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Strategies in the Realization of Compliment: Insights from Punjabi-Speaking English Language Learners

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Let's Start!

Strategies in the Realization of Compliment: Insights from Punjabi-Speaking English Language Learners

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Abstract

As effective social tools, compliments support the development of rapport, the reinforcement of constructive behavior, and the preservation of peaceful interpersonal relationships. Gaining proficiency in the pragmatic use of compliments is just as crucial to second language acquisition as mastering grammar, especially since pragmatic miscommunication can result in social misunderstandings. The interplay of the social expectations of the target language and the cultural norms of their home language shapes the complementing behavior of Punjabi-speaking English language learners. Expressive, detailed praises are generally valued in Punjabi culture, which frequently uses straightforward language to communicate warmth and affection. However, English may favor more controlled, context-sensitive, and formulaic complimenting patterns, particularly in Western situations. This article examines how Punjabi-speaking learners interpret English compliments, as well as the common strategies they employ, the challenges they encounter, and instances of pragmatic transfer from their mother tongue. According to the findings, Punjabi-speaking students are willing to offer flattering remarks, but they usually find it difficult to fit in with English-speaking norms. This can lead to overgeneralization, pragmatic mistakes, and perhaps unintentional social embarrassment. Improving learners' comprehension of cultural pragmatics and integrating pragmatic education into language learning could significantly boost communicative ability.

Key words: Compliments, Reinforcement, Pragmatic instruction, social expectations, Pragmatic Transfer

INTRODUCTION

Learning a language is not just memorizing grammar and vocabulary; it also requires mastering pragmatics, the subtle rules of social use. Compliments are a crucial aspect of daily communication, and they perform numerous social functions, including indicating approval and managing interpersonal relations and solidarity. In English-speaking countries, the compliments are often administered cautiously so as not to appear forced, too personal or intrusive in any way, shape or form, intertwining sincerity with acceptable social norms. As a result, ELLs need to know when, how, and to whom they should give praise, as well as how to

compliment people in English. The investigation of the use of complement forms is especially intriguing for Punjabi ESL students because it is highly expressive in terms of Punjabi communicative culture.

In Punjabi, compliments are typically direct, heartfelt, and often poetic. For instance, it's normal to openly compliment one's physical characteristics and possessions or to offer multiple compliments in a single conversation. The relational and collectivist orientation of Punjabi society, which values and anticipates verbal expressions of affection and thanks, is reflected in these practices. However, when Punjabi-speaking learners apply these norms to English discussions, pragmatic incompatibilities may occur. A Punjabi speaker might say to a new English-speaking acquaintance, "You are very beautiful, and your clothes are very expensive-looking!" This well-intentioned statement could be construed as being unduly intimate or materialistic in English-speaking nations. Moreover, responding to praises might be challenging. In Punjabi culture, it's normal to accept praise with pleasure or even to promptly return the favor, whereas in English, it's sometimes expected to respond with shyness or light downplaying ("Oh, it's nothing!"). These cultural differences highlight the need to explicitly teach pragmatic ability to learners who speak Punjabi. If learners are unaware of the social standards that govern complimenting behavior in English, they face the risk of creating a social faux pas that could damage their relationships and communication effectiveness. Furthermore, given the increasing globalization and the widespread use of English in social, professional, and academic contexts both in Pakistan and abroad, developing an awareness of international pragmatics is not only a linguistic requirement but also a crucial social skill. By identifying the strategies that Punjabi-speaking English learners commonly use, analyzing the influence of their native cultural norms, and identifying the areas where pragmatic errors are most common, this paper aims to methodically examine the complementing behavior of these learners. It accomplishes this in an attempt to enhance South Asian learners' understanding of pragmatics in second languages and to offer practical recommendations for English instruction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

It is necessary to have a thorough and fair understanding of the nature and purpose of compliments, models of complimenting behavior, the idea of pragmatic competence, and the influence of cultural transfer on second language pragmatics in order to comprehend compliment strategies among Punjabi-speaking English language learners. In order to provide a theoretical basis for the current investigation, this section examines important literature.

DEFINITION AND FUNCTIONS OF COMPLIMENTS

According to standard definitions, compliments are spoken acts that either directly or indirectly convey appreciation, approval, or praise for a quality, trait, or conduct of the hearer (Holmes, 1988; Wolfson, 1983). Compliments have important social roles as part of constructive politeness techniques because they strengthen social bonds, lessen social distance, and validate social norms (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The compliments in American English are rather formulaic, according to Manes and Wolfson (1981), with adjectives like "nice," "good," "beautiful," or verbs like "like" and "love" predominating. Sentences such as "You did a great

job" or "I love your dress" are examples of patterns that are favored by the culture. This formulaicity is less noticeable in many non-Western cultures, though, and complimenting may entail more complex or situation-specific language (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989). Crucially, compliments are socially motivated speech acts that are regulated by cultural norms about what is desirable and how praise should be expressed; they are not just linguistic embellishments (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE AND SPEECH ACT THEORY

The capacity to utilize language effectively and appropriately in a social situation is known as pragmatic competence (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Thus, it refers to the ability of the second language learners to follow a certain pattern of compliments to deliver their compliments with an appropriate and effective manner. Likewise, it includes both pragmalinguistic knowledge, which involves selecting the appropriate linguistic structures to realize speech acts, and sociopragmatic knowledge, which involves comprehending the social rules of interaction (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989). A framework for examining communicative acts like compliments is provided by the Speech Act Theory, which was first proposed by Austin in 1962 and refined by Searle in 1969. One way to classify compliments is as expressive speech acts that indicate the speaker's psychological condition regarding the hearer or the hearer's possessions. However, second-language learners might not be sensitive enough to cultural norms to conduct speech actions effectively (Kasper, 1997).

Likewise, the locutionary perspective is always viewed through the lens of sounds, encompassing the fundamental units of a vocabulary and the predicted sequence of syntax. It is pertinent to mention briefly that Austin has used the dimension or perspective in the terms of sense and reference since both are included in the outcome of this social phenomenon. It is very difficult to define the true parameters of mandate of the term locutionary is still debatable as what was meant when used by Austin (1975). As a concluding notion, it can be asserted that the term illocutionary act has been used and refers to an utterance done by means of convention in generating an utterance for a particular purpose; therefore, assumes an act of assertion or positing an imperative or enquiring or whatsoever. On the other hand, the performance of a perlocutionary act indicates an utterance producing the effect during the production or accomplishment of an illocutionary act. For instance, if a speaker wants to tell someone about the accomplishment of a suitable speech act such as an illocutionary act might be described as an act of convincing or negotiating over a concern with the interlocutor (perlocutionary act). It is debatable and cannot be decided firmly as to Austin's consideration for the accomplishment of a particular speech act might be regarded or viewed as good remains to a large amount vague.

In contrast, it is assumed that many illocutionary acts are used in a pattern of conventional in the sense; and to decide promptly whether they are to be accomplished in certain contexts or not in a target situation, by a particular habitation or stretch, by a specific individual, keeping in view a particular assumed communal or recognized perspective thereby at a certain point, or an arrangement of well-organized dealings, causes a material or amount to a

larger extent of convention. Thus, it is often viewed that a performance may be conformist in the sagacity because some resources or a component of the resources engaged during the accomplishment strength be associated as conventional. For instance, the performance of properly delivering a salutation to somebody might be executed by a truncated bend or simply greeting or it could be accomplished in many other several ways. It is, in its broader context, regarded as the identical performance in entirely different scenarios, specifically an acknowledgment, nonetheless the resources through which the particular act is performed are different. Therefore, it is the particular means, rather than one over the other is engaged is in this situation a matter of an account of agreement.

In the same vein, Wolfson (1983), non-native speakers frequently show proficiency in grammatical structures but struggle with pragmatics, which results in the usage of compliments in socially inappropriate contexts. It is evident that learners from diverse linguistic background display different kinds of orientation while performing compliments as a core speech act in their daily communicative practices. Pragmatic transfer, on the other hand, in which learners inadvertently apply first-language social norms which are embedded in the second-language usage, thus, occurs frequently and leads to the cause of failure or miscommunication (Kasper, 1992).

CROSS-CULTURAL VARIATION IN COMPLIMENTING BEHAVIOR

The frequency, subjects, directness, and response techniques of complimenting behavior vary greatly among cultures. For example, according to Holmes (1988), compliments are rather prevalent in New Zealand English and usually highlight one's looks, belongings, or performance. However, they are given modestly to prevent coming across as untrue. Conversely, Chen (1993) discovered that, due to a cultural focus on humility, praises in Chinese frequently elicit rejection or downplaying rather than outright acceptance. According to research on Middle Eastern and South Asian cultures (Farghal & Haggan, 2006), praises can also be more effusive, addressing topics that are deemed sensitive by Western standards, such as wealth, family, and looks.

Similar to other South Asian customs, Punjabi culture encourages and tolerates open adoration, especially for material belongings, familial standing, and physical attractiveness. "Your son is so intelligent!" and "Your gold jewelry is amazing!" are typical and appreciated compliments. However, Western interlocutors may find such rules intrusive, excessively personal, or materialistic if they are translated into English without modification (Spencer-Oatey, 2008). Furthermore, cultural values are reflected in the selection of complement themes. In Punjabi culture, complimenting someone on their appearance is common, even among acquaintances, although in English-speaking societies, it may only be used in intimate connections. Therefore, it depends on the status or intimacy of the interlocutors holds during the interaction. These variations highlight how crucial it is to educate pragmatic awareness in addition to linguistic forms (Ishihara & Cohen, 2010).

COMPLIMENT STRATEGIES AND ESL/EFL LEARNERS

The management of compliments by English language learners has been the subject of numerous research. Holmes (1988), for example, noted that non-native speakers usually either

overuse or underuse compliments, and that their replies to compliments typically differ from native standards. Additionally, students could find it difficult to choose themes for suitable compliments, like as praising someone's beauty in countries where doing so is viewed as overly forward. Research on pragmatic competence among English language learners in Pakistan is few but expanding. The research conducted in the past has taken into consideration the speech act of apology and request thereby the speech act of compliment has been unexplored and overlooked. In this regard, the current study makes an attempt to find out the characteristics of Punjabi speaking English language learners and their performance of compliment who dominates a major population across the country of the researchers.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The present study has benefitted from the qualitative research paradigm which provides thick and thin description of the data being analyzed. It also focuses to examine through a thematic analysis the use of compliments carried out by Punjabi-speaking English language learners. Thus, the selected approach is more relevant and appropriate as it examines the accomplishment of the speech act of compliment which, in other words, cannot be analyzed through the quantitative paradigm.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants selected for the current study are pursuing their higher studies with a major concentration on English studies, and are enrolled in different post graduate institutions of District Jhelum, Punjab, Pakistan. Considering the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the learners, the sample was chosen carefully through purposive sampling technique, and the following criterion was set to select the participants: (a) Punjabi as their L1, (b) English with major concentration, and (c) enrolled in 5th semester of college or university. Students from Semesters 6 and 8 who were primarily advanced-intermediate or advanced English proficiency learners made up the sample. For the purpose of gathering data, 30 participants in total—15 from Semester 6 and 15 from Semester 8—were chosen.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

A Discourse Completion Task (henceforth, DCT), modified to elicit complimenting behavior in a range of social contexts, served as the main instrument for gathering data. Participants in the DCT were asked to provide compliments in ten fictitious scenarios (such as praising a teacher's presentation, a peer's academic achievement, or a friend's new wardrobe). A subset of ten participants also participated in semi-structured interviews to learn more about their attitudes, perceptions, and mental processes when offering English-language compliments.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The nature and goal of the study were briefly explained to the participants at their initial orientation. To guarantee a controlled environment, the DCT was conducted in a classroom. In order to respond naturally, participants were told to picture themselves engaging with actual individuals in actual situations. There was no time limit to ease anxiety and encourage sincere responses. Depending on their level of comfort, a subset of participants were asked one-on-one

to explain their choices and explanations in either Punjabi and English or English after the DCT results were gathered. The interviews of the selected learners were transcribed and coded later for analysis purposes.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through DCT was transcribed and thematic analysis was done. Three different scenarios were developed to examine the variation in their responses when complimenting each other. The analytical framework was adopted from Blum-kulka et.al. (1989) and (e.g., Holmes, 1988; Manes & Wolfson, 1981) who have analyzed different speech acts through classification. Further, the interviews were analyzed with the tool of thematic analysis supplemented with content analysis. This method endorsed and validated provided the researcher with an opportunity to examine the understudy speech act of compliment among Punjabi-speaking English language learners focusing on the attitude and behavior during the accomplishment of the understudy speech act. The analysis was conducted using the following methods:

1. **Knowledge of the Information:** The DCT responses were several times revisited and revised to get a holistic view of the responses concerning the understanding of the lexical choices, techniques being employed in compliment, thereby situating the different scenarios for cross study across different social contexts. The interview recordings were also verbatim transcribed, and these were thoroughly reviewed.

2. **Initial Coding:** Open coding was used to identify recurring patterns, words, and strategies among the participants. Codes were assigned to certain pragmatic elements (including appropriateness, cultural transmission, and politeness levels) and linguistic characteristics (such the use of adjectives, repetition, and directness).

3. **Theme Development:** The codes were then grouped into broader themes that reflected common complimenting strategies. Among the emerging topics were: The literal meaning of Punjabi translation Excessive or exaggerated praise and the usage of culturally specific terms Inappropriate formality or a lack of knowledge with standard responses to compliments.

4. **Cross-Contextual Comparison:** Responses were compared across multiple social circumstances (e.g., complimenting a teacher versus a peer) to examine the impact of context on participants' complement approaches. This illustrated the extent to which students may alter their terminology in response to relationships and social statuses.

5. **Interview Integration**: Interview data was used to elaborate on and elucidate the DCT results. It was common for participants' explanations to reveal cultural thinking, word choice purposes, or a lack of knowledge about particular English pragmatic rules. This increased the subtlety and dependability of the written responses' interpretation. The final study clearly showed how Punjabi-speaking learners consider and employ compliments in English, showing a clear relationship between their cultural-linguistic background and pragmatic choices.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

During the analysis of the data, significant results were obtained. Similarly, it was found that the selected participants opted for effective strategies to accomplish the speech act of complement

employed by Punjabi-speaking English language learners which cannot be simply ignored as demonstrated the results obtained from the Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs). Most importantly, it was inferred that second learners not only remained conscious about the interference of their respective mother tongue, but the influence of their mother tongue linguistic resources and cultural background remained prominent in different social and linguistic contexts. The following major findings were demonstrated after the identification of the main themes.

1. The result displayed showed that learners accomplished or complied with the accurate norms of the target language, and remained more close to native speaker in terms of their pragmatic competence. Many Punjabi words were literally translated directly into English thereby embedding it; for example, "Your dress is very shining," "You have a lot of noor on your face."

    Likewise, these complimentary words and lexical choices may not imitate to the concords of outdated English compliments, but they also encompass some elements of cultural expressions.

2. Use of Intensifiers: To highlight appreciation, participants commonly employed intensifiers and repetition, which usually led to overly dramatic remarks: "You are a very good teacher." "It's really, really lovely." This is similar to Punjabi expressive language, where sincerity and emotion are communicated through repetition.

3. Topic Preference in comments: The majority of comments emphasized one's physical attributes, attire, or personal possessions, all of which are highly prized in Punjabi society. It was uncommon to get compliments on skills, accomplishments, or personal traits: "Your shoes are beautiful." "You look very intelligent today."

4. Inappropriate Contextual Use or Formality: Some compliments were offered in ways that native speakers believed were inappropriate. For example, in a formal academic setting, a participant gave a teacher praise for their haircut. This suggests a lack of awareness of hierarchy and social context.

5. Limited Use of Conventional English Phrases: Very few participants employed common English compliments like "Well done" or "That's impressive." Most instead used straightforward remarks, frequently with the help of their L1 frameworks.

    Patterns of Compliment Response According to interview data, students frequently didn't know how to react in English when they were complimented. Many acknowledged feeling uncomfortable or just shifting the topic. Typical answers were as follows: Either quiet or apprehensive laughter "It's not good, no, no." "It's nothing, but thank you." This illustrates cultural humility, as declining praise is considered kind in Punjabi but could be interpreted as condescending or awkward in English-speaking settings.

    The Impact of Code-Switching and Bilingualism Many interviewees alternated between Punjabi and English to defend their selections. This bilingualism demonstrated: A heavy dependence on cultural norms for speech act production, a propensity to convert thoughts from Punjabi to English, has trouble automatically locating suitable English structures.

Theme	Example	Cultural Influence
Literal Translation	"Your dress is very shining."	Direct transfer from Punjabi phrases
Repetition & Intensification	"Very very nice!"	Expressiveness in Punjabi culture
Appearance-focused Compliments	"You look smart."	Cultural preference for physical compliments
Inappropriate Context	Complimenting a senior on minor details	Hierarchical misunderstanding
Awkward Responses	"No, it's not good."	Culturally rooted humility

These results demonstrate that although Punjabi-speaking English language learners use compliments to indicate their sincere respect, they have practical difficulties when utilizing them in English in ways that are appropriate for their culture. The information also demonstrates how learners' complementing behavior in a second language is greatly influenced by their first language and cultural standards.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The current study revealed several significant results obtained from the data related to Punjabi speaking English language learners and displayed various results during the accomplishment of the speech act of compliment. The participant demonstrated the different realization of the speech act of compliment through indirect manner and positive response thereby using a formal tone. These findings were found consistent and aligned with the preceding research conducted on speech act of compliment, and it was found that the execution of the speech act vary across cultures (Cohen, 1997). Furthermore, it was found that the participants were more prone to the use of already established norms or set phrases when complimenting the interlocutor with reference to their linguistic development and considering their cultural background.

It was asserted that learners demonstrated and knew how to negotiate when interacting with the interlocutor during the accomplishment of compliment, and maintained a conducive environment. It showed that pragmatic competence as they remained close to native speakers in the performance of the compliments. Several participants advocated strongly that it is pertinent to mention that how much it is important to be polite which showed the consideration of the diverse learners and used the most appropriate forms of compliments in the interaction. It can be ascribed most probably to their mother tongue culture as the participants relied more on the target language cultural resources to make their communicative decisions.

CONCLUSION

Pragmatic competence of the Punjabi speaking English language learners was found to be ranging from high to low with most of the participants experiencing difficulties in nonverbal

communication and employment of right speech act in interpersonal communication. Outcomes identified showed that participants appeared to be challenged with the manifestations of compliments and greetings and due to this they came across cases of misunderstanding due to inadquate knowledge of cultural polity. The participants' cultural background was the major factor affecting the pragmatic performance, since many of the participants reverted to the Punjabi norms of use instead of using that appropriate for the English speaking environment. The research highlighted particular areas of ineffective interaction, including expectations of communication shown by non-native speakers when interacting with each other, especially in greetings and compliments. This research focused on the pragma-linguistics as a necessary component of achieving pragmatic competence where context awareness coupled with the understanding of the conversational dynamics became the key findings.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

It is strongly recommended to study specific speech acts such as compliments than learning how they are developed culturally. Moreover, there is a dire need to conduct a longitudinal research to examine the holistic view of other speech acts. It is also recommended for English language teachers to teach the speech acts according to the prevailing cultural and social norms of the target language. The English language teachers need to examine extensively as to how and what can be taught during complimenting. It is also recommended to develop teaching aids for use in compliment. At last but not the least, it is suggested for policy maker to devise such strategies which might be helpful in the support of learners' diversity and helpful in the facilitation of inclusive language teaching.

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