A Socio-Pragmatic Study of Compliments and Compliment Responses in American and British Sitcoms

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ABSTRACT

Compliments in general are an essential part of everyday interactions. People use compliments mainly to reinforce or encourage certain behaviours or acts, as well as to show admiration or praise a certain possession or trait. The researcher seeks to answer the following questions: What are the aspects that might affect the use of different compliment functions, topics and structures? What are the culture-based similarities and differences in the use of compliment responses between the American culture and the British one? What are the most frequently used strategies of compliments and compliment responses in each culture, and why? The results of the study have shown that there are social aspects that can affect the use of compliment functions, topics and structures, such as the social status, social distance and gender of the complimenter and complimentee. The results have also shown that the most commonly used compliment function is 'Admiration' in both American and British sitcoms even though it was hypothesized to be 'reinforcement'.

INTRODUCTION

Compliments and compliment responses play a big part of everyday interactions, since they are considered some of the most used aspects of speech in almost all languages. It is used as a way of expressing an opinion about a certain thing or behaviour, or as icebreakers to start conversations. Compliments can be explained as comments a speaker makes to express his/her admiration of a particular characteristic or possession of another person. According to some linguists, compliments are statements or phrases that are used to make others feel good about themselves.

The data of this study is collected from two TV sitcoms: The Big Bang Theory (American: 2007 - 2019) and The IT Crowd (British: 2006 - 2013). These two sitcoms were specifically selected since both of them are of the same genre, have a very similar storyline and only differ in cultural background. The analysis will be limited to 2 episodes of each and 4 in total. This study aims to identify the use of compliments and compliment responses in everyday life, by offering an extensive theoretical background on the phenomenon of compliments, and how they are affected by different cultural norms and values. It also aims to investigate the types, functions and strategies of compliments and compliment responses that are presented in the two selected TV series. Finally, it aims to differentiate between how people from these two Western cultures perceive and react towards compliments and compliment responses.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

For many years, language has been studied from different perspectives. It started with studying language in term of its structure, all the way to its pragmatics, which is concerned with the way language is used in a society. However, the emergence of sociolinguistics shed lighter on the relation between the language and the society that uses it. This can be witnessed, for instance, in the difference of using compliments and compliment responses across different communities, societies and cultures, since each has its own perspective of language that is reflected in its use (Holmes, 1990). In fact, the society and culture are strongly connected with the way different speech acts are used in communication. Therefore, to be able to fully analyze the mechanisms of using compliments and compliment responses, it is necessary to tackle both the pragmatic and the sociolinguistic aspects related to them. The socio-cultural context needs to be taken into account too since

what is positive for one group may not be for another, and there may even be variation across sociocultural groups in terms of "what counts as a compliment" (Wolfson 1981, p. 117).

Sociolinguistics

Hudson (1996, p.4) defines sociolinguistics simply as "*the study of language in relation to society*". Wardhaugh (2010, p. 12) gives a more detailed definition: "*sociolinguistics is concerned with investigating the relationship between language and society with the goal being a better understanding of the structure of language and how languages function in communication*". Sociolinguists are concerned with elaborating on why people speak differently in different social environments or contexts, as well as identifying the ways in which language is used to convey a specific social meaning. Hudson (1996) explains that studying speech without refereeing to the society that uses it means not being able to find the social explanations behind using such structures.

Theorizing that all speakers have one style of using language would make it so much easier for many linguists to set strong generalizations about how language works. However, in spite of how intriguing it might seems, there is no such thing as single-style speakers. Every speaker has his own way or style of using language, hence, there are no two speakers who utilize linguistic items in the exact same way, which leads us to the Variation Theory, which is one of the primary concerns of sociolinguistics (Wardhaugh, 2010). Chambers (2003) defines the Variation Theory as the correlation between have the independent social variables and the dependent linguistic variables. Thus, according to this theory, a sociolinguistic study of any language must focus on the relationship between linguistic factors (such as pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, etc.) and social factors (such as culture, age, education, ethnicity, etc.) (Wardhaugh, 2010, p.5).

Culture and Communication

In the broad anthropological sense of the word, culture refers to the habitual and menial activities in everyday life that people usually learn since birth, such as greetings, expressing feelings, eating and drinking manners, physical interaction and personal space manners, and so on. In that sense, culture is defined as "*the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another*" (Hofstede 1991, p.5). Minkov (2011) states that in order to differentiate one

439

culture from another, one must look at the adopted behaviours, beliefs, norms, and values of that culture. This is also seen in Hofstede et al.'s (2010) Cultural Dimensions Theory, in which he views culture as a multilayered concept, just like the skin of an onion. According to him, culture consists of four layers: symbols, heroes, rituals and values, in addition to practices that are connected to the first three layers.

Communication is "*the process of transmitting messages or information from one person to another*" (Deresky 2008, p.127). It is a cooperative effort used to convey the identity of the speaker to the listener; therefore, communication depends heavily on the shared knowledge between the interlocutors about the subject being discussed. There are two ways of communications: verbal communication (such as words, sounds, idioms, grammar, and dialects), and non verbal communication (such as using gestures, express emotions through facial expressions, sending messages through eye contact, and the physical distance between the interlocutors) (Browayes & Price 2008).

Communication differs evidently between cultures, not only in verbal communication, but also in non-verbal communication. This difference in communication across cultures can be attributed to the variability in sociolinguistic norms and behavioural patterns. Thus, any sort of communication that takes place between people from different cultures may be hindered by the difficulty in knowing what is and what is not appropriate to say, which may result in some sort of misunderstanding, (Chick, 1985).

Cultural Globalization

Over the past few decades, globalization has become an important field of research in most social sciences due to the growing interconnectedness of social, cultural and economic phenomena across communities, societies, and nations. Globalization in general is defined by Giddens (1990, p.64) as "the intensification of worldwide social relations, which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa". Later on, Held (as quoted in Guibernau, 2001, p.427) put it in a more simple way as "the stretching of connections, relations, and networks between human communities".

Cultural globalization refers to the cultural flows among nations and

countries in a way that transcends national boundaries. This cross-cultural flow denotes the increasing transaction of people's ideas, values, believes, traditions, and way of living (U.N. Report, 1999). In the same sense, Castells (2009, p. 117) defines cultural globalisation as "the emergence of a specific set of values and beliefs that are largely shared around the planet". According to David (2002), people usually tend to accept and embrace the differences of values and cultural norms of each community due to its importance in maintaining the solidarity and harmony between cultures.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics is a linguistic framework originated in late 1930s by Morris, Carnap, and Peirce, who define it as understanding the meaning of signs to their users and interpreters (Morris 1938). Crystal (2008, p.379) defines pragmatics as "the study of language from the point of view of the users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction, and the effects their use of language has on the other participants in an act of communication." Therefore, pragmatics goes beyond the dictionary meaning and deals with the actual meaning of a certain utterance based on the context or the

norms of the society in which it takes place (Yule, 1996).

Being able to use language to perform actions as well as to comprehend and understand the actual purpose of the language used is called having a pragmatic competence. Leech (1983) subdivides the pragmatic competence, which he refers to as general pragmatics, into two main categories. On the one hand, pragmalinguistics, which reflects the knowledge of the linguistic forms as well as the pragmatic strategies that are often used to convey meaning, for example, realizing the pragmatic strategies of speech acts by using the linguistic forms required for such strategies. On the other hand, sociopragmatics, which refers to the knowledge of using these strategies and forms in an appropriate social contexts relevant to the participants, for example, the relationship between using certain speech acts strategies and forms and the difference in the social distance or social status/power between the participants, (Kasper and Roever, 2005).

Sociopragmatics

Leech (1983) is one of the first linguists to account for sociopragmatics as an essential aspect of general pragmatics. According to him, general pragmatics is concerned with "the general conditions of the

communicative use of language" and is divided into pragmalinguistics, which is concerned with "the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions"; and sociopragmatics, which focuses on "specific 'local' conditions on language use" (1983, pp. 10-11).

Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (2003) point out that the three levels of context mentioned above can be seen as parallel to the three area of sociolinguistics: interactional sociolinguistics, social dialectology, and the sociology of language. One of the best examples to show how sociolinguistics and sociopragmatics often overlap is the Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson (1987) which is often cited in pragmatic works but was originally published within a sociolinguistic interactional series.

Speech Acts Theory

Gibbs (1999) states that the functions of utterances in interpersonal communications were tackled for the first time by Austin, there for it is generally believed that J. L. Austin is the initiator of the Speech Acts Theory. According to Thomas (1995), Austin believes that language is used not only for expressions, but also to perform actions. In his book 'How to Do Things with Words', Austin

criticizes the common claim that "the business of a [sentence] can only be to 'describe' some state of affairs, or to 'state some fact', which it must do either truly or falsely" (1962, p. 1).

According to Austin (1962), speech acts include three different levels of action: first is the locutionary act, which can be defined as the act of uttering something. Second is the illocutionary act, which is connected to the force that a performative utterance has, such as "promising" or "apologizing". Third is the perlocutionary act, which focuses on how the listener is effected by an illocutionary act while trying to identify the illocutionary intention of the speaker. A more comprehensive taxonomy of speech acts is presented by Searle's (1979) classification system in which he lists five illocutionary functions that can be performed by speech acts: assertives, commissives, directives, declarations and expressives.

Compliments: A Working Definition

Holmes (1986, p. 485) 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". Newton and Burgoon (1990, p. 509) explain that compliments are "statements that are intended to make the other feel good about himself/herself". So generally, compliments are considered as a type of speech acts, which enables the speaker to express a positive attitude or express his/her admiration of a particular characteristic or possession of another person, such as the complimentee's appearance, behaviour, manner, skill, etc. (Wolfson 1981).

Although compliments are widely considered as expressions of "positive evaluation" to the addressee (Wolfson 1981, p. 120), determining what exactly a 'positive evaluation' is can be problematic. Holmes (1995) points out that compliments pose a challenge as they could be perceived as ironic, offensive, sarcastic, patronizing, or even as putdowns. Some may consider giving a compliment as a face-threatening act because it leads to "the compliment's debt" (Holmes, 1986, p. 487), where the receiver of the compliment may feel obligated to return the compliment. Some compliments that appear to be direct in terms of their lexis and structure may not function as such in a given context, making context an integral part of interpreting compliments (cf. Boyle 2000, Sifianou 2001, Maíz-Arévalo 2010).

Compliment Responses

Pomerantz (1978) is the first to discuss compliment responses from a conversational analytic perspective. According to her, when trying to respond to compliments, people face two problems: (1) they feel obliged to agree with what the speaker is saying, and (2) they try avoiding praising themselves (1978). These two problems are also seen in the light of Leech's (1983) two maxims of politeness: the Agreement Maxim "Minimize disagreement between self and other; maximize agreement between self and other" and the Modesty Maxim, "Minimize praise of self; maximize dispraise of self" (Leech, 1983, p. 32). Urano (1998) explains these problems further by stating that when a complimentee responds by agreeing with the complimenter as in the first maxim, he will most likely violate the second maxim by appearing as praising himself, and vice versa.

To solve this problem, Pomerantz suggests using several strategies, which she refers to as 'shifts'. For example, the 'evaluation shift', in which the addressee downgrades the praise; the 'referent shift', in which the addressee shifts the object of the praise by trying to praise someone other than himself, and 'returns', in which the addressee returns the compliment back to

443

the speaker. By using these strategies, the addressee can indirectly accept/agree with the compliment and keep his self-praise minimal, thus satisfying both the Modesty Maxim and the Agreement Maxim. Herbert (1986) cites a quote from an American etiquette book saying:

> **When you are complimented, the only response necessary is 'Thank you.' Don't disparage yourself. If someone admires your dress, don't say, 'This old thing, I got it at a bargain sale.' A simple thank you is sufficient.** Johnson (1979, pp. 43-44), cited in Herbert (1986, p. 76)

MODELS OF ANALYSIS

The study will be conducted using an eclectic model based on several models, namely: Holmes' (1988a) "Model of Compliment Functions" for the sake of analyzing the function of the sentence; Manes and Wolfson's (1981) "Model of Compliment Topics" for the sake of analyzing the topics; Manes and Wolfson's (1981) "Model of Compliment Syntactic Structure" for the sake of analyzing the structure of the sentence; and Holmes' (1995) "Model of Compliment Responses Strategies" for the sake of analyzing the strategies used.

Holmes' (1988a) Model of Compliment Functions

Although compliments are considered as positive politeness strategies used for supporting the complimentee's face, they can sometimes also be used as face-threatening negative strategies (Manno, 2005). So, between the positive and negative uses of compliments, there are several functions, such as (Holmes, 1988a): 1) Encouragement or Reinforcement 2) Praise and Admiration 3) Patronizing and Flattery 4) Sarcasm or Irony 5) Envy.

Manes and Wolfson's (1981) Model of Compliment Topics

A research by Manes and Wolfson (1981) show that there are some common topics in compliments, such as: 1) **Appearance:** Includes compliments on a person's looks or an overall impression, e.g. 'hair', 'figure', 'smile', 'eyes', etc.. 2) **Ability/Performance:** Includes compliments on the ability to solve problems, pass an exam, play some instrument, dance, organize a party, draw, drive a car, sing, etc.. 3) **Possessions:** Includes compliments that mostly refer to things people wear: sweaters, trousers, shoes, coats, glasses, earrings, etc. 4) **Personality/Friendship:** Includes

444

compliments that are connected with the positive personal character. 5) **Other**: Includes compliments which did not clearly refer to any of the above-mentioned topics or might refer to more than one, for example, complimenting a certain action or event.

Manes and Wolfson's (1981) Model of Compliment Syntactic Structures

There is an infinite number of words that could be chosen to give a compliment, but the set of lexical items and grammatical patterns people use in their daily interaction when complimenting and have high frequency in their daily discourse can be narrowed down. According to Wolfson (1986), two-thirds of English compliments use the adjectives "nice, good, beautiful, pretty, great", and 90% make use of just two verbs "like and love" (p.116). Compliments in society are formulas just like greetings, thanking, and apologies, therefore, they have a narrow, but not limited, number of syntactic patterns (Manes and Wolfson, 1981).

Manes and Wolfson (1981: 120) study the corpus of 686 naturally occurring compliments in American English, and find out that the majority of their corpus belonged to one of the following structures:

No.	Syntactic Structure	Example
1.	NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ	Your hair looks nice
2.	I (really) {like, love} NP	I love your hair
3.	PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP	That was really a great meal
4.	You V (a) (really) ADJ NP	You did a good job
5.	You V (NP) (really) ADV	You really handled that situation well
6.	You have (a) (really) ADJ NP	You have such beautiful hair
7.	What (a) (ADJ) NP!	What a lovely baby you have!
8.	ADJ (NP)!	Nice game!
9.	Isn't NP ADJ!	Isn´t your ring beautiful!

Holmes' (1995) Model of Compliment Responses Strategies

According to Holmes (1995), in English-speaking societies "thank you" is considered as the appropriate response to a compliment. However, there are other responses that can be classified into three general categories: agreements, non-agreements and evasions.

Agreements include six subtypes of responses: 1) Appreciation Tokens, 2) Comment Agreements, 3) Praise Upgrades, 4) Comment History, 5) Praise Downgrades, 6) Return. Non-agreements include five subtypes of response: 1) Scale Down, 2) Question, 3) Disagreement, 4) Qualification, 5) No Acknowledgement. Evasions includes four subtypes: 1) Shift credit, 2) Informative comment, 3) Ignore, 4) Request reassurance.

DATA COLLECTION

The data is taken from two sitcoms, one American and one British. The Big Bang Theory is an American sitcom created and produced by Chuck Lorre and Bill Prady. It was premiered on CBS on September 24, 2007, and concluded on May 16, 2019; having broadcast over 12 seasons a total of 279 episodes, making it the most ever for a studio sitcom. The IT Crowd is a British sitcom written by Graham Linehan and produced by Ash Atalla. It was premiered on Channel 4 on February 3, 2006, lasted for four seasons, each containing six episodes making a total of 24 episodes, and was concluded with a special one-off episode on 27 September 2013.

The researcher takes her data from 4 episodes, 2 from each show. From the IT Crowd, the researcher takes Episode 1 of Season 1 (The Pilot) and Episode 1 of Season 12 (The Conjugal Configuration). From the Big Bang Theory, the researcher takes Episode 1 of Season 1 (Yesterday's Jam) and Episode 1 of Season 4 (Jen the Fredo). The purpose behind taking the first episode of the first and last season in both sitcoms is to investigate the beginning and the final events of the sitcoms, making it more comprehensive.

DATA ANALYSIS

After watching the two sitcoms and reading the transcript, the researcher proceeds to take the utterances that contain the compliment/compliment response to analyze it according to the eclectic model. The analysis is done in the form of a table that consists of four columns. The first is the number of the utterance. The second is the utterances containing the compliment/compliment responses, which are underlined and written in italics. The third is the analysis, which includes the

compliment structure/topic/function and the compliment response type. The fourth is the explanation, in which the researcher will give a background of the encounter, the setting in which it takes place, and the relationship between the interlocutors.

The American Sitcom (The Big Bang Theory)

Episode 1 of Season 1 (The Pilot)

No.	Utterance	Analysis	Explanation
1	Leonard: What, are you kidding? *You're a semi-pro*. Sheldon: *No. We are committing genetic fraud*. There's no guarantee that our sperm is going to generate high IQ offspring, think about that. I have a sister with the same basic DNA mix who hostesses at Fuddruckers.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Ability - **Function**: Reinforcement **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Non-agreement/ Disagreement	**The context:** Leonard and Sheldon were about to donate semen to a 'high IQ semen bank' but Sheldon is having second thoughts **The relationship:** Best friends
2	Leonard: *Significant improvement over the old neighbour*. Sheldon: Two hundred pound transvestite with a skin condition, yes she is.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Appearance - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Leonard and Sheldon meet their new neighbour Penny for the first time. **The Relationship:** New neighbours.
3	Penny: Oh, *that's nice*. Leonard: *Oh… uh… no… we don't live together… um… we live together but in separate,*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Admiration	**The Context:** Leonard and Sheldon introduce themselves as the two guys living together next door and Penny compliments that

447

	heterosexual bedrooms.	**Compliment Response** - **Type:** Non-agreement/ Qualification	thinking they are in a relationship. **The Relationship:** New neighbours
4	Penny: Oh, *that's so nice*, I'd love to. Leonard: *Great*.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Other (they invited her to eat together) - **Function**: Appreciation **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Appreciation tokens	**The Context:** Leonard invites Penny for lunch with them at their apartment. **The Relationship:** New neighbours
5	Penny: *This looks like some serious stuff*, Leonard, did you do this? Sheldon: *Actually that's my work*.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Ability/ Performance - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Evasion/ Informative comment	**The Context:** Penny is impressed by the board filled with scientific stuff. **The Relationship:** New neighbours
6	Penny: *Wow!* Sheldon: *Yeah, well, it's just some quantum mechanics, with a little string theory doodling around the edges. That part there, that's just a joke, it's a spoof of the Bourne-Oppenheimer approximation.*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Performance/ ability - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Praise downgrade	**The Context:** Penny is impressed by Sheldon's work. **The Relationship:** New neighbours

448

7	Penny: _This is really impressive._ Sheldon: (Smiles) Leonard: I have a board. If you like boards, this is my board.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Performance/ ability - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Non-verbal appreciation tokens (smiling)	**The Context:** Penny is impressed by Sheldon's work. **The Relationship:** New neighbours
8	Leonard: _Well this is nice_. We don't have a lot of company over. Penny: (Smiles) Sheldon: That's not true. Koothrapali and Wolowitz come over all the time.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Other (the situation) - **Function**: Appreciation **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Non-verbal appreciation tokens (Smiling)	**The Context:** Leonard is happy with having Penny over in their apartment. **The Relationship:** New neighbours
9	Leonard: _Well, if that was a movie I would love to go see it._ Penny: _I know, right?_ Okay, let's see, what else? Um, that's about it. That's the story of Penny.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Ability - **Function**: Reinforcement **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Praise upgrade	**The Context:** Penny tells Leonard and Sheldon the script she is writing. **The Relationship:** New neighbours
10	Penny: Thanks. _You guys are really sweet._ Howard & Sheldon: _(Smile)_	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response**	**The Context:** Penny tells Leonard and Sheldon that her shower is broken and they offer that she use theirs. **The Relationship:** New

449

		- **Type:** Agreement/ Non-verbal appreciation tokens (smiling)	neighbours
11	Howard: Wait till you see this. *It's fantastic. Unbelievable*. Leonard: See what? Howard: It's a Stephen Hawking lecture from MIT in 1974.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Possession - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type: None**	**The Context:** Howard wants to show Leonard something exciting that he and Raj got. **The Relationship:** None
12	Leonard: *That's great*, you guys have to go. Raj: *Why?*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Possession - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Evasion/ Ignore	**The Context:** Leonard expresses his admiration with Howard's tape. **The Relationship:** Best friends
13	Sheldon: *It's just a privilege to watch your mind at work.* Leonard: *Come on, we have a combined IQ of 360, we should be able to figure out how to get into a stupid building, right?*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Performance - **Function**: Sarcasm **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Evasion/ Request reassurance	**The Context:** Leonard and Sheldon try to figure a way to get into Penny's Ex's apartment complex. **The Relationship:** Best friends
14	Howard: This is one of my favourite places to kick back after a quest, *they have a great house ale.*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: PRO have (a) (really) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Possession - **Function**: Admiration	**The Context:** Howard is showing Penny a game he plays and is complimenting it. **The Relationship:**

	Penny: Wow.	**Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	None
15	Penny: *cool tiger*. Howard: *Yeah, I've had him since level ten. His name is Buttons.* Anyway, if you had your own game character we could hang out, maybe go on a quest.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Possession - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** **Type:** Agreement/ Comment agreement	**The Context:** Penny is complimenting Howard on the game that he is showing her. **The Relationship:** New acquaintances
16	Penny: *Uh, sounds interesting*. Howard: *So you'll think about it?* Penny: Oh, I don't think I'll be able to stop thinking about it.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Other (invitation) - **Function**: Sarcasm **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Evasion/ Request reassurance	**The Context:** Penny is complimenting Howard on the game that he is showing her. **The Relationship:** New acquaintances
17	Penny: Really, thank you so much for going and trying you're, uh, *you're so terrific*. Why don't you put some clothes on, I'll get my purse and dinner is on me, okay?	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Appreciation **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Non-verbal appreciation tokens (nodding)	**The Context:** Penny is grateful for Leonard and Sheldon for going to her ex's house to try and get her TV back **The Relationship:** New neighbours
18	Leonard: *Our babies will be smart and beautiful*. Sheldon: Not to mention	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Appearance &	**The Context:** Leonard fantasizing about marrying Penny and telling Sheldon about it.

451

imaginary.	ability - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Relationship:** New neighbours
19	Penny: *That sounds really fun*. Howard (sings): Baby, baby don't get hooked on me. Uh, baby, baby don't get hooked on me.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Other (a place with karaoke) - **Function**: Reinforcement **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Non-verbal appreciation tokens (smirking)	**The Context:** Everyone is in the car debating where to go to for dinner and Howard suggests a place with a karaoke. **The Relationship:** New acquaintances

Episode 1 of Season 12 (The Conjugal Configuration)

No.	Utterance	Analysis	
20	Raj: So, something pretty cool happened. Channel asked me to be on the news tomorrow night to talk about the meteor shower . Leonard: Oh, *that's great*. Raj: (nods)	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Achievement - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Non-verbal appreciation tokens (nodding)	**The Context:** Raj is asked to be on TV and she is telling his friends all about it. **The Relationship:** Best friends
21	Bernadette: Man, *that is one hot weather girl .* Howard: How come if I say that I get in trouble?	**Compliment** - **Structure**: PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Appearance - **Function**: Envy	**The Context:** Berny and Howard are watching the news to see their friend Raj. Berny compliments the weather girl.

		Compliment Response - **Type:** None	**The Relationship:** TV Worker/ Viewer
22	Raj: Oh, no, *I love Neil*. *I mean, not as much as Neil loves Neil*, but who does, right ? The host: Oh, you know, I'm told we are out of time, (chuckles) having learned nothing about meteor showers and too much about Dr. Koothrappali. Thank you.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: I (really) {like, love} NP - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Sarcasm **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Raj ranting about his rivalry with Neil to the interviewer. **The Relationship:** An esteemed scientist/ a young scientist (different social ranks)
23	Sheldon: Do you know what I love about Broadway theater? *It's so interactive .* Amy: Uh-huh.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Sheldon and Amy are on their honeymoon. Sheldon is expressing his admiration to theaters to Amy. **The Relationship:** None
24	Dr. Tyson: "*Nice try, genius*. The skin is epithelial tissue". Raj: Oh, it's on. He's Katy, I'm T-Swift.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: ADJ (NP)! - **Topic**: Performance - **Function**: Sarcasm **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Evasion/ Ignore	**The Context:** Raj is reading Dr. Tyson's tweet for him after he dragged him down on national TV. **The Relationship:** An esteemed scientist/ a young scientist (different social ranks)

25	Sheldon: Of course they're listening; *we're interesting*. Unlike that guy . Amy: I-I'm walking away from you.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response** - **Type**: Evasion/ Ignore	**The Context:** Sheldon and Amy are having an argument in the streets and people are listening to them. **The Relationship:** Newlyweds
26	Leonard: It's not true. (stammers) Mrs. Fowler is an angry, vindictive woman, whereas *you are warm and-and loving, quick to forgive .* Penny: *Oh, please.*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: personality - **Function**: Flattery **Compliment Response** - **Type**: Non-agreement/ Disagreement	**The Context:** Leonard mistakenly compares Penny to Mrs. Fowler, bring moody and hardhearted. Then he tries to take it back by complimenting her. **The Relationship:** Married couple
27	Mrs. Fowler: He said I'm overbearing ! Penny: Oh, please, *you're just the right amount of bearing*. Look, I know he loves you. If you just give him some space, I'm sure he'll come back. Mrs. Fowler: *You really think so ?* Penny: Yeah, I do.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Flattery **Compliment Response** - **Type**: Evasion/ request reassurance	**The Context:** Penny is trying to console Mrs. Fowler after her argument with her husband Mr. Fowler **The Relationship:** Friend's parent

28	Mrs. Fowler: *You're a good person*, Penny. I hope we get to spend lots of time together . Penny: (*Smiling*) *Me, too*.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Non-verbal appreciation tokens (Smiling)	**The Context:** Penny is trying to console Mrs. Fowler after her argument with her husband Mr. Fowler **The Relationship:** Friend's parent
29	Amy: Sheldon, *I could never be with anybody but you.* Sheldon: *That's good to know.* I wouldn't want to fight a man who's brave enough to touch a fish*.*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ comment agreement	**The Context:** Sheldon is trying to fix things up with Amy. **The Relationship:** Newlyweds
30	Raj: Uh, *w-wow. (chuckles) How fun is this Twitter thing*, huh ? Dr. Tyson : You think you're funny?	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Irony **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Dr. Tyson calls Raj to scold him about all the drama he has been making on twitter. **The Relationship:** None
31	Dr. Tyson: *Smart move*, and the next time you pick up your phone, remember, I'm the guy who kicked Pluto out of the solar system . Raj: *And it deserved it, sir. Thank you. Bye-bye.*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: ADJ (NP)! - **Topic**: Performance - **Function**: Patronizing **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Comment Agreement	**The Context:** Dr. Tyson calls Raj to scold him about all the drama he has been making on twitter. **The Relationship:** An esteemed scientist/ a young scientist (different social ranks)

The British Sitcom (The IT Crowd)

Episode 1 of Season 1 (The Pilot)

No.	Utterance	Analysis	Explanation
32	Denholm: Well, _you certainly seem to know your stuff_. That's settled. _I've got a good feeling about you Jen_ and they need a new manager. Jen: _Fantastic_, so the people I'll be working with, what are they like?	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Ability - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Appreciation Tokens	**The Context:** Denholm is interviewing Jen for her new Job. **The Relationship:** Employer/Employee
33	Jen: _Oh my god! look at that view!_ I feel like I'm on top of the world. (lift bell sounds)	**Compliment** - **Structure**: ADJ (NP)! - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Denholm is showing Jen the company building and Jen is impressed. **The Relationship:** None
34	Jen: Yeah, Denholm. Yeah, yeah, no n-n-n-no, no _they've been fine so far_. Yeah, I think we're going to get on great. Yeah I know, alright then, no you take care, alright, yeah I will, yeah, okay take care, take care, okay bye, bye. So, hello, what can I do you for... what can I do for you?	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Patronizing **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Evasion/ Ignore	**The Context:** Jen is pretending to be on a call with the company's president, Denholm, complimenting Moss and Roy in front of them. **The Relationship:** Manager/Employee

456

35	Roy: Oh no! *We are getting on like a big house on fire*. Denholm: (Nods)	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Performance - **Function**: Sarcasm **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Non-verbal appreciation tokens (nodding)	**The Context:** Roy and Moss are lying to Denholm about their relationship with the new manager, Jen, in order not to lose their job. **The Relationship:** Employer/ Employee
36	Roy: Errmmm. We set up a voice activation system on your computer. Err I think you're gonna enjoy it. It might just take a little while to get the pitch right on the voice but none the less go ahead. Thank you very much, bye bye. Denholm: Thank you. *How exciting!*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Performance - **Function**: Appreciation **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Roy lies about the reason they are in Denholm's office saying that they set up a new system, which makes Denholm happy. **The Relationship:** Employer/ Employee
37	Jen: *Oh my God. Are those Manolo's?* Laura: *Oh, yes.*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Possession - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Comment agreement	**The Context:** Laura is in the IT department beating up Roy which her shoes for disrespecting her over the phone. Jen admires her shoes. **The Relationship:** New acquaintances
38	Jen: *They are gorgeous.* Were they expensive? Laura: *No, no, no. Got them in the sale.*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Possession - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response**	**The Context:** Laura is in the IT department beating up Roy which her shoes for disrespecting her over the phone. Jen admires her shoes.

		- **Type:** Agreement/ Praise downgrade	**The Relationship:** New acquaintances
39	Jen: _Oh God, clever you_. I'm never lucky enough to get a bargain like that. Laura: _Well, I should take you shopping_.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: ADJ (NP)! - **Topic**: Ability/performance - **Function**: Envy **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Comment agreement	**The Context:** Laura is in the IT department beating up Roy which her shoes for disrespecting her over the phone. Jen admires her shoes. **The Relationship:** New acquaintances
40	Jen: Yeah, no that would be fantastic. Yeah, _it was nice to meet you_. Laura: _Nice meeting you_.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Flattery **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Return	**The Context:** Laura is in the IT department beating up Roy which her shoes for disrespecting her over the phone. Jen admires her shoes. **The Relationship:** New acquaintances
41	Moss: _Chairman wow! You've just diffused that entire situation_. Jen: _What situation? Oh that, yeah. Oh my God, does that happen a lot?_ Moss: They're fairly regular the beatings, yes. I'd say we're on a bi-weekly beating.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Performance - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Non-agreement/ Question	**The Context:** Moss is impressed by the way Jen calmed Lauren and ended the fight. **The Relationship:** Manager/ Employee

458

42	Office girl: I don't know why we don't go out with you IT guys more often. *You're hilarious*! Roy: *Yes, we are*!	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Praise upgrade	**The Context:** Jen manages to set a party in the IT department inviting all company employees in order for Roy and Moss to have a social interaction. **The Relationship:** Co-workers
43	Roy: Moss! Moss! Come here, come here. Tell them that story about when we were drunk in Amsterdam. Moss: Really? Roy: Yeah, yeah. Oh *It's brilliant*, *this is a great story*, you're gonna love it. I'm just gonna get another box of wine. Moss: All right.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ / PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Encouragement **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Roy askes Moss to tell everyone about the Amsterdam story. **The Relationship:** None
44	Moss: Well. One night we really drunk, and err... we were so drunk that we decided to hire prostitutes. But when they arrived at the hotel we were too scared to do anything so we brought them to a fair. *They were really nice*. In the end they only charged us half but we did have to pay for all the	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Moss goes on telling the wrong story to everyone, while Roy is at the back bringing more beer. **The Relationship:** co-workers

459

	rides.		
45	Roy: Haha! *Oh isn't that just the best story.* Moss: But you told me to never tell that story to anyone.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Isn't NP ADJ! - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Non-agreement/ Qualification	**The Context:** Roy comes back still excited about the story, but notices that everyone is staring at them awkwardly. **The Relationship:** Friends
46	Roy: What are you talking about? *That's a brilliant story* and then you walked into the canal. Has it got to that part with the boat man? Moss: Oh, you mean the story where I lost my glasses?	**Compliment** - **Structure**: PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Roy realizes that Moss must have told the wrong story to everyone. **The Relationship:** None
47	Moss: *That was a nice day at the fair*, wasn't it. With Brandy and Crystal. (phone rings)	**Compliment** - **Structure**: PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Roy, Moss and Jen are back sitting alone in the IT department, while Moss still remembering the story he told. **The Relationship:** None

Episode 1 of Season 4 (Jen the Fredo)

No.	Utterance	Analysis	
48	Jen: _Iit is quite mysterious_. Moss: _I was hoping for ruddy mysterious_. Jen: _It's fairly mysterious_.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type**: Evasion/ Request assurance	**The Context:** Jen enters the IT department on Moss, who asks her opinion on the music he made for his role-playing game. **The Relationship:** Friends
49	Moss: a post has opened up for Entertainments Manager. Jen: _That sounds great_. I could do that. Better than whatever this job is. Moss: _It's not for you, Jen_	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Encouragement **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Non-agreement/ Disagreement	**The Context:** Jen thinks about applying for a new post in the company. **The Relationship:** Friends
50	Jen: _You do seem better than yesterday_. But Roy, you've got to snap out of this. Roy: I know, I know.	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Appearance - **Function**: Reinforcement **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Evasion/ Ignore	**The Context:** Roy, still heartbroken after his break up with his girlfriend, finally shows up at work. **The Relationship:** Friends
51	Douglas: _Jen may look like an old maid holding pennies in her arse, but she knows the sleaziest routes round this old town I like to call Londinius._ And I'm	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP V (a) (really) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Ability/ performance	**The Context:** Jen meets the businessmen that she is responsible to entertain for the week. Denholm compliments her in front

461

	sure she's planned something suitably raucous for you reprobates. Jen: _Oh, yes, yes, I have tickets for a wonderful show in the West End._	- **Function**: Patronizing **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Comment agreement	of them. **The Relationship:** Employer/Employee
52	Phill: What happened to Gerry? Douglas: His heart exploded. Phil: _Brilliant_! Douglas_: No, he's quite seriously ill._	**Compliment** - **Structure**: ADJ (NP)! - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: sarcasm **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Non-agreement/ Disagreement	**The Context:** Pill, one of the businessmen is asking about the last guy before Jen. **The Relationship:** Business relationship
53	Roy: I'm sorry, I just came out of a long term relationship, so...It doesn't... _She was the greatest woman I've ever met_ and I'm never going to see her again. But it's fine, I mean, she never said goodbye. I'm not going to bore you with it. Phil: See then you bloody don't!	**Compliment** - **Structure**: PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Admiration **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Jen brings Phill and the other businessmen to the IT department hoping they will be entertained by playing Moss's roleplaying game. Roy, being all gloomy and sad, tells them about his breakup **The Relationship:** Ex lovers

462

54	Jen: Oh, come on, Phil! *These guys are the best.* They're going to do things tonight that'll blow your mind. Phil: Really?	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Ability/Performance - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response** - **Type:** None	**The Context:** Jen brings Phill and the other businessmen to the IT department hoping they will be entertained by playing Moss's roleplaying game. **The Relationship:** Friends
55	Woman: No, we all make mistakes. And *you intrigue me. Something tells me there's more to you than meets the eye*. Douglas: *Do you mean the rumours that I killed my wife?* Woman: No. Are there rumours?	**Compliment** - **Structure**: Other - **Topic**: Personality - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Non-agreement/ Question	**The Context:** Denholm sleeps with one of the women from Woman Affairs to make them withdraw the 'shithead award' they gave him. **The Relationship:** Employer/ Employee
56	Moss: *You look well*. Roy: *So do you*...	**Compliment** - **Structure**: NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ - **Topic**: Appearance - **Function**: Flattery **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Return	**The Context:** Moss, Roy and the businessmen all play the game. Moss pretends to be Roy's ex-girlfriend in order to give him closure. **The Relationship:** Best friends
57	Phil: *Brilliant night! Brilliant! I can't believe I've never tried role-playing games before. I'm going to go home and tell*	**Compliment** - **Structure**: ADJ (NP)! - **Topic**: Other - **Function**: Praise	**The Context:** Phil and the businessmen are happy with the game and the whole night at the IT

	the whole rugby club about it. Jen: _Roy and Moss did not disappoint?_ Phil: They did not. I'd like to see them again.	**Compliment Response** - **Type:** Evasion/ Request reassurance	department **The Relationship:** Businessmen/ Hostess
58	Phil: _That's one special little lady you've got there._ I'm glad Jerry died. Jen: (Smiling)	**Compliment** - **Structure**: PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP - **Topic**: Ability/ performance - **Function**: Praise **Compliment Response** - **Type:** Agreement/ Non-verbal appreciation tokens (smiling)	**The Context:** Phil and the businessmen are happy with the game and the whole night at the IT department **The Relationship:** Businessmen/ Hostess

ASSESSMENT AND FINDINGS DISCUSSION

After looking at the results above, several things can be noticed that the majority of compliment functions in both American and British sitcoms is 'Praise/Admiration'. However, the second to most used function in American is 'Encouragement/Reinforcement', and in British is 'Patronizing/Flattery'. On the other hand, the least used function in both sitcoms is Envy.

In both American and British sitcoms, it is noticed that the total number of topics is more than the total number of compliments. That is because some compliments has more than one topic. It is also noticed that the majority of compliments given to females are on appearance.

For some compliments, the researcher put 'None' in the compliment responses tap, and that is for one of two reasons. First is that the complimentee (subject of compliment) is not present at the interaction; therefore, no compliment response is given. Second, is that the subject of compliment is an inanimate

464

object, thus, a 'None' is put in the 'Relationship' tap as well. Such compliments are used in interactions as icebreakers or as a way to open the channel of conversation.

The majority of interactions in the data under analysis are multi-party interactions, which means that there are more than two parties involved. Therefore, there are a lot of 'second compliments' or 'second assessments' in the data. These second compliments or assessments usually show the agreement or the disagreement of a third party with the compliment given.

Praise upgrades are rarely used, since they violate the second maxim of the two compliment responses maxims (Agreement Maxim and Modesty Maxim) by appearing as praising oneself. While 'Sarcasm' is only used between well acquainted interlocutors, like best friends, family members or couples.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the abovementioned results, it is concluded that one of the major aspects that affect compliment functions, is the social distance between the complimenter and the complimentee. For instance, in utterances where the complimenter is of a lower social position than the complimentee the function used is 'Flattery'. Flattery is usually insincere and ingenuine and used to gain the favour of the complimentee. In revered positions, however, where the complimenter is of a higher social position than the complimentee the function used is 'patronizing'. Patronizing is often used to assert dominance. Another example that shows the effect of social distance on the use of different functions is in utterances where they use 'sarcasm'. In these utterances, the complimenter and complimentee are close friends or married couple, which means that there is no social distance between them.

It is also noticed that the gender of the complimenter/complimentee has a great effect on the use of different topics. For instance, most compliments given/received by females are on 'appearance', while the majority of compliments given/received by males are on 'ability/performance'. Furthermore, in regards to compliment structures, the results show that women tend to use words (such as love, like) that are linguistically stronger than men do and that women use intensifiers (such as really, very) more than men do.

In both cultures American and British, it is noticed that the complimentees tend to respond to compliments by 'agreement' in order not to break the Modesty Maxim and Agreement Maxim; however, this was not

always the case. A study by Bergqvist (2009), shows that British speakers, unlike Americans, tend to avoid agreeing with compliments, usually evading them or rejecting them all together. This shift in the compliment response strategy can be attributed to the globalization of America in the mass media over the past decade. However, since this was not properly analyzed in this study, the researcher will leave it for future studies to assert or deny this.

The results show that both American and British cultures use the 'Praise/Admiration' function and the 'NP {is, looks} (really) ADJ' structure the most. However, the most used topic by Americans is 'Ability/Performance', unlike the British who use 'Personality/Friendship the most. Lastly, as established above, both Americans and British used the 'Agreement' compliment response strategy the most, specifically the subcategory 'Appreciation Tokens'. American and British people are also similar in the most used subcategory within 'Non-agreement' (Disagreement) and within 'Evasion' (Ignore).

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