Compliments In The Yemeni Society:
A Sociolinguistic Perspective

Nada Qanbar
Nabed26@yahoo.co.in
Department of English,
Faculty of Arts,
Taiz University, Yemen

Abstract

This paper is a wide-range empirical investigation of the compliment behavior in the Yemeni speech community. It seeks to investigate its distribution, the structures and syntactic patterns of a compliment expression, the attributes praised, and how compliment is influenced by the sex and social status of both the complimenter and the receiver of the compliment. The corpus of the study consists of 400 compliments collected by the author through an ethnographic method. 20 students studying at Taiz University in Yemen participated in the study. The study reveals that a compliment in Yemeni society is formulaic. 65.75% of compliments in Yemeni Arabic fall into major identifiable syntactic patterns and 55% of the compliments contain adjectives, almost two thirds of which are fixed adjectives. This formulaic nature of compliments in Yemeni society supports that their function is to consolidate solidarity and maintain relationship. The corpus also reveals that 60% of compliments occur among females, and the majority of compliments are on 'Appearance', followed by 'Personal Traits'. The majority of compliments are paid and received among equal status, and the least frequent compliments are given by lower status to higher status.

Keywords: compliments; speech act; Face Threatening Act; gender differences; social status; Yemeni compliments

Introduction

Several researches (Morgan, 1977; Thomas, 1983; Bach, 1997; Sadock, 2004; Lee 2009, among others) note that Austin and Searle use isolated sentences to illustrate their theory of speech acts, and maintain that Searle's analysis of some speech acts does not consider the cultural settings in which these speech acts are used. Hence, there is a need to complement the speech act theory with the study of the overall process of understanding intention (Mey, 1998) because both the performance of the speech act and the interaction of speaker and addressee (Croft, 1994), as well as the cultural context are important (Wierzbicka, 1991). Studying speech acts in context provides insights about social structure and value system of the target speech community. In studying apologies, requests, or compliments one learns what members of the speech community consider to be inappropriate behavior (Wolfson, 1983). Hymes (1974, p.75) argued for the necessity of describing the native speaker's internalized knowledge about how to use the resources

of his language. He explicitly suggests that the system itself is not to be taken as "given" but should be seen as open to empirical investigation.

Significance of the Study

A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually addressed, for some "good" qualities which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer (Holmes, 1988, p.458)

Compliments are of particular interest in relation to the reflection and expression of cultural values because of their nature as judgments, overt expressions of admiration of another's work, or taste (Manes, 1983). They reflect a variety of cultural norms and values and in so doing serve to express and maintain those values. Brown & Levinson (1978, pp.74-5) in their politeness framework consider compliments as "redressive action" counteracting the potential face damage of a face threatening act. They are also considered FTA (Face Threatening Act) because they imply some elements of envy, and sometimes if the object of admiration is small or can be given, this imposes an obligation on the part of the addressee to give the admired object to the complimenter.

Speech act studies have been criticized as, being ethnocentric in that most have investigated variations of English (Blum-Kulka *et al.* 1989, p.10). Researchers call for extensive collection and analysis of speech acts across cultures in order to prevent cross-cultural misunderstandings. There is a great need for careful empirical studies of the communicative behavior of native speakers of Arabic. Such studies are, unfortunately, very scarce for Arabic, and nonexistent in Yemeni Arabic in particular. The present study is valuable, in part, because it was conducted in Arabic and the results will contribute to an understanding of the sociolinguistic rules of Arabic, an understudied area of speech act research.

This paper seeks to empirically investigate the compliment behavior in the Yemeni speech community in terms of its distribution, the structures and syntactic patterns of compliment expression, and the attributes praised. It also explores how compliment is influenced by the gender and social status of both the complimenter and the receiver of the compliment.

Objectives of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the compliment behavior in the Yemeni speech community. This is achieved by answering the following questions:

1. What is the structural form of a compliment in Yemeni Arabic?
2. What do Yemeni people complement each other on?
3. Does a compliment topic or the frequency of compliment change with the sex of the complimenter and the recipient of the compliment?
4. Does a compliment topic or the frequency of compliment change with the relative social status of the complimenter and the recipient of the compliment?

Literature Review

Most of the work on the compliment speech act has been done from an ESL perspective (Nelson *et al,* 1996; Qu & Li-ying, 2005 among others), or from cross-cultural perspective (Barnlund & Araki, 1985; Farghal, 2006). There is also substantial work on the responses to compliments (Chen, 1993; Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001; Ruhi, 2007; Tang and Zhang, 2009; Chen and Yang, 2010). However, not many studies investigated the compliment behavior as a speech act operating in cultures. The most extensive research is conducted on English varieties.

Wolfson and Manes (1980) studied in detail the complimenting behavior in American English. They found that the overwhelming majority of compliments fall within a highly restricted set of adjectives and verbs. 80% of all compliments in the American variety fall into fixed syntactic patterns. They also found that 2/3 of the adjectival compliments use fixed adjectives. The study, however, did not explore variables like gender or status of the interlocutors which are essential to evaluate the underlying factors affecting complimenting.

Using ethnographic methodology, Knapp *et al* (1984) analyzed American compliments for attributes praised, compliment forms, and relationships between giver and recipient of compliments. Appearance and performance are the most frequently praised attributes. Compliments tend to occur more among status equals.

Holmes (1988) collected 200 compliments in New Zealand and found that almost 80% of the compliments belong to fixed syntactic patterns, with a number of fixed adjectives. The most frequently praised attributes are personal appearance and skill.

In their comparison between the American compliments and Egyptian compliments, Nelson et al. (1993) suggested that both Egyptian and American compliments tend to be adjectival; both frequently complimented personal appearance; Egyptian compliments tend to be longer than American compliments and contain more comparatives, references to marriage and metaphors. Americans tend to compliment more frequently than Egyptians. Egyptians tend to compliment personality traits, whereas Americans tend to compliment skills and work; and both Egyptians and Americans prefer direct rather than indirect means of complimenting. Again, the study did not refer to social variables and its effect on the production of a compliment expression.

Ye (1995) conducted a discourse completion task to 96 native speakers of Chinese in China. Ye investigated compliment structure, focus, and response strategy. Some distinctive features of Chinese compliment emerged: the most frequently used positive semantic carriers in Chinese compliments are adjectives, stative verbs and adverbs. In Chinese culture, there is preference for giving compliments about performance rather than appearance. There are constraints upon giving compliments across genders, because while giving compliments in Western cultures is seen as a courtesy; in Chinese it can be seen as a violation of social order.

Lee (2009) examined the act of complimenting and responding to compliments among Singaporean Chinese using 300 compliments collected in naturally occurring settings

during a Chinese New Year celebration. Lee concluded that married females pay and receive compliments the most. The most complimented topic centres on children's academic achievement. These exchanges are not only gender-sensitive, but age- and generation-sensitive as well. The study also shows that the function of compliments in Chinese culture is different from Western cultures because while compliments function to create solidarity in Western cultures, in Chinese it may actually increase social distance. Empirical data supports this claim in that the occurrence of compliments is shown to be relatively low when the status of the Chinese interlocutors is equal. Although the study was about the production of compliments as well as their responses, the study focused more on responses to compliments, and did not also provide a comprehensive analysis of the complimenting act among Singaporean Chinese.

It would be imprudent to generalize from these studies to the Yemeni context due to the specificity of cultures and social discourses. However, this study might be integrated into the larger literature on the speech act in language use and the sociology of compliments.

Methodology

The method for collecting data for this study was through the ethnographic fieldwork which is supposed to be the only reliable method for this purpose (See also Wolfson & Manes 1980, Holmes, 1988). 400 compliments were collected for this study by the author and by some of the author's students as part of their sociolinguistic assignments at Taiz University. 20 students helped in the data collection for this study. The students were asked to collect as many compliments as they hear in their everyday interactions. They were asked to note down, along with the compliment expression, the age, the sex of both the speaker and the recipient, their social relationship to each other, their educational background, their social position, and the context in which the expressions were said. They were instructed to write the compliments down exactly as they hear them without any modification.

The compliments gathered, thus, took place in a wide range of speech situations, among various interactants, from diverse walks of lives, ages, social positions, and educational backgrounds.

The compliments obtained were then analyzed for their forms, attributes praised, gender, and status relationships.

Data Analysis

Compliment Structure

Syntactic Pattern
The compliments in the data show various syntactic structures. These patterns are as follows:

1. Pro + Adj + (int.)
    ʔntə Təyeb (giddən)

you kind   very
You are very kind.

2. NP + Adj + (int.)

ʕoyon-ək   ħelwæt (mərə)

eyes-your beautiful very
Your eyes are (very) beautiful.

3. Pro + N

ʔant-i mələæk

you-F angel
You (are) an angel.

4. ʔei∫ + NP + Adj

ʔei∫ ʔttəsri:ħə əl-ħelwə

what   hair-do   the-beautiful
What a beautiful hair-do!

5. Pro + Superlative form

ʔant-ə   ʔaħsən wəħe

you-M   the best one
 You are the best one.

These patterns are ordered from the most frequent to the lowest frequent as they appeared in the data:

Table 1: The Frequency of Compliments by Syntactic Pattern in the Yemeni Society

	Syntactic Pattern	**Frequency**	**%**
1	Pro+Adj+ (int.)	107	26.8
2	NP+ Adj+(int.)	94	23.5
3	Pro+N	22	5.5
4	ʔei∫ +Np+Adj	15	3.75
5	Pro+Superlative form	13	3.25
6	Adj	12	3
7	Others	137	34.3

Table 1 demonstrates that, out of 400 compliment expressions in the corpus, 65.75% of the compliments fell into identifiable syntactic patterns, with the *Pro+Adj.* constituting the majority of the Yemeni compliment structural pattern. 34.3% of the compliment did not belong to a particular category.

The high frequency of the majority of compliments falling into identifiable structural patterns shows that Yemeni compliments are formulaic.

Adjectives Pattern
Although there are limitless possible ways to express one's admiration and appreciation for the addressee, a limited number of adjectives appeared in the data as illustrated in Table 2:

Table 2: Frequency of Adjectives in Yemeni Compliments

	Adjective	**Frequency**
1	*ħelw* (sweet)	67 (30.18%)
2	*rəwʕə* (wonderful)	34 (15.31%)
3	*gunæn* (amazing), *qumri* (moon-like)	15(6.7%)
4	*ʕəsəl* (honey), *gəmi:l* (beautiful)	9(4.1%)
5	*ŧəyeb* (kind)	7 (3.2%)
6	*muħtərəm* (respectable), and *wəsi:m* (handsome)	4(1.8%)
7	*mumtæz* (excellent)	3 (1.35%)
8	*ðəkiyə* (intelligent)	2 (0.9%)
9	Others	1 (0.45%)

The use of adjectives constituted 55.5% of the compliments in the Yemeni corpus. The most frequently used adjective wasħelw (sweet) occurred 67 times (30.18%), followed by rəwʕə (wonderful) occurring 34 times (15.31%). The next most frequent adjectives, which were found to have similar frequency of occurrence, were gunæn (amazing), and qumri (moon-like), which both occurred15 times (6.75%). Other adjectives such as ʕəsəl (honey), and gəmi:l (beautiful), occurred 9 times each (4.1%), followed by ŧəyeb (kind) occurring 7 times (3.2%). Other adjectives did not occur more than four times as presented in Table (2).Some compliment expressions included more than one adjective. This array of adjectives in the same expression is a feature of Arabic discourse, i.e., Arabs like to repeat the same idea and use a series of adjectives when praising others (Shouby, 1951 in Nelson et al 1993).

The use of the first four adjectives ħelw (sweet), rəwʕə (wonderful), gunæn (amazing), and *qumri*/ə (moon-like) constitutes 59% of all the adjectives used. The first two adjectives were the most common and compromised 45.5% of all the adjectival compliments. These adjectives are positive in meaning but express general and neutral meaning. They semantically lack the specificity and the force of other adjectives like *fəten* (charming), or *kəri:m* (generous). This high and restricted use of regular adjectives indicates that Yemenis, in paying compliments, make use of what is known as 'semantic formula'.This finding about the reoccurrence of certain adjectives is also found in American (Manes and Wolfson 1981), New Zealand (Holmes 1988a), and Egyptian compliments (Nelson *et al*. 1993).

The fact, therefore, that 65.75% of the compliments have identifiable and fixed syntactic structure, and 59% of them make use of certain adjectives, indicates that compliments in Yemeni Arabic are formulas.

Use of Ritual Phrases

Among the 400 complimenters, 47 (11.75%) of them express admiration in the form of ritual phrases, proverbs, similies, and metaphors.

> e.g.   Ɂərrəʃəqə   nesf   Ɂəl-gəmæl.
>   fitness   half   the-beauty
>   Fitness is half the beauty.

The use of ritualized phrases and figures of speech seem to be one feature of Arabic discourse. Wolfson (1981) notes that Arabs compliment in the form of "proverbs and other preceded ritualized phrases" (p.19).

There are phrases like *m*a ʃa:Ɂəlləh (God's grace be upon you), *ɁəlləhməSəlli Ɂəlləənnəbi*

(Peace be upon the prophet) which almost exclusively accompany compliments. These "compliment markers" make compliments recognizable in any context. The function of these compliment markers is to block the possibility of the evil eye of the complimenter which may do harm to the object complimented as Arabs believe that someone's evil eyes can cause harm to a person or a person's property. These expressions are traditionally used when speaking well of anyone or anything potentially vulnerable (Spooner, 1976). Moreover, the expression of appreciation for an object may be interpreted as a desire to obtain it.

Topics of Compliments

Compliments are triggered by speakers upon positively valuing or admiring a certain 'object or quality' in the addressee. Wolfson (1983:90) says "with respect to topic, compliments fall into two major categories: those having to do with appearance and those which comment on ability." Barnlund & Araki (1985) provides a classification scheme with four categories (appearance, traits, skill, and work), though there seems to be no difference between skill and work since they can be merged into one category relating to ability or performance. The Yemeni data, however, revealed five categories of complimenting topics:

1. **Appearance**
   In this category the speaker praises the outer appearance and the look of the addressee.

   > e.g.   ʃəʕr-ek   Ɂəlyoum   ħelw
   >   hair-your   today   beautiful
   >   Your hair today (is) beautiful.

2. **Personal Traits** (praising a personal quality like being kind, intelligent, etc.)
    e.g.   ʔənt-ə ɬəyeb
            You-M   kind
            You (are) kind.

3. **Ability and Skills**
    Manes (1983) describes this category as compliments on "the quality of something produced through the addressee's skill or effort: a well-done job, a skillfully played game, a good meal" (p. 101).

    e.g.   ʔət-təSmi:m ʔəlli   Semel-tu   rəwSə
            the-design   that   made-you wonderful
            The design you made (is) beautiful.

4. **Relationship**
    This category refers to the expressions in which the speaker expresses how much the addressee meant to him/her.

    e.g.   ʔənt-I kol   ʃi li

            you-F everything to me
            You are everything to me.

5. **Possessions**
    In this category the speaker praises a substantial object owned by the addressee.
    e.g.   *beit-i-k*   *ħelw*
            house-F-your   beautiful
            Your house (is) beautiful.

Table 3 below shows the order of these topics as they appeared in the data:

Table 3: The Frequency of Compliments by Topic in the Yemeni Society

	Topic	**Frequency**
1	Appearance	129 (32.5%)
2	Personal Traits	126 (31.5%)
3	Ability or Skill	81 (20.25%)
4	Relationship	57 (14.25%)
5	Possession	7 (1.5%)

Table 3 shows that the majority of compliments were on Appearance, which accounted for 32.5% of the corpus. This result is also similar to both the American data (Manes, 1983), and the New Zealand data (Holmes, 1987), in which appearance accounted for 50% of the data.

The second most frequent topic is complimenting Personal Traits which accounted for 31.5% of the data. Through complimenting a certain trait or value in someone,

compliments serve to reinforce the value praised (cf. Manes, 1983). The next commonly complimented topic is Ability and Skill (20.25%).

The Relationship category accounted for 14.25% of compliments. This category was not found in the literature reviewed by the author. But as the percentage indicates, about a quarter of Yemenis like to show their feelings and let others know what they mean to them.

The least frequent category in the data was on Possession (1.5%). There might be two reasons for this low frequency. First, new, significant and noticeable acquisitions, usually, elicit compliments such as a new car, a new house, or a mobile phone. These possessions will be noticed and commented on positively by almost anyone who sees them for the first time. Perhaps, the collectors of the data did not come across a situation, where they had to pay a compliment on a newly acquired item. Another reason could be linked to the way compliments are perceived in the Yemeni society. Compliments may be seen as an FTA which is common "in societies where envy is very strong..." (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 252).

After discussing topics of compliment in Yemeni Society, it is important to examine who tend to compliment more in Yemen: males or females? And who among them receive compliments more?

Compliments and Gender

Table 4 shows that there is a big difference in the complimenting behavior between males and females.

Table 4: Compliments in Yemeni Society according to Gender

Variable	Frequency
f-f	201(50.25%)
f-m	39 (9.75%)
m-f	73 (18.25%)
m-m	87 (21.75%)
Total	400 (100%)

Females paid more compliments than males did (60% vs.40%). Similarly, females in the Yemeni society received almost more than twice the compliments males got (68.5% vs.30.5%). Compliments between males constituted 21.75% of all the compliments in the corpus. The highest incidence of compliments occurred among females (50.25%), and the least compliments recorded were across gender, with men tending to compliment women twice than vice versa (18.25% vs.9.75%). The low incidence of compliments across gender is predictable given the fact that the interactions between males and females in Yemen are limited, and in the few cases where the interactions occur, compliments may hardly take place. There are more compliments from males towards females, this is due to the nature of males as being more forthcoming in dealing with females than females are in the Yemeni society.

They are also in a more powerful position than women (Weatherall, 2002), which entitles them to approach women easily. The predominance of male compliments in cross-gender interactions is also found in the complimenting behavior of the French (Kerbrat-Orecchion, 1989).

The high frequency of female compliments compared to male compliments (see also Wolfson, 1983; Lee, 2009; and Bayraktaroglu & Sifianou, 2001) shed light on the way women perceive the function of compliments. This is compatible with the hypothesis in the literature (Holmes, 1988, 1948; Wolfson and Manes, 1980) that women consider compliments an affective speech act and a positive politeness device whose job is to consolidate solidarity and serve to establish and re-establish relationship, while men may perceive compliments as a FTA, as embarrassing and discomfiting.

Wolfson (1984) noted that women receive far more compliments than men. She described compliments on Appearance and Possessions to males as 'rare' and concluded that "women, because of their role in the social order, are seen as appropriate recipients of all manner of social judgments in the form of compliments."(p. 241)

It is of essence at this point to identify the topics preferred across gender, as the interaction between them and the topics praised will highlight the sociology of complimenting in the Yemeni society.

Gender and Topic of Compliment

The Yemeni data as shown in Table 5 reveals that there is a difference in the preference of topics by men and women.

Table 5: The Frequency of Topics according to the gender of Complimenter

	Appearance	Personal Traits	Ability	Relationship	Possession	Total
f-f	88 (43.78%)	54 (26.86%)	22 (11%)	32 (15.9%)	5 (2.5%)	201 (50.25%)
f-m	7 (17.9%)	13 (33.3%)	17 (43.58%)	2 (5.1%)	-	39 (9.75%)
m-f	19 (26%)	26 (35.6%)	10 (14%)	17 (23.3%)	1 (1.37%)	73 (18.25%)
m-m	15 (17.24%)	33 (37.9%)	32 (36.8%)	6 (6.9%)	1 (1.15%)	87 (21.75%)
Total	129 (32.5%)	126 (31.5%)	81 (20.25%)	57 (14.25%)	7 (1.5%)	400 (100%)

The most preferred topic among females was Appearance (43.8%), while the most frequent praised topic between males was Personal Traits (37.9%), followed by Ability (36.8%).

Appearance is what women always tend to place high value on. Compliments of this sort are "more than just a reflection of the importance of personal appearance for women in our society; they are a means of reinforcing that importance" (Manes, 1983, p.98).

On the other hand, males tend to praise and like to be praised on personal traits, and abilities and achievements. Holmes (1995, p. 131) suggests that "compliments on appearance cause some men embarrassment".

The predominance of females' tendency for complimenting Appearance and receiving compliments on Appearance supports the idea that women make use of compliments to maintain solidarity, and reinforce intimacy. This is supported further by the low frequency of females complimenting males on Appearance (17.9%). Holmes (1988:456) states that "Compliments on a person's appearance maybe felt to presume an intimacy which could be regarded as inappropriate in some cross sex interaction". And interestingly enough at a deeper analysis of the data and when the author examined the relationship of the interlocutors, the author found that the females who complimented males on Appearance were mostly family members.

Table 5 also shows that Yemeni females liked to express the value of their Relationship to other females (15.9%). Males, on the other hand, were twice less forthcoming to express the value of Relationship to other males (6.9%), though they are willing to do that to other females (23.3%). This difference may be used to support the theories on the relationship between language and sex. Women are characterized as other –oriented and cooperative in their speech behavior, while men's speech is characterized as control-oriented and competitive (Weatherall, 2002, p.56).

The general low tendency of males expressing praise on objects possessed by either males or females, and also compared to females' supports the view that males may consider complimenting as a FTA. Across gender, females compliment males more on Ability and Skill (43.6%), while males compliment females more on Personal Traits (35.6%). Not only the sex of the interlocutors, but also their relationship and whether the complimenter of a higher social status than the addressee or lower than him/ her will influence the compliment production. The following section will focus on this factor.

Compliments and Social Status

Table 6 shows the relationship between compliments and social status of the interlocutors.

Table 6: The Distribution of Compliments according to Status

Variable	Frequency
A=B*	263 (65.75%)
A>B	85 (21.25%)
A<B	52 (13%)
Total	400 (100%)

A is the complimenter and B is the recipient of the compliments

Table 6 reveals that complimenting in Yemeni society occurred most among status equals constituting 65.75% of the corpus. The next frequent compliments were given from people of higher status to those of lower status (21.25%); and the least frequent compliments were given by lower status to higher status (13%).

This finding is similar to the findings in the American data (Knapp et al, 1984,p.26, and Wolfson, 1983, p. 91),and the New Zealand data (Holmes, 1988a).

The least occurring compliments, in the Yemeni data, which were given by people of lower status indicate that compliment is a complex sociolinguistic skill (Herbert, 1990) which requires confidence on the part of the complimenter- the complimenter of lower status may also risk the possibility of being misunderstood as flattering the addressee, and "it would be more likely to be the person of lower status who would need to make use of compliments for the purpose of manipulating the addressee" (Wolfson, 1983).

It will be more revealing to examine the effect of the relationship between the gender of the interlocutors and their relationship on paying compliments.

Gender and Status

Table 7 presents the interaction between the gender of the interlocutors and their social status.

Table 7: The Distribution of Compliments according to Gender and Status in the Yemeni Society

Variable	f-f	m-f	f-m	m-m
A=B*	147 (36.75%)	34 (8.5%)	19 (4.75%)	63 (15.75%)
A>B	27 (6.75%)	32 (8%)	11 (2.75%)	15 (3.75%)
A<B	27 (6.75%)	7 (1.75%)	9 (2.25%)	9 (2.25%)
Total	201 (50.25%)	73 (18.25%)	39 (9.75%)	87 (21.75%)

Table 7 shows that among status equals, females exchanged compliments twice more often than males did among them (36.75% vs. 15.75%). Across gender and among the same status, Yemeni males paid almost as twice compliments to females as they received compliments from them (8.5% vs. 4.75%). Lower status females paid compliments to females of higher status more than lower status males complimented males of higher status. Whether of higher or less or equal status, males, in general, receive fewer compliments than women do, as discussed earlier.

Higher status female complimenters paid compliments to lower status females as much as they received from them (6.75% each). Higher status males, on the other hand, complimented lower status females almost twice as they complimented males of lower status (8% vs.3%). The reason behind this might be related to the fact that women are more receptive to compliments than males because, as Holmes (1987) argued, that compliments are usually directed to the socially insecured to build their confidence. Women, resulting from their status in the social order, are seen as appropriate recipients of all manner of social judgments in the form of compliments (Wolfson, 1989).

Across gender, compliments upward compliments occurred with very low percentage. Higher status males tended to compliment more frequently than higher status females did.

At this stage of analysis it is important to know what topics males of higher status, for example, compliment females of lower status on, and what could be the topics females of lower status compliment males of higher status.

Gender, Status and Topic

The interaction between the sex of the interlocutors and their relationship in terms of status and the object of compliment gives a clear picture of how compliments work in the Yemeni society, as shown in table 8.

Table 8: The Interaction of Compliments in Yemeni Society: Sex, Topic, and Status

	Appearance			Personal Traits			Ability			Relationship			Possession		
	A>B	A<B	A=B	A>B	A<B	A=B	A>B	A<B	A=B	A>B	A<B	A=B	A<B	A>B	A=B
f-f	16 (8%)	8 (4%)	64 (31.84%)	5 (2.5%)	7 (3.5%)	42 (10.5%)	1 (.50%)	3 (1.5%)	18 (9%)	5 (2.5%)	9 (4.47%)	18 (9%)	-	-	5 (1.25%)
f-m	4 (10.3%)	-	3 (7.7%)	4 (10.3%)	1 (2.5%)	8 (20.5%)	3 (7.7%)	7 (18%)	7 (18%)	-	1 (2.5%)	1 (2.5%)	-	-	-
m-f	6 (8.2%)	1 (1.4%)	12 (16.4%)	12 (16.4%)	2 (2.7%)	12 (16.4%)	6 (8.2%)	1 (1.4%)	3 (4.1%)	8 (11%)	3 (4.1%)	6 (8.2%)	-	-	1 (1.4%)
m-m	3 (3.45%)	1 (1.4%)	11 (12.6%)	8 (9.2%)	3 (3.45%)	22 (25.3%)	4 (4.6%)	4 (4.6%)	24 (27.6%)	-	1 (1.14%)	5 (1.14%)	-	-	1 (1.24%)

*A is the complimenter and *B* is the recipient of the compliments

Table 8 shows that among equal status, females paid compliments and received most on Appearance (31.84%). Similarly, among status equals, males complimented each other most frequently on Ability (27.6%). Across sex, among status equal, females tended to compliment males on Personal Traits (20.5%); while males complimented females on Appearance and Personal Traits (16.4% each). Males know how important looks are for female and praised this aspect. Males of equal status, also, are more confident to compliment females on Appearance than females compliment males (16.4% vs.7.7%). They also tended to express their feelings to females more than females did to them (8.2% vs.2.5%). When in higher status, females complimented as twice as lower status females on Appearance (8% vs.4%). Males also praised lower status males on Appearance (3.45 vs. 1.14%). In general, higher status people complimented lower status people more than vice versa in almost all topics.

In general, compliments from higher status in the Yemeni corpus consistently correlated with topics like Appearance and Personal Traits, while lower status compliments were associated with Relationship and Ability.

The low frequency of compliments on Appearance from lower status regardless of gender in the Yemeni context proves that complimenting Appearance is a strategy to show solidarity and closeness (*cf*. Holmes, 1989, p. 459). And this finding further supports the fact that the function of compliments is to create social bonding.

Conclusion

From the analysis above, it can be concluded that the fact that 65.75% of compliments in Yemeni Arabic fall into major identifiable syntactic patterns, and 55% of the compliments contains adjectives, almost two thirds of which are predictable adjectives, indicate that compliment in Yemeni Arabic is formulaic. It is as formulaic as greeting and thanking, though these speech acts have a determined and expected position in conversations. This structural regularity of a compliment has a job to serve. Compliments can occur at any point in a discourse, and if compliments did not have an identifiable pattern which makes them recognizable as a compliment, they would lose their major function as expressing and creating solidarity. Ambiguity and confusion of whether an expression is meant to be a compliment or not is avoided by the use of a compliment formula (cf. Manes and Wolfson, 1981).

It is also interesting to find that more than half of the compliments (60%) belong to females, which shows that complimenting is mostly women's behavior. This is consistent with the findings in the relationship between gender differences and speech style-women's linguistic behavior is characterized as cooperative and rapport-oriented while men as competitive and report-oriented (Tannen, 1997)**.** Women are socialized in using linguistic features that connote tentativeness, deference, and a lack of authority (Lakoff, 1975).

The analysis also indicates that although the realization of speech acts varies from culture to culture and from one language to another, and different cultures have been shown to vary in interactional styles, leading to different preferences for speech act behaviors (AbdulSattar *et al*, 2011), there are more similarities than differences in realizing

compliments. The similarities include a similar function of compliments, the language behavior of both males and females and their perception of the act of complimenting, the prevalence of complimenting among status equals, and the topics of praise. These findings prove the universal characteristics of speech act and their underlying principles. However, this study is mono-cultural, and a cross-cultural investigation is required to detect universal characteristics of complimenting behavior in different cultures. Research in complimenting behavior will yield fruitful results in the area of pragmatics and sociolinguistics.

To conclude, the study of compliments in Yemen will not be complete without considering the compliment event as a whole. Responses to compliments need to be investigated in further research to fully understand the sociology of compliments in the Yemeni society.

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About the Author

Nada Yahya Qanbar is an Assistant Professor, Faculty of Arts, Taiz University, Yemen. She got her MA in 2003 and PhD in 2006 in Linguistics & Phonetics from CIEFL (the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages), Hyderabad, India. Her major interest is in sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and cultural studies.