

Abstract

Dissertation: The Sociolinguistics of Compliment Behavior in Najdi Saudi Arabic

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This study examines the politeness strategies employed by Najdi Saudi Arabic speakers in giving and responding to compliments. Gender, age and relationship were hypothesized to influence features of compliments and compliment responses. A corpus of 592 compliments and compliment responses collected in natural contexts were analyzed.

The researcher hypothesized that: a) gender influences the way men and women pay and respond to compliments; b) people of different age groups give and respond to compliments differently; and c) the relationship between the participants affects the strategies used in giving and responding to compliments.

The results show that Najdi compliments draw on a limited number of syntactic patterns as well as a limited number of adjectives which makes Najdi complimenting formulaic. Najdi speakers are likely to implicitly accept the compliments. As for the interaction of compliments and compliment responses with social variables, the results reveal speaker-gender/age/social relationship contrasts. Compliments occurred more frequently among interlocutors of the same gender, age and social relationship. Men focused on personality and performance whereas the majority compliments of women's compliments focused on appearance. Women's compliments

are lengthier than men's. Women also used more invocation, appreciation tokens, praise upgrade, relationship and returned more compliments than men.

In terms of the relationship between compliment topics and generations, the findings show that young and middle-aged speakers paid more compliments on appearance while the older group focused on personality and performance. Additionally, the middle-aged group and the older group used more non-acknowledgment than the young generation. Social relationships also play a role in complimenting behavior. Unfamiliar speakers paid more compliments on performance and their compliment responses contained primarily invocation and blessing.

Though the speech act of *compliment* is used frequently in everyday human interaction in Saudi culture, no study has investigated the nature of compliments as a speech act in Najdi Arabic. Because there has not been any attempt to uncover differences in the linguistic and semantic realizations of compliments and compliment responses of Najdi Saudis, there still exists a gap that needs to be filled in the cross-cultural study of speech acts.