

A Sociolinguistic Study of Compliments in Iraqi Arabic

Dr. Ibrahim Khidhir Sallo

Instructor

University of Dohuk

College of Arts

1. Abstract:

The study deals with the phenomenon of Compliments in Iraqi Arabic (henceforth IA). It is based on the analysis of compliments collected through social participation and personal observation of everyday interaction in our speech community. The paper is mainly based on the sociolinguistic analysis of one hundred forms of questionnaire given to Translation students at Mosul University. The linguistic part includes the lexical, semantic and syntactic considerations of compliments. The sociolinguistic part deals with the influence of some sociolinguistic variables on complimenting (i.e., "topic", "setting" and "participants" including their age, sex, education, urban vs. rural, solidarity vs. power, and intimacy vs. formality). The study also includes: (i) a comparison between compliments and other speech acts (ii) the functions of compliments in IA. (iii) developing sociopragmatic competence of foreign learners of IA, and (iv) cross-cultural differences of compliments. The findings are expected to reveal that compliments in IA are formulaic in nature. This implies the semantic and syntactic regularity. The study sums up with significant conclusions and recommendations.

2. Introduction:

2.1. The Problem:

The use of 'compliments' as a speech act has received little attention from sociolinguists in Iraq. Moreover, it has been neglected by textbook designers in our country. The study deals with the topic so as to find out the lexical/semantic and syntactic formulas of compliments in IA, Moreover, the study is hoped to shed light on the



influence of 'topic', 'participants' and 'setting' on compliments. The study is also expected to refute the misconception that compliments have no functions. Therefore, the value of this study is significant for textbook designers in order to take the findings especially the cultural differences of compliments into account.

2.2. The Hypotheses:

The study is expected to prove the following hypotheses :(i) complimenting is a systematic and rule-governed speech act, (ii) compliments have semantic and syntactic patterns, (iii) complimenting is correlated with some extra-linguistic variables (i.e., topic, participants and setting) and (iv) since complimenting is both formally and functionally rule-governed sociolinguistic phenomenon, the study is hoped to investigate the functional motivations of compliments in Iraq.

2.3. The Objectives of the Study:

The value of this paper is theoretical as well as practical. The study attempts to shed light on complimenting in IA including its nature, types, causes, linguistic and extra-linguistic factors imposed on it. The empirical part will focus on the effect of the sociolinguistic variables on compliments with reference to 'topic', 'participants' and 'setting'. The statistical results of the sociolinguistic analysis of IA compliments are hoped to answer: what is a compliment?. How to compliment? What are the main factors influencing expressing compliments? What are the main strategies of expressing compliments? What are the compliment intensifiers in IA? What are the most common compliment expressions in IA?

2.4. Data Collection:

The data were collected via a sociolinguistic sample of 100 college students from Department of Translation at Mosul University during the academic year 1993/1994 to find out the ways in which compliments are performed in IA, by setting 20 discourse situations to be as a constant element in the study. All the respondents who acted the 'role play' technique are native speakers of Arabic. They are 50 males versus 50 females. Their ages range from 20 to 24. A list of situations was given to the informants and the

researcher has to take note of the possible topics, linguistic formulas and how the compliments would change if the sociolinguistic variables (i.e., topic, setting and participants including their age, sex, social status, education, degree of their familiarity and intimacy, etc.) were changed. The interactants were asked: How do you compliment in the following situations? This allowed for a free compliment response. As for instructions and descriptions of the relevant situations they were given in the native language of the respondents. One of the advantages of carrying out data collection in this way is that compliments occur less frequently and are more situation-dependent than other speech acts although the best approach in collecting data is the ethnographic approach, i.e., the collection of spontaneous speech in natural setting but one of the disadvantages of it is that it needs a long period of time. However the situations of this study were designed in such a manner that the 'role play' looked like real situations (Sallo 1989: 57-60).

3. Compliments in Iraqi Arabic:

3.1. The Linguistic Analysis of Compliments in Iraqi Arabic:

In Standard Arabic, exclamation is expressed by 'ni9ma' (how good), 'bi?sa' (how bad), 'maa' (how), as well as some other expressions. For example (i) 'ni9ma ar-rajulu 9alyun' (How good (or what a good man) Ali is!), (ii) 'bi?sa maa sana9a 9aliyun' (How bad what Ali did! or What a bad thing Ali did!) (Kharma 1989: 106).

This part deals with the linguistic analysis of compliments' in IA at three different levels, i.e., lexical, semantic and syntactic. Here they are:-

3.1.1. Lexical Considerations of Compliments in Iraqi Arabic:

Arabic lexical items have various frequencies, namely, some of them are very frequent whereas others rarely occur, Function items are not used while content words are commonly used. As far as content lexical items are concerned, adjectives are more common than other parts of speech. The most common adjectives are the following:

'raai9' (in good mood) 'rahiib' (terrific), 'Hulwa' (beautiful), 'faakhar' (luxurious), 'fadhii9a' (fantastic), 'Tayba' (delicious), 'muHtaram'

(respectable) , '9awii' (strong), 'mumtaaz' (excellent) , 'sarii9' (fast) , 'zeen' (good, fair), 'madhbuut' (punctual, exact), 'razeen' (well-behaved), 'xajuul' (shy), 'rasiiq' (nimble), 'mua?addab' (polite), '?aniiq' (elegant) '9aaqla' (well-mannered), 'Habbaaba' (lovely) , 'saaHira' (charming), 'dhakiya' (clever).

It seems that compliment adjectives are used by women more than by men, the data include many examples of using adjectives , e.g.

1. "?akla kulash Tayba".
(A very delicious dish.)
2. "Suura raai9a" .
(A wonderful picture.)
3. "Sudag dhakii".
(You are really clever.)
4. "9ayuunkii saaHira".
(Your eyes are charming.)

Verbs are also frequently used in compliments. The most common ones are the following :

'takhabul' (He's gone crazy) , 'tajanana' (It makes one crazy) '?adamar' (Lit. It destroys), 'taqtul' (Lit. it kills), Here are some examples:

5. "Sudag takhableen hal yoom".
(Today you 're really fascinating)

6. "?ashoon 9uyuun tajanana"
(What charming eyes you have!)

For the nouns they are somewhat rare and they are mostly used in similes related to compliments e.g.

7. "?shoon Hachii mithil ?al-9asal".
(Your speech drops honey.)
8. "sarii9 mithil ?As-Saaruux."
(Fast as a rocket)
9. "---mithil ?al-malaak".
(Angel-Like)

10. “--Hulwa chanha Huuriya”
(As beautiful as a mermaid)

It is supposed that all IA lexical items which are used for the purpose of compliments should be loaded with positive meanings and cultural evaluation.

3.1.2 Semantic Considerations of Compliments in Iraqi Arabic:

Compliments should embody some lexical items which are loaded with positive semantic evaluation. Adjectives are the most frequent part of speech followed by verbs. As for the adjectives they are used as the base form and sometimes they are used in the form of superlative degree, e.g.

11. “?antii ?aHla waHda shaayifha liHad ?al?aan”.
(You are the most beautiful one I've ever seen.)

12. “kaan ?arwa9 hadaf sajalta”.
(That was the best goal you scored.)

13. “haadhi ?aTyab ?akla na?kulha”
(This is the most delicious dish I've ever had.)

The superlatives and the comparatives ‘aHla’ (the most beautiful), ‘?arwa9’ (The best...), ‘?aTyab’ (The most delicious) in the above sentences are followed by the nouns ‘waHda’ (one), ‘hadaf’ (goal) and ‘?akla’ (dish) respectively.

It happens that a compliment becomes as an exaggeration, e.g.

14. “maa kan ?aklat mithil haadhi ?al?akla, ?aSlan waaHid yaakul
?aSaaba9u min waraaha”.

(I have never tasted such a dish. It makes one eat his fingers.)

15. “qaSiidtak kaanat raai9a ?atayyir ?al-9aqal, taxabul, tajanana”.

(Your poem was fascinating. It makes one lose his mind, go crazy and become insane.)

In examples 14 and 15, the exaggeration is created through using more than one complimentary item and expression which sound illogical and unreasonable.

Compliments include a lot of intensifiers which precede adjectives. The most common ones are: ‘kulas’ (so, too, very), ‘heel’ (so, very). Here are some:

16. “kulash Hulu” (very beautiful)
17. “kulash shaaTar” (very clever, so bright)
18. “kulash qawiiya” (very strong)
19. “kulash maliiH” (very good)



20. "kulash zeen" (very good)

For 'Heel' it can precede or follow an adjective, e.g.

21. "Heel Tayab" (extremely delicious for food).

Or "Tayab Heel" (extremely delicious for food).

22. "Heel mu?adab" (very polite or extremely polite).

A simile should be distinguished from a metaphor since the latter does not imply the literal meaning (Levinson 1983 :151). Here are some examples:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 23. "mithil il ?al-9aruus" | (like a bride) |
| 24. "taala9 9abaalak malik" | (You look as if you were king). |
| 25. "sha9arha mithil al-Hariir" | (Her hair is like silk). |
| 26. "?antii beeda mithil ?al-gumar" | (You are as white as the moon). |
| 27. "Taala9 mithil ?alan diloona" | (I took you for Alan Dilon). |
| 28. "ka?anha warda" | (As if she were a flower). |
| 29. "?aj9alu baTiikha" | (as if he were a melon (for a baby)). |
| 30. "9abaalak pariis" | (as if it were Paris.) |
| 31. "9aruustak mithil ?al-malaak" | (Your bride is like an angel) |
| 32. "taktab mithil shakspiiir" | (you write as if you were Shakespeare) |
| 33. "Hulwa mithil ?al-gazaal" | (as beautiful as a deer). |
| 34. "mithil aS-Saaruukh" | (like a rocket). |
| 35. "sarii9 mithil at-Talqa" | (fast as a bullet). |
| 36. "9abaalak maraadoona" | (as if he were Maradona.) |
| 37. "?aj9alak zambuug" | (as busy as a wasp). |
| 38. "mithil ath-tha9lab" | (like a fox (of being foxy)). |
| 39. "taal9a mithil ?al-baTa" | (you look white and beautiful as a duck) |

40. "sha9rach 9abaalak dhahab" (you hair is golden as if it were gold)

41. "sayaartak mithi1 ?al-9aruus" (your car is fantastic as a bride.)

42 "Saghiir, nuunu mithil ?al-katkuut" (little like a chick.)

3.1.3. Syntactic Considerations of Compliments in Iraqi Arabic:

It has been noticed that most of the compliments in IA are expressed by using IA expressions whereas the standard patterns are not used. As in English most of the compliments are direct whereas the indirect ones can be found too. The most common patterns are the following :

1. ‘?ashoon’ + N. (Lit. What + N.), or ‘?ashloon’ +N. (Lit What + N.)
‘?ashoon’ + N. + Adj. (Lit What + N. +Adj.), or ‘?ashloon’ + N. + Adj.
(Lit. What +N. + Adj.) ‘?ashoon’ + N. + V. (Lit. What + N. + V.)
2. ‘?shgad’ + Adj. (Lit. How + Adj.) or ‘ashqad’ + Adj . ' (Lit. How + Adj.)
3. ‘khoosh’ + N. (Good + N.)

Here are some examples which illustrate that:

43. “?ashoon Hafla” (What a party!)
44. “?ashoon ?athaath” (What furniture!)
45. “?ashloon tasriiHa Hulwa”. (What a lovely hair-style)
46. “?ashoon ma9radh raai9” (What a wonderful fair)
47. “?ashoon dhawq yikhabul” (What a good taste you have)
48. “?ashloon 9ayuun tasHar” (What enchanting eyes you have!)
49. “?ashoon filim yijanan” (What an interesting film!)
50. “?ashgad mu?adab” (How polite he is !).
51. “?ashqad sarii9” (How fast you are!).
52. “khoosh maqaala” (What a good essay it is!)
53. “khoosh qaSiida” (Such a great poem !)
54. “khoosh dhawq” (Good taste !)

In the above examples the compliment patterns are similar to the English syntactic patterns. They sound as exclamatory sentences. For example, ‘?ashoon’ + ... or ‘?ashloon’ + ... stands for What a + ... whereas ‘?ashgad’ +... or ‘?ashqad’ + ... stands for How +

In Arabic , for ‘?ashoon’ followed by a noun, it can express positive or negative meaning depending on the attitude of the complimenter and whether he intends to compliment or criticize or make an irony and sarcasm.

The illocutionary force is based on the intonation and the way we utter the statement. So the paralinguistic and extra-linguistic features which affect the utterance should be taken into consideration.

As for ‘?ashoon’ + N. + Adj., the expression of compliments depends on the type of adjectives used; therefore, the role of nouns as a topic for compliment is insignificant unless it is followed by an adjective with positive meaning otherwise it will not be a compliment, e.g.

55. “?ashoon ?usluub Hulu” (What a lovely style it is!)

The above sentence can be considered as a compliment since ‘?ashoon +N. +Adj.’ is not necessarily a compliment but the adjective ‘hulu’ which modifies the noun ‘?usluub’ has positive evaluation. Accordingly, if we put the sentence as follows ‘?ashoon ?usluub rakiik’ (What a poor style it is!), this sentence is not a compliment but a harsh criticism. The same explanation is

applicable to the pattern ‘?ashoon + N.+V.’ because the verb should have positive implication, e.g.

56. “?ashoon ?ughniya takhabul” (What a fascinating song it is!)
The use of the verb 'takhabul' makes the word '?ughniya' sound good while if we say:

57. “?ashoon ?ughniya ?tfaTas dhihik”
(What a ridiculous song!) (What a song which sounds funny and laughable).

The use of the ‘?atfatas dihik’ (funny and laughable) makes the word ‘?ugniya’ (song) sound funny and laughable.

As for ‘?ashgad’ or ‘?ashqad’ followed by an adjective, the type of the adjective gives the recipient the impression whether it is compliment or not, e.g.

58. “?ashgad maltazam bil-waqit”
(How punctual you are!)

The use of the word ‘maltazam’ (punctual) gives the addressee the impression that it is a compliment. But, if we

59. “?ashgad muz9ij” (What a nuisance!)

The use of ‘muz9ij’ (naughty) which carries bad connotation does not make it a complimentary statement.

As for the third pattern ‘khoosh’ + N. (good + N), the state of being a compliment or not depends on the type of the noun which should embody positive meaning. Moreover, the same noun can be explained in two different ways, that is to say, positive and negative implication depending on the way we utter it and intonation. In other words, the paralinguistic and extra-linguistic factors play a great role in making an utterance sound as a compliment, e.g.

60. “khoosh muHaadhara” (Good lecture !)

61. “khoosh ?akhlaaq” (Good manners!)



62. “khoosh taSarruf” (Good behaviour!)

3. 2. Sociolinguistic Variables of Compliments in Iraqi Arabic:

3.2.1. Participants:

The concept of ‘participants’ refers to the persons sharing a speech act. They can be defined in terms of:

3.2.1.1. Age:

Age plays an important role in compliments. The acquisition of compliments comes unconsciously in the process of socialization. So, it is unexpected from children and babies to compliment. The questionnaire includes the following question 'when do you expect we acquire the strategy of compliments in our society ?' The informants answered it as follows:

16% claim that it comes at the age of 1.5.

20% claim that we acquire it since our childhood.

10% state that there is no fixed time for acquiring compliments.

20% state that the acquisition of compliments is the result of co-education and social intercourse.

6 % state that we acquire it at the age of 18.

5 % state that we acquire it after we finish our secondary school.

6 % assume that the Iraqis acquire the compliments when they join universities (But not all Iraqis join universities)

12% assume that Iraqis know how to compliment when they become mature.

20% state that the acquisition of compliments depends on the education of the parents but not on the age of the complimenter .

3 % do not give any answer.

It has been found that when a youth compliments an older one it is the result of personal interest or special purpose and it seems artificial whereas if an old man or woman compliments a boy or a girl it is the result of expressing a truth or an encouragement or offering an advice, e.g.

63. Youth: complimenter Old man: recipient

“?ash-shagla maHad yiTla9 min Hagha gheerak u ?anta

9ala gadha SaaHab qawl u fa9al”

(No one else can manage to do it for us. You do what you say or promise).

64. Old man: complimenter Youth: recipient

“?al-Haq yuqaal u biduun mujaamala, ?anta khoosh walad u ?ibin Halaal, walad 9aaqal u mu?adab u dhakii u saba9”.

(As a matter of fact, far of being complimenting you are a nice boy, well-behaved, polite, clever and brave).

3.2.1.2. Sex:

One of the questions in the questionnaire is related to sex differences and compliments (i.e., who compliment more men or women?). With reference to the percentages of the responses of the question, 56% claim that men compliment more than women while 44% claim that women compliment more than men. To my knowledge, men usually compliment more and somewhat, exaggerate especially in contexts of business. It is also noteworthy that there is sincerity in female compliments more than in male compliments. Furthermore, women compliment men freely in our society because men accept that while men do not have full freedom in complimenting women since they do not accept all compliments as a result of the socialization of women and the social conventions of our society and this assumption depends on the type of relationship between the he/complimenter and the she/recipient and whether it is intimate or formal.

As for the responses of the informants concerning the question: What are the most common topics for the compliments of men? The topics can be listed depending on the percentages of the informants as follows : jobs and profession, clothes and appearance, cars, money and business, behaviour and manners, personality , beauty, education and social status, bravery , sports, etc.

With regard to the question : what are the most common topics for the compliments of women? The following list stands for the percentages given by the respondents, i.e., clothes and appearance, beauty, hair-style, cooking, manners, make-up, social activities, children, of being dandy and nimble, face complexion, furniture, cars, etc.

It is clear from the two lists and from the personal observation that women concentrate on physical, materialistic and concrete objects



whereas men focus on abstract, impressionistic and spiritual aspects of life. This impression is also based on sex differences and language of women and men (Coates 1987:96-133).

Here are some examples of compliments given by men and women and how they reflect sex differences:

65. Female: “tasriiHatki takhabul, Taal9a tajaniin, taguuliin 9aruus”
(Lit. Your hair-style is fantastic and makes one crazy. You look like a bride.)

66. Male: “khoosh Hilaqa Taala9 dilooks”
(What a nice haircut 1 you look nice.)

67. Female: “?ashgad Hulu ?aj9alu wardaaya, k?annu baTiikha, 9abaaalak 9ajiinaaya, ?aykhabul hal katkuut”.
(Lit., How handsome he is 1 He looks as if he were a rose, a melon, dough.
He makes one lose his mind.)

68. Male: “Hulu, ?alla yiHfadhu...” (Nice (beautiful) God protect him).

69. Female: “tanuuratki Hulwa takhabul, rahiiba, ?akiid mustawrada lees la kashkha”.
(Lit. Your skirt is fascinating, fantastic, awful. Certainly it is imported.
Why not? you look smart).

70. Male: “?ashloon qaat Hulu taala9 spoort”.
(What a lovely suit!)

Regarding examples 67 and 68 it should be taken into consideration that for a baby it can be regarded as a property in our society and even we can compliment a person on having a good father or mother or wife, e.g.

71. “?ashoon ?ab 9andak, heeba kulu wazn”.
(What a good father you have! He is influential and has social status).

72. “hanyaalaki 9ala haay ?al?um, muthaqqafa ?aj9alha sadiiqqa”
(I wish I had a mother like yours. She is well-behaved and a deep thinker.)



73. “?ashoon zawja Habaaba u ?um beet 9indak”.
(What a lovely wife and a good housewife you have!)

3.2.1.3. Education:

The analysis shows that education is an effective element in the process of giving compliments. It has been observed that the uneducated people compliment more than the educated. This may be due to the fact that the educated are serious and even when they compliment they do that far away of being exaggerating and they usually avoid artificiality. Moreover, their compliments embody few adjectives and verbs which are markers of compliments. The limited use of compliments by the educated is likely to be attributed to their principles of avoiding crooked ways in satisfying their purposes in life. Some of the informants claim that the educated consider compliments as a type of hypocrisy and dualism. 72% of the respondents claim that the educated compliment less than the uneducated whereas 28% mention that the educated compliment more than the uneducated. Here are some examples which illustrate that:

74. Educated = “qaSiida Hulwa” (Nice Poem !)
75. Educated: “dhawq rafii9” (Good (nice or excellent) taste).
76. Uneducated: “?ashoon Suwar takhabul u tawagaf ?al-9aqal, sheetan, balwa, 9abqarii”.
(Lit. What bewildering pictures which stop thinking, what Devil, Satan and genius you are!)
77. Uneducated: “shanhu hal ?anaaqa, taala9 spoort, shiik, walla takhabul, fiit 9aleek mufaSala, tafSaal”
(What a bewitching elegance ! You look smart and chic.)
(Lit. You make one lose his mind. The suit fits you so much.)

It seems that the compliments of the educated are mostly simple whereas the compliments of the uneducated are mostly complex (i.e., more than one compliment given by the same complimenter to the same recipient in the setting). Education also plays a great role in giving greetings which are very often accompanied by compliments. It has been noticed that when the

educated greet they usually use the normal expressions whereas the uneducated use many complimentary expressions in addition to the greetings.

78. Educated: “marHaba” (welcome).

Receiver: “?ahlan wa marHaban.” (Lit. welcome and welcome).

79. Uneducated: “marHaba” (Hello or Hi).

Receiver : “?alaf hala, hala kul al-hal.a halaw 9eenii, halaw 9eenii, hala ?aghaatii, halaw taj ra?sii, halaw 9umrii, halaw galub. ?ashoonak Habiibii, mushtaaqiin ?alkum”

(Lit. One thousand welcome, welcome...Hello my eye , hello Sir,
hello my crown, hello my life, welcome my heart. How are you
my lover? I am very eager to see you).

The most common complimentary and courtesy expressions used in such cases are the following: ‘kabadii’ (Lit. my liver!), ‘Hayaatii’ (Lit. my life) ‘9ayuunii’ (Lit. my eyes!), ‘qalbii’ (Lit. My heart) ‘miit marHaba’ (Lit. one hundred welcome), ‘?alaf hala’ (Lit. one thousand welcome), ‘maay 9ayuunii’ (Lit. the water of my eyes, e.g. my tears), ‘?aghaatii’ (Lit. My Lord or My sir).

3.2.1.4. Urban vs. Rural:

As it is expected the people of the countryside are different from the people of urban centres as far as the degree, frequency and type of compliments are concerned , that is to say, the topics of compliments common in each domain are not the same since education is correlated with urban life. Therefore, the compliments of this domain are correlated with jobs, professions, business, arts, literature, academic life and degrees, success and promotion, climbing the socioeconomic ladder, and TV programmes and films. Whereas the common topics for rural areas are : everyday life, beauty and appearance, houses and furniture, of having babies, food and cooking , marriage, bravery, agriculture and animals. Here are some examples: .

80. Rural: “?ashoon ?ahduum ghaaliya, kashkha Taala9a”.

(What expensive clothes you are wearing! you look smart)

81. Urban: “?ashoon shiyaaka! ?ashoon ?anaaqa u tansiiq!”
(Lit., How elegant, smart and well-dressed you are!)
82. Rural; “khoosh beet 9abaalak qaSar, 9abaalak madrasa, 9abaalak qal9a.”
(Nice house as if it were a palace or a school. It looks like a castle !).
83. Urban: “maashaa ?alla khoosh beet kulash Hulu. ?a shoon dikoor ?ashgad maratab!”
(Thanking God. Nice house , very impressive. What a lovely decoration-.
How well-arranged it is !.)

In example No. 80, the lexical item ‘?ahduum’ is very common in the countryside while ‘malaabas’ is very common in cities. The use of the modifier ‘ghaaliya’ is the marker of being rich and belonging to the high class since the villagers suffer from a social gap between high class and low class. In example No. 81, the lexical items ‘shiyaaka’, ‘?anaaqa’ and ‘tansiiq’ are commonly used by the educated people in cities since they stand for good taste in selecting clothes. In example No. 82, the use of ‘qaSar’, ‘madrasa’ and ‘qal9a’ reflects that such buildings are not common in the rural environment and maybe because some villagers still live in cottages made of clay. On the contrary, the use of ‘dikoor’ and ‘marattab’ in example No. 83 represents having expensive and up to date furniture in cities.

3.2.1.5 Intimacy vs. Formality:

The occurrence of compliments depends on the intimate relationship between the complimenter and the recipient because the social distance and the formal relationship may limit the use of complimentary expressions between them. For instance, it is socially unacceptable to compliment somebody on the first occasion without having any demanding necessity because a compliment should have some requirements (i.e., complimenter, addressee, topic of compliment, and suitable situation). Here are some examples:

84. Intimate Relationship:

Speaker: “SabaaH ?al-kheer” (Good Morning).

Addressee: “SabaaH ?al-kheer 9eenii, halaw Habiibii”
(Lit. Good Morning my eye, Hello love).

85. Formal Relationship:

Speaker: “SabaaH ?al-kheer” (Good Morning).

Addressee: “SabaaH ?al-kheer!” (Good Morning)

86. Intimate Relationship:

Speaker; “Sudug ?anta fard kaatab maaku taka. ?aSlan kitaabatak tabachii ?al-Hajar. khoomaa Sarat shaksbiir”.

(Lit. Really you are an excellent writer. Your writing makes the rock weep.)

87. Formal Relationship:

Speaker: “?amal ?adabii raa?i9, intaaj badii9.”

(Fantastic masterpiece. A Fine Work.)

In example No. 84, the greeting is accompanied by courtesy expressions since it is an intimate relationship while the use of courtesy expressions when greeting strangers sounds strange and eccentric. In example No. 86, the expressions ‘Sudug’, ‘maakuu taka’, ‘tabachii ?al-Hajar and ‘khoomaa’ are purely colloquial and mostly used by the uneducated in the intimate domains whereas example No. 87 marks the complimenter of being educated and it gives the impression that the situation and the relationship are formal.

As a matter of fact, not all the topics are suitable for compliments among strangers in a formal setting since there are cultural constraints and social norms which limit the categories of compliments used by strangers whereas close friends have full freedom, and can comment on and compliment any aspect they like. In Iraq, the comment on appearance, make-up, hair-style, cooking, personal affairs, topics of everyday life is socially unacceptable and likely to create an offence and embarrassment if there is no intimate relationship between the speaker and the addressee. This sensitive issue should be emphasized in textbooks for foreign learners of Arabic language and those who are not familiar with Iraqi culture (for full details the reader may see section 3.6 and 4). Here are some unacceptable examples.

88. Employee —————> Employer

“?ashoon Hilaaqa Hulwa Taala9 dilooks”.

(What a nice haircut you have....)

89. Official —————> Manager

“shanhu hal kaskha, ?akhar mooda”

(What a nice appearance! The latest mode.)

The above examples are acceptable if there is a close and intimate relationship between the interlocutors.

3.2.1.6 Solidarity vs. Power:

This section sometimes overlaps with 'social status' and 'intimacy and formality' because the three headings deal with the three levels of relationships of interlocutors (i.e., Equal/Equal, Low/High, High/Low). Although this study does not give percentages of the frequency and type of compliments of each level because such details are beyond the scope of this paper. Anyhow, it is obvious that compliments are commonly used by 'equals' since there are no social restrictions against using them and the complimentary functions are direct and straightforward. For the other two levels, the functions of compliments are indirect, in other words, the complimentary utterances have 'illocutionary force' (Austin's term).

A compliment in a 'speech act' can be explained as follows: a compliment is not an 'act of speech' in the sense of parole but a communicative activity (i.e., a locutionary act) defined with reference to the intentions of the complimenter (i.e., the illocutionary force of the utterance) and the effects it achieves on the addressee (i.e., the perlocutionary effect of the utterance) (Crystal 1985 : 285).

It is expected that when a complimenter of low level compliments an addressee of high level he intends to flatter or to achieve some personal interests, in other words, it is a kind of hypocrisy whereas when a high level complimenter utters a complimentary expression he either encourages or wants to take the addressee as an example (the reader may see section 3. 4). Therefore, in examples 88 and 89, it is unexpected to have compliments on personal topics since the relationship is formal and not that intimate one to elicit compliments. Here are some examples of the three levels:

90. Equal/Equal:

“?alaf mabruuk, sayaartak Hulwa ?aj9alha 9aruus”

(Lit. Thousands of congratulations. Your car is nice and it is so beautiful like a bride).

91. Low/High:

“biduun mujaamala , Hadratak afdhal mudiir jaana liHad ?al?aan”
(Honestly speaking, (without being flattering) you are the best manager we have ever had).

92. High/Low: lecturer—————> student

“maqaala jayida, usluub jayid , 9unwaan munaasab”.
(Good essay, nice style, suitable title)

3.2.2. Setting:

‘Setting’ refers to ‘situation’ or social situation which refers to the physical and psychological setting and the roles of the speakers including their rights and obligation and the congruency of place and time (Sallo 1983:16). The role of setting cannot be denied in the sociolinguistic fields of study. The setting should be suitable for the compliment otherwise the sociopragmatic failure will occur as a consequence of the unsuitability of the situation. For instance, academic compliments may take place between teachers and pupils in the school domain while they rarely take place in a market or a bus or any other unsuitable place. Here is an example:

Complimenter	= Student
Recipient	= Lecturer
Topic of compliment	= lecturing
Setting	= University domain

93. “fi91an kaanat muHaadhara qayyima u tatdhaman ashyaa? jadiida fii majaan 9ilim al-lugha.”

(Certainly, it was a good lecture which contained many new issues in the field of linguistics).

This compliment is acceptable as far as it occurs in the suitable domain and the appropriate setting whereas if the same speaker utters the same thing to the same addressee in unsuitable setting such as a cinema or a public place where the setting sounds laughable and funny for hearing such a message the compliment would be unacceptable.

3.2.2. Topic:

The term 'topic' refers to the apparent content or referent of speech or 'subject matter'. With regard to 'topic' two questions were given to the informants (i.e., (i) what are the most common parts of women's bodies in compliments? and (ii) what are the most common parts of men's bodies in compliments?) In fact, there is a kind of overlapping between topic and sex in this study, therefore, the reader is referred to (3.2.1.2) to have a clear idea about the most common topics for males and females in Iraq since there are sex differences in this domain.

For question No. 1 above, here is a list of the most common body parts of women used by complimenters. They are arranged according to percentages : eyes 30%, face 16%, hair 16%, of being nimble 12%, tallness 11%, chest and breasts 5%, waist 4%, lips 3%, nose 1%, arms 1%, facial expressions 1%.

For question No. 2 above, here is a list of the most common body parts of men used by complimenters. They are arranged according to percentages ^ tallness 25%, eyes 15%, body 12%, face 8%, personality 8%, of being nimble 7%, appearance 6%, hair 5%, of being handsome 4%, moustache 3%, lips 3%, fingers 2%, nose 2%.

Another question was given to the informants to list the most common topics used by complimenters. The list was as follows: beauty, eyes, and body 32%, personality, manners and principles 16%, appearance and clothes 13%, tallness 9%, richness 8%, cleverness 7%, manner of speaking and fluency 6%, profession and academic career 5%, self-confidence 4%.

In Iraq, it is acceptable to compliment people on their properties but what is considered as a property varies from one country to another. Holmes (1987: 544) states that in Newzealand compliments to a husband on his wife will reflect considering her as a property which would be socially unacceptable except between close friends but not all women would accept that. This is applicable to Iraq. Holmes adds that it is unacceptable to compliment a friend on his false teeth. Perhaps this would be appropriate between family members. Therefore, compliments on age or wealth are acceptable in some speech communities but not in others.

3.3. Compliments and Other Speech Acts:

The expressions such as 'ma9a as-salaama' (good bye), 'SaabaaH al-kheer' (good morning), 'as-salaam 9alaykum' (peace on you), 'marHaba'

(welcome) and 'shukran' (thank you) are learnt by children at an early stage. Children are very often reminded publicly to say 'marHaba' (welcome), 'shukran' (thank you), etc. as a part of the socialization process. This is not true of compliments since complimenting cannot be taught explicitly. Some times, compliments can serve other functions, e.g., as an alternative for thanking or greeting. Compliments, unlike thanks, greetings and partings, do not have fixed positions within an interaction. This is shared by Manes (1981:125-129).

As far as teaching of compliments is concerned, Holmes (1987 :535) assumes that the formulaic nature of compliments makes the teaching of compliments possible as the other speech acts.

3.4. The Purpose of Using Compliments in Iraqi Arabic:

Compliments are formally and functionally ruled since they are not used at random. They express the positive (Manes 1981: 123 , 124) . Some compliment makers which are loaded with cultural meanings function as intensifiers.

The functions of compliments are based on the intentions of complimenter which are correlated with the relationships of the participants, the topics of compliments , degree of familiarity and intimacy, the socioeconomic levels of the interlocutors, etc.

With regard to the questions related to this section which were given to the informants (i.e., whether the compliments are necessary or not) the percentages were as follows: positive and negative 14%, positive 56%, negative 15%, necessary 40%, unnecessary 22%, necessary and unnecessary 38%.

Some purposes of using compliments are positive while some others are negative . The latter is the reason why many people consider complimenting as hypocrisy, dualism or of being double-faced. But, it should be stressed that complimenting is a part of the social convention in our speech community . So we should not underestimate the cultural weight of all speech acts including compliments.

It is believed that complimenters of lower level are likely to compliment people of higher level to flatter. The analysis of this paper shows that compliments 'downwards' focus mostly on performance whereas the

compliments ‘upwards’ or between ‘status equals’ are mostly related to appearance or possession. This observation is shared by Holmes (1987: 532, 533) .

3.5. Developing Sociolinguistic Competence of Foreign Learners of Iraqi Arabic

The acquisition of compliments is a part of the socialization and it is illogical to believe that a child of six years would compliment appropriately. This observation seems to be universal and it is not confined to I.A.

The lexical, semantic and syntactic considerations of compliments in IA reflect the regularity of compliment formulas in it. This systematic occurrence refutes the assumption that this speech act is random. In other words, compliments are 'rule-governed' and have ‘social constraints’ and ‘functional incentives’ behind them.

As far as learning IA by foreign learners is concerned, it is expected that they will face very few problematic areas since it is expected that languages share many similarities in compliments. The only differences might be related to cultural differences especially with regard to topics. So, the Arabic textbook designers should focus on the most frequent topics in IA so as to develop the awareness of the cultural similarities and differences between the IA and the native language of the learners.

It is also recommended to expose learners of Arabic to authentic data and they should be aware of the appropriate topics and the possible functions of compliments.

3.6. Cross-cultural Differences of Compliments

The expression of compliments is an aspect of communicative competence which may differ from one culture to another . It is often raised whether it is possible to teach compliments since some believe that they are absorbed unconsciously in the process of learning teachable material. Teachers should remind learners of any language of the cross-cultural differences in expressing compliments (Holmes 1987: 523,524).

Holmes (1987: 525) states that some informants claim that they find difficulty in accepting a compliment under the influence of traditions (i.e., not to accept a gift or a compliment) since they assume that they are insincere. This observation seems to be applicable to Iraqi culture. Accordingly, individuals of different backgrounds do not agree on what is considered as a compliment and it may create an offence to the addressee and embarrass the complimenter.

To consider an utterance as a compliment, a learner should notice the clues, e.g. ‘?shoon sayyaara Hulwa’ (What a nice car!). This is considered a compliment since it fits one of the compliment formulas. Moreover, it has to be said to somebody who has a car. It can occur between friends on the first occasion of seeing the car by the complimenters (Holmes 1987: 537).

Misunderstandings may occur if the interlocutors do not share the same cultural backgrounds, e.g.

Foreign complimenter: “What a lovely watch you have!”
Iraqi recipient : “Please take it.”

In this example, the complimenter would be embarrassed of being offered the watch he had admired. This response is expected by anyone familiar with Iraqi culture. Whereas a different response is expected by a foreign addressee.

Some topics are compliments in a culture whereas in other cultures they are not, e.g. Weight loss, large families, etc. The identification of them is the task of the language teacher otherwise misunderstandings may occur. The use of the appropriate linguistic strategies of compliments should be acquired by sociolinguistic competence learners (Holmes 1987: 527).

Compliments on some topics may be more acceptable than others in a particular context e.g. a student who expresses his appreciation to a lecture he has attended is unlikely to create embarrassment as in the case of a comment on the lecturer’s appearance (Holmes 1987: 528).

4. Conclusion:

The study shows that compliments in IA have lexical, semantic and syntactic formulas. The analysis reflects the regularity of this speech

act which occurs systematically but not at random. Therefore, this sociolinguistic phenomenon is 'rule-governed' and 'social-constrained'.

It has been noticed that most of the differences between IA and other languages are cross-cultural. In writing textbooks for foreign learners of Arabic in general and IA in particular the designers of textbooks should focus on the differences since they create problematic areas for the learners. Most of the differences are related to topics which may be socially appropriate in a culture while unsuitable in other cultures. That is to say, the most common topics of compliments in our society might not be the same in other speech communities. In addition, the most common topics of compliments for males in Iraq might not be the same ones for the English males and the same supposition might be true of females in the two communities.

If learners of any language do not take into account the relevant social factors influencing a compliment in a particular setting they are expected to make confusion between the norms of the mother tongue and that of the target language and its culture and this may create unintended offence (Holmes 1987: 534).

It has also been observed that the IA compliments embody exaggerated forms which reflect the eastern culture and the Arabic conventions in dealing with compliments. In other words, the IA compliments are mostly complex (i.e., the use of more than one complimentary expression in the utterance) and this is the reason why the translated Arabic compliments into English in this paper sometimes sound funny and wordy.

To sum up, this study sheds light on a very virgin and interesting area but it does not exhaust the topic and it asks for further future studies to give a full comprehensive picture of the subject.

References

Brouwer, Dede (1982). "The influence of the Addressee's Sex on Politeness in Language" *Linguistics*. Vol. 20, pp 697-711.

Brown, P. (1980). "How and why women are more polite: Some evidence from a Mayan Community". In McConnell-Ginnet, Borker & Furman (Eds). 111-

36.

Coates, Jennifer. (1987). *Women, men and language*. Longman, UK.

Herbert, Robert K. (1990) "Sex-based Differences in Compliment Behaviour]" *Language in Society*. Vol. 19, No. 2 201-24.

Holmes, Janet and Dorothy F. Brown. (1987). "Teachers and Student Learning about Compliments." *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 21, No. 3 .

Kharm, N. and Ali Hajjaj. (1989). *Errors in English among Arabic speakers: Analysis and Remedy*, Longman.

Lakoff, R. (1973). "Language and Women's Place" *Language in Society*. 2,45-80.

Levinson, Stephen C. (1987). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge University Press.

Manes, J. and Wolfson, N. (1981). "The Compliment Formula". In F. Coulmas (Ed.) *Conversational Routine* (pp. 115-132) Mouton: The Hague.

Olshtain, E. and Cohen, A. D. (1983). "Apology: a speech act set" In N. Wolfson and E. Judd (eds.) *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*. Rowley: Newbury House 18-35.

Sallo, Ibrahim (1983). *A Socio-psycholinguistic Study of Code-Switching*. Unpublished MA Thesis. University of Baghdad.

_____. (1981) . "A Sociolinguistic Study of A Apology in Iraqi Arabic." *Adab Al-Rafidayn* Vol. No. 20. Mosul University Press.

Searle, J. (1969). *Speech Acts*. Cambridge University Press.

Sims, Anntarie (1989). "The Compliment Sequence" *Southern Speech Communication Journal* Vol. 54, No. 2, pp.171-84.

Smith Hefner, Nancy (1988). "Women and Politeness: The Javanese Example"

Language in Society. Vol. 17, No. 4, pp. 535-54.

Trudgill, P. (1975). *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*.

Harmondsworth: Penguin.

17-1-09 1 am