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1 2000

**Compliments in the classroom: Gender and status differences
in Midwestern American English**

by

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**A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS**

Major: English (Teaching English as a Second Language/Applied Linguistics)

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Ames, Iowa

2000

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Signatures have been redacted for privacy.

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This study examines several patterns in compliments within a hypothetical university classroom in the Midwest, especially the effects of status and gender. The data were gathered by means of a discourse completion test which included four items. Respondents were required to answer in written form. Data from 75 males and 75 females were collected and were analyzed for semantic patterns, lexical choices, and syntactic formulae with respect to gender and status effects within these categories.

Results showed that females give and receive more compliments than males, regardless of status. Females of equal status to the respondent were the most complimented; the least complimented was a male of higher status than the respondent. Lexical, semantic and syntactic patterns showed a relatively limited set of formulae. Possible social factors for the highly patterned compliment were outlined. Finally, implications for teaching these formulae in an ESL or EFL classroom were drawn and ideas for lessons were presented.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Recently, the idea of teaching speech acts and pragmatic competence in ESL has become popular. However, in spite all the research pointing to the benefits of teaching speech acts, even the newest textbooks have made very little mention of the social norms of speech acts. During my search for speech acts in ESL textbooks for use in my class, I found some did have very basic rules for social situations like going to the bank and using the telephone. However, vocabulary seemed to be the main focus and the lessons found were not nearly complete enough to help my students in social situations. For example, in a few conversation skills textbooks, a compliment pattern can be found in a list of other “useful” expressions to be used in social situations; however, in most textbooks no mention is made at all.

Focus of this Study

Many previous studies have investigated compliments. For example, Holmes (1986, 1987, 1988) examined compliments and compliment responses in New Zealand English. Herbert (1986,1989) did studies concentrating on native speakers of English in both South Africa and New York. Wolfson (1981, 1983, 1984) and Wolfson and Manes (1980) worked with a corpus of compliments gathered in Pennsylvania and Virginia. Creese (1991) did a contrastive analysis of British and American compliments. Nelson, Al-batal, and Echols (1996) compared compliments from native speakers of Arabic and American English.

The current study of compliments attempts to fill gaps in previous studies with respect to three main points. The first is a focus on compliments in a classroom setting only. The second is the ability to state compliment avoidance in a quantifiable manner. Because data were gathered by means of elicitation rather than naturally occurring data, respondents were able to opt to avoid a compliment, so avoidance resulted in countable data. And third, the current study examines data from participants who are from the Midwest and primarily use the Midland or North Central dialects of American English, which have been largely neglected in previous studies.

The results of this study could prove to be an invaluable tool for teachers and students in a second language classroom. When teaching compliments, teachers would be provided with a more accurate and complete set of rules for this behavior than current texts provide, and pass on more accurate information to students.

Focus on a classroom setting

Previous work has provided very useful information about general patterns in complimenting behavior, including a template for syntactic and semantic structures of compliments and a set of the most frequent lexical choices (Manes and Wolfson 1981, Herbert 1986b, Holmes 1986). Previous work has also provided some explanations for the social function of complimenting behavior (Wolfson 1988, Herbert 1986b). However, the studies have gathered data from the general population. None of the studies have compiled and analyzed data limited to the context of a university classroom, which is the behavior most interest to university ESL students. Only one previous study focused on the student population. Herbert (1986b) examined a corpus which was gathered by university students within their own social groups. His data included compliments and compliment responses recorded and uttered while students were engaged in a wide

variety of activities, but his student researchers did not limit data to classroom activities. Other studies have included students, but have not focused solely on students. In fact, Holmes (1986) and Wolfson (1983) both state that analysis of data from a cross-section of society was an important part of the study. The results in data analysis will be useful when teaching speech act behavior in a university-level ESL classroom. The data in the corpus are gathered from the same group of people in the same setting where the university ESL learner will likely have the first opportunity to interact with native speakers. The current study hopes to provide a set of general norms specifically for the classroom and the university ESL student.

Quantifiable results of compliment avoidance

The compliments in the previous studies were gathered ethnographically. In order to achieve an ethnographic study, researchers gathered compliments in natural settings and recorded the first compliments they either overheard or participated in. In ethnographically-gathered data, there is no way to quantifiably state when a respondent has an opportunity to give a compliment but chooses not to.

The data for the current study were gathered by means of a discourse completion questionnaire. Although it will be described in more detail in Chapter 3, it is important to mention that the written questionnaire in the current study presented respondents with a context, and in each question respondents were asked how likely they would be to comment. A compliment was a possible answer for each question. In some cases, the respondent chose to say nothing at all, thus avoiding a compliment opportunity. When using ethnographically-gathered or naturally-occurring data, it is possible to speculate about relative frequency of compliments and the effect status and gender has in that frequency, but information about avoidance is much more limited.

Gathering data with a questionnaire or discourse completion test lessens bias due to the gender of the researcher. One example of the problems in gathering data ethnographically can be seen in Holmes' 1988 study. In the style of ethnographic research, she instructed her university student data collectors to record the first 20 compliments they heard, without discrimination. Holmes explains that since most of the students who had volunteered for the project were female, her data could be skewed to include more compliments given and received by females because female researchers probably had more opportunity to witness and take part in compliments involving females. For this reason, Holmes' male representation in complimenting behavior could be lower than would truly be found in the general population. Admittedly, Holmes' data may well show an accurate picture of male and female ratios. However, it is hoped that by gathering data by means of a questionnaire and administering it to an equal numbers of males and females, the question of bias on the basis of the researcher's gender will be greatly lessened. When analyzed, the data in the current study will provide a more quantifiable way to express male and female patterns.

An issue similar to the question of gender bias is the affect of status on complimenting behavior. Holmes (1986) stated that her researchers didn't always know the exact nature of the relationship between compliment participants. Researchers recorded what was known, if anything, about the status of compliment participants. She goes on to say that more concrete information regarding status was necessary in order to draw meaningful conclusions. The data collection instrument in the current study constructs a context so that status and its effect on compliments can be stated quantifiably.

Study of English in the Midwest

The third, and perhaps most important, gap the current study attempts to fill is the lack of research done using the dialects of English spoken in the Midwest. Although much finer distinctions are made, five very broad dialect divisions describe the English spoken in the United States: Inland North, South, West, North Central and Midland (Labov, Ash, and Boberg 1997) (see Fig. 1). The English spoken in Iowa and the Midwest belongs to the Midland and the North Central Dialects.

Some degree of disagreement has existed about which dialect of American English is most “general” and most useful for ESL students to learn. Some linguists have called the Midland dialect “General English” and claim that it is the least marked of all American dialects. This study will not attempt to further argument for or make use of such assumptions. Instead, I push all controversy and discussion aside, and contend that the Midland and North Central Dialects are geographically a large part of the five dialect divisions. Yet, surprisingly, the Midland and North Central Dialects have not been included for research involving compliments. Holmes (1986) used data collected in New Zealand, Herbert (1989) used data from the Inland North Dialect and South Africa, Wolfson (1983) used data from the South and the Philadelphia Dialect area, Nelson, Al-batal and Echols (1996) gathered data from speakers of the South Dialect and Arabic speakers, and Creese (1991) compared data from the Philadelphia Dialect area to British English. The Midland and North Central dialects have been almost completely neglected in compliment research thus far. The isogloss between the Midland and the North Central Dialects divides the state of Iowa and is just north of Ames, Iowa, where the research for this study were gathered.

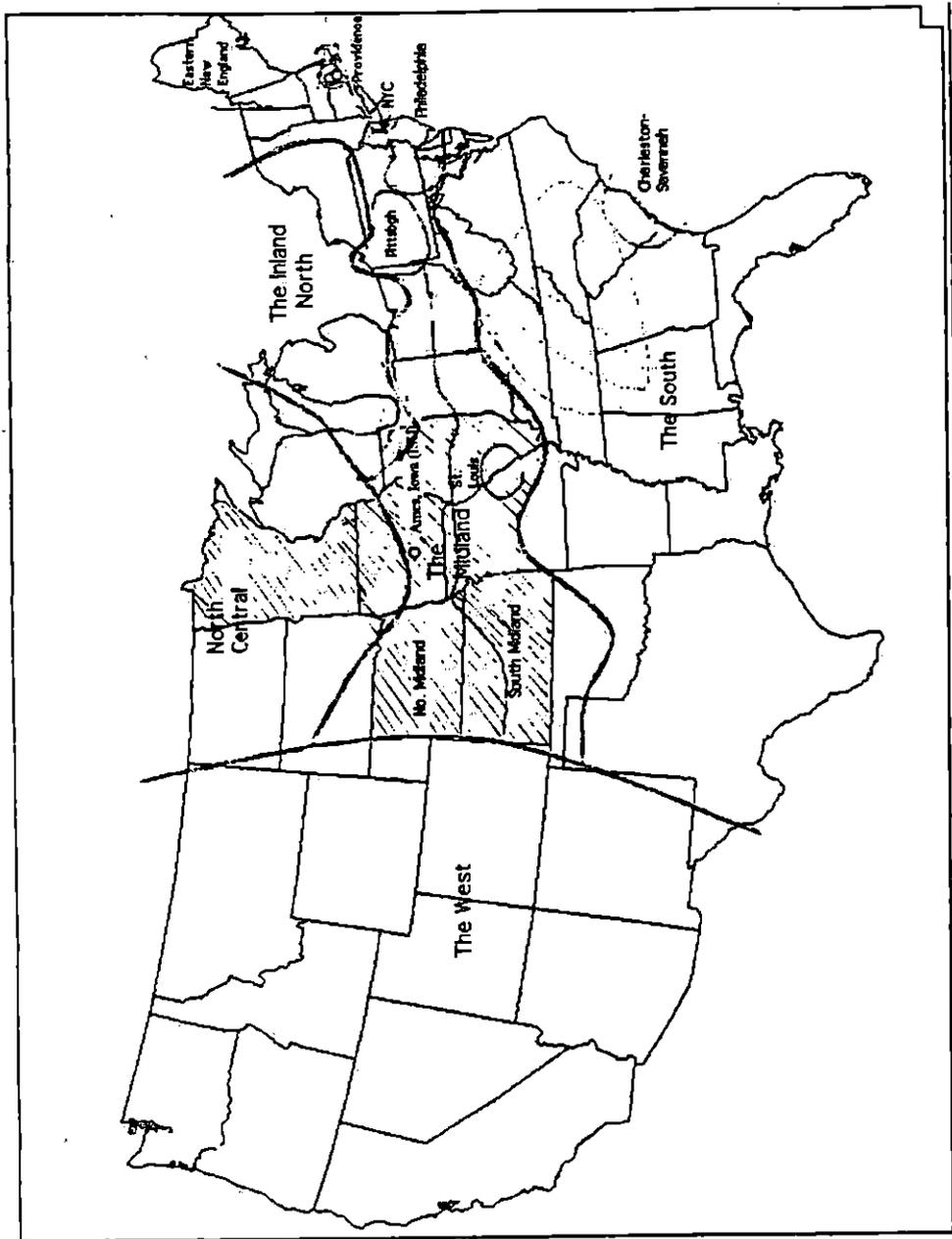


Figure 1.1 Dialect map of the United States. From Labov, Ash, and Boberg (1997).
Shaded area represents home state or major linguistic influence of respondents.

Importance to students and teachers

The results of this study can be useful in an ESL classroom by incorporating them in ESL lessons. In this way the students might at least better understand their American classmates' behavior, if not master some of the linguistic strategies needed in order to more easily form social relationships with their American classmates. Social relationships not only improve quality of life, but have been proven to speed language learning and provide more opportunity for professional advancement.

Research Questions

The analysis of data will have two focal points. For the first focus, the data from all respondents (male and female) will be combined. I will seek to answer the following questions:

- Are semantic and syntactic patterns evident?
- How frequently are compliments given?
- What are the most common lexical choices?
- How does status affect these patterns?

In the second part, the data from men and women will be analyzed separately in order to examine how gender affects responses. The questions are as follows:

- Are certain semantic patterns more prevalent with one of the genders?
- Do men and women make different lexical choices?
- Which gender receives more compliments?
- How does gender affect status patterns?

This paper examines patterns in the use of compliments in a hypothetical classroom setting. The first focus is on finding general patterns for complimenting behavior by focusing on lexical, semantic, and syntactic information and how status affects these patterns. The second focus seeks to find gender differences within these patterns. Third, the results from the current study will be compared to previous studies in

order to see if any similarities can be found. Lastly, some implications will be drawn for use when teaching compliments in an English as a second language classroom.

Motivation for undertaking research in this area came from an English as a second language (ESL) conversation skills class I recently taught at Iowa State University. After performing a needs assessment, I discovered that while the students did have a desire to learn English for use in formal settings, they were equally hungry to learn the rules for social situations (i.e., they wanted boyfriends and girlfriends). They were advanced enough learners to realize that the rules for their own cultures sometimes did not have the same effects in English, but not advanced enough to be able to employ new rules without some degree of instruction.

Organization of this Study

In the next chapter I will define terms useful for discussion of this study. Then, I will present some background information, together with a review of past research. In Chapter 3, I will explain how I formulated the method of data collection with a rationale for its use and a description of the participants in the study. In Chapter 4, I will present the data and interpret it in light of the research questions, compare these results to the findings in previous studies and offer possible explanations for differences found. Lastly, in Chapter 5, the Conclusion, I will provide a summary of major findings of this study and outline its limitations and make suggestions for future research. Also, suggestions will be given for using these findings in a language classroom.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before it is possible to discuss the data in a meaningful way, several key terms will be defined, necessary background information provided, and useful examples outlined. Finally, results from the data of previous studies will be presented.

Definition of Important Terms

In this section, I wish to define the terms which will be used to discuss the data in this study. First, it is important to recognize the term speech act. Speech acts are defined as “attempts by language users to perform specific actions” (Ellis 1994). Some examples of speech acts which have been researched in the past are compliments, apologies, requests, invitations and refusals. Speech acts are often studied in adjacency pairs (Sacks 1972). This refers to two utterances in sequence which are dependant on one another.

Consider the following example:

Example (1)

A: You've lost weight. You look great.

B: Oh, thanks. I've been working out.

This example is an adjacency pair because the response which speaker B makes is dependant on his or her interpretation of speaker A's intention. In this case speaker A appears to be giving speaker B a compliment. If the intention is misinterpreted (i.e., if the utterance is taken as an insult), then speaker B would be more likely to give an inappropriate response. Decisions must be made by speakers about when to use speech acts in order to have their intentions interpreted correctly. Inappropriate timing or

subject choices which are outside of the norms of the culture where the utterance is spoken, may cause tension among the speakers. The speaker must know *when* to speak.

The *when* of using speech acts can be described using two different terms. The first is pragmatic competence. Pragmatic competence describes the knowledge of how utterances relate to context. It is different from grammatical knowledge in that it recognizes meaning behind speech acts. Pragmatic competence is dependent on the idea that speech acts can be either direct or indirect. A direct speech act has form and function which are congruent. In other words, there is no “hidden meaning” behind the phrase. In a direct speech act the phrase “I’m cold” would mean that the speaker is cold, but it would not function as an indirect request to shut the window.

However, an indirect speech act has incongruent form and function or multiple functions. In other words, the speaker’s intention is other than what the form of the utterance dictates. An example of an indirect speech act is seen in the following example of two friends, one of whom is late for an appointment with the other:

Example (2)

A: It’s nice of you to show up today.

B: Yeah, sorry, my alarm didn’t go off.

In this example, A phrases her comment in a way that has the pattern of a compliment. If the context is not taken into consideration, it may well be mistaken for one. But the illocutionary force, or real meaning behind the comment, is a complaint, for which B apologizes. It is this illocutionary force which drives the meaning behind such indirect speech acts and makes utterances like “I’m thirsty” mean “Please get me some water.” If speaker B had not taken into account the illocutionary force behind his or her response would have been inappropriate.

Holmes (1986) defines a compliment as “a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some ‘good’ (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.” As in other research done in complimenting behavior, the only compliments that will be considered in this study are ones which have both the form and illocutionary force of positive evaluation and attributing “good”. For example,

Example (3)

A: I like your hat

B: Thanks.

would be considered in the data. Searle (1979) outlines a set of rules which govern the interpretation of speech acts called felicity conditions. Searle states that the essential element of these conditions is that the speech act in question represents a truthful state of affairs. In other words, the hearer must interpret if the illocutionary force and the form of the speech act match. In example 2, the hearers would ask themselves if the speaker is really giving a compliment, and then respond according to the interpretation. Example 2 would not be included in the data because of its contrary meaning, but utterances such as Examples 1 and 3 would, because they both attribute “good” to the compliment recipient. Data that was not included in the study will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Politeness Theory

Speech acts have been studied within the constraints of the Politeness Theory (Brown and Levinson 1978). The authors say that etiquette in conversation involves the idea of “face”. This concept is divided into “positive face”, or the desire to be liked and approved of, and “negative face”, or the desire to be left alone. In conversation and in

many formulaic speech acts, one aspect of face is at risk. For example, a face threatening act (FTA) like a request damages negative face, while a FTA like failing to invite a friend to party damage the friend's positive face.

The degree to which the FTA has potential to damage face affects the level of politeness. A small request, like asking to pass the salt at a dinner table, requires a lower politeness level than asking to borrow a large sum of money, for example. Passing the salt represents much less of an imposition and threatens negative face much less than a sizeable loan, and therefore is more likely to be accomplished without much politeness.

Compliments are potential FTAs. A speaker may not compliment in an obligatory situation, like a friend's new hairstyle, and would thus damage the positive face of the recipient. However, if the speaker compliments in a way which is outside of the norm, he or she meets with disapproval and positive face is damaged.

Compliment responses are also potential FTAs. For instance, if the recipient does not acknowledge the speaker, or gives an inappropriate response, the positive face of the speaker is damaged, as well as the negative face of the recipient.

Importance of Speech Acts

Many researchers have outlined the need and the importance for incorporating sociolinguistic competence and speech acts in a foreign language classroom (Judd 1999, Holmes and Brown 1987, Tanaka 1997). A student's success as a language learner in an immersion setting is thought to depend upon (among other factors) his or her level of investment in the culture where he or she will use the target language (Ellis 1994). That is to say, if the student feels a part of the culture or sees the value in being a part of it, he or she will be more motivated to learn. If the student feels more motivated to learn, then the he or she will seek situations where there are more opportunities to learn. For

example, if the student can participate in social functions in the target language and sees the value in participation, he or she will feel more connected to the culture. Without participation in the target culture, no attachment and value or benefit is perceived, and the language learner is less likely to be successful.

The rules to a culture's speech acts are the keys to understanding the people in that culture. Manes (1983) contends that a culture's speech acts reflect its values. However, if the language learner does not learn *when* to use the grammar learned in the classroom, he or she will transfer his or her own cultural rules. Some rules and values may transfer successfully, while others may not. Depending on the context, this can lead to uncomfortable situations for both the learner and the native speaker. First, if all the non-native speaker (NNS) feels are uncomfortable moments, he or she will not be able to lessen the social distance he or she feels in the new culture and will not achieve an adequate level of investment and involvement to facilitate language learning. And second, the NNS's failure to communicate that which he or she means may cause the native speaker to mistake the pragmatic transfer as rudeness or even stupidity (Judd 1999, Tanaka 1997). As a result, the NNS may miss opportunities academically and professionally, since promotions and advancements often depend on social connections.

Cross-cultural comparisons of speech acts

Striking cultural variances are found when investigating norms of speech acts. Even cultures which share a native language may have different norms. Any American who has lived for any length of time in another English-speaking country can attest to that. For example, while I was in high school I spent a year living in Australia. During my year abroad I was lucky enough (linguistically speaking, in any case) to live in a home with a rather precocious child who informed me, among his many other insights,

that I said “you’re welcome” far too often. He went on to explain that “you’re welcome” should only be said if the person who is receiving the thanks has done something very large. By saying it after every thanks I received, as was the norm of speech behavior in my culture, I broke a speech act norm in his culture. The “you’re welcome” rule for speech acts was probably not one that he or I could have explained before I broke it for him. All he knew was that the stranger was using speech incorrectly.

Other investigations of speech acts have indicated cross-cultural differences as well. Creese (1991) interviewed British and American subjects who agreed that Americans seemed very direct when making requests, whereas her British subjects were more inclined to hedge and even apologize before making requests. One of her British subjects commented that Americans seem to view small requests as very routine and not requiring much hedging (a minor FTA to negative face), but in England, infringements on another person’s time and space is more serious and requires more hedging and even apologizing before a request is made (potentially more damaging to negative face). As a result, an American making a small request might be considered rude in England if he or she spoke using American norms of requesting behavior.

On the other hand, in American culture, over-hedging can have an equally negative effect. One example of this is taken from a social setting in the Midwest. For several years I served drinks in a college bar which had a casual atmosphere. One of the regular customers was a gentleman in his mid-thirties from the Middle East who always caused great argument among the bartenders. The staff did not want to wait on him. He was never rude; the problem was the opposite. When ordering, he used hedging to such a great extent that it seemed excessively flowery to the Americans. Every request was preceded by a long phrase such as, “I was wondering if you would be so kind as to....” or “I would very much appreciate it if you could possibly...”. His speech seemed too formal

and therefore exhausting to the staff. One bartender was overheard saying, "I want to tell him it's our job [to serve him] and to just relax a little". Several possibilities exist for his actions. The first is that in his culture, even small requests represent a potentially very damaging FTA, and he is transferring his cultural rules into his speech. Second, the gentleman could have learned these prescriptive rules for request in a ESL class, and is simply using them and trying to be polite in the new culture. Finally, considering that alcohol is taboo in many Middle Eastern cultures, the gentleman might be using excessive formality in order to compensate for his feelings of guilt for drinking alcohol. Whatever the reason, tension between the participants was the outcome and speech act instruction in ESL class would contribute to its solution.

Critics of cross-cultural comparisons of speech acts cite the assumption that the same factors govern speech behavior in all cultures as faulty. However, situational and social factors influence speech acts. For example, a change in appearance in American culture would elicit a compliment (Manes 1983) because of the importance this society places on possessions and appearance. However, the same compliment to a French speaker might be taken as an insult (Wolfson 1981). Furthermore, in much of the western world an apology would be offered for lateness, but Hebrew speakers are less concerned with time, so a reason would be offered but not an apology (Olshtain 1983).

This is not to say that cross-cultural comparisons are impossible or not useful. However, special care should be taken to investigate the social and situational factors which dictate speech acts (and the degree to which they are potential FTAs) within one culture before comparisons can be made to another.

Overview of Compliments and Compliment Responses

Compliments and compliment responses are adjacency pairs and are linked because the interpretation of the former dictates the content of the latter. Although the current study examines only compliments, some attention should be given to work involving compliment responses because of the degree to which they are interdependent. In this section, a detailed overview of compliment research will be given, then a summary of work done with compliment responses will be provided.

Compliments

Numerous studies have noted that Americans compliment far more often than many other cultures. Americans have been found to compliment more often than the British (Creese 1991), than South Africans (Herbert and Straight 1991), than New Zealanders (Holmes 1986), than Poles (Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk 1989), and than Arabic speakers (Nelson, Al-batal and Echols 1996). In fact, Manes and Wolfson (1981) give examples from many different cultures where compliments are not as frequent as in the United States. Even my own students have mentioned that Americans seem very shallow and insincere when it comes to compliments because, from their perspective, the compliments are overly abundant. Students are often unsure about the meaning of compliments because of their frequency.

Americans complimenting in other cultures has also been problematic. To illustrate this, I take an example from a study-abroad program to Mexico in which I participated. Each student on the trip stayed with a Mexican family in order to create an immersion experience. Before the trip, the director of the program had some advice for his American students. He warned all of them against complimenting any object in the Mexican family's home. The director explained that after a compliment, the family

members might give the object as a gift, even if they could ill-afford to do so. At the time, the warning made little sense to the American students. But in reviewing the research, Holmes (1986) explains that compliment can have the illocutionary force of a request for an item in many cultures. Even if the Mexican family didn't give the item as a gift, the compliment may still have been interpreted as having the illocutionary force of a request. As a result, the family might be left with the impression that the American was very rude because she asked to be given a gift in an inappropriate situation.

Social functions of compliments

A compliment is the nicest kind of ice-breaker you can have when you are having a tough time getting a conversation going with another person. Even if the other person is as shy as you are, when you pay that person a compliment, he or she will usually react positively, and the compliment just might cause the recipient to start rowing her end of the boat.

-Baldrige, L. (1990) Complete guide to the new manners for the 90's

If complimenting is so much more frequent in American culture than in many others, we might be able to assume that it performs more functions than the simple act of praise. For some indications of this culture's prescriptive rules for complimenting behavior, an etiquette books was consulted. Although an argument could be made that a source such as an etiquette book is merely a cultural artifact and may not reflect patterns in authentic conversation, an etiquette expert's advice does provide valuable information about the *perceived* norm. In the excerpt above, Baldrige mentions complimenting as a good way to begin a conversation with a stranger. In her book, she also lists social situations which require a compliment, such as receiving a gift, after a friend has purposefully changed appearance, after a dinner in someone's home, and after competitive sports. She further suggests "fibbing a bit" in order to compliment a friend who has changed her appearance in a way which is unflattering. Why should a

compliment be so important in this situation that the prescriptive rule calls for a lie?

What are the consequences of failing to compliment?

To answer these questions, one might imagine a host inviting several people over for dinner and not receiving any favorable comments on the meal. Chances are, the lack of comments would create tension. The host would consider the guests impolite and would likely be upset. Wolfson and Manes (1981) suggest that in cases where a compliment is expected but absent indicates disapproval. In this case, a compliment seems to say, “we have the same tastes and like the same things. I approve of your actions. We are equals.” If a compliment isn’t delivered, it would be perceived as meaning the opposite. Wolfson and Manes (1981) state that without “receiving constant reassurance from our friends and colleagues about our taste, abilities, and decisions we feel distinctly uncomfortable.”

In a pop culture example, we also see that a lack of compliments indicates disapproval. Although the following event is totally fictitious, it is useful because pop culture can mimic a culture’s norms. One episode of the television comedy *The Brady Bunch* finds Jan changing her appearance drastically (she put on a dark wig) and going to a social event. During the event, Jan finds a distinct lack of comments about her change in hairstyle. A change of appearance in this culture would warrant a compliment from peers. When none were delivered, Jan was very upset. In this case, absence of comments did indicate disapproval, just as Wolfson and Manes (1981) suggest.

In another pop culture example, advice about compliments are found. “Miss Manners” (Martin 1989) warns women that compliments from a strange man should be ignored and advises men against complimenting a woman in the workplace for fear of a sexual harassment suit. What perceived function do compliments have that cause the

authority on politeness to say that they should be ignored when given by a strange man?

Why would a compliment evoke a sexual harassment suit at the workplace?

Tannen (1993) may provide an explanation. In her work, she finds that complimenting is a type of courting behavior. She views compliments as a way to create solidarity between the speaker and the recipient. My previous study on complimenting behavior Riesberg (1999) also illustrates the compliment's function of solidarity in American English. In the 1998 study, 30 American males and 26 American females were given a discourse completion test. The test contained six questions which sought to provide information on the effects of gender, status and social distance on complimenting behavior in the general population. One of the test items asked respondents what they would say if they saw a stranger at the bus stop wearing a pretty skirt. One answer from a male was "Nothing. She would think I was hitting on her", another was "It depends. If she's cute I would compliment her". However, no data from females included such explanations. These data support the idea that compliments function as courting behavior and a way to create solidarity and closeness. In fact, only 13% of the males in the 1999 study complimented the female stranger, while 63% of the females did.

Other functions of the compliment exist in American English. Although native speaker intuition has been notoriously misleading about real speech behavior, Baldrige (1990) has pinpointed several instances such as after receiving a gift, or after a friend changes appearance purposefully, where complimenting is required. Furthermore, the compliment in American English is used frequently as part of a greeting, especially between two people who have not seen each other in a long time (Wolfson and Manes 1980). It is often used in farewells or with an appreciation token to strengthen its effect (Holmes and Brown 1987). If the compliment serves these multiple functions in

American English, it is not surprising to find that they are more abundant than in other cultures.

Status differences

Wolfson (1990) indicates that compliments occur much more frequently between status equals and intimates than to strangers or status unequals. She goes on to explain that if a compliment does occur between status unequals, that it is most frequently the person in higher status who compliments. For example, a boss, a parent, or a teacher commenting on the progress of a charge. A compliment given by a person of higher status often provides encouragement and feedback about progress.

Compliments between status unequals can be unwelcome when closeness is unwanted by the recipient. An example showing a person of higher status receiving a compliment presented itself one day to a colleague of mine who teaches an English composition class to native speakers. One class period she was taken by surprise when a student commented on how good she looked in her skirt while she was writing on the board. She was embarrassed, ignored the comment, and felt she had to keep as much emotional distance between herself and the student as possible in order to feel comfortable. Since the student's compliment went against the norm, as well as the fact that a compliment can be interpreted as a way to initiate courting, as Tannen explains, then it is not surprising that my colleague was uncomfortable. Her seemingly good-intentioned (yet horribly timing-impaired) student broke a complimenting norm by trying to create solidarity and sameness and she reacted by trying to maintain an even greater distance.

Another affect of status on complimenting behavior was found in my 1999 pilot study. Although explanations were not requested during data collection, one respondent

added this reason for complimenting a higher status individual: “Gotta suck up to the boss”. Complimenting higher status individuals, or those put in “temporary” higher status by holding information, possessions, or power which is valuable to the speaker, may be motivated by the desire to incur someone’s good favor for self-serving purposes. For example, we may compliment a friend before asking for a favor, or compliment a stranger on his shoes before inquiring where he purchased them.

Complimenting in order to gain good favor can also backfire. The recipient of the compliment may sense it is not in line with the norm. The compliment may cause the recipient to become suspicious about the speaker’s motives. To illustrate this we see an example of a parent and her teenage daughter (taken from personal experience):

Example (4)

A: Mom, you look nice today.

B: What do you want?

Herbert (1989) finds that in situations and cultures where social standing and status are not fluid, compliments are less frequent. He proposed that compliments from his white, middle-class South African participants were much less frequent than American participants because of the idea in American society that status is not fixed. Americans believe that social mobility is not only possible but also that the country is founded on that principle. He suggests that members of the American middle class negotiate their status often as well as using the compliment for multiple functions in conversation, and therefore they pay more compliments.

Gender differences

One concern that comes to mind when studying speech acts is the importance of focusing on gender variation. Tannen (1993) explains that women and men should be considered separately because they are socialized into speaking differently. But perhaps the most obvious answer is that the data supports the hypothesis that a significant difference between men's and women's speech behavior exists. In my 1999 study, women gave and received compliments nearly twice as frequently as men, regardless of status. In fact, in studies of gender variation (Wolfson 1994, Holmes 1986, Herbert 1990), the authors find that females give and receive compliments significantly more frequently than males. Since we view it as important to teach speech act norms in the classroom, it follows that we should equip students with a complete picture including gender variation so that they are able to interpret the illocutionary force behind the utterances of the culture they are studying.

Still, why do females show up so predominantly in the data? Tannen (1993) concludes that women's talk in informal tasks tends to be more "affiliative and facilitative toward both sexes. Women tend to work harder at keeping conversations going" (1993, p. 298) than men. This view fits in with the popular stereotype that women tend to be more polite than men. Tannen's view certainly indicates that women strive to "keep the peace" more than men. Giving a compliment makes the speaker feel accepted, which is precisely what affiliative conversation does.

Earlier in this paper, a compliment was defined as the act of offering praise. It should not be overlooked that aside from all of its social functions, a compliment is also a form of approval and evaluation which occurs most frequently to and from women. Wolfson (1984) offers a view which may seem extreme to some:

A feminist interpretation would certainly hold that the constraint against complimenting adult males is but another indication that male behavior is normative and requires little comment or judgement, while females must be constantly reminded to behave in socially approved ways. [...] What we see in the analysis of compliments is that the way a woman is spoken to is, no matter what her status, a subtle and powerful way of perpetuating her subordinate role in society (243).

Many forward-thinking men and women in today's society might take exception to this statement. They see themselves as not purposely seeking to perpetuate any negative attitudes toward women, and would likely be shocked to find themselves accused of it. However, as shocking as this subordinate view of women may seem, if we look again at the example of my female colleague whose student interrupted class to give her a compliment, evidence to support Wolfson's view is seen. If the scenario were changed slightly and the professor were male and the student female, a compliment would seem unlikely. This is not to say that a compliment couldn't have occurred, just that using our native speaker intuition and finely-honed subconscious list of cultural norms, it seems less likely. The improbability of a male in a higher status position receiving a compliment as compared to a female receiving one in the same context is also precisely what the data in previous studies supports (Wolfson 1984, Holmes 1986, Herbert 1989).

Semantic patterns

The word semantic refers to the meaning in language. In the current study, the only semantic concern for compliments is where the positive meaning is carried. In other words, which word makes the utterance a positive evaluation? Only two types of semantic choices appear in the current study: those responses which use the verb to carry positive meaning and those which rely on adjectives. Manes and Wolfson (1981) find examples of compliments which also use nouns and adverbs to carry the positive meaning. Examples of each type of semantic pattern are listed in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1 Semantic patterns of compliments

Semantic pattern	Example
Adjective	<i>You have a <u>nice</u> watch.</i>
Verb	<i>I <u>love</u> your boots.</i>
Adverb	<i>You've done very <u>well</u>.</i>
Noun	<i>You are a real <u>professional</u>.</i>

Syntactic patterns

Most compliments in previous research have been categorized into relatively few sets of syntactical patterns. Manes and Wolfson (1981) outline nine patterns in their study which were used as the basis for classifying data in the current study. See Table 2.2 for patterns and their examples.

Over 80% of the 686 compliments in Manes and Wolfson's (1981) study followed patterns 1, 2, and 3. Holmes' (1986) New Zealand compliments used only 4 different

Table 2.2 Syntactic patterns with examples

Pattern number	Pattern	Example
1	NP is/looks (really) ADJ	<i>Your watch is cool. Your tie looks really nice.</i>
2	I (really) like/love NP	<i>I love your boots. I really like your tie.</i>
3	PRO is (really)(a) ADJ NP	<i>That is a nice hat. This paper is fantastic.</i>
4	You V (a) (really) ADJ NP	<i>You did a great job. You wrote a great thesis.</i>
5	You V (NP) (really) ADV	<i>You handled that very well. You did wonderfully.</i>
6	You have (a) (really) ADJ NP	<i>You have such great taste. You have a pretty smile.</i>
7	What (a) ADJ NP	<i>What pretty earrings! What a lovely baby you have!</i>
8	ADJ NP	<i>Cool watch! Nice tie!</i>
9	Isn't NP ADJ?	<i>Isn't your ring beautiful? Aren't these cookies great?</i>

syntactic patterns in 86.2% of the 517 compliments gathered (patterns 1, 2, 3, and 8). Herbert (1989) gave no specific numbers, but revealed that the most frequent pattern in the American corpus of 1062 compliments was pattern 1 (NP is/looks (really) ADJ).

Herbert (1989) found gender differences according to syntactic patterns. The women in his corpus preferred pattern number 2 (*I love your coat*). He attributes this to the 1st person focus found in pattern number 2. The men's data contained more examples of 2nd and 3rd person focus. An example of a 2nd person focus formula would be pattern number 4 (*You have a great coat*) and 3rd person being pattern number 1 (*Your coat is great*).

Lexical patterns

The term lexical patterns refers to word choices within compliments. In the current study, it is used to describe the adjective choices within the data. Considering the number of possible adjective choices in the English language, a very limited set lexical choices appear in the previous research. In Holmes' (1986) study, only 5 adjectives were used (*nice, good, lovely, beautiful, great*) in over two-thirds of the 517 compliments collected. Manes and Wolfson's (1981) corpus of 686 compliments and Creese's (1991) corpus of 73 compliments show identical lexical patterns with an even more restricted set of adjectives. Only 4 appear (*nice, good, beautiful, great*) in two-thirds of the data in each study.

Some gender differences in adjective use have been found. For example, in different analyses of the same corpus, Wolfson (1981) and Wolfson (1984) found that although the word *cute* was used by both men and women, her data showed that it was never used about men. In addition, she found that the adjectives *pretty* or *beautiful* are not usually used about male appearance.

Topics

Topics of compliments in naturally-occurring data are varied in a way that the current study could not duplicate without a questionnaire so long that quality of data would be compromised (see Chapter 3). Holmes (1986) created a system of classifying compliments by topic which can be seen in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3 Compliment topic categories with examples adapted from Holmes (1986)

Topic	Example
Appearance	<i>Your hair looks nice.</i>
Ability	<i>You are a good worker.</i>
Possessions	<i>What a cool car.</i>
Personality	<i>You are a good friend.</i>

The most frequent topic of compliments in Holmes' (1986) New Zealand corpus and Creese's (1991) American corpus was personal appearance. In Holmes' (1986) study, compliments about personal appearance were more frequently given and received by women than by men. She explains that appearance is important for women in her society and this importance shows in compliment research. However, in Manes and Wolfson's (1981) data, although no numbers are supplied, the authors state that the topic of appearance occurs equally in both men's and women's compliment and compliment response data. Other compliment topics, with frequency comparisons in previous studies, can be found in Table 2.4.

Wolfson (1981, 1983, 1984) does not provide specific data on topic frequency for her American data, but does explain that most compliments in her corpus appear in a group which she terms possessions/personal appearance. This category encompasses two of Holmes' (1986) categories. Wolfson seems to take the view that these two categories share more qualities than they differ because of their focus on the superficial. It is with

Table 2.4 Frequency of compliment topic in previous studies

Topic	Holmes (1986) New Zealand		Creese (1991) American		Creese (1991) British	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Appearance	262	50.7	48	65.8	53	39.2
Ability	158	30.6	24	32.9	75	54.3
Possessions	58	11.2	1	1.3	10	7.3
Personality	25	4.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Other	14	2.7	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	517	100.0	73	100.0	138	100.

this in mind that the questions for the discourse completion test in the current study were chosen. More attention will be given to the process of creating a discourse completion test in Chapter 3.

Compliment responses

This study considers compliments separately from compliment responses. However, since they are adjacency pairs with meaning and interpretation tied together in natural speech acts, it is important to give an overview of research done in the area of compliment responses. Pomerantz (1978) proposes that compliment responses pose a distinct problem for the recipient. She explains that in order to respond to a compliment, the recipient must break one of the constraints on conversation:

1. Agree with others
2. Avoid self-praise

If the recipient accepts the compliment, he or she breaks constraint number 2. On the other hand, if he or she does not accept the compliment, then he or she breaks constraint number 1. American etiquette books (Baldrige 1990, Martin 1989) mention that a simple “thank-you” is all that is needed when responding to a compliment; however, Herbert

(1989) has shown that Americans respond in this way only to only about 30% of the compliments that they receive. Instead, the Americans in Herbert's data used strategies such as giving a history of the item being complimented (My mother bought it for me), or a compliment return (You look great, too).

Americans give more compliments than many other cultures, but it is interesting to note is that they also deflect compliments. Herbert and Straight (1989) found that while South Africans offer far fewer compliments than Americans, they accept them with a simple "thanks" far more often. They hypothesize that since the South African compliment occurs with far less frequency than the American compliment, and it performs fewer strategies in speech, a "textbook" response is given.

In Arabic, compliment responses are accepted frequently, but with a formula which offers the item being complimented, or a compliment return (Nelson, Al Batal and Echols 1996). These strategies would lessen the effect of accepting the self praise, but would, at the same time, agree with the speaker.

Gender differences in compliment response type have been investigated. Herbert (1989) mentions that compliments from females to females are likely to be rejected, while compliments from males to females are more readily accepted. Compliments given to males from either gender are more likely to be ignored or evaded. In fact, the sex of the speaker and of the recipient make good predictors for the type of response used (Holmes 1986).

Compliment responses are just as formulaic and patterned as compliments are. While each culture has its own norms, it also has its own patterns within these norms. Failure to interpret these intentions and norms within compliment responses can cause just as many problems for a NNS as a compliment.

Possible Reasons for Patterns

A highly patterned set of lexical and semantic choices appears in all of the studies done on compliments in English. Wolfson (1983), Herbert (1989), and Holmes (1986) suggest that the reason for the lack of variation is due to the compliment's main function of creating and maintaining solidarity. That is to say, speakers do not want to be original in the form of a compliment because it would set them apart from the addressee. If a compliment says "we are the same", then an original pattern would say "we are different" and would work counter to the solidarity effort being sought.

Many researchers have conducted contrastive studies of compliments comparing one variety of English to another variety of English or language. Although other languages and cultures have shown differences in patterns from English, patterns are still quite evident in the corpora. For example, Nelson, Bakary and Al Batal (1996) found that Egyptian compliments were highly patterned with respect to both syntax and lexical choice. Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989) finds that Polish and British compliment responses have a high correlation of linguistic strategies (i.e. accepting or deflecting the compliment). Valdez and Pino (1981) examined compliment responses among Mexican-American bilinguals and Mexican monolinguals and found that each group used its own set of patterns of lexical and semantic choices in their responses. Wolfson and Manes (1980) argue that the highly patterned occurrence in many cultures makes compliments easily recognizable and less likely to be misinterpreted by the recipient.

Compliment research has further shown that Americans compliment much more frequently than other cultures, even those which speak another variety of English. This pattern of frequency is attributed to the observation that Americans use the compliment to function in the same way that other speech acts do. Already outlined earlier in this chapter were the functions of openings and closings, appreciation tokens. The

compliment is also used for creating solidarity. It is no small wonder that the compliment has been the subject of confusion for ESL students in this country.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

In Chapter 3, I present two possible methods of data collection: ethnography and elicitation and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of each in order to provide rationale for the one chosen in the current study. Next, I outline the development process of the instrument used in data collection. Finally, I outline the criteria used for statistical analysis.

Methods of Data Collection

In previous works examining speech act behavior, two methodologies for data collection have been employed. The first, ethnography, gathers naturally-occurring discourse for use as data. The second, elicitation, makes use of a specific instrument to produce speech from subjects for use as data. The advantages and disadvantages of each method are presented in the following sections.

Ethnography

Because nearly all of the previous research on compliments and compliment responses discussed in this study made use of ethnographically-obtained data, it is important to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of ethnography, a method of data collection in which researchers observe and record authentic discourse with the use of items such as tape recorders, videotape, or notebooks. The researchers may be a member of the group being studied or simply an observer. However, in many cases, researchers even produce their own speech acts for consideration in the data (Herbert 1989, Holmes

1986, Wolfson and Manes 1980). In fact, Wolfson (1988) contends that a researcher's involvement in and research of his or her own speech community is an important part of the speech behavior analysis. She further states that only a member of the speech community is able to intuit its patterns of customs and values to produce a deeper level of analysis than is possible for an outside observer who is less able to make such judgements as accurately as a member of that community.

However, disadvantages to ethnographically-obtained data have been noted. For instance, Beebe and Cummings (1996) propose that the lack of situational constraints make ethnographically obtained data unpredictable. They state that *situations* are the force which drives change in speech behavior. In ethnographies, it is impossible to make certain that the context in question will be repeated enough to make generalizations. In one study of rejections (Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig 1992), the data were so random that the authors report not enough native speaker rejections could be obtained naturally.

A second disadvantage is that the researcher often records the data after the speech event. As a result, the researcher must rely on his or her memory, which can be inaccurate. Generalizations of patterns within data may also be problematic. The gender of the researcher may influence the amount of access to a certain speech situation. For example, Holmes' (1986) mostly female researchers collected far more compliments involving females than males. While a pattern of more compliments given and received by females may exist in the general population, numbers in the data may be skewed because most of the researchers were female and had more access to compliments involving females.

One important aspect of the current study is an examination of how status affects compliments. In the previous studies, researchers made note of the status of the participants if it was known. Holmes (1986) admits that in some cases the relationship of

the speaker and the addressee was not clear to her researchers. As a result, data could not provide a clear picture of how status affected behavior. However, in the current study, a context is supplied to the respondents so that they and the researcher know the exact status involved with each compliment. Generalizations in the current study can be made with a degree more of confidence than in previous studies.

Elicitation

The second method of data collection discussed in this section is elicitation, which requires participants to produce responses in created contexts. Examples of elicitation are discourse completion tests, interviews, or role-plays. The current study uses a discourse completion test (DCT) to gather data. A DCT requires that participants respond to an incomplete dialogue before which a detailed context was created. Beebe and Cummings (1996) compared gathering data from natural speech in a closed role play and data from a DCT in a study concentrating on refusals. In order to compare the methods, the researchers created a context where the participant performs a task. The participant was instructed to decline. Eleven participants were given the written context on a DCT and asked to write their response, and eleven were read the exact same context over the phone and asked to respond orally. The researchers then compared data. They found DCTs are a reliable method of data collection with respect to:

- Gathering a large amount of data quickly;
- Creating an initial classification of semantic formulas and strategies that will likely occur in natural speech;
- Studying the stereotypical, perceived requirements for a socially appropriate response;
- Gaining insight into social and psychological factors that are likely to affect speech and performance;
- Ascertaining the canonical shape of speech acts in the minds of speakers of that language.

In other words, Beebe and Cummings found that the strengths of a DCT are that it reduces researcher bias, makes the data more predictable, and enables generalizations about speech act patterns, real and perceived. Examples of real and perceived speech acts were illustrated in Chapter 2.

The DCT is not without its disadvantages. Beebe and Cummings (1996) found that the DCT does not reflect natural speech with regard to range of strategies employed, the length of the response, depth of emotion, and the number of repetitions and elaboration which occur. For example, they explain that strategies which occur in natural speech, such as turn-taking, do not appear in data gathered with a DCT because the format is not interactive and does not allow it.

In the present study I found that a DCT was the best way to gather data. Even with these disadvantages taken into consideration, the DCT is the best choice because of its ability to isolate factors like status and gender within complimenting behavior and because it is able to provide acceptable patterns, even if the variety of them is slightly less than natural speech.

Developing a Discourse Completion Test

According to Wolf (1988), the first step in the construction of a test or questionnaire is to pick subjects who have the knowledge to answer questions about the hypothesis under investigation. Next, test items must be developed. Wolf explains that the items must be in a context which the participants are able to understand, but must not be too sensitive in nature, or respondents might not be willing to answer in an honest manner which is representative of their true-to life behavior. Finally, the number of questions for the DCT must be decided.

Choosing subjects

The data analysis in the current study attempts to find patterns in classroom complimenting behavior by undergraduate students who speak the North Central or Midland Dialects of English. The results of this study are intended for use in ESL classes which are generally attended by undergraduates or students who wish to enroll in undergraduate courses. For this reason, 75 female and 75 male undergraduate students at Iowa State University were chosen as respondents. The average age for male respondents was 20.9 years and for females 19.8 years. See Table 3.1 for average ages and numbers of participants in the present study.

Table 3.1 Gender and ages of participants in present study

Gender of participant	Number	Age Range	Average age
Male	75	18-24	20.9
Female	75	18-27	19.8

Although a question about the race respondents was not included on the DCT, I noted that all but 7 (4 female and 3 male) of the respondents appeared to be white. All respondents were native speakers. Eighty-four percent (126) of the 150 respondents indicated that they were from Iowa; one stated that he was from Florida. The remainder of the respondents were from Illinois (16), Minnesota (3), Nebraska (2), Missouri (1), and Kansas(1). Although the current study does focus on complimenting behavior among participants using the North Central and Midland Dialects, the respondent from Florida was not omitted from the study for two reasons. First, during a follow-up question, the respondent indicated that his parents were raised in Iowa. Second, he stated that he spends considerable time with his grandparents, who are also from Iowa. I believe that

many of his linguistic influences come from the Midland dialect, and have opted to include his DCT in the data analysis.

Choosing test items

Before specific test items were chosen, a context was created for the DCT. In an introductory paragraph, a description of a first-year English composition classroom in which the respondents was asked to imagine themselves as a student (see Appendix). Then, four situations were created. Each of the four situations included an opportunity for a compliment about possessions/appearance. A single category of topics was chosen for all situations for two reasons. The first was so that patterns found could reflect those affecting gender and status, and not those due to changes in topic. For example, if the context in the DCT involving the male professor focused on appearance, and the context involving the female professor involved ability, then changes in the data may reflect patterns due to compliment topic, not to gender. A student might be more likely to compliment the professor on ability rather than a possession, or vice versa. To isolate gender and status factors only, the topic of the compliments was uniform throughout the DCT.

As stated earlier, the most common topic for compliments among both men and women in Herbert's study was a category named possessions/appearance. It was thought that more compliments would be available for analysis with a smaller sample size if the topic of compliments used was one which made the most frequent appearance in the data. Items complimented on included boots (situation 1), a watch (situation 2), a hat (situation 3), and a tie (situation 4).

One question was devoted to each factor under investigation: two situations involve contexts where the person being complimented is of equal status as the

respondent (one male and one female), and two which are of higher status (one male and one female). The situations are outlined with status of complimenter and recipient together with item being complimented in Table 3.2. Exact wording and instructions which appeared on the DCT are found in Table 3.3 and in the Appendix.

Table 3.2 Test items according to the gender and social status of the complimenters

n	Male respondent	Female respondent	Item
1	Male--->female equal status	Female--->female equal status	Boots
2	Male--->female higher status	Female--->female higher status	Watch
3	Male--->male equal status	Female--->male equal status	Hat
4	Male--->male higher status	Female--->male higher status	Tie

Table 3.3 Directions, scenario and items from DCT in present study

Exact wording from DCT

- Directions** Each of the following questions is concerned with language use in different classroom situations. Answer the questions without reflection. There are no right or wrong answers. The questionnaire should take less than five minutes to fill out.
- Scenario** You have been in a lower-level English (104 or 105) class that meets three times a week for about one month. The professor is professional and approachable, but not overly-friendly. While you know most of the students' first names, you are not friends with any of them outside of class. They are approximately your age.
- Item 1** You are working in a small group and you notice that your classmate Tracey is wearing boots that you like. How likely would you be to say anything to her about them?
- Item 2** Each member of the class is working on in-class assignments in pairs while the professor circulates and talks to each group. You notice that you like her watch. How likely are you to say anything to her about it?
- Item 3** When you and your classmate Tom are sitting waiting for class to begin you notice that you like his hat. How likely are you to say anything to him about it?
- Item 4** You are once again in small groups in the English class. Your professor is wearing a tie that you like. When he comes around to your group, how likely are you to comment on his tie?

Within each situation, respondents were offered a continuum (1 through 6) of how likely they would be to comment in each situation. Number 1 was highly unlikely and 6 was highly likely. If respondents circled 4, 5, or 6 on the continuum, the DCT instructed them to write what they would say in that situation (see the Appendix for the DCT sample).

Length

Evans (1984) states that questionnaires should be kept short in length because respondents will be more likely to participate if the time investment is minimal. Still another justification is that during a trial data collection for the current study, a longer questionnaire produced unreliable results. Participants completing a DCT with two items for each situation seemed to lose interest and give answers which were incomplete. Interviews conducted after the trial DCT confirmed this conclusion. Respondents stated that the questionnaire seemed too repetitive and they lost interest. Furthermore, interviews after the longer trial DCT revealed that a shorter test may provide answers closer to natural speech than a longer test because it shortens reflection time. Respondents did not reflect upon and change answers when situations were not repeated and items were kept to a bare minimum. Thus, one question for each status and gender situation under investigation appears on the DCT.

Data Collection Procedure

I chose 75 female and 75 male respondents at random from two different undergraduate dormitories at Iowa State University. Data were gathered during a single evening in March, during the middle of the Spring 2000 semester. I asked each respondent to participate in a study being done for a sociolinguistics course at Iowa State

and informed them that the questionnaire would only take about three minutes to complete. Respondents were highly cooperative, as I was visibly armed with twelve pounds of candy for use as tokens of appreciation.

Data Excluded from Analysis

All 150 DCTs gathered were considered in the analysis; however, three responses from individual tests were omitted from consideration. Two of the omitted responses appeared on one female respondent's DCT. In situations 2 and 4, the female provided two possible answers including an explanation of which one she would actually say depending on how comfortable the professor made her feel. The other response which was omitted came from the men's data. For situation number 3, the respondent indicated that he would not compliment, "but only because I really don't like hats". The former respondent's answers were omitted because she either didn't understand the context of the situation, or she was not provided enough context to make a judgement about her speech act. The latter example was omitted because the respondent indicated that neither status nor gender was the reason he did not compliment. This study seeks to find gender and status patterns in complimenting behavior, and he indicated that his answer was not affected by either of those factors.

Statistical analysis

Data are given in raw numbers and percentages. To discover if differences between observed and expected results in data are significant, the chi square test of statistical significance is used. The chi-square test compares differences in observed and expected frequencies within a set of data grouped by categories. For example, in this

study, the chi square test is performed when comparing response frequency between the two status groups and also between the two genders in different situations.

For the chi-square test, the hypothesis is that the groups are the same. For instance, in this study we would say, "In situation 1, men and women's answers are the same." Then, the test is performed for the *p-value* (probability). A *p-value* of less than 5% ($p < .05$) means that the probability that the observed differences in the groups of random sample occurs by chance is less than 5 in 100. In this study, a *p-value* of less than 5% is considered significant.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first part of the research question focuses on determining patterns from combined female and male respondents including compliment frequency, lexical and semantic patterns, and syntactic formulae. These factors are then examined with respect to how status affects them. In the second part, male and female respondents' data is considered separately in order to examine how gender affects the patterns outlined within the combined data.

Male and Female Data Combined

The DCT provided respondents with an opportunity to compliment in 597 situations. When answering an item, respondents circled a number (1 through 6) on a continuum which indicated how likely they would be to say something in a given situation (See Appendix A). The DCT was left slightly open-ended in that if a respondent chose numbers 4, 5, or 6, then he or she was instructed to write an example of what they would say in that situation. This left the possibility that the respondent would still choose not to compliment. The three types of utterances produced are illustrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Possible response types in present study

Likelihood of giving compliment	Type of utterance produced
1. Respondent chooses 1, 2, or 3	(No further data)
2. Respondent chooses 4, 5, or 6	Respondent compliments (Possible request for information in addition to compliment)
3. Respondent chooses 4, 5, or 6	Respondent requests information only

When a respondent chose low likelihood ratings (i.e., 1, 2, or 3), no further data was elicited, and respondents did not provide further data. However, when they chose 4, 5, or 6 on the continuum, the respondents were asked to provide an example of what they might say. All respondents who chose numbers 4, 5, or 6 provided an answer. The respondents in this study opted for one of two response types. The first was a request for information only:

Example (5)

Where did you get your boots?

The second was a compliment with an optional request for information:

Example (6)

I love your tie. Was it a gift? or,

Example (7)

Nice watch. Was it expensive?

The men and women in this study complimented with optional information request in 43% (254) of the situations, said nothing in 55% (330) of the situations, and requested information only in 2% (13) of the situations. Numbers for response types with each situation are provided in Table 4.2. Within the compliment with request for information category, 32.2% (82) included a request for information.

Table 4.2 Types of response by situation in present study

Situation and description	No utterance produced		Compliment with request for information		Request for information only	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Situation 1 Female classmate (boots)	45	30.0	99	66.0	6	4.0
Situation 2 Female professor (watch)	97	65.1	51	34.2	1	0.7
Situation 3 Male classmate (hat)	74	49.6	72	48.3	3	2.1
Situation 4 Male professor (tie)	114	76.5	32	21.5	3	2.0
Total	330	55.2	254	42.5	13	2.3

One problematic aspect of analysis was the response in which respondents requested information only. As mentioned in Chapter 2, in authentic conversation, a response like Example 4 would probably have been followed by a compliment, as mentioned in Chapter 2. It does not seem likely that a speaker would take notice of a personal object without following up with a praise for the object. But because the DCT did not allow for turn-taking in compliments, the data ends, and there is no compliment. For this reason, the “request for information only” category will be treated separately from a compliment in this study, because no compliment is provided, and separately from a non-compliment because in natural conversation a compliment would likely follow.

Semantic patterns

In the current study, 44.1% (112) of the 254 compliments used a verb to carry the positive meaning, the 55.9% made use of an adjective. The numbers for each situation are provided in Table 4.3.

These numbers are very different from Manes and Wolfson (1981) in that nearly 80% of their compliments are adjectival (see Table 4.4 for semantic comparisons to Manes and Wolfson). Holmes (1986) did not supply exact figures, but comments that most of the compliments in her data are also adjectival. The respondents in the current study use verbs and adjectives to carry positive meaning almost equally.

Table 4.3 Types of response by situation in present study

Situation and description	Verb		Adjective		Total Number
	Number	%	Number	%	
Situation 1 Female classmate (boots)	53	53.5	46	46.4	99
Situation 2 Female professor (watch)	23	45.1	28	54.9	51
Situation 3 Male classmate (hat)	27	37.5	45	62.5	72
Situation 4 Male professor (tie)	9	28.1	23	71.9	32
Total	112	44.1	142	55.9	254

Table 4.4 Semantic patterns in present study compared to Wolfson and Manes (1981)

Semantic pattern	Manes and Wolfson 1981 American		Present study American	
	Number	%	Number	%
Verb	96	14.0	112	44.5
Adjective	546	79.5	142	55.5
Other	44	6.5	0	0.0
Total	686	100.0	154	100.0

Lexical patterns

As in previous studies, a very small set of adjectives are found in compliments. Only 4 different adjectives (*nice, cool, cute, great*) account for 88.1% of the data. In fact, only two adjectives (*nice* and *cool*) account for 80.2% of the lexical choices. In Table 4.5 we can see that none of the other adjectives appear more than twice in the data.

Table 4.5 Lexical choices in present study

Adjective	Number	%	Adjective	Number	%
Nice	75	52.8	Snazzy	2	1.4
Cool	39	27.4	Good	1	0.7
Cute	8	5.7	Appealing	1	0.7
Great	3	2.2	Kickin'	1	0.7
Awesome	2	1.4	Bad-ass	1	0.7
Sweet	2	1.4	Pretty	1	0.7
Neat	2	1.4	Retro	1	0.7
Fly	2	1.4	Fat	1	0.7
Total				142	100.0

In Table 4.6, lexical choices are given for each situation on the DCT. The individual situations do not seem to affect lexical choices to a great degree. One interesting note, however, is that slang lexical choices seem to appear more frequently when directed to the men (situations 3 and 4). The adjectives *sweet, fly, snazzy, kickin'*

and *bad-ass* occur a total of 8 times and are used by either men or women, but only to men. The slang adjectives that are directed towards women (situations 1 and 2) are *retro* and *fat* and occur only 2 times. However, any conclusions drawn on this pattern should be made hesitantly, as the data sample is not large enough to say that it occurs with statistical significance.

Table 4.6 Lexical choice by situation in present study

Adjective	Situation 1 Boots		Situation 2 Watch		Situation 3 Hat		Situation 4 Tie		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Nice	27	58.7	16	57.1	18	40.0	14	60.9	75	52.8
Cool	11	23.9	6	21.3	20	44.6	2	8.8	39	27.4
Cute	5	10.8	2	7.1	0	-	1	4.3	8	5.7
Great	0	-	1	3.6	1	2.2	1	4.3	3	2.2
Awesome	1	2.2	0	-	1	2.2	0	-	2	1.4
Sweet	0	-	0	-	2	4.4	0	-	2	1.4
Neat	0	-	2	7.1	0	-	0	-	2	1.4
Fly	0	-	0	-	1	2.2	1	4.3	2	1.4
Snazzy	0	-	0	-	0	-	2	8.8	2	1.4
Good	0	-	0	-	1	2.2	0	-	1	0.7
Appealing	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	4.3	1	0.7
Kickin'	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	4.3	1	0.7
Bad-ass	0	-	0	-	1	2.2	0	-	1	0.7
Pretty	0	-	1	3.8	0	-	0	-	1	0.7
Retro	1	2.2	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	0.7
Fat	1	2.2	0	-	0	-	0	-	1	0.7
Total	46		28		45		23		142	100.0

A restricted set of lexical choices is also evident in previous studies, although the adjectives themselves differ (see Table 4.7). For example, the words *cool* and *cute* appeared to a very small degree in Holmes' data (1% combined), but accounted for 33.7% in the current study. Two explanations for the prevalence of these words in the current study's data are offered. First, the current study focuses on a very young segment of American society, whereas Holmes' (1986) data was gathered from a cross-section of

New Zealand society. The differences in lexical choices illustrated here may be a reflection not only of cultural differences but also age. Differences may be less inclined to use the word “cool” than the respondents in the current study. The second reason for the prevalence of the adjective *cool* and *cute* is that perhaps the lexical choices represent adjectives used for comments about appearance and possessions more than other adjectives. The numbers for frequency of adjective use in previous studies do not add up to the total number of adjectives because authors did not make all of the data available. The most frequent adjectives and the total numbers were given in previous studies, so they are shown on the chart in Table 4.7

Previous studies showed that appearance and possessions did account for a majority of the topics of compliments, they did not account for all of them, and as a result, data concerning lexical choice could be affected. The same reasoning could be applied to explain why adjective *lovely* did not show up at all in the current study, but did in other studies of American English. Unfortunately, the authors of previous studies do not provide data for lexical choices within different compliment topics.

Table 4.7 Lexical frequency comparison to previous studies

Adjective	Wolfson (1981)		Holmes (1986)		Creese (1991)		Present Study	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Nice	229	23.0	100	23.2	12	30.7	75	52.8
Good	104	19.0	60	13.9	4	10.3	1	.7
Lovely	N/A	N/A	42	9.7	N/A	N/A	0	-
Beautiful	N/A	N/A	34	7.9	5	12.8	0	-
Great	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	2	5.1	3	2.2
Cool	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	39	27.4
Cute	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	8	5.7
Total	546	42.0	431	54.7	39	58.9	142	91.0

study shows an extremely restricted set of formulae found in compliments. In fact, four patterns account for 98.9% of the 254 compliments in the corpus. Pattern number 5 appears twice and pattern number 6 appears only once in the data.

In Table 4.9, data for each syntactic pattern within the four different situations are provided. Each situation change alone does not seem to greatly affect syntactic formulae.

Table 4.9 Syntactic formulae in each situation in present study

Pattern number	Sit. 1		Sit. 2		Sit. 3		Sit. 4		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1. I (really) like/love NP	53	53.5	23	45.1	27	37.5	9	28.1	112	44.1
2. ADJ NP!	30	30.3	14	27.4	26	36.1	16	50.0	86	33.9
3. Pro is (really) ADJ NP	9	9.1	13	25.4	9	12.5	3	9.4	34	13.4
4. NP is/looks (really) ADJ	6	6.1	1	1.9	8	11.1	4	12.5	19	7.5
5. You have (really) ADJ NP	1	1.0	0	-	1	1.4	0	-	2	0.7
6. Where did you get ADJ NP?	0	-	0	-	1	1.4	0	-	1	0.4
Total	99		51		72		32		254	100.0

One very obvious difference in this data from other studies is pattern number 2 (see Table 4.10 for syntactic formulae comparisons to previous studies). It accounts for 33.9% of the compliments in the corpus in the current study, but no more than 7.7% in previous studies. Instead, respondents in other studies show a preference for pattern number 4, which only 7.5% of the respondents in this study chose. Perhaps the reason for this is the omission of the subject in pattern number 2 (NP ADJ!). The phrase *Nice tie!* doesn't require mention of an additional subject the way that *Those boots are nice.* (NP is/looks (really) ADJ) does. Respondents may be reacting to the fact that they are not actually speaking to a person who might need clarification about which item is being complimented. There might be no need to say *those boots*, or *your hat*, because no confusion is possible within the context of the questionnaire.

Table 4.10 Comparisons of syntactic formulae in present study to previous studies

	Manes and Wolfson (1981) American	Holmes (1986) New Zealand	Creese (1991) American	Present study American
Pattern	%	%	%	%
1. I (really) like/love ADJ NP	16.1	15.9	42.4	44.1
2. ADJ NP!	1.6	7.7	5.4	33.9
3. PRO is (really) ADJ NP	14.9	13.0	2.7	13.4
4. NP is/looks (really) ADJ	53.6	41.4	34.2	7.5
5. You really have ADJ NP	2.4	N/A	N/A	0.7
6. Where did you get ADJ NP?	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.4
Totals	88.6	78.0	84.7	100.0

Status differences

The two status situations that the DCT created were: two items with a compliment recipient in equal status and two of higher status (see Table 4.11 for response types with regard to status). The men and women in the current study had an opportunity to compliment the two professors (items 2 and 4 on the DCT) a total of 298 times. However, the professors received a compliment in only 27.8% (83) of the responses gathered; while the classmate, (items 1 and 3 on the DCT), was complimented in 57.2% (171) of the 299 opportunities to compliment ($X^2=52.3$, $p=.0001$).

Table 4.11 Response type with status situation in present study

	To higher status						To same status					
	Situation 2		Situation 4		Sit. 2 & 4		Situation 1		Situation 3		Sit 1 & 3	
Response type	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
No compliment	97	65.1	114	76.5	211	70.8	45	30.0	74	49.6	119	39.8
Compliment	51	34.2	32	21.4	83	27.8	99	66.0	72	48.3	171	57.2
Information only	1	0.7	3	2.1	4	1.4	6	4.0	3	2.1	9	3.0
Totals	149	100.0	149	100.0	298	100.0	150	100.0	149	100.0	299	100.0

Respondents' compliments included a request for information in 55.7% (46) of the 83 compliments to the higher status; however, only 35.6% (61) of the 171 compliments to the same status individual contained a request for information. Why did respondents choose to speak more to the higher-status person? Researchers have indicated that the compliment functions as a way to create and maintain solidarity and also functions as a way to open conversations in American English. We have also seen that a compliment to a higher status individual is not within the norm. Perhaps respondents added the request for information more often to the higher status person to ease conversation because a request for information requires a response from the recipient much more than a compliment does. The individual of the same status would be more likely to volunteer information and engage in a conversation, but the person of higher status would have to be asked something in order to stimulate conversation.

Another possible reason for the higher occurrence of requests for information within the compliments to higher status individuals may be that the respondent needed some sort of excuse for complimenting them. For example, a typical request for information was "*Where did you get it?*" The respondent may be able to further explain that he or she wanted to purchase the complimented item, for example.

Lexical choices and semantic choices are unaffected with regards to status (see Table 4.6 for data within each situation).

Gender Based Analysis

Overall, men complimented in 35.1% (105) out of 299 opportunities, women gave compliments in 50% (149) of 298 opportunities. Table 4.11 shows the different situations in which respondents had the option of complimenting and average frequencies

Table 4.11 Frequency of compliment by gender in present study

Situation	Status	Female respondent frequency of compliment		Male respondent frequency of compliment		X ²
		Number	%	Number	%	
1	To female equal	59	78.6	40	53.3	p=.001
2	To female high	30	40.5	21	28.0	p=.056
	<i>To all females</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>59.7</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>40.6</i>	<i>p=.001</i>
3	To male equal	43	57.3	29	39.2	p=.046
4	To male high	17	22.9	15	20.0	p=.910
	<i>To all males</i>	<i>60</i>	<i>40.2</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>29.5</i>	<i>p=.068</i>
Total		149	50.0	105	35.1	p=.001

with the raw number and in percentages. Women respondents were more likely to give compliments to females ($p=.001$), but were not significantly more likely to give a compliment to a male ($p=.068$).

Status differences

In Chapter two, I presented the example of a female colleague whose male student interrupted class to give her a compliment and explained that previous research supports that the situation would have been less likely to occur if it had been a male professor and a female student. Surprisingly, in the present study, males and females were equally likely to compliment the male professor ($p=.910$) in situation 4, while females showed a slight, although not statistically significant, preference for complimenting the female professor ($p=.056$) in situation 2.

It is interesting to note that the highest occurrence of compliments occurred from female respondent to female classmate (situation 1). In 78.6% of the DCTs the female respondent offered a compliment. The situation which received the fewest frequency of compliments was from male respondent to male of higher status (situation 4), with only 20.0%.

Semantic formulae

Men used an adjectival semantic pattern in 66.6% (70) out of 105 compliments. Women used an adjectival semantic pattern in 47.7% (71) out of 149 compliments. In other terms, males in the data show a preference for adjectival compliments ($p = .003$) while women show a preference for verbs. See Table 4.12 for data about semantic formulae within each situation.

Table 4.12 Semantic formulae by situation in present study

	Verb	Adjective	Total	X ²
Situation 1				
Female	39	20	59	
Male	14	26	40	$p = .004$
Situation 2				
Female	15	15	30	
Male	8	13	21	$p = .578$
Situation 3				
Female	19	24	43	
Male	8	21	29	$p = .238$
Situation 4				
Female	4	13	17	
Male	5	10	15	$p = .824$
Situations combined				
Female	77	72	149	
Male	35	70	105	
Total	112	142	254	$p = .005$

In Chapter 2, it was mentioned that Herbert (1990) saw patterns with regard to personal focus and gender. He found that females preferred using compliments which have a 1st person focus. For instance,

Example (10)

I like your boots. (*verb*)

has a 1st person focus, but

Example (11)

Those boots are nice. (*adjective*)

has a 3rd person focus. An example of a 2nd person focus is found in the following:

Example (12)

You have cool boots. (*adjective*)

Therefore, the shifts in semantic formulae shown in the data could be due to the limited number of 1st person syntactic formulas which were possible answers on the DCT. The women in this study may have chosen a semantic formula which used a verb because it is the only formula with a 1st person focus. The adjectival compliments in this study have 2nd and 3rd person foci, which are more preferred by men.

Lexical patterns

Lexical choices seem even more restricted for men than women. Men used a total of 8 different adjectives; women used 13 different adjectives. When comparing the two most frequent adjectives in the data (*nice* and *cool*) and another category which included all others, women were found to have a much more varied set of lexical choices than men ($p=.001$). Restricted adjective use by men may be tied to the fact that the adjectives *cute* and *great* do not show up at all in men's data. They seem to be women's adjectives with respect to both use and recipient. In Table 4.13, adjective use with regards to gender of recipient and respondent is illustrated. The adjectives *nice* and *cool* appear to be gender neutral. In Table 4.13, the gender of the respondent is shown with the data according to status of the recipient.

Table 4.13 Adjective use according to gender of respondent and gender of recipient

Respondent gender	Adjective	To females		To males		X ²
		Number	%	Number	%	
Female	nice	14	40.0	12	32.4	p=.001
	cool	10	28.5	16	43.2	
	other	11	11.5	9	21.7	
Male	nice	29	74.3	20	64.5	
	cool	6	15.4	7	22.5	
	other	4	10.3	4	13.0	

Table 4.14 Adjective use according to gender of respondent and status of recipient

Respondent gender	Adjective	To same status		To higher status		X ²
		Number	%	Number	%	
Female	nice	13	28.8	13	48.1	p=.001
	cool	22	48.8	4	14.8	
	other	10	22.4	10	37.1	
Male	nice	32	71.1	17	68.0	
	cool	8	17.7	5	20.0	
	other	5	11.2	3	12.0	

Summary

Respondents in this study produced a compliment in 42.5% of their responses. The data from the participants in this study showed a restricted set of semantic patterns. Respondents answers showed use of two different semantic patterns. They used a verb or an adjective to carry the positive meaning of the compliment. Respondents showed a

slight preference for adjectival compliments, using this semantic pattern in 55.9% of the 254 compliments, while using a verb to carry positive meaning in 44.1%.

The compliments in the data showed a limited set of lexical choices. Only 4 different adjectives (*nice, cool, cute, great*) account for 88.1% of the data. The lexical choices are even more restricted than found in previous studies done on compliments.

The data also showed a small set of patterns with regard to the syntax of the compliments. Only six different patterns were seen in the data, with only two (*I (really) like/love NP*, and *ADJ NP!*) account for 78% of the data.

The status of the individual being complimented affects these patterns in the following ways: the person of the same status as the speaker is more likely to be complimented (57.2%) than a person of higher status than the speaker (27.8%). Lexical choices and semantic and syntactic patterns within the compliments don't seem to be significantly unaffected by status.

When the men's and women's utterances are contrasted, we see that men complimented in only 35.1% of the time, while women complimented 50.0% of the opportunities. The lowest frequency of compliments occurred from male respondents to higher-status males, with only 20.0% of the data showing compliments. The highest category was from female respondents to same-status females, with 78.6%. In fact, female recipients were significantly more likely to receive a compliment than males.

Gender significantly affected semantic patterns, as well. Men used adjectival compliments twice as often as they used semantically verbal compliments, while women showed equal preference for the two semantic patterns.

Although the women's data showed a restricted set of lexical choices, it was significantly less restricted than lexical choice in the men's data. One reason for this was that women used the adjectives *cute* and *great* (accounting for 7.9% of total lexical

choices) which did not appear in men's data. Men and women preferred using just two adjectives (*nice* and *cool*) in 80.2% of the data.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This chapter begins with a summary of results. Second, an overview of the limitations of this study is provided. Next, areas for further research are discussed. Then, I present some applications for an English language classroom and some challenges for teachers and students learning about speech acts. A final word about complimenting behavior is found in the conclusion.

Summary of results

First, I present the research questions first shown in Chapter 1, in order to provide answers for them. In Table 5.1, I address the results when the males and the females are combined.

Table 5.1 Summary of male and female data combined

Research question	Summary of results
Are semantic and syntactic patterns evident?	The data showed only two different semantic patterns; those which use adjectives to carry positive meaning (55.9%) and those which use verbs (44.1%). Only 8 syntactical patterns are seen, with 2 of them accounting for 78.4% of the data.
How frequently are compliments	Compliments appear in 42.5% of the responses.
What are the most common lexical choices?	The four most frequent lexical choices are nice, cool, cute, and good, which make up 88.1% of the data.
How does status affect these patterns?	A person of the same status was significantly more likely to receive a compliment (57.2%) than a person of higher status (27.4%). Lexical, semantic and syntactical choices are not significantly affected by status.

In the second part, of the data analysis, men's and women's data were contrasted in order to examine how gender affects semantic, syntactic, lexical and status patterns. In Table 5.2, the research questions are listed with a summary of the results found in Chapter 4:

Table 5.2 Summary of male and female data contrasted

Research question	Summary of results
Are certain semantic patterns more prevalent with one of the genders?	Men show a significant preference for semantically adjectival compliments, while women show equal preference for adjectival and verbal compliments.
Do men and women make different lexical choices?	Men's adjectives show a much more restricted set than women's, although both sexes use the adjectives nice and cool most frequently, only women used the adjectives cute and great.
Which gender receives more compliments?	Women respondents complimented 50.0% of the time; men only 35.1%.
How does gender affect status patterns?	Higher status males received the fewest compliments; same status females received the most compliments.

Limitations of the Current Study

Although comparisons are made in the Chapter 4 between this study of Midwestern complimenting behavior and previous compliment studies, these direct comparisons of syntactic patterns from previous studies may provide misleading information. The current study collected compliments involving a single topic (personal appearance/possessions) while other studies were not so restricted. The differences in the percentages from other studies may be due to the single topic, and not the gender and status factors in the research questions.

Because of the nature of the data collection, numbers for frequency of compliment occurrences could be inflated. Although the instructions on the DCT attempted to provide an equal opportunity to say nothing in a each situation, questionnaires require some sort of answer by their nature. Respondents may have answered using a compliment when normally they would not have said anything at all in a certain situation. They may have also relied heavily on “etiquette” book rules and responded with a compliment when they would not do the same in natural speech.

However, in some cases the opposite effect may have been evident. For example, the category that was named “request for information only” was one in which a respondent indicated that he or she would “say something” (numbers 4, 5, or 6 on the DCT in the Appendix) in a given situation but still did not compliment. It is likely that the request for information would have been followed by a compliment in authentic conversation. One of the disadvantages of a DCT is that it does not accurately show turn-taking. The next logical turn in an information request is to compliment the item in question, but it could not happen in the DCT.

A further limitation to the current study is that it is the first to use the Midland and North Central Dialects and compliments in a hypothetical classroom situation as a source of data. Furthermore, the current study made use of a discourse completion test for gathering the data used in analysis, while other studies used natural speech. Differences in complimenting patterns found in the current study may be attributed to dialect, research method, gender, or status. Without previous work done in the Midland dialect or work done in other dialect using a DCT, direct comparisons are to be made cautiously.

The data was collected from undergraduate housing, so it was assumed that all respondents were undergraduate students at Iowa State; however, since there was no

question on the DCT requiring students to provide their year at the university, there is no way of knowing if all of them were really undergraduates. Also, it is possible that a student with freshman classification would have responded differently than one senior classification. More information about respondents' student classification would be needed in order to make that judgement.

Finally, some degree of confusion about the context in the DCT was evident in the data which was excluded from analysis. In Chapter 3 (page 39), I described that one respondent's answer was left out of consideration because he indicated that he did not compliment the male of the same status because he didn't like hats. I explained that this showed that he didn't fully understand the context or the directions on the DCT. Although he is the only respondent who provided an explanation, it is possible that this is also the reason why other respondents chose the answers which they did. There is some possibility that respondents reacted to change of item in the compliments and not change of gender and status, which the present study attempts to investigate.

Areas for Further Research

The first step in preparing to conduct contrastive analyses is to investigate fully the speech behavior within one community. This study was a first step, since little work has been done concerning classroom complimenting behavior, and even fewer studies have been done using the Midland dialect of English.

To further investigate complimenting behavior in a classroom, a study involving the comparison of the DCT to natural (videotaped) data could be done. Then, a contrastive analysis could be used to investigate ESL students' compliments to see how they compare to NS compliments in the classroom with each method of data collection. Beebe and Cummins (1996) compare data collection methods this way in their study of

refusals. Even if the DCT is found to be an unreliable method of collecting compliments, comparison to native speaker intuition could be made and discussion in a classroom could stimulate discussion.

One interesting step would be to distribute different versions of the DCT with different compliment topics in each version in order to investigate how topic change affects compliment behavior. The results of this could again be compared to natural speech to test the validity of the data collection method.

Geis and Harlow (1996) investigated French and English politeness strategies by using pairs of native speakers who were asked to cooperate to put together a child's puzzle. In this way the participants were unaware of which linguistic features were being solicited. It would be interesting to construct a situation where compliments could be elicited from participants without informing them of the exact intentions of the study. In this way, data could be controlled yet natural.

In their work investigating apologies, Cohen and Olshtain (1981) used role plays to gather information from participants in order to develop a rating scale of sociocultural competence. This kind of role play could also be used when investigating compliments see if language learners can be rated on their knowledge of compliments, and therefore, can be determined where students need the most work in the ESL classroom.

Implications for an ESL or an EFL Classroom

The next step after this research is to use the results from the data analysis in English language teaching. Many different speech acts could be taught in an English language class, including apologizing, refusals, invitations, compliments and insults. To do this, Tanaka (1997) proposes that one option for the teacher would be to use the students-as-researchers approach. She explains that the first step is to have students

formulate assumptions about speech act strategies in English. For example, the Japanese students in her class had many faulty assumptions about the level of directness which Americans employed. She further notes that some students had used these assumptions in their speech behavior and had caused tension with native speakers in the community. Next, a discussion about the rules of speaking in the students' own culture is started, and ends with the language learners developing a list of rules for their own culture and language. Tanaka's students constructed and gathered data with a DCT as described in the methods section of the current study. Tanaka suggested that her students select situations for the survey in which they had experienced difficulty in natural speech. The students then compare their findings in the questionnaire to their previous assumptions and to the rules for speaking in their own language. Possible follow-up assignments include journal entries and a small research paper.

Tanaka states that in an EFL situation, videotapes of television and movies can be used to get learners to investigate speech strategies. However, I suggest that a teacher in an EFL situation could put students into groups and discuss assumptions about the speech act in question as described above, but then assign students to construct a DCT in their native language. Then, students would be instructed to gather data from members of their own community. After the data are summarized by the students, comparisons to American data from one of many previous studies done in speech acts can be made. This would provide a useful platform for discussing possible reasons for differences in patterns. Finally, a research paper which reports results in English, as well as vocabulary assignments, could be constructed. Even a conversation summarizing the results would be useful in an EFL situation.

However, even after students have researched speech act rules, and have corrected their faulty assumptions, it is not ensured that language learners will include

new speech behavior into their own vernacular. Judd (1999) recommends that speech acts may be introduced into students' natural speech in five steps. The first step is the teacher's own analysis. This analysis includes which speech act is most important for students, when they will use it, and under which constraints. The teacher should also consider the differences in patterns in the native language of the students. The second step engages "cognitive awareness skills". This term refers to making students aware that differences in strategies and patterns exist. Third, activities are presented which require students to recognize the speech act, for instance, activities in which students identify a compliment within a text. Next, students produce the speech act in a controlled activity, like a cloze exercise. It is the last step that Judd advises that is missing from many ESL textbooks, so teachers may have to invent their own materials. The last step is to allow students the opportunity to produce the speech acts in a natural setting without teacher guidance. He suggests that problem-solving activities such as puzzles and debates which require little teacher assistance during the activity be used for the last step. Although, for the speech act of compliments and responses, this step is more difficult to realize than for disagreement, for example. After the activity, the teacher offers feedback to students.

Challenges for students and teachers

While teachers and researchers have noted the importance of teaching speech acts and pragmatic competence in an ESL classroom, perhaps the reason it has not been included in classroom instruction material is because many *students* view it as less important than other skills. Many students (especially those in an Intensive English Program [IEP] course) think only of passing the TOEFL or other similar tests. One semester while I taught in an IEP, four students out of 17 in my conversation skills class

were absent for the last three weeks of the semester because each of them said they needed to study for the TOEFL and they didn't feel conversation skills were crucial to the passing the test. Other teachers reported similar absences from their classes.

Teachers' and students' end goals seem congruent (to become fluent in the language), but the way to achieve the goals appears worlds apart. Many teachers have commented about the student mentality of "first I want to pass the TOEFL, then I will learn English". I have talked to many students (some of them my former students, most students in other classes) who view any divergence in the content of the course from direct teaching to the TOEFL as a waste of their time, energy and money. Even though the TOEFL does claim to test pragmatic competence, some students view anything but rote TOEFL test questions as time wasted. Realistically, ESL course content is driven by students, for their enrollment provides the funds which keep the program in business.

Conclusion

Wolfson's (1994) view of compliments keeping a woman in a subordinate position in society (page 23, present study) should not frighten all of us into silence, but should make us more aware of some of the possible consequences of our actions, whether our intentions are subconscious or purposeful. For example, a person in a higher status is likely to be caught off guard by a compliment in a situation which is out of the norm and have an adverse reaction to a gesture of friendship. Furthermore, a compliment from a woman to an unknown man may be ignored or even met with hostility.

Knowing when and who to compliment is especially important for learners of English as a second language. Americans have been found to compliment far more than many other cultures because the compliment performs multiple functions in American

conversation. Students living in the American culture have commented on and doubted the sincerity of American compliments. If we make use of data in studies like the current one in the ESL classroom, misunderstandings about American compliment behavior may be avoided. Foreign students may be able to recognize the strategies behind the compliment, and may be able to use his or her own successfully and further his or her social and professional opportunities in the community.

The American student in the example in Chapter 2 may or may not have been malevolent in intention when giving a compliment to his female professor on her manner of dress during a lesson. However, the effects of his compliment were not beneficial. For a NNS learning English, speech acts may be even harder to interpret because of different cultural rules. As I have said to my students when teaching slang in class, it is possible to say anything you like, and the utterance may be grammatically correct, but often that is not the issue when interacting with people. We must be aware of the reaction we may get from the person we are talking to. If students are armed with the norms and functions of speech acts, mistakes like the one in the example may be avoided because the student would have been better informed of the underlying function of the speech act he was using.

Lastly, knowledge about the patterns and norms of American complimenting behavior may be invaluable for native speakers of American English. Although we are able to intuit the rules of speaking in this country simply because we have been exposed to them and socialized into "correct" behavior, this doesn't mean a detailed introspection into our own behavior isn't useful to us. Knowledge of our own norms may provide us with the tools to be more skillful in finding the norms of another culture. When travelling abroad, or interacting with foreigners in this country, and even interacting with

other native speakers, knowledge of speech behavior rules is essential for maintaining and developing social relationships.

APPENDIX : DISCOURSE COMPLETION TEST

Questionnaire for Sociolinguistics study

Directions: Each of the following questions is concerned with language use in different classroom situations. Answer the questions without reflection. There are no right or wrong answers. The questionnaire should take less than five minutes to fill out. Thank you for your participation!

Scenario

You have been in a lower-level English (104 or 105) class that meets three times a week for about one month. The professor frequently has the class of 20 students work in small groups. The professor is professional and approachable, but not overly-friendly. While you know most of the students' first names, you are not friends with any of them outside of class. They are approximately your age.

1. You are working in a small group and you notice that your classmate Tracey is wearing boots that you like. How likely would you be to say anything to her about them? (circle one):

VERY UNLIKELY 1 2 3 4 5 6 VERY LIKELY

If you would say something (numbers 4, 5, or 6), what would it be?

2. Each member of the class is working on in-class assignments in pairs while the professor circulates and talks to each group. You notice that you like her watch. How likely are you to say anything to her about it? (circle one):

VERY UNLIKELY 1 2 3 4 5 6 VERY LIKELY

If you would be likely to say something (numbers 4, 5, or 6), what would you say?

3. When you and your classmate Tom are sitting waiting for class to begin you notice that you like his hat. How likely are you to say anything to him about it? (circle one):

VERY UNLIKELY 1 2 3 4 5 6 VERY LIKELY

If you would say something to him (numbers 4, 5, or 6), what would you say?

4. You are once again in small groups in the English class. Your professor is wearing a tie that you like. When he comes around to your group, how likely are you to comment on his tie?

VERY UNLIKELY 1 2 3 4 5 6 VERY LIKELY

If you would say something to him (numbers 4, 5, or 6), what would you say?

5. Your age _____

Your sex: Male or Female (circle one)

6. Your home state _____.

Thank you for your time!

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