

COMPLIMENTING IN ENGLISH AND IN ARMENIAN CULTURES

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Speech act theory says talking is not just semantics but acting and meaning-making. This theory holds that the meaning of linguistic expressions can be explained in terms of the rules governing their use in performing various speech acts (e.g., commanding, exclaiming, promising, requesting, warning, complimenting).

It is worth distinguishing between compliment and praise or admiration. Sometimes praise is confused with compliment or they are considered to be the same speech act because both phenomena evaluate things and express an opinion on a particular thing. But scientists suggest considering praise as a wider category in which compliments should be included.

Although these two speech acts demand positive judgments, complimenting has to apply to the addressee. When we say something pleasant to a person, who is absent, it is rather praise or admiration than a compliment.

In modern life, more and more attention is paid to the impact of the speech acts and in this case complimenting is the most important tool of speech influence and optimization of speech communication in general. Among many acts that we comply every day through speech, complimenting is one of the main speech act that helps us establish good interpersonal relationships with others. Compliments are a part of the etiquette of communication because they are involved in the procedure of dating, greeting, saying good-bye and so on. Compliments are also included in the official business and friendly communications, and also they are a part of a more complex speech genre which is the declaration of love. In all cases, compliments promote communicative rapprochement, they establish friendly and confidential relations between the addresser and the addressee. We also can say that in modern communication it appears to be a unifying element in the development of positive interpersonal relationships as well as strengthening social relations. It contributes to the harmonization of interaction between people. Here we can see that the speaker does not pay any direct compliment to his/her interlocutor, but the latter implies the idea and the goal of the complimenter.

Compliment is quite an appropriate speech act to examine when we comprise two cultures, because compliment is like a window through which we can view what is important and valued in that particular culture. Compliment is a speech act that often happens in daily conversations and which is an integral part of the speech etiquette. Compliments can be described informally as “both direct and indirect utterances expressing the speaker’s positive opinion about the addressee’s outward appearance,

work, personality traits, possessions, and about third parties closely related to the addressee (e.g. children)” (Jaworski 1995: 64).

It is worth mentioning that a lot of researches have been done referring to English compliments throughout the world, about their functions, purposes, responses as well as about their frequency and structure. As for Armenian compliments, they are not thoroughly studied yet. For that very reason a local investigation has been conducted by us to find specifications and characteristics of Armenian compliments.

There are both important similarities and differences between Armenian and English compliments and these differences mainly depend on shared beliefs and values of the speech community and thus cannot be interpreted apart from social and cultural contexts. In English society people usually widely use compliments, and that compliments play an important role in communication. Using compliments become a custom just like thanks and apology. In English society, people encourage some admirable actions with compliments. For example, mother will cheer her son up saying “*Well done my dear, you are really studying hard*”. People also build and keep social relation with compliments and usually use them saying “*That’s a delicious dinner*”. When two companies or friends who have not seen each other for a long time meet again, they compliment each other firstly instead of regards. Compliments play the same role in Armenia. Compliment can improve one’s relationship with others. When Armenians meet their old friends they greet each other with the words “*You look younger than before*”. Sometimes after having dinner in a friend’s house, people will pay compliments to the housewife for making such kind of tasty dish. Both in Armenian and English cultures the principle is to compliment and make others feel better. So people should pay attention to the words that are used to compliment others.

Although both in Armenian and in English languages speech behaviour states that the appropriate response to the compliment is to say “*Thank you*”, speakers often ignore the compliment or return it to the complimenter.

Speaking about English compliments, two famous linguists Nessa Wolfson and Johan Manes (Manes and Wolfson 1981:115, Wolfson and Manes 1980:402-404) many times have noted that “the most striking feature of compliments in English is their total lack of originality”: They have mentioned that 80% of English compliments consist of adjectives and nearly two-thirds of all adjectival compliments made use of 5 adjectives. Those adjectives are: *good, nice, great, beautiful, pretty, wonderful*.

According to these linguists there are also 5 verbs in English which are used for compiling semantically positive verbs: *like, love, be impressed by, enjoy, admire*. From these 5 verbs *love* and *like* account for 86% of the positively evaluative verbs. At the syntactic level more astonishing evidence of formulaicity in English compliments is found. The function of compliment becomes more and more important, so the

compliment language becomes standardized. Wolfson and Manes studied the data of compliments and found out that more than a half of them displays a single syntactic pattern.

As for Armenian compliments, our investigation showed that there are an infinite number of words that can be used in paying compliments. However in their everyday conversation Armenians use restricted expressions and phrases in order to avoid misunderstanding. The aim of complimenting in Armenian culture is to make the addressee happy, praised or satisfied. During our inquiry we found out that most of the respondents avoid paying creative compliments in formal meetings or during interacting with distant relatives. However, most of the respondents confess that while interacting with their close friend, family members or beloved they use a lot of creative compliments. Among them are such kinds of expressions such as “*You are a life*” or “*You are a gem*”. Anyhow there are some adjectives which are mostly used while paying compliment. These are: *Գեղեցիկ, սքանչելի, աննսնն, լավ, հրաշալի, հոյակապ, հիանալի*.

One of the characteristics of the Armenian compliments is the type of compliment, when one is compared with the *sun, life, treasure, gold, king*, etc. Sometimes men are compared with *rocks and mountains* for demonstrating their strength and power. Women or girls are often compared with a *flower, deer or angel*. Sometimes it can be considered a compliment when a woman is compared with a man for emphasizing her strength and masculine features. It is worth mentioning, that a lot of interjections, such as *վա՛յ, օ՛յ* are used while paying a compliment. As for the word order in the sentence, there is relatively free word order in Armenian compliments compared with the fixedness of English word order.

As we know English culture is taking individualism as a main orientation, and here compliment language is extremely important. Unlike English culture, Armenian culture is taking groups, relation, and others as orientation; the cultural differences are caused by two society's structures of traditional culture. In Armenia, a nation with modesty as virtue, everyone should respect the old and cherish the young. In English culture everybody is deep-rooted with the minds of “Everyone is equal”, and pursuits that. The individualism of English makes people incline to express the view and opinion from the self-angle even more, in using compliment language, they like to use the structure of the first person very much. Armenian group or others' orientation makes people try one's best to narrow oneself in communication; the utilization of the first person in compliment language is not frequent. (Feilin L. 2005:71-72)

According to Herbert, women prefer more personalized forms, such as 1st or 2nd person focus, while men proffer impersonal focus (3rd one).

1st person focus: *I like your bag!*

2nd person focus: *Your rings beautiful!*

3rd person focus: *Nice earrings!*

Another linguist Linglin Wu (2008: 26) mentions that females compliment with more flexibility and they just want to express their feelings and emotions paying less attention to the form. For females, complimenting form is not important while giving and receiving compliments are everyday occurrences.

As for the 2nd point we can mention that in both languages it has nearly the same index. It may seem natural, because the definition of a compliment is a confirmation of appreciation for some skills, achievements, victories and so one concerning to the addressee or things related to the addressee. One of the interesting things is that nearly all of the second person structures focus on addressee's possessions, *egg. "You have very beautiful earrings."* This is mainly used when one notices that her friend or relative has acquired a new possession. In Armenian culture too it is like an obligation to notice the new possession or the new appearance of your relative/friend and pay a compliment on it. (*For example: New hairstyle, new shoes, loss or gain of weight and so on*). According to Manes (1983: 99) appearance is the most frequent focus for complimenting. Of course there are a lot of topics for complimenting but the enormous part of the compliments refers to some topics. Homels (1987-1988: 449- 454) distinguishes 4 main topics in English language complimenting. They are: appearance, possessions, ability/performance, personality/friendship. According to her examinations, most of the women give and receive compliments on their appearance. 56,7 % of all the compliments related to the aspects of women's appearance. In contrast to this, men receive only 36 % of the compliments related to the appearance. Complimenting on someone's appearance is a positively affective speech act and it is the expression of harmony and solidarity. Women particularly use this compliment topic for this positive function. However in some cultures complimenting on the appearance can be considered an inappropriate or irreverent and sometimes they can show both intimacy and vulnerability.

As for Armenian complimenting topics we can mention that like in English speaking countries in Armenia also the prevailing topic for complimenting is appearance, *egg. «How charming you are!»*, The noticeable difference is referred to the personality topics. It is known that there are two types of compliment: explicit and implicit. Complimenting on someone's personality can be ascribed as an implicit compliment. You pay compliment on your addressee's personality and in that way you secretly pay compliment on the addressee. For implicit compliments are often used such tropes as hyperbole, comparisons, Gricean maxims. As we have noticed complimenting on personality in English culture forms about 5% whereas in Armenian culture it is 18%.

In Armenian culture it is accepted to pay compliment to the addressee's friends, relatives and children. Armenians strongly respect family values, they are very affectionate of their children they maintain strong family ties and mutual respect. So in this respect it would be very pleasant for Armenian mother or father to listen a compliment about their child. For example people in Armenia often praise children for making their parents feel proud, evaluated and happy: «*You are great! We are proud of you!*». Mainly it comes from Armenian values and mentality because in our culture family has a leading role in the society.

As for possessions we can see that in English culture it is used more than Armenian culture. Complimenting on possessions is not very rare but it is used in some situations. For example when your friend bought new glasses you can pay compliment to him/her for pleasing your friend or just for expressing your admiration: «*Oh, they are really gorgeous!*». And the problem, how you pay a compliment to your friend, depends on circumstances and mainly on his/her gender. Homels (1987-1988: 449- 454) made an investigation to find out whether man or women often receive and pay compliments in English speaking cultures. In Armenian culture complimenting behaviour appears to be much more used by women than men. As our investigation showed, Armenian women give and receive considerable amount of compliments. But in English speaking cultures women pay compliments to men more than in Armenian culture. A male speaker has to be very careful to compliment a female so as to avoid the inappropriateness or even rudeness.

Sometimes Armenians express compliments by humbling themselves to compliment others which is a polite way of keeping good relationship with each other. Armenian people (especially elder generation) are also reported to hardly accept compliments. But the particular compliment to their talent is always well appreciated.

Generally in Armenian we can come across direct speech acts more often than in English. This implies that in Armenian directness is considered as a positive cultural value and the use of direct speech acts may often indicate that the interlocutors are on quiet intimate and close relations. In English, on the contrary, the speakers try to be more indirect and not to threaten the hearer's face. Clearly, one factor responsible for this difference is the principle of "polite pessimism", characteristic of Anglo-Saxon culture, but absent from Armenian culture.

So examining the differences and similarities in Armenian and English cultures we made sure once again that culture is one of the main and inseparable part of the language. People could learn the whole culture during learning and using language. As language learners we must therefore deepen our understanding of contexts of language use.

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Key words - speech act, compliment, culture, speakers, communication.

Narine Gasparyan, Complimenting in English and Armenian cultures - Complimenting is considered as a positive evaluative speech act and part of negotiating strategy of the conversation. The article is devoted to the analysis of the speech act of complimenting in English and in Armenian cultures. There are both important similarities and differences between Armenian and English compliments and these differences mainly depend on shared beliefs and values of the speech community. The article studies pragmatic, semantic and lexical peculiarities of complimenting in English and in Armenian cultures.

Նարինե Գասպարյան, Հաճոյախոսելը անգլիական և հայկական լեզվամշակույթներում - Հաճոյախոսելը համարվում է դրական գնահատողական խոսքային ակտ և հաղորդակցության բանակցային ռազմավարության մի մաս: Հոդվածում վերլուծվում են հաճոյախոսության խոսքային ակտի նմանություններն ու տարբերությունները անգլիական և հայկական լեզվամշակույթներում: Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում են հաճոյախոսության գործաբանական, իմաստային և բառապաշարային առանձնահատկությունները այս երկու մշակույթների մեջ:

Нарине Гаспарян, Compliments in English and Armenian linguocultures – Compliment positively-evaluative speech act, which is a part of the negotiation process of communication. In the article, similarities and differences of compliments in English and Armenian linguocultures are analyzed. Also in the article, pragmatic, semantic and lexical differences in the two named cultures are considered.