siempre serán grandes. Enhorabuena*

'@colomacarlos Great people will always be great. Well done!'

2. Compliments using rhetorical figures: metaphors² and similes

Indirect compliments as metaphors form about 31.54% of our corpus; most of these structures are lexicalized metaphors, as in (30), tending to have the same syntactic structures and the same intensification procedures as the other syntactic structure types.

2. See Sifianou (2001: 418–423) for a consideration of metaphors in compliments.

(30) *Saul_Craviotto muchísimas felicidades Saul!!! Eres una auténtica máquina*
 ‘@Saul_Craviotto many congratulations Saul!!! You are a real machine’

3. Compliments making reference to speakers’ feelings and emotions

These are the most common compliments in our corpus (38.25%), probably because congratulatory tweets are generally presented as true expressions of joy, and the sender of the tweet has no qualms about directly praising the athlete or about doing this indirectly by openly showing their emotions, which implicitly involves an evaluation of the athlete. Example (31) illustrates this type of compliment made through an emotive expression (Maíz-Arévalo 2012) which involves the evaluation of the feat accomplished:

(31) *@lydikit esta mujer me tiene enamorado ¡VIVA ESPAÑA!*
 ‘@lydikit I love this woman. LONG LIVE SPAIN!’

4. Compliments using questions

Indirect compliments can also be found in the form of interrogatives which “request some type of information on the referents of the compliments” (Choi 2008: 210), “asking the interlocutor an apparently irrelevant question” (Maíz-Arévalo 2012: 988); or through rhetorical interrogatives whose function is to intensify both the propositional content and the affective meaning, that is, the attitude towards the addressee. This resource is sparsely used in our corpus (3.35%) since the effort required for its interpretation may be great, something which does not fit so well with the immediacy of Twitter. For instance, encyclopedic knowledge is required for the interpretation of other indirect compliments, as in Example (32):

(32) *@joelgonzaleztdk #Taekwondo es expert en artes marciales y criminólogo. Seguro que no es Bruce Wayne?*
 ‘@joelgonzaleztdk #Taekwondo is an expert in martial arts and criminology. Are we sure he isn’t Bruce Wayne?’

The speaker shows that he/she has found a surprising quality in the addressee receiving the compliment and evaluates it positively and emphatically, by means of a rhetorical question, which, as it does not lead to an answer of any orientation different from the one implied, intensifies the speech act.

5. Other forms of indirect compliments

Some compliments fit into what Jucker (2009) describes as cultural or social compliments, used appropriately in a specific cultural community. This type of compliment makes up 13.42% of our total corpus of tweets. These are strongly deictic forms, dependent on a highly specific temporal and geographical context; they are not formulaic in nature and are based on shared knowledge. Hence, it is necessary to resort to intertextuality. As such, an appropriate interpretation

will depend on the knowledge that the participants in the communicative interaction have of previous texts related to it, such as films, songs, etc. Example (33) illustrates this type of compliment.

- (33) *Ahora sí que @sakira puede cantar eso de 'Óyeme Carlos llévame en tu bicicleta Enhorabuena @colomacarlos*
 'Now @shakira can sing the one that goes "Hey Carlos take me on your bicycle Congratulations @colomacarlos'

In instances like (33), even though the recovery of the meaning and, more specifically, its function as a compliment, may require a greater effort, this is minimized by the fact that the tweets make reference to very well-known texts, as can also be seen in (33).

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest that compliments play a very important role in congratulatory tweets. Their most common role is either to serve as head acts that replace the congratulations themselves or as supportive moves that appear alongside formulaic expressions of congratulations. Congratulations on their own, without the presence of a compliment, were found to account for a low percentage of the total corpus. This may be because a compliment is an evaluative act that allows users to convey the admiration and emotion that they feel for the recipient's achievements.

Among categories of compliments, the most commonly found within our corpus were direct compliments, with the majority expressed through elliptical and vocative constructions. This is possibly attributable to the tendency to conciseness detected in tweets. Although many SNSs are characterized by the conciseness of their messages, due to the need for dynamism in the conversations, the "small buffers [on Twitter] also increase the likelihood that language will be structurally abbreviated" (Herring 2007: 15). However, the conciseness of the compliment may, in some ways, also be determined by the direct and immediate communication facilitated by Twitter.

The need for spontaneity and the tendency to conciseness may also be affecting a significant percentage of the other strategies accounted for in the corpus. Twitter users employ intensification methods typical of the informal register and characteristic of spoken interactions, using phonic, morphological or syntactic procedures and even ortho-typographic resources.

On the other hand, indirect compliments have a lower frequency (29.2%) given their need for additional contextual knowledge. The characteristics of Twitter – immediacy and tendency to conciseness – also appear to influence the types of indirect

compliments used. This may explain why the majority of indirect compliments are lexicalized metaphors or expressions of feelings because these are acts that require less processing effort. Even if they may require shared contextual knowledge, they also encourage the establishment of relationships among their user community.

As the data analysis shows, direct and indirect compliments are both prevalent in congratulatory tweets and are used to recreate the emotional state of overflowing joy and enthusiasm that a sport victory generates. The findings of the present study may serve as a basis for future research in other SNSs, whose characteristics may influence the realization of compliments and other speech acts.

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PART IV

Perception of self-praise

Modified self-praise in social media

Humblebragging, self-presentation, and perceptions of (in)sincerity

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Compliments that have the speaker as their referent can be referred to as self-praise. This chapter introduces humblebragging, a modified self-praise speech act that involves both an expression of self-promotion and a modesty element to convey favorable impressions to others. Drawing on literature in both pragmatics and social psychology, we examine the components of humblebrags and how humblebrags can influence impression formation, and we consider how this distinct form of self-praising behavior may be shaped by social media. Finally, we report on an empirical study of the perceptions of humblebrags that finds that humblebrags posted on Facebook are perceived as less honest than straightforward brags and that humblebraggers are viewed as less sincere than braggers, when they received negative social evaluations. The results reveal that humblebragging may undermine the goal of presenting oneself as sincere on social media.

Keywords: compliments, modesty constraint, self-presentation, humblebrags, sincerity, social media, computer-mediated communication, technology-mediated communication, self-praise, humility, complaint

1. Introduction

Compliments, which involve expressions of positive evaluation and approval directed at someone other than the speaker (Manes and Wolfson 1981; Vanderveken 1990: 215; Holmes 1995: 117), are common social practices. A converse of compliments is self-praise, which involves positive evaluations toward *speakers themselves* (Dayter 2014, 2016). Self-praise is used to convey positive attributes to impress others and ultimately build an overall positive self-image in the eyes of others (Goffman 1959; Dayter 2014). A more aggressive type of self-praise like bragging is considered problematic and face-threatening in many cultural contexts and

settings. Therefore, modifications are often needed to balance self-praise in order to avoid appearing too boastful.

One example of modifications on self-praise is humblebragging (Wittels 2012), which, taken literally, synthesizes both “humble” and “bragging” elements in a single word insofar as it not only compliments or praises one’s positive qualities but also masks the self-aggrandizing statements with complaints and modesty (Sezer, Gino, and Norton 2018). In Examples (1) and (2) below, speakers are self-praising or bragging indirectly about being famous and attractive by expressing a sense of dissatisfaction and incomprehension of their success and/or attractiveness.

- (1) *Being famous and having a fender bender is weird. You want to be upset but the other drivers just thrilled & giddy that it’s you* (Wittels 2012: 173)¹
- (2) *Why do men hit on me more when I am in sweat pants? It makes no sense* (p. 45)

Humblebragging has become a common discourse tactic that covers many aspects of everyday life, including looks and appearance, personal success and performance, and social life. For instance, to self-praise about achievement and social status, speakers often humblebrag about being busy, as shown in Example (3):

- (3) *Opened a show last Friday. Begin rehearsals for another next Tuesday. In-between that, meetings in DC. I HAVE NO LIFE!*
(Bellezza, Paharia, and Keinan 2016: 123)

In everyday interactions, people make social judgments about others and manage their own impressions on others. From a social psychological perspective, since competence and warmth are two basic dimensions of impression formation or social judgments (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu 2002), the motives to appear competent and to look warm should drive self-presentation (Baumeister 1982; Jones and Pittman 1982). Therefore, as humblebrags integrate self-praise and modesty they can be employed to fulfill both goals of self-presentation simultaneously.

Furthermore, humblebragging can be seemingly effective in impression management because self-praising can gain speakers prestige and, meanwhile, modesty might help reduce the risk of appearing too boastful and help gain affection from others. Some psychology research suggests, however, that humblebragging may be problematic due to concerns of sincerity (Sezer et al. 2018). Indeed, humblebrags are considered by some as false modesty (Wittels 2012), suggesting that the modesty or complaining claims do not stem from authentic dissatisfaction or innocence as described by the speaker, but from an intentional control of messages to make the self-praise or brags less apparent to the receiver.

1. Unless indicated, all examples provided come from Wittels (2012).

The increased public visibility of personal self-disclosures afforded by social media has made humblebrags more salient and observable (Alford 2012). Given the extent that communication technologies affect language use in self-disclosure (Bazarova 2012) and deception (Hancock 2007) in digital contexts, specific features of social media are expected to shape humblebrags and to affect how receivers perceive them and form impressions of speakers.

In this chapter, we begin by proposing a working definition of humblebragging as a modified self-praising linguistic strategy, from a pragmatics perspective. We discuss how this unique speech act can be examined through the lens of self-politeness and compliment response research (Section 2). We then provide an overview of humblebragging from a social psychological approach, including the psychological motives (Section 3) and the effects of humblebragging on impression formation (Section 4), as well as how social media afford the production and perception of humblebrags (Section 5). In this section, we also review existing complimenting research on social media and introduce an empirical study examining how self-presentation styles (humblebragging vs. bragging statements) and other users' comments affect perceptions of sincerity and liking. We provide some conclusions in Section 6.

2. An overview of humblebragging from a pragmatics perspective

In the book *Humblebrag: The Art of False Modesty*, Wittels (2012: 11) defines humblebragging as a strategy that “masks the boasting part of a statement in a faux-humble guise.” Although humblebrags constitute a relatively new type of speech act in pragmatics research, both the humble and bragging elements have been examined respectively, and typically in the context of compliment research.

The bragging or boasting part of a humblebrag involves a positive statement of oneself or self-praising utterances. Self-praise is a converse compliment because this speech act attributes credit to *the speaker* rather than the hearer for some “good” (possession, accomplishment, skill, etc.) (Dayter 2014: 92). Self-praise includes a wide spectrum of self-presentation practices, ranging from positive self-disclosure that is associated with healthy self-confidence to bragging that is related to competitiveness, inflated ego and deceit (Decapua and Boxer 1999; Dayter 2014).

The humble elements of a humblebrag, on the other hand, can be seen as a modification or redress of self-praise, which is critical in social interaction because explicit self-praise or straightforward bragging has long been considered problematic (Pomerantz 1978; Leech 1983; Brown and Levinson 1987). In her seminal work, Pomerantz (1978) argued that there are two conflicting constraints on compliment response, which pose a dilemma for recipients of compliments: there is a preference

for acceptance or agreement in operation, which means that rejection and disagreement are dispreferred actions; on the other hand, accepting a compliment can be seen as a form of self-praise, which needs to be avoided. Compliment recipients can address these contradictory constraints by shifting credit for praise, for example, and thus avoid an outright rejection of the compliment.

Leech (1983: 132), in turn, considers avoiding self-praise as a way of adhering to what he calls the Modesty Maxim – Minimize praise of *self*; maximize dispraise of *self*. This maxim would come into conflict with his Agreement Maxim – Minimize disagreement between *self* and *other*; maximize agreement with *self* and *other*. Compliment responses breaking the Modesty Maxim may seem arrogant and boastful, and those breaking the Agreement Maxim may seem rude. Leech suggests that, in compliment response, different cultural groups will give priority to one or the other maxim (p. 137).

Since speakers have the desire to be liked during interactions – a positive face need in Brown and Levinson’s (1987) face theory – this may drive them to modify self-praise so as to save their own face (see also Chen 2001). One instance of self-praise modification can be found in the work of Wu (2011) who examined social interaction among Mandarin speakers. This author identified the use of a “self-praise plus modification” strategy: the speaker who engages in self-praise follows up immediately with retraction or modification about the matter he or she just self-praised for (p. 3156). Other strategies conforming to the Modesty constraint include using disclaimers to present one’s accomplishment as the second best, and “treating the accomplishment ostensibly as complainable” (Wu 2011: 3170).

Building on Wu (2011), we consider humblebragging to be a self-praise plus modification speech act, which aims to attenuate or mask face-flattering acts. Recent research has identified two main forms of humblebragging: humility-based and complaint-based humblebragging (Sezer et al. 2018). Humility-based humblebrags, as shown in Examples (4) and (5), taken from Sezer et al. (2018: 57), involve a “lack of superiority in assessment of one’s abilities and strengths” (Sezer et al. 2018: 55).

- (4) *I don't understand why every customer compliments me on my books*
- (5) *He thinks I am super hot, and smart, so weird.*

Both examples imply that the speaker is unaware of his/her achievements and good attributes, seeking to elicit reassurance from his/her interlocutor. This strategy conforms to Leech’s (1983) Modesty Maxim. This humility-based humblebragging can also be seen as a modesty strategy of redress – an act used to mitigate the threats of self-face threatening acts (SFTA) in Chen’s (2001) self-politeness theory.

Examples (6) and (7) demonstrate complaint-based humblebrags, which involve “an expression of dissatisfaction or annoyance” (Sezer et al. 2018: 55) derived

from a speaker's performance that he/she actually wants to brag about. Concerning (7), the hashtag #Takingforever explicitly indicates that the speaker is dissatisfied or annoyed by the maid working too long in the house.

- (6) *Omg, I am so embarrassed, paparazzi just blinded me with flashes again, as I was walking into dinner. They pushed me and I tripped :(hurt* (p. 179)
- (7) *Maids leave my house so I can go workout!!! #Takingforever* (p. 59)

Both statements use complaining tone to convey a level of disagreement with desirable possessions one actually gets and reports. Prior research suggests that the strategy of masking self-praise with a complaint can not only bring the praiseworthy matter to others' attention (Dayter 2014) but also "secure or reinforce recipients' alignment with the speaker's attempt for self-praise" (Wu 2011: 3174). Overall, complaint-based humblebragging should be effective in reducing the risks of the speakers being seen as overly self-face-flattering.

In summary, we take humblebragging to be a modified self-praising speech act. Both compliment response research and Chen's (2001) self-politeness theory provide a useful theoretical lens to understand this speech act and its function(s) in interpersonal communication: to enhance one's self-image but to avoid threatening one's own face.

3. Humblebragging as self-presentation work

Using our working definition of humblebragging as modified self-praise, this section aims to discuss two basic human needs and motives underlying self-presentation from a social psychological perspective (Baumeister 1982; Jones and Pittman 1982), and the potential reasons for employing humblebrags in interpersonal impression management.

3.1 Dual goals of self-presentation

Self-praise is essentially a self-presentation strategy, which attempts to control the impressions others form of the speakers (Leary and Kowalski 1990). Well-established theories in the field of interpersonal influence have identified two fundamental dimensions that reflect two different routes to human judgment: people are attracted to (a) those who can facilitate collective goals and have the potential to benefit the group on one hand, and (b) those who look warm, friendly and personally responsive on the other (Baumeister 1982). In this regard, to create favorable impressions on others, people are inclined to demonstrate self-profitable

abilities such as competence, knowledge, skill, and intelligence to highlight their instrumental social value, as well as personal attributes such as warmth, friendliness, and likeability to emphasize their relational value (Holoien and Fiske 2013; Leary, Jongman-Sereno, and Diebels 2014). Certainly, being both respected and liked can provide greater social benefits than either one alone (Leary et al. 2014). Therefore, the pursuit of both status or respect and acceptance or inclusion through self-presentation provides a psychological basis for humblebragging. Indeed, Sezer et al. (2018) found that people who had both desires to impress others and to seek sympathy are most likely to create humblebrags compared to either straightforward complaining or bragging-only messages.

3.2 “Bragging” indicates competence

Speakers who want to look competent and gain respect from their audience often adopt an array of self-promotion strategies – practices of drawing others’ attention to positive personal attributes like skills and knowledge, and accomplishments that can signal social status (Jones and Pittman 1982; Godfrey, Jones, and Lord 1986; Leary et al. 2014). These self-promotion strategies can be seen as proactive self-praise (Vanderveken 1990: 215). In the case of humblebrags, the bragging component serves as the self-promotion strategy that conveys an overall positive self-image (Sezer et al. 2018).

Explicit self-promotion or self-praise can produce perceptions of competence in some contexts. Research in organizational settings suggests that self-enhancing one’s experience and qualities can make interviewers think highly of the job applicant and think him/her as a good fit for the job (Kristof-Brown, Barrick, and Franke 2002). Extant literature has shown that perceived personal success is the foundation of humblebrags. Topics about this theme have a wide range of realizations: from winning an award (8), to becoming very famous (9) (Wittels 2012).

(8) *I just received an award for my teaching?! #thedangersofpublicschools* (p. 119)

(9) *For the 3rd time in 3 yrs I’ve been asked to speak at Harvard, but I’ve yet to speak at my alma mater. What’s a girl gotta do* (p. 131)

Although performing self-praise can make speakers appear competent and gain respect from the audience, explicit self-praise without modification or redress may lead to negative responses that could potentially threaten speakers’ own face (Chen 2001) and could impair self-presentation. The potential negative impacts explain why “being humble” may be important in bragging statements.

3.3 “Being humble” engenders liking

Early pragmatics research considered self-praise and bragging outwardly as socially problematic as it indicates that the speaker does not care about the hearer’s feelings, and thus may appear face-threatening (Leech 1983; Holmes 1986; Brown and Levinson 1987). Research in psychology suggests that people attempt to adopt modification strategies to underplay their performance or achievement to reduce the risk of seeming arrogant by making explicit self-praise and to avoid offending others (Jones and Pittman 1982; Godfrey et al. 1986; Higgins, Judge, and Ferris 2003). Therefore, modification strategies are employed to make speakers appear warm, likable, and friendly – the other key dimension of self-presentation and social judgment (Jones and Wortman 1973; Jones and Pittman 1982).

Although conceptually distinct according to other definitions (Owens, Johnson, and Mitchell 2013), humility and modesty, in general, involve several socially desirable characteristics and personality traits, such as the ability to acknowledge personal limits, think more of others, and evaluate personal achievement without exaggeration (see Tangney 2000 for an overview). Typical strategies include highlighting other people’s accomplishment and shifting credit from oneself to external factors (Wu 2011; Dayter 2014). These strategies can reduce the risks and anxiety of social comparison perceived by others (Schlenker and Leary 1982), and thus elicit interpersonal liking. Humility can benefit relational maintenance as well (Davis, Worthington and Hook 2010; Van Tongeren, Davis, and Hook 2014) because humble individuals think more of relational values, are able to overcome selfish desires for power and superiority, and have clearer and more accurate self-views, which, together, lead to a higher level of relational satisfaction and commitment (Davis et al. 2010; Van Tongeren et al. 2014). Given the effectiveness of humility in eliciting liking across varied contexts, combining humility with self-praise may produce desirable interpersonal impressions.

Furthermore, complaints that involve expressions about dissatisfaction and unfavorable attitudes toward any object, can also facilitate liking in interpersonal communication. For example, pragmatics research argues that indirect complaints can sustain intimacy and establish solidarity between speakers (Boxer 1993). Similar accounts have been confirmed in social psychology research: indirect complaints have been shown to gain sympathy (Alicke et al. 1992) and to provide “a script” for social interactions (Kowalski 2002). Indeed, when communicators have similar experiences, receivers often conform to complainers’ statements and provide instrumental resolution with the complainers due to conversational norms (Alicke et al. 1992). Additionally, since complaints are more prevalent in close relationships than between strangers (Kowalski 1996), they serve as indicators of relational intimacy and tools of social bonding. In this sense, complaints can lead to liking

through increased intimacy and interpersonal trust (Kowalski 2002; Sezer et al. 2018). Overall, complaint-based humblebrags with negative emotion words and dissatisfaction expressions (e.g., *I hate, I am fed up with, I am sick of*) could be effective in achieving impression management successfully, especially for people who wish to project liking as a key attribute of their self-images on others.

3.4 A potential solution to balance self-praise and humility

As discussed earlier, looking competent and likeable can bring success in social judgment (Leary et al. 2014). Therefore, projecting competence and likeability at the same time is the ultimate self-presentation goal. Strategies that can make self-praise and humility work in concert to engender the most favorable impression have not received much attention. In practice, there is a negative association between obtaining respect and liking: people may downplay their competence when they want to appear warm and also underplay their warmth when they attempt to appear competent (Holoien and Fiske 2013). This so-called “competence-acceptance” dilemma suggests that people’s desire to gain affection can reduce their desires for seeking social status or gaining respect, and the desire for social status and respect can undermine the desire for liking as well (Anderson et al. 2006; Leary et al. 2014).

To solve the competence-acceptance dilemma, combined self-presentation tactics may be required. Given the fact that self-praise is effective in achieving perceived competence but might make the actors seem boastful (Steinmetz, Sezer, and Sedikides 2017), and that humility and complaints can elicit liking from others but might make the actors seem boring or incompetent (Kowalski 1996), combining both tactics might be a wise strategy to influence others’ impressions. Humblebragging may be effective to the extent that it could obtain both respect and affection from others because the bragging and humbling elements in a single statement can serve both functions simultaneously.

As shown in (10), being “*thoughtful and kind*” is a self-praise, which aims to impress others by highlighting positive personal qualities.

(10) *I am tired of being the thoughtful and kind person all the time*

(Sezer et al. 2018: 57)

However, complaining expressions like “*I am tired of*” involve negative affect expressed by the compliment, which is used to downgrade the self-praise in order to seek sympathy and affection from the audience.

4. Effects of humblebragging on impression formation

People believe that the act of humblebragging enables them to compliment personal attributes in a modest manner so as to obtain both respect and affection from the audience (Sezer et al. 2018). Receivers, however, may judge humblebrags differently than speakers might have expected because humblebrags may sacrifice a key dimension of human judgment and impression management: sincerity or morality (Sezer et al. 2018).

Sincerity or morality is concerned with the intentionality of speakers' self-presentation, which has vital implications for impression management because receivers may routinely gauge the motives of self-presentation to avoid the potential harms from immoral speakers (Wojciszke, Bazinska, and Jaworski 1998). Prior research suggests that morality is a distinct dimension from either competence or warmth, and can directly affect how much the receivers like and/or respect the presenters (Nguyen, Seers, and Hartman 2008; Lafrenière, Sedikides, Van Tongeren, and Davis 2016).

Prior work has shown that intentional self-promotional claims are judged as more immoral and unintelligent than those without self-promotional intentions (Lafrenière et al. 2016). In addition, the sincerity of motives that underlie complaints and humility can also determine the success of interpersonal impressions. Sincere complaints refer to the genuine dissatisfaction underlying the complaining claims, whereas insincere complaints occur when the person expects to achieve desired rewards or to avoid undesired punishment through making complaints (Caron, Whitbourne, and Halgin 1992; Kowalski 1996). In the latter case, receivers may be less tolerant of the complainer's ranting if they recognize the fraudulent complaints and raise suspicion about the motive (Caron et al. 1992; Kowalski 1996). Moreover, if speakers deliberately underestimate self-worth or intentionally show ignorance about their successes, they may engender unfavorable impressions on others because the false modesty may seem more condescending and patronizing than a straightforward self-praising claim (Driver 1989).

Taken together, receivers may make judgments about speakers based on inferences and assessments of their self-presentation motives or goals. If receivers can see through the calculated bragging intent or the fraudulent complaint or humility, they may form unfavorable impressions about the speakers (Sezer et al. 2018).

Even though the speech act of humblebragging is quite common, less scholarly attention has been paid to the effects of humblebragging on impression formation or social judgments. An early study suggested that self-praise followed by disclaimers (e.g., "I did well, but it's no big deal") in attempt to denigrate the self-presentation was judged as more boastful than statements without the disclaimers (Schlenker

and Leary 1982). More recent work found that speakers who humblebragged were perceived as less likable or competent, and received less social support than those who either bragged or complained (Sezer et al. 2018). Additionally, complaint-based humblebrags were perceived even more negatively in terms of liking and competence than humility-based humblebrags. For these findings, perceived sincerity served as the psychological mechanism that explained why humblebragging decreased interpersonal attraction and behavioral generosity (Sezer et al. 2018).

Research in organizational contexts suggests similar findings. For example, Vranka, Becková, and Houdek (2017) found that job candidates who humblebragged were perceived as less sincere but perceived as more competent and flexible than those who did not humblebrag. Another study showed that investors were less willing to invest in a company when the CEO humblebragged about the firm's performance than when he/she either bragged or was modest about company performance (Grant, Hodge, and Sinha 2018). All in all, existing research suggests that humblebragging can be an ineffective self-presentation strategy in both everyday social interactions and in work environments.

5. Humblebrags in social media

5.1 The role of technology in constructing and perceiving humblebrags

In the emerging media age, technological changes have facilitated technology-mediated communication (TMC), which allows for self-presentation in the Internet space, including humblebragging. Online self-presentation literature is broad and extensive, as it relates to self-disclosure and online deception. For example, social media users may employ a number of affordances of social media to fulfill different disclosure goals, which, in turn, affect relational intimacy (Bazarova and Choi 2014). In addition, online deception research suggests that people can make use of communication technologies to intentionally control information so as to create a false belief about self-image (Hancock 2007; Toma and Hancock 2010).

As a distinct modified self-praise strategy, humblebragging is increasingly common on social media (Sezer et al. 2018). Two theoretical perspectives may shed light on the factors that may affect the likelihood and the relational outcomes of humblebrags. First, Clark and Brennan's (1991) chapter on grounding in communication provides a framework for analyzing how specific features of technology can impact language use, such as the use of humblebrags in TMC. Second, the hyperpersonal model (Walther 1996) specifies how technological characteristics affect relational outcomes of humblebrags by considering the effects of properties of online environments on transforming sender, receiver, channel and feedback dynamics.

To begin with, TMC allows for asynchronous communication, which can facilitate selective self-presentation (Walther 1996): people can take more time to construct self-image and to engage in more sophisticated self-presentation. For instance, Toma and Hancock (2012) found that asynchronicity and editability affected the production of cognitive markers of deception in people's self-presentation in online dating profiles. Along with this rationale, the nature of TMC may allow social media users to construct humblebrags more effectively than in face-to-face (FtF) settings because people can take time to contemplate and edit the message to achieve a delicate balance between self-praise and modesty by embedding positive qualities within complaints or humble statements.

The second feature of TMC – communal visibility – is particularly concerned with social networking sites (SNSs). Private messaging on social media is often for one-on-one interaction, whereas status updates and wall posts are, by default, accessible to everyone, leading to a wider potential audience review (Bazarova and Choi 2014). The public visibility allows diverse groups of online users to coexist, and thus collapses multiple audiences into a single context (Marwick and boyd 2011). In this collapsed context, social media users may construct self-presentation based on their perceptions of the “imagined” audience rather than their actual audience (Bazarova and Choi 2014; Litt 2012). Audience diversity complicates self-presentation because presenters need to adopt certain strategies to fulfill different self-presentational goals in order to address different audience values simultaneously. In particular, following the two-dimension self-presentation approach (Leary and Kowalski 1990), people seek to appear warm and to maintain relational closeness with their strong ties (i.e., friends and family members) through humble and complaining expressions. They may also want to appear competent and obtain respect from someone they feel less familiar with (Tice, Butler, Muraven, and Stillwell 1995) through self-praise. Therefore, people's desire to elicit sympathy and to impress others simultaneously in the interaction with a diverse audience may encourage more use of humblebrags on social media.

With respect to the receivers, a theoretically fruitful question to ask is whether humblebrags would be judged differently on social media relative to FtF or other communication platforms. Drawing on the hyperpersonal model (Walther 1996), the absence of physical and non-verbal cues (e.g., visual and audial cues) provided in FtF conversations allows the receivers to fill in the blanks about missing information, and thus they [the receivers] tend to exaggerate the self-portrayal of the presenters and to generate an idealized impression of them. Moreover, research on interpersonal deception suggests that reduced non-verbal cues in text-based TMC may attenuate the negative effects of deceiving motives because it would be more difficult for receivers to detect deception (Vrij 2000). By the same token, the negative impacts of humblebrags may be reduced in the TMC environment, as receivers

may be less able to detect the insincere intent underlying humblebrags. However, insincere self-presentation, after all, is not identical to lying; perhaps, receivers can see through the ulterior motives of bragging equally well through TMC and FtF. In support of this proposition, a recent experiment examined the effects of a CEO's communication styles and mediums on receivers' investment judgments (Grant et al. 2018). Results showed that investors were less willing to invest in a company if the CEO humblebragged about the firm's performance than if the CEO either bragged or was modest, regardless of the medium of interaction, whether through Twitter or conference call. Considering that limited research exists in this field, future studies could examine whether and why humblebrags can be judged differently across communication media in different contexts.

5.2 Compliments and humblebrags on social media

While psychological research has a focus on the construction of humblebrags via TMC and the effects of using humblebrags on interpersonal impressions in TMC, studies from a pragmatics perspective provide a more comprehensive understanding of actual complimenting behavior in social media and its linguistic realizations (see Placencia and Lower 2017, for an overview).

With specific technology features presented in social media, prior literature suggests that people use the "Like" button on Facebook for compliment response (Placencia, Lower, and Powell 2016). For humblebrags, existing studies have shown a common use of hashtags on Twitter and Instagram. Hashtags on social media can serve as interpersonal bonds because messages appended with the hashtags presuppose to have "ambient audience" who may want to share or contest the values constructed in the messages (Zappavigna 2014). Often, the humble elements are embedded in hashtags appended to humblebragging posts. For example, consumers often mention brand names* to self-praise their wealth, taste and knowledge. In order to avoid the negative evaluations from the audience that may be derived from self-praise, consumers may share negative experiences by using humble and complaining hashtags (e.g., "My whip for the day. Oh the places we will go! #Mercedes #notmine") (Sekhon, Bickart, Trudel, and Fournier 2016: 18). Other hashtag examples, taken from Zappavigna (2014), include "#badmom" or "#badparent", appending with tweets such as "Just split wine on son's homework diary" (p. 220), and "I put her in the closet" (p. 216). In another study, Dayter (2014) found that ballet students in a community humblebragged on Twitter. Some strategies that they used include explicit self-praise with disclaimers and/ or complaints (e.g., "My iPhone 5 is here! Too bad I am still on my 4S contract... #iphoneproblems" (p. 97).

In all, these examples suggest that humblebrags can occur on social media, especially in some professional communities and around particular topics. How other

members in the community may judge and react to the humblebrags may depend on the community norms and community of practice (Dayter 2014). Furthermore, social media features like hashtag through text-based TMC have metalinguistic functions of self-presentation, which may complicate the meanings and shape the pragmatics of humblebrags in social media (Matley 2018). As a result, how receivers make sense and evaluate humblebrags on social media warrants close examination in future research.

5.3 A study on humblebrags and social judgments

While existing research on modified self-praise primarily draws on pragmatics or discourse analytic approaches, here we take a social psychological perspective and report on an experiment to examine the effectiveness of humblebragging – the modified self-praising speech act – against bragging in social judgments of liking and sincerity on Facebook.

Since few studies, except Sezer et al. (2018), have provided empirical evidence that humblebragging is an ineffective self-presentation strategy, the present study firstly aims to explore if the main findings in Sezer et al. (2018) still hold in a specific social media platform – Facebook. We hypothesized that humblebragging will engender lower liking and perceived honesty, and lower perceived sincerity of the presenter than bragging (H1). In addition, social media allows self-presentation to be shared publicly, for example, through a wall post on Facebook, and is thus available to others (Walther, Van Der Heide, Hamel, Shulman 2009). The warranting principle (Walther and Parks 2002) posits that when people make judgments about others online they assign more credence to information that cannot be manipulated by the presenters themselves. Furthermore, the valence of others' comments may affect social judgments, with negative messages weighted more heavily than positive messages (Kellermann 1989). In this regard, we predicted that negative comments indicating other users' negative perceptions of the self-presentation (e.g., are you showing off?) can undermine liking and perceived sincerity of the presenter, compared to positive comments suggesting other users' positive perceptions of the self-presentation (e.g., that's awesome!) (H2).

We created 30 experimental stimuli containing a mock-up of a Facebook status update (i.e., a status update followed by two comments). These stimuli were designed to reflect differences in (a) self-presentation styles (i.e., humblebrags vs. brags) and (b) other users' comments on the self-presentation (i.e., positive, negative, not available), which rendered the experiment a 2 X 3 between-subject design. Two independent research assistants selected five typical humblebrags from a public dataset constructed by Wittels (2012) and created another five bragging statements that involved the same content as the humblebrags with no humble or

complaining components. For example, “I left my book in the helicopter. Haven’t even finished reading. Sad” is a humblebrag, whereas “Reading my favorite book in the helicopter. Life is great!” is a brag. The research assistants also created both positive (e.g., Awesome, You are amazing!) and negative comments (e.g., Show off, Stop bragging). The full list of the stimuli employed can be seen in the Appendix.

In total 60 undergraduate participants from Stanford University were randomly assigned to one of the six conditions. Depending on the assigned condition, each participant read either three humblebragging or three bragging status updates randomly drawn from the stimuli sample and saw comments on these statements that were either positive, negative or not available. Participants reported on measures of liking, perceived sincerity of the presenter, and perceived honesty of the Facebook posts on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *Very little* to 5 = *Very much*): “How much do you like this person?”, “How sincere do you think this person is?”, and “How honest do you think this person’s Facebook post is?”. They were also asked to provide open-ended responses to a question asking why they liked or disliked each self-presentation.

We conducted two-way ANOVAs (self-presentation X comment type) for hypotheses testing. For perceived liking, neither the main effects of self-presentation [$F(1, 54) = 2.90, p = .09$] and comment type [$F(2, 54) = 1.66, p = .20$], nor the interaction effect between the two factors was significant [$F(2, 54) = 1.44, p = .22$]. For perceived honesty and perceived sincerity, while the main effects of self-presentation [$F_s < 1, p_s > .05$] and comment type [$F_s < 1, p_s > .05$] were not significant, significant interaction effects between the two factors emerged [$F(1, 54) = 3.22, p = .048, \eta^2 = .11$; $F(1, 54) = 5.93, p < .01, \eta^2 = .18$].

Post-hoc analyses showed that humblebragging posts ($M = 3.13, SE = .36$) were perceived as less honest than bragging posts ($M = 4.08, SE = .40$) when they received negative comments from others, $t(54) = -1.75, p = .08$. Similarly, humblebraggers were perceived as less sincere ($M = 3.10, SE = .32$) than braggers ($M = 3.96, SE = .36$) when presented with negative comments, $t(54) = -1.8, p = .07$. However, in the absence of others’ comments, humblebraggers ($M = 4.39, SE = .29$) were perceived as more sincere than braggers ($M = 3.33, SE = .29$), $t(54) = 2.57, p = .01$.

Our qualitative analysis of the open-ended questions revealed several themes explaining why participants liked or disliked humblebragging statements. Some participants viewed humblebrags as amusing and funny, while some felt uncomfortable. Most participants, however, showed little interest in strangers’ self-presentation styles (e.g., “s/he wasn’t worth my time”). This observation suggests that the relationship with the speaker may play an important role in how humblebrags affect liking. People may be more tolerant of humblebrags and may interpret this style of self-presentation more positively when the presenters are family or friends to whom they feel close (Sezer et al. 2018).

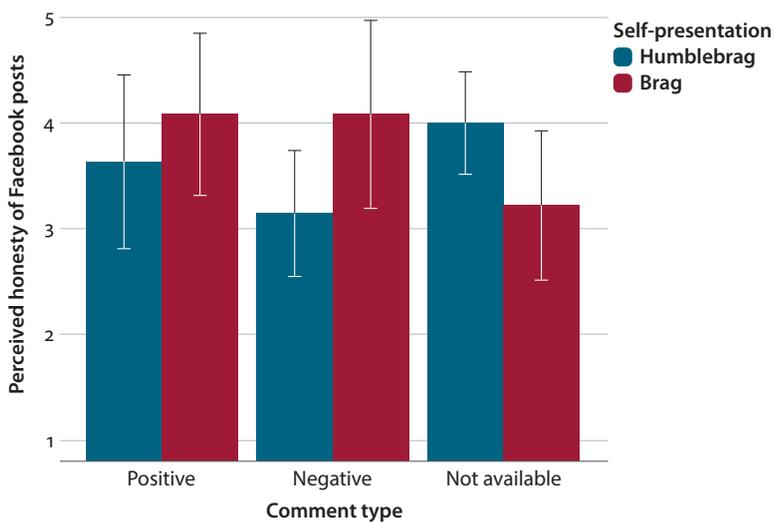


Figure 1. Perceived honesty of Facebook posts as a function of comment and self-presentation type

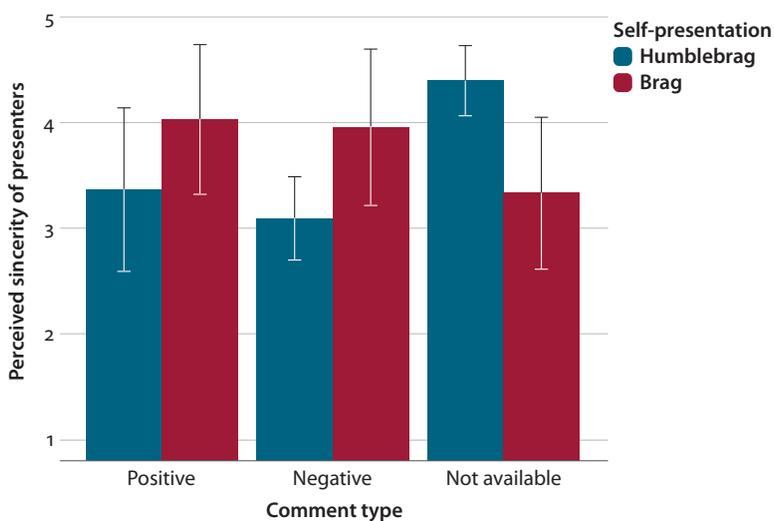


Figure 2. Perceived sincerity of presenters as a function of comment and self-presentation type

6. Conclusion

We defined humblebrags as a modified self-praise speech act in which speakers incorporate self-praise expressions and modesty modifications in a single statement. Psychologists argue that speakers' desire to obtain both respect and affection from audiences may drive the use of humblebrags. However, humblebragging may be ineffective managing interpersonal impression to the extent that it indicates the insincere intentions of the self-presentation.

The act of humblebragging has been widely adopted in both interpersonal and organizational communication via multiple media, especially social media. The publicness affordance and asynchronous communication on social media not only encourage speakers to construct humblebrags, but may also complicate the judgments made about humblebrags by the receiver. In a study of how modified self-praise can shape social judgments, we provided evidence for humblebragging being an ineffective self-presentation strategy due to lack of perceived sincerity and honesty in the presence of negative comments.

In conclusion, speakers construct humblebrags using multiple strategies, including those associated with compliment and compliment response in pragmatics research, and those related to self-presentation in social psychological research. Further examination is needed to advance our understanding of the linguistic construction of humblebrags and the interpersonal effects of humblebragging in different contexts and media.

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Appendix

Table 1. Status updates with friends' comments used in the experiment

Self-presentation type	Examples	Comment type	Examples
Brag	Here I am, reading my favorite book in the helicopter. Life is great!	+	Awesome; you are amazing
		-	Show off; bragging much?
	Just crashed my car into my other car, in my own driveway! Don't worry, I can afford.	+	Hope you are okay; still love your cars though
		-	Show off; not impressed
	I'll have a private dinner in a private dining room with our dean. What a day!	+	Amazing; enjoy! Heard he's awesome
		-	Not impressed; probably not a good thing
	I love having maids in my house. I can finally go workout instead of doing the dishes!	+	Come to the gym with me next time; awesome
		-	Bragging much? Must be nice, huh?
I just made a donation to my two alma maters. Proud alum of Stanford and Harvard!	+	Great schools!; glad to see you're doing well	
	-	Show off; not impressed	
Humblebrag	I left my book in the helicopter. Haven't even finished reading ☹️	+	Awesome; you are amazing
		-	Boooo-hooo; stop bragging!
	Just crashed in a major car accident... In my own driveway... Involving two of my own cars. #BestDayEver	+	Hope you are okay; still love your cars though
		-	Show off; we are not impressed
	Private dinner in a private dining room with a dean. Wow. Feels like I am in trouble	+	Amazing; enjoy! Heard he's awesome
		-	Not impressed; probably not a good thing
	Maids leave my house so that I can finally go workout!!! #Takingforever	+	Come to the gym with me next time; awesome
		-	Must be nice, uh?; stop bragging
Graduating from 2 top universities means you get double the calls asking for money/donations.	+	Great schools!; glad to see you're doing well	
	-	Show off; not impressed	

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The present volume focuses on complimenting behavior, including the awarding of (self-)praise, as manifested on social media. These commonplace activities have been found to fulfil a wide range of functions in face-to-face interaction, discursal and relational amongst others. However, even though the giving of compliments and praise has become a pervasive practice in online environments, it remains a largely underexplored field of study within pragmatics. Self-praise is an activity that appears at the present time to be rapidly gaining ground online, and the various functions it performs clearly also need further investigation. The different contributions to this ground-breaking volume – 12 in total – aim to address this gap in research by exploring and shedding light on a number of aspects of these phenomena in a range of languages and language varieties. New socio-digital contexts are examined, supported in some cases by social networking sites not previously studied in complimenting behavior research. These include Facebook, Instagram, Renren, Twitter, as well as web forums, message boards and live text commentary.

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