

A Comparative Study of the Compliments and Compliment Responses between English and Persian TV Interviews

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a cross-cultural study of compliments and compliment responses in American and Persian TV interviews. Based on eight video-taped and transcribed interviews of Oprah Winfrey's programs with celebrities from MBC4 channel and eight Persian interviews conducted by the Iranian TV host Reza Rashid Pour with eight Iranian celebrities, the paper investigated the topic and the function of the compliments and the way interlocutors responded to the compliments in the Persian and American TV interviews. The project set out to examine the similarities and differences in the compliments and compliment responses of English and Persian TV interviews. The result of our analysis revealed that there are both similarities and differences between the complimenting behavior of English and Persian interlocutors when complimenting and responding to compliments in TV interviews. This study lends weight to the claim that complimenting behavior is cross-culturally varied and different.

Key words: compliments; compliment responses; taarof; media discourse; cross-cultural

INTRODUCTION

Compliments, as speech acts, are classified as expressives. According to Hatch (1994), expressives are expression of like and dislike, while a compliment is one form of speech act defined as an utterance containing a positive evaluation by the speaker to the addressee (Liu as cited by Al Falasi, 2007). Matsuoka (2003, p.1) maintains that compliments are an "intricate combination of positive evaluation, displayed good feelings, implicit friendliness, and half-admitted desire to please."

Compliments perform various functions but primarily and most obviously act as affective speech acts serving to increase or consolidate the solidarity between the speaker and the addressee. In brief, compliments have been said to grease the social wheels and thus to serve as social lubricants that create or maintain rapport (Wolfson, 1983). Hatch (1994) outlines four significant functions of compliments out of several others: First, compliments establish rapport and smooth the transition from greeting to the first topic of the conversation. Second, compliments reinforce and encourage good performance like a coach's compliment to an athlete. Third, compliments can be used for thanking like saying 'great dinner' to a cook; and the fourth function of the compliment is to soften criticism.

A topic may serve as the focus of a compliment. Based on Manes and Wolfson's (1981) classification, major compliment topics can be classified into 3 categories:

1. Appearance/possessions - Compliments on someone's appearance or possessions are the most common type of compliments in American English.
2. Performance/skills/abilities 'You did a good job!' and 'You are such a wonderful writer' are examples of compliments on performance/skills/abilities. Concise

compliments such as ‘Nice shot!’ are typically given by male speakers (Herbert, 1990).

3. Personality traits. Such comments as ‘Good boy’ and ‘You’re so sweet’ are compliments on the addressee’s personality traits. This category of compliments occurs less frequently than those on appearance/possessions and performance/skills/abilities (Holmes, 1988).

COMPLIMENT RESPONSES

Like all other linguistic phenomena, several communicational rules condition compliment response use. It seems that such rules are related in one way or another to the notion of the ethnography of speaking which presupposes that an appropriate use of a compliment or compliment response may recognize the presence of the interactants in a conversation (Hymes, as cited in Al Khatib and Fargal, 2001). Pomerantz was the first researcher who investigated the topic of compliment responses. She claimed that two general maxims of speech behavior conflict with each other when responding to a compliment (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 81-82). These conflicting maxims are, ‘agree with the speaker’ and ‘avoid self-praise’.

As can be seen in the following segment, adapted from Pomerantz as cited by Golato (2002), self praise routinely gets sanctioned by co-participants.

B: Sure. I have a lot of friends who would come to the funeral and say what an intelligent, bright, witty, interesting person I was.

A: They wouldn’t say that you were humble.

B: No. Humble, I am not.

Holmes as cited by Wang and Tsai (2003) developed three main categories of compliment responses: accept, reject and deflect or evade. She analyzed complimenting behavior in terms of Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory and considered compliments to be, on the one hand, positively affective speech acts, and on the other, potentially face-threatening acts, which account for the variety of compliment responses.

THE CONCEPT OF *TAAROF* IN IRANIAN CULTURE

Taarof is an aspect of routine cultural behavior among Iranians, used in their daily interactions with old and new acquaintances alike. It is a hollow system of flattery and false modesty to make others feel good; often, a practice of polite dissembling, where people express nice sentiments that they do not truly mean or feel (Fathi, 2004).

Rezaei (2007) tends to the belief that *taarof* has deep roots in the Iranian tradition of treating your guests better than your own family and being great hosts. *Taarof* is a verbal dance between the giver and the recipient until one of them agrees. It is a natural phenomenon that consists of refusing something that has been offered to you even though you want it, out of politeness. Or being forced to do something you really have no desire for, again out of politeness and fear of what ‘they will say’.

Fathi (2004, p. 2) believes that *taarof*, in short, is an inescapable part of the patterns of courtesy, deference and consideration for others that are integral to Iranians social life. Campbell (2006) proposes that speech has different function in Iran than it does in the West. While in the West, eighty percent of language is denotative; in Iran eighty percent of the language is connotative. That is to say in the West ‘yes’ generally means yes. In Iran, ‘yes’ can mean yes, but it often means *maybe* or *no*. The locution of exchange of *taarof* can change

depending on who offers *taarof* and whether the offer is sincere *samimaneh* or deceitful *chaploosaneh*.

Rezaei (2007) states *taarof kardan* (practising *taarof*) has three meanings:

1. Pleading somebody politely and insistently to do something or to accept a suggestion, invitation.
2. Polite rejection of an invitation or suggestion (which is a *taarof* itself!) despite an inner tendency to accept it.
3. Uttering polite and respectful statements to please or welcome somebody, this one can be put equivalent to compliment.

MEDIA DISCOURSE

Conversation is a complex phenomenon and so are the practical applications arising from it. The number of possibilities arising from conversational practices have clearly found a dimension in the context of mass media, and on TV, in particular (Gregori- Signes, 2000, p.195). O'Keeffe (2006, p. 33) suggests the following media categorization:

- There is a presenter/interviewer/ host who represents the broadcasting institution and he or she is a known public person.
- There is an interviewee/caller/guest who can be a celebrity/publicly known individual or can be someone from the private sphere.
- There is an audience either present in the studio at the time of recording and/or listening to or watching the interaction.

CROSS- CULTURAL STUDIES OF COMPLIMENTS

Cross-cultural studies concerning the use of compliments by United States English students of German using a Conversation Analysis have been carried out by Golato (2003) and Huth (2006). Findings of the studies suggest that United States speakers give appreciation token (such as 'thank you') whereas German speakers preferred to agree with the compliment. In a two-year ethnographic study, Yu (2005) contrasted how compliments and compliment responses differed in data collected in Boston and Taipei. The study found significant differences in cultural norms. The United States data showed a higher frequency of compliments. Sharifian (2005) investigated the differences among Persian and Australian English speakers in an academic context using both ethnographic methods and discourse completion tasks. The author was concerned with how Persian speakers communicate with the notion of *Shekastehnafsi*, which literally is translated into 'self-braking', the closest concept being 'modesty'. The author argues that although modesty exists as a word in both Persian and English, it is conceptualized differently in these two cultures. The Persian schema encourages speakers, who receive a compliment to downgrade it by attributing it to the speaker's talent, which was interpreted as inappropriate by academic interlocutors in an Australian university.

More recently, Cedar's (2006) contrastive study of compliment responses used by Thai non native speakers of English and American native speakers of English revealed significant differences in response to English compliments between the two groups. While Americans tended to accept compliments and elaborate positively in their responses, Thai speakers of English refrained from elaborating and used formulaic expressions in their responses.

Hence the compliment speech event can be the cause of misunderstanding and communication breakdown because of different norms of complimenting and responding to compliments. According to Holmes (1988), the primary function of a compliment is affective

and social rather than referential or informative. For any culture, a compliment must express approval of something that both parties, speakers and addressees, regard positively and it must be valued by the culture indicated (Manes, 1983). Yet, the ways in which people compliment and respond to the compliment vary culturally (Holmes, 1987; Manes, 1983). In this study compliments and compliment responses are taken into account. As Manes (1983, p. 119) states “A compliment is a structured speech act that reflects social values in the culture.” The goal of this study is to reveal differences between Iranian and American cultures in terms of complimenting and responding to compliments.

METHOD

DATA

The corpus of the English data studied was based on eight video-taped and transcribed interviews of the Oprah Winfrey’s talk shows from MBC4 channel. The programs selected for this study were recorded from September to December 2007. The interviewees included three actresses: Annette Benning (AB), Julia Roberts (JR) and Dakota Fanning (DF); two actors: Will Smith (WS) and his real life eight year old son, Jaden Smith (J), Will Smith’s daughter, Willow (W) , an entertainer Cedric (C) and an African American multimillionaire, Chris Gardner (CG), whose book, *The Pursuit of Happiness* had inspired a movie that Will Smith starred in. The corpus of the Persian data was collected through the same way, where eight interviews were video taped and transcribed. The interviews were conducted by the Iranian TV host Reza Rashid Pour with eight Iranian celebrities comprising four actors: Mohammad Reza Golzar (MRG), Shahab Hosseini (SH), Parviz Parastui (PP) and Reza Kianian (RK); two actresses: Golshifteh Farahani (GF) and Elham Hamidi (EH); a soccer player Ali Dai (AD) and a clergyman Naghavian (N). The reason for selecting a talk show and a TV interview was because media discourse in its narrowest sense can refer to the discourse of interaction in broadcast setting such as political interviews, chat shows, radio phone-ins, where two people are interacting and an audience is listening (O’Keeffe, 2006). Therefore, since both TV interviews and talk shows take place in similar institutionalized settings and their interlocutors have similar institutionalized turn taking rights, the authors opt for these two types of media discourse genres.

PROCEDURE

The data studied in this paper included the compliment event, which is composed of a compliment and the response to that compliment. The compliment events were selected out of 16 interviews (8 English and 8 Persian). The gender factor was not taken into account in the English and in Persian interviews. The Persian interviews included six men and two women, all of whom were celebrities selected randomly. Since the English data were recorded from a talk show, not a TV interview. After selecting, recording and transcribing the interviews to be investigated, the compliment speech events resulting in 42 English and 101 Persian compliment sequences were collected from each TV interviews. Compliments were classified according to their topic and function frequency. This frequency included the frequency of the compliments given by the host to the interviewees or by the interviewee to the host or by both of them to the spectators or the third person. In terms of compliment responses, they were classified according to Pomerantz’s (1978) classification (reproduced below) including: acceptances, rejections and solution type for two conflicting preference.

COMPLIMENT RESPONSES IN AMERICAN ENGLISH

Response Type	Example
I. Acceptances	A: That is beautiful. It really is. B: Thank you.
1. Appreciation token A compliments B, B accepts the compliment	
2. Agreement/second assessment A compliments B, B agrees with compliment assertion	A: The organ music came out so beautifully B: I thought it did too.
II. Rejections:	
1. Disagreements A compliments B, B disagrees with compliment assertion	A: Gee, hon. You look nice in that dress. B: Do you really think so? It's just a rag that my sister gave me.
III. Solution type for 2 conflicting preferences	
1. Question-neutral stance A compliments B B questions compliment assertion A confirms question/compliment	A: Those tacos were good. B: You like them? A: I loved them yes.
2. Evaluation shift (downgrade) A compliments B B scales down compliment assertion	A: Oh, it was just beautiful. B: Well thank you...uh I thought it was quite nice.
3. Evaluation shift (qualification) A compliments B B qualifies compliment assertion	A: Good shot. B: Not very solid though.
4. Referent shift (away from self) A compliments B B compliments other than self	A: You are a good rower, honey B: These are very easy to row, very light.
5. Referent shift (compliment return) A compliments B B compliments A	A: Ya sound (just) real nice. B: Yeah, You sound real good too.
6. Comment history A compliments B B comments on item/gives history	A: I love that suit. B: I got it at Boscov's.
7. Reinterpretation A compliments B B reinterprets compliment	A: I like those pants. B: You can borrow them anytime.

8. Ignoring

A compliments B

B ignores the compliment

A: You are the nicest person

B: Have you finished your essay yet?

(adapted from Pomerantz, as cited in Golato, 2002)

RESULTS

TOPICS OF THE COMPLIMENTS

In the English data a very frequent topic was about the ability of the compliment receiver; all the compliments about ability were given by the host to the interviewees. The following compliment from the English data had the function of introducing the guest and it focused on the ability of the interviewer.

Extract 1:

Host: I have to say that as a performance by a young actor he is mesmerizing, he's mesmerizing, and he is the co-star making his screen day view and he's Will's real life eight year old son playing the five year old.

The most frequent compliment topic in the Persian data was about the personality of the compliment receiver. The following compliment from the Persian data was given by the guest to the third person functioning as commenting on a person, focusing on the personality of the complimentee.

Extract 2:

Guest: Mr. Mashayekhi is a very lovely actor. What I mean is that his mere presence makes the audience love him.

The 'Other' category was the second highly frequent topic in both English and Persian data. In the English interviews this category referred to commenting on a movie or scene of a movie, whereas in the Persian interviews it was used both for commenting on a movie and for practicing *taarof*. In extract 3 which is from the English data the host compliments the movie *The Pursuit of Happiness*.

Extract 3:

Host: This movie is fantastic; it's a fantastic movie.

Guest: I was manly.

In the following extract from the Persian data, the guest uses the word 'this humble' to refer to himself. This word is used here as *taarof*.

Extract 4:

Guest: I believe that he can not make an actor, because he has not experienced what I have. This humble believes that in the world of media it is very difficult.

Host: What a beautiful interpretation. That is to say every new task means a new birth in your career.

In the following extract from the Persian data the host compliments a scene from the movie.

Extract 5:

Host: Mr. Kianian, there is a scene in the movie "A house on a lake " which I believe is a very beautiful scene which takes place in the age-care center, so is the conversation which you have with Mr. Entezami. What do you think? I know that you have an interesting memory about this scene.

Guest: Yes, it is a very beautiful and impressive scene. in addition to its beauty, since this scene evokes the emotion of the audience, everybody remembers it more.

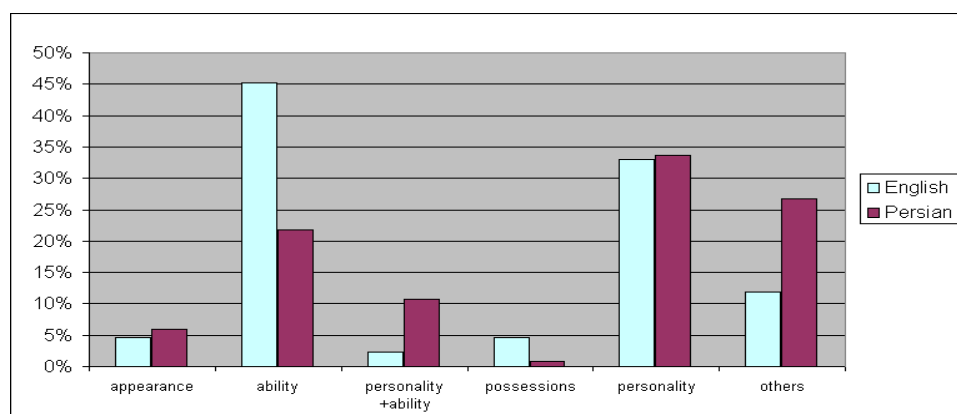
The frequency of the topic of the compliments are shown in Tables 1 and 2. The percentages of the topics of the compliments are shown in graph 1.

TABLE 1. The frequency of the topics of the compliments in the English interviews

Topic	JR	DF	C	WS	J	W	CG	AB	Total
Appearance								2	2
Ability	1	3	1	2	4			8	19
Personality + Ability					1				1
Possessions						1	1		2
Personality	6		3	2		1		1	13
Others	1			2	1			1	15
Total	8	3	4	6	6	2	1	12	42

TABLE 2. The frequency of the topic of the compliments in the Persian interviews

Topic	MRG	PP	SH	RK	GF	AD	EH	N	Total
Appearance	2		3					1	6
Ability	4	2	6	1	5	2		2	22
Personality + Ability	1	1	2	3	2	2			11
Possessions						1			1
Personality	9	4	2	3	5	3	6	2	34
Others	1	4		6	7	2	4	3	27
Total	17	11	13	13	19	10	10	8	101



GRAPH 1. The percentage of compliment topics

FUNCTIONS OF THE COMPLIMENTS

In both English and Persian programs, compliments were used as a means to perform different functions. The English compliments used in Oprah’s interviews had six functions which include introducing the guest, affective function, commenting on a personality, evaluative function, self praise and thanking. The compliments in the Persian interviews served eleven functions which include the affective function,

commenting on a personality, evaluative, self praise and thanking, saying good bye, greeting, criticizing, asking for ideas, and a compliment followed by a question and taarof. In all the English interviews the guest were introduced with compliments and praises about their achievements and accomplishments except for two guests. In the following extract, the interviewee is introduced to the audience by compliments.

Extract 6:

Host: Coming up a really funny man who plays my husband ..Cedric, entertainer is here

In all the Persian interviews, the guests were introduced in the same way. While the greeting and goodbye functions of compliments were used for starting and finishing the program, they did not have the opening and closing functions as in the English programs.

The concept of *taarof* which is a unique characteristic of Iranian culture had the frequency of four in the Persian data. In the following extract the compliment is given by the guest to the interviewer.

Extract 7:

Host: You are 45 years old. I think you look much more younger.

Guest: This is the beauty of your eyes. Beauty sees beauty.

Host: This is really kind of you. The reason that young people listen to you is that you have a happy face.

The compliments that functioned as criticism were only seen in the Persian interviews, which were done by the host, by complimenting on the performance of the guest and then criticizing a part of their performance with a question followed by that compliment. This, however, was not the case in the English interviews. Two other functions including compliment followed by a question and asking for ideas were only used in the Persian data and not in the English data. In the following extract from the Persian data, the host compliments the guest and then asks a question.

Extract 8:

Host: What you said was wonderful. you mean you should be able to present a fixed character in different ways, but have you been able to do that?

Guest: I think so.

In the next extract, the host compliments the guest and then asks for ideas.

Extract 9:

Host: Perhaps it is a very good idea to talk about family and loyalty with Mrs. Hamidi who is one of the most modest actresses of Iranian cinema. Is it true that stars don't care about their families?

Guest: I guess because of our career our spouse should try to get along with us.

Tables 3 and 4 show the frequency of the function of the compliments. Graph 2 shows the percentage of the functions of the compliments.

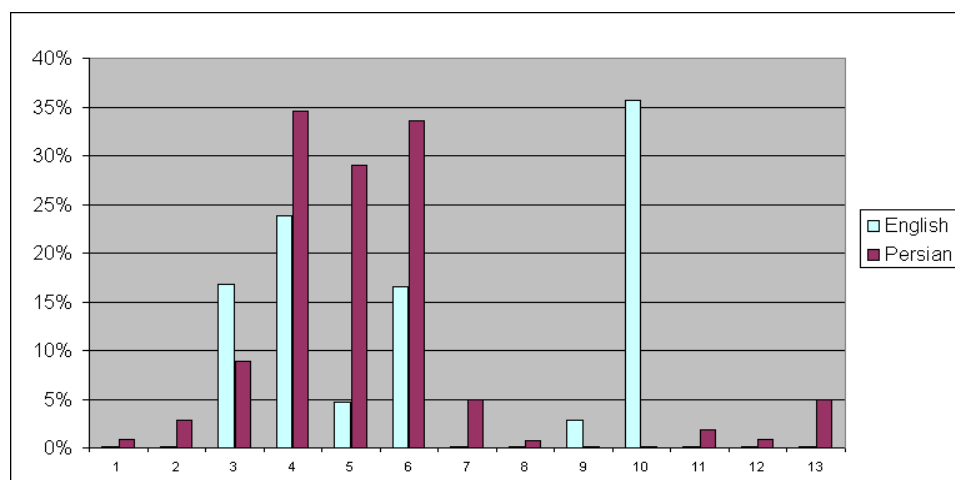
TABLE 3. The frequency of the functions of the compliments in the English interviews

Functions	JR	DF	C	WS	J	W	CG	AB	Total
Introducing the guest	2	1	1		1			2	7
Affective Comment on personality	1		2	1	1	1		4	10
Evaluative	5	1						1	7
		1	1	4	4			5	15

Self-praise avoidance				1					1
Thanking						1	1		2
Total	8	3	4	6	6	2	1	12	42

TABLE 4: The frequency of the functions of the compliments in the Persian interviews

Functions	MRG	PP	SH	RK	GF	AD	EH	N	Total
Saying goodbye					1				1
Greeting	1		1					1	3
Thanking	3	2							5
Criticizing	1		2		2				5
Self-praise	1								1
Affective	3	8	7	5	4	4	1		35
Comment on personality	7			4	9	4	4		33
Introducing the guest	1	1	1	1	2	1	1		9
Taarof			4						4
Asking for ideas				1					1
Compliment followed by question				2	1		2		5
Total	17	11	15	13	19	9	8		101



GRAPH 2. The percentage of the functions of the compliments

Numbers include the following functions.

1. saying good bye 2. greeting 3. introducing the guest 4. affective 5. thanking 6. commenting on a personality 7. criticizing 8. self-praise 9. self-praise-avoidance 10. evaluation 11. taarof 12. asking for ideas 13. compliment followed by a question

COMPLIMENT RESPONSES

The common point in responding to compliments between the English and the Persian data was that in all 16 interviews (8 English and 8 Persian) none of the complimentees rejected the compliments. All the categories and subcategories proposed by Pomerantz (1978) were used in as responses to compliments except for "comment history" and "evaluation shift" for the Persian data and "ignoring" for the English data. The category of special cases had the highest percentage in both the Persian and English data. The category of special cases fulfills a number of different compliment

responses which were impossible to be included in the categories and sub categories proposed by Pomerantz (1978).

THIRD PERSON (COMPLIMENT REFERS TO THE THIRD PERSON)

Either the interviewer or the interviewee complimented the third person absent in the program, so the compliment response was given by the interviewer or the interviewee. In both the English and Persian data, special cases had the highest frequency. In the following English example, the guest complimented her husband and the host asked further questions:

Extract 10:

Host: Could you look more in love today more than.

Guest: He hates when I talk about him, but I just love him to bits

Host: and what's it about him?

Guest: He's just the shiniest human being that I've ever met

Host: so shiny

In the following Persian example, the guest compliments the third person and the host confirms this compliment by giving another compliment about the same person.

Extract 11:

Host: Dear and beloved Mr. Parastui.

Guest: Mr. Parastui, I feel each of his scenes is an acting institute for every young person.

Host: Even talking to Mr. Parastui gives you the same feeling. I do not want to flatter, when Parviz Parastui talks you learn a lot from his talk.

THE COMPLIMENT FUNCTIONING AS A FEEDBACK

A compliment functioning as a feedback or confirmation for what a person had said was given and no response was received, and the speech continued. This case was not seen in the English data while it frequently appeared in the Persian data. The complimentee completes the complimenter's speech without responding to the compliment.

Extract 12:

Host: So I heard you're such a dedicated father; I heard you were shooting somewhere you flew back for one day for your daughter's three year old..

Guest: birthday party.

Host: yeah.

The same compliment response can be seen in the Persian data:

Extract 13:

Guest: You know, there is something extraordinarily beautiful about death in Mr. Farmanara's movies. That is about the beauty of death.

Host: If you live beautifully.

The second highly frequent compliment response was 'no response' subcategory in both the English and Persian interviews. In the following extract from the English data the guest does not respond at all to the compliment that the host gives to her.

Extract 14:

Host: You know everybody is talking about this movie being Oscar potential for you. It certainly is an amazing performance by you. You have been several other times. Do you get excited by that?

Guest: That's a wonderful thing

In the following Persian extract the guest compliments the people of Iran but the host does not give any answer and talks about another topic.

Extract 15:

Guest: You know that is because we have intelligent people

Host: Remember we were talking about economical growth

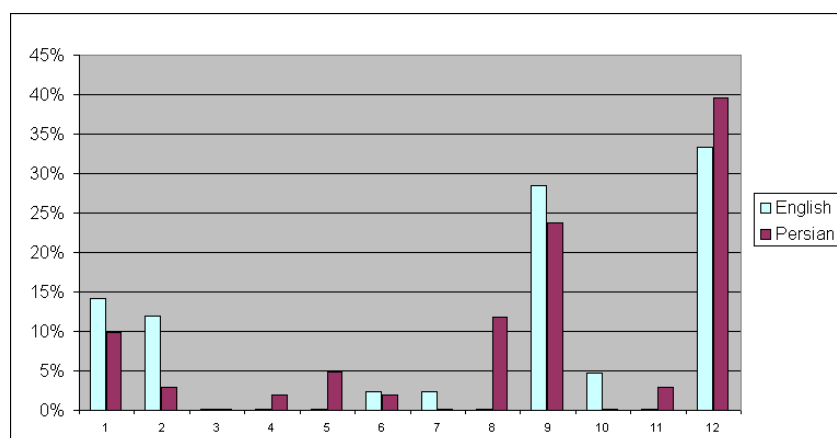
Tables 5 and 6 show the frequency of the compliment responses and graph 3 shows the percentage of the compliment responses.

TABLE 5. The frequency of the compliment responses in the English interviews

Response type	Sub category	JR	DF	C	WS	J	W	CG	AB	Total
Appreciation	Appreciation					1	2	1	2	6
	Agreement	1		1	1	1				4
Rejection	Disagreement									0
Solution	Question	1								1
type for 2 conflicting preferences	neutral stance									0
	Ref. shift					1				2
	Comment history			1		1				2
	Evaluation shift		1							1
	No response	2	1	2	2	2			3	12
	Self praise						2			2
	Special cases	4	1	1	1	2			5	14
	Total	8	3	5	4	7	4	1	9	42

TABLE 6. The frequency of the compliment responses in the Persian interviews

Response type	Sub category	MRG	PP	SH	RK	GF	AD	EH	N	Total
Acceptance	Appreciation	1	2	1	3		2	1		10
	Agreement			1	2					3
Rejection	Disagreement									0
Solution	Question	2								2
type for 2 conflicting preferences	Neutral stance									0
	Ref. shift			3		1			1	5
	Comment history			1		1				2
	Ignoring	7	1		1	2				11
	No response	4	1	1	3	7	2	4	2	24
	Self praise		1				2			3
	Special cases	3	6	6	4	8	4	5	4	40
	Total	17	11	13	13	19	10	10	7	100



GRAPH 3. The percentage of the compliment responses

CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that there are both differences and similarities involved in complimenting behavior of American and Iranian speakers, when analyzed with a comprehensive pragmatic model of the speech act of complimenting. What is apparent is that language and culture are intimately related and are in interaction with each other and a rigorous study of one cannot be possibly undertaken without considering the other.

Furthermore, it seems paramount in any culture that the speaker be aware of the importance of appropriate topics to compliment. The selection of appropriate topics is important to make adequate compliments in any culture, in the sense that both interlocutors find the topic familiar and relevant to the discourse environment at hand. Along the same lines, it was evident that in these two sets of TV interviews American and Iranian participants chose similar topics for complimenting, including ability and personality.

According to Holmes's (1988) observations, appearance is the most frequent topic between equals, close friends and intimates. Since the interviews were conducted between persons with unequal statuses and with celebrities and the compliments were given and received by both the host and the interviewees, appearance was not the most frequent topic in the interviews. Similarly, in both interviews, it was observed that compliments served the common function of introducing the guests. However, compliments tended to serve multiple functions such as thanking, and performing affective functions like establishing rapport and common ground. Another similarity to highlight is the concept of self-praise which was not sanctioned by any of the participants, which was not in line with Pomerantz's (1978) belief that holds self-praise gets sanctioned by co-participants. This could be justified by the status of the guests, all of whom were celebrities.

Apart from some similarities between the two TV interviews in terms of function and strategic approach to the speech act of complimenting, there were some differences too. The case in point is the use of *taarof* among Persian interlocutors. This rigorous amount of niceties and formalities or embellishments beautified the Persian type of exchange.

It is noteworthy in the Persian data that the host set things moving by greeting the audience, complimenting them profusely through attributing good characteristics to them. Alternatively, he might thank them for watching the program and showing interest in it. Similarly, the guests could start by complimenting or thanking the audience, one feature that was tellingly absent in the English data. This is a great support for the interactional discourse of the two cultures being essentially different.

Overall, the functions of compliment making in the Persian data were manifold, twice those in the English data. Generally speaking, compliments can be said to be made and responded to more often in the Persian interviews than in the English ones. Sometimes the excessive use of compliments in the Persian data can be attributed to the pervasive place and role of *taarof* in Iranian culture.

Brown and Levinson (1983) believe that the speech act of complimenting is a positive politeness strategy for the most part, for it lets the addressee know that he or she is liked or approved of. As positively affective speech acts, the most obvious function a compliment serves is to polish the social relationship, pay attention to positive face wants and thus increase solidarity between people. This could be seen in the third function of *taarof*, which involves uttering polite and respectful statements to please and welcome somebody. Therefore, expressions like "your eyes are beautiful",

" your eyes see everything beautifully" and "I am the guest of a kind host" were only seen in the Persian data.

When it comes to compliment responses, none of the interlocutors in both the Persian and American interviews rejected the compliment. Both were seen to draw upon categories and strategies like appreciation token and agreement, but with different frequencies as one might expect. All the categories and subcategories proposed by Pomerantz (1978) were observed in both English and Persian interviews except the ignoring category which was deployed with higher frequency in the Persian data and not in the English data.

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