

Contrastive Analysis of Compliments in Contemporary Bulgarian and English Language

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Abstract: *The aim of the current research is to analyze the structure and function of the compliment as a speech act. Speech formulas for making compliments are presented and comparison between contemporary Bulgarian and English compliments is made.*

Key words: *compliment, speech act, dialogue, contrastive analysis*

In Discourse Pragmatics compliments are expressions of positive evaluation that commonly occur in everyday conversational encounters among interlocutors of equal or higher status. A compliment may be used to open a conversation or to smooth conversational interaction by reinforcing the links of solidarity between the interlocutors. People often compliment qualities related to personal appearance (e.g., clothes, hair), possessions, skill, or accomplishments.

The aim of the current research is the compliment in Contemporary Bulgarian and English language.

In Bulgarian dictionaries the word **compliment** is explained as:

Искрена или неискрена похвала, изказана към някого с цел да го поласкаем или да му доставим удоволствие.

Синоними на думата са: *похвала, любезност, ласкавост, ласкателство*
/Sincere or insincere praise, uttered to someone in order to please him/her. Synonyms of the word are: praise, kindness, flattery/.

In English the word **compliment** has a broader meaning:

1. *An expression of praise, commendation, or admiration: A sincere compliment boosts one's morale.*
2. *A formal act or expression of civility, respect: The mayor paid him the compliment of escorting him.*
3. *A courteous greeting; good wishes; regards: He sends you his compliments*

Included in the social strategy, the function of the compliment is to establish and maintain solidarity between the speaker and addressee [Wolfson, Manes 1980]. According to Brown and Levinson [Brown, Levinson 1987] this function is an expression of positive politeness, which aims to find a common ground with the addressee, as part of a group of people who share specific goals and values. Compliments are used to make the listeners feel good about themselves, their interests or possessions, and are usually made in situations when the interlocutors know each other fairly well.

The function of the compliment to establish and maintain solidarity between communicators is implemented according to social factors such as gender, age, social status, etc. Exactly the principle of solidarity provides a basis for making socio-and ethno linguistic comparisons such as: Americans more often use compliments than English-speaking South Africans; distribution of compliments in American English is "completely free" as opposed to British English [Herbert 1989].

In varieties of English such as American [Wolfson, 1988; Manes & Wolfson, 1981, 1983] research has shown that compliments are formulaic in terms of both their meaning and forms. With regard to their meaning, compliments are mainly realized by means of adjectives and verbs. In American English, the majority (approximately two thirds) are compliments realized by means of five adjectives: *nice, good, beautiful, pretty, and great* and combination of two verbs (approximately 90%) such as *like and love*.

With respect to their form, almost 80% of the compliments are realized in three patterns given and received by middle-class speakers of American English; of these, the first one seems to be the most common structure chosen by U.S. Americans:

Your hair *looks* nice --> Noun Phrase + is/looks/ (really) Adjective

I really *like* your car --> I (really) like/love + Noun Phrase

That's a *nice* tie --> (PRO (really) (a) Adjective + Noun Phrase

With regard to gender differences, females tend to give and receive more compliments to and from other females and males, while males tend to give more compliments to women (about their overall appearance) and, to a lesser degree, to other males.

Compliments in Bulgarian are also mainly formulaic with a limited choice of adjectives and verbs. They are often associated with appearance, skills, as well as personality traits. The most frequently used adjectives are: *хубав, прекрасен, страхотен, красив, "як", „готин“* (pretty, wonderful, awesome, beautiful, cool).

Concerning their form the most common compliments in Bulgarian have an exclamation character:

Колко си *хубава* тази сутрин! → Adverb + Verb + Adjective + Noun

Готина кола! → Adjective + Noun

Роклята ти стои *прекрасно*! → Noun + Personal Pronoun + Verb + Adjective

Compared to gender differences, women tend to make more compliments to other women than men.

The true nature of the compliment is more than an occasional remark and is realized in a dialogue sequence. Compliments take the first position in the local organization of the dialogue. Designed for a recipient, it requires compliment response in the second position - verbal or nonverbal, non-preferred or preferred [Levinson 1983].

Compliment is closely linked with praise: in semantic plan both speech acts contain positive assessments of the quality, characteristics, condition, activity or object relevant to the addressee. But while praise may be depersonalized, compliment requires to be accepted by the person we praise and to be correlated to him/her, whether he/she is directly addressed or a "third party" in the dialogue.

Compliments are a special 'luxury' in verbal communication and can not be used at any time. They are found more often at the beginning of the verbal interaction and sometimes are even included in the strategies to initiate conversation. Since by definition compliment comments something new and unexpected, in case it remains unnoticed by one interlocutor, the other can turn his attention and direct it towards making a compliment. That's why in both languages we can find similar phrases like: *ishing for compliments*" and *„прося си комплимент“*.

Usually compliments stand in the first position of the dialogue and initiate "positive talk". But even when in compliance with the accepted speech etiquette formulas they can get either a preferred or a non-preferred response. The analyses of the compliment as a positive talk raise the question that refers to all kinds of verbal and non-verbal interactions: Namely, to what extent compliments are linguistically and culturally specific? Is there a 'Bulgarian element' in the exchange of compliments in Bulgarian language?

The interlingual comparison that follows compares dialogue sequences consisting of Compliment – Response exchanges made by English interlocutors from three English-speaking communities (American, British and South African) and similar dialogue exchanges made by Bulgarian students in a real-life situation. The data in English are taken from the publications of Pomerantz [Pomerantz 1978] and Herbert [Herbert 1989].

Functions of the compliment in contemporary Bulgarian and English language.

English

Bulgarian

1. Expressing gratitude

A: *That's beautiful!*

B: *Thank you!*

A: *Страхотна кола имаш!*

B: *Благодаря!*

2. Acceptance with a comment

A: *I like your jacket.*

B: *Yeah, it's cool.*

A: *Прекрасно изглеждаш тази сутрин!*

B: *Да, всичко по мен е марково.*

3. Rejecting the compliment and degrading the praise

A: *You are a very good rower!*

B: *You should have seen me in my twenties.*

A: *Чудесно ти стои тази рокля!*

B: *Хм, голяма ми е.*

4. Comment history

A: *I love that outfit!*

B: *I got it for the trip to Arizona.*

A: *Харесват ми обувките ти!*

B: *Купих ги преди две години от Испания. Старите ми се изтриха, взех ги на промоция.*

5. Reassignment of the compliment

A: *That's a beautiful sweater!*

B: *Did you finish the assignment for today?*

A: *Ех, че яки маратонки!*

B: *Гледа ли мача вчера?*

6. Accepting the compliment as a request

A: *I like your shirt!*

B: *You can borrow it anytime.*

A: *Хубаво колело!*

B: *Искаш ли едно кръгче?*

7. Positive acceptance of the compliment

No examples in English

A: *Изглеждаш страхотно!*

B: *О, ще те почерпя!*

As a result of this comparison we can conclude that in both languages compliments have similar functions with some minor differences. The function "Reassignment of the compliment" is hardly found in the Bulgarian language, while in English it is a polite reason to change the subject and to start another topic.

In case number 7 the function of the compliment is to show that the reply "I'll treat you! What will you have for a drink" in such responses is limited to a verbal gesture that marks the exaggerated praise of the evaluation expressed by the compliment. This is a typical Bulgarian usage.

The Interlingual and intercultural similarities and differences in the dialogue coherence Compliment - Response in contemporary Bulgarian and English language can be viewed in conjunction with the term "communication style" in the sense that is given by Susan Ervin-Tripp [Ervin – Tripp1979]. She applies the distinction between positive and negative politeness, developed by Brown and Levinson, to the so-called mutual engagement in the conversation. Ervin-Tripp emphasizes that cultures differ in their reactions to threats. On one side are the cultures that emphasize on negative politeness. In these cases the interlocutors can talk without listening to each other and say something unrelated to the compliment. This communicative style has proposed the term "civil rights approach". On the other side are cultures emphasizing on positive politeness: conversations are looking for a positive effect, emotional support and empathy, and are based on markers of appreciation, expressions of interest, agreement [Ervin - Tripp1979]. This style is associated with a high degree of mutual commitment and is typical of nations, supporting the idea of egalitarianism, which include the Bulgarian ethnicity. This parameter indicates that the Bulgarian has greater similarity to American than to English and English-speaking South African.

In conclusion we can say that in both languages compliments have a similar function: to serve as a means of reinforcing the links of solidarity and affiliation between interlocutors and to be a way of smoothing conversation. Compliments in contemporary Bulgarian and English language, like the expressions for gratitude, follow similar speech act formulas [Tzoneva, Kopankova 2007]. Differences occur in the parts of speech, constituting the compliment in both languages and in the frequency of their use. While in the English culture compliments are employed to "break the ice" in an initial encounter and are part of the negotiating strategy of the conversation, in the Bulgarian culture they are less common and can be uttered only by intimates or good acquaintances. They are rarely used between strangers.

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