

**Teachers' Use of Compliments  
as Linguistic Politeness  
Strategies during Classroom  
Interaction: The Case  
of Selected Secondary  
Schools in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania**

*JLLE*

Vol 16(2) 83–107

© The Publisher

DOI: 10.56279/jlle.v16i2.5

*Ishmail Mwambapa*  
and  
*Erasmus Akiley Msuya*  
ORCID: 0000-0002-9649-6009

**Abstract**

*This article appraises teachers' use of compliments as linguistic politeness strategies (PSs) in a non-native English-speaking community. It is guided by Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory and Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory. The paper uses materials recorded in 32 lessons by 16 teachers of different subjects which took place in selected secondary schools in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Purposive sampling was used to obtain the participants. Data was collected through classroom observation and interview. Results show that the teachers used a variety of compliments as linguistic PSs, including compliments, compliments with gratitude, and compliments with congratulatory notes. By so doing, they positively influenced various aspects of the classroom interaction, for example raising students' feeling of being admired by their teachers, promoting students' confidence, encouraging active participation in lessons, and promoting students' relaxation. This study traced the use of compliments as linguistic PSs using cross-sectional data; future studies may examine longitudinal data to unearth a number of key issues with regard to compliment use.*

**Keywords:** *Compliments, face-saving strategies, politeness theory, linguistic politeness strategies, face-saving strategies, speech acts*

---

**Corresponding author:**

Ishmail Mwambapa, P.O. Box 35040, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.  
E-mail: ishmailmwambapa@gmail.com

## Introduction

Compliments are of great significance in classroom teaching and learning processes because of their vital role in teacher-student classroom interaction. Effective interaction in a classroom is fundamental because it establishes a productive classroom learning atmosphere. For example, a teacher's expression of admiration towards students is a crucial element in creating a positive classroom learning atmosphere. This means that the role of the teacher is that of a patient motivator, a helpful facilitator, and a positive counsellor (Penget *al.*, 2014). In this respect, compliments which are part of politeness have been proven to play a critical role in interaction (Gordon, 2006; Spencer-Oatey, 2008; Ho, 2011). This paper presents the teachers' use of compliments as linguistic PSs during classroom interaction with specific reference to the selected secondary schools in Dar es Salaam Region, Tanzania.

Compliments have been described as explicit and implicit expressions of praise and/or appreciation and admiration for someone other than the speaker (Holmes, 1988:446). According to Holmes (*ibid*), although the speech act of compliment hardly appears in the classification of speech acts, they presumably belong to Searle's (1979) taxonomy. While compliments can be used on their own, Wolfson (1989:88) asserts that combinations of expressions of compliments with gratitude are so common place as in 'Well, what a superb presentation that was! A thousand thanks' and 'That was lovely, thank you'. Thus, compliments are normally regarded as expressions of praise consolidating or increasing solidarity. There is a close link between compliments and politeness together with speech act theory as compliments are produced in the utterances by speakers who have intentions to accomplish (to be considered polite, for that matter).

Therefore, compliments can be undoubtedly considered linguistic devices employed to express positive politeness in Brown and Levinson's (1987) terminology. They are effective face-saving acts (FSAs). A number of studies have been done to examine how people value or manifest politeness in different speech acts such as compliments and how context shapes interaction in different discourses (cf. Sulu, 2015; Dragnic 2017; Nene, 2017; Ling-Yao, 2018). However, it is unclear how secondary school teachers who teach different subjects use compliments as linguistic PSs during classroom interaction and how the use of such linguistic PSs influence classroom interaction. Baxter (1984), Ya'Allah and Laheebi (2014), and Dozie and Otagburugu (2019) posit that people with power use less politeness than less powerful people. The researchers set out to determine the extent to which, in this study,

teachers demonstrated linguistic politeness though teachers had greater power in the classroom context. The researchers wanted to identify the types of compliments the teachers gave to the students during classroom interaction and assess the influence of the teachers' compliments on students' interactional behaviour. Thus, the researchers wanted to appraise the extent to which the teachers in the present study satisfied the students' positive face wants via compliments as linguistic PSs during classroom interaction in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

### **Literature Review**

Compliments as linguistic PSs are used for motivating students. Through this, teachers can speak politely to make students believe that they have the skills to succeed (Peng, Xie & Cai, 2014; Jiang, 2010). According to Peng *et al.* (2014), teachers may use linguistic PSs that involve complimenting students to help them perceive themselves as successful. The authors, for instance, point out how the teacher in their study never forgot to praise students with positive words like 'well-done,' 'impressive', 'awesome', and 'excellent'.

Linguistic PSs, especially involving the use of giving compliments, help students perceive themselves as successful (Peng *et al.* 2012; Peng *et al.* 2014). As a result, students are likely to actively participate in classroom interaction. They may participate fully because they know that whatever they say will be appreciated by the teacher. Consequently, such students will always plan to contribute during classroom interactions. This may keep them advancing academically.

In connection to this, Peng *et al.* (2012) investigated college teachers' linguistic PSs in Chinese EFL university classrooms using Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory to investigate students' perceptions and interpretations of teachers' linguistic PSs. The data were collected through classroom observation, survey questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews involving a 30-year-old female Chinese teacher and her 74 freshmen engineering major students. The researcher found that both positive and negative PSs were used by a university teacher in EFL classrooms. The linguistic PSs employed include giving compliments among other sub-strategies of linguistic politeness. Moreover, the participants in this study showed a high level of awareness of linguistic PSs. The teacher preferred using positive PSs such as praising and complimenting her students, which might have helped in bridging the gap between the teachers and the students and in building rapport between them.

While Peng *et al.* (*ibid*) provide useful insights about the teachers' use of linguistic PSs, the researchers used data from questionnaires which are

always self-reported. For that matter, such data also mean that respondents reported information based on what they think, believe, or recall from previous knowledge (cf. Griffiee, 2012). Consequently, the present study avoided using questionnaires and instead employed non-participant observation and follow-up interviews. The reason is that non-participant observation and follow-up interview seem to be better forms of data collection as in this study the researcher wanted to ascertain what actually teachers do during classroom interaction with regard to the use of compliments as linguistic PSs.

Bergqvist (2009) conducted a comparative study on compliment responses among native and non-native speakers of English. A comparison was made between the Swedish and English compliment responses provided by the native Swedish speakers. The researcher set out to answer the research question posed: to what extent do Swedish speakers of English as a second language transfer their first language pragmatic rules? To analyse the responses, the researcher firstly categorised them into five response types, and a Chi-square test was carried out to see whether there was any significant difference between the compliment responses in Swedish and to that of English in the group of native Swedish speakers.

Nonetheless, a sample of Scottish English informants was collected from Glasgow which in turn is a regional dialect and does not include all different varieties of Scottish English. The Scottish English sample included people from different professions as well as students. Thus, the sample might be more representative of the Scottish. Besides, the Scottish English comparison with the Swedish data suggested that the two languages have different strategies when responding to a compliment. The Scottish population as opposed to the Swedish sample only included students from Stockholm University. The results suggest that there was no significant difference between the compliment responses given in Swedish and those given in English by Swedish native speakers. Hence, pragmatic transfer could have taken place in their English responses. As opposed to the study by Bergqvist (*ibid*), the present study sought to identify the compliments used by Tanzanian teachers who are English non-native speakers when interacting with Tanzanian students who are also English non-native speakers. It then set out to examine the influence the compliments the teachers gave had on the students' interactional behaviour during classroom interaction.

In much the same way, Sucuoglu and Bahcelderli (2015) did a comparative study on compliments responses in English. The researchers aimed at assessing the compliments responses of native and non-native Turkish ELT students in North Cyprus. The data were

collected using a written Discourse Completion Task (DCT) with a set of six different situations in which students were asked to respond to particular compliments. In the study, six non-native Turkish ELT participated. The findings reveal that there was significant difference in English compliment strategies between native and non-native ELT students. Conversely, the present study confined itself to the compliments the teachers who are non-native speakers deployed during classroom interaction to determine the extent to which the teachers could either maintain or deviate from the ideal ways of expressing politeness.

Besides, Matiki, and Kgolo (2022) carried out a socio-pragmatic analysis of compliment responses among students of Botswana University. The authors investigated the linguistic resources that students at the University of Botswana use in responding to compliments in English. The researchers employed tape-recorded interviews and DCT. The study shows that the subjects preferred to agree with their compliments. It further reveals that the interlocutors' level of education as well as sex were not important benchmarks in determining the responses to compliments. As opposed to the study, the present study limited itself to finding out the types of compliments the teachers used and the influence they had on the students' interactional behaviour.

As we have seen, previous studies have largely concentrated on countries other than African ones like Tanzania where the absence of adequate attention (i.e. a considerable number of studies on the use of compliments as linguistic PSs) might have rendered part of the account of teachers' politeness in classroom interaction untold. The nature of the participants found in Tanzania is different from that of those found in the Western and oriental worlds, particularly in terms of cultural backgrounds, which may have a great impact on politeness issues.

The findings of previous studies, however, were based on data collected using either observation or interviews during a few hours of classroom sessions mostly in universities and colleges. The studies also involved fewer participants, for example, one or two. In this regard, the current researchers reckon that additional observations and follow-up interviews show different distributions of linguistic PSs. The researchers also believe that the results and conclusions drawn from such findings yield more convincing results than the previous studies as participants' voices were heard via follow-up interviews in this study. Therefore, the present study sought to appraise compliments as linguistic PSs that the Dar es Salaam Region secondary school teachers use during classroom interaction.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, Speech Act Theory by Austin (1962), and Semiotic Theory by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1939-1914) in appraising teachers' use of linguistic PSs in the Tanzanian context. The section, therefore, presents the three theories that guide the study.

### **Politeness Theory**

Brown and Levinson (*ibid*) proposed the theory based on the concept of 'face', which was initially introduced by Erving Goffman in 1955. Several researchers who investigated teachers' general linguistic politeness and compliments also employed Brown and Levinson's theory in their studies (e.g. Jiang, 2010; Senowarsito, 2013; Subertova, 2013; Peng *et al.* 2014; Monsefi & Hadidi, 2015; Sulu, 2015; Matiki & Koglo, 2017).

The theory has two fundamental tenets: first, it states that all interlocutors have face, which is the public self-image that every member wants to maintain for himself or herself. This face consists of two related elements: negative and positive face. Negative face is the basic claim to territories, personal preserves and rights to non-distraction. In other words, negative face is a need for freedom of action and freedom from imposition. Positive face, on the other hand, includes the need that self-image be appreciated and approved of. Both negative and positive face are claimed by interlocutors (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The tenet was useful for analysing linguistic PSs, namely compliments that were used by teachers during classroom interaction in enhancing the face of students.

The second tenet is that interlocutors have rational abilities to accomplish particular goals. To maintain their face, speakers, as rational agents, admit their defencelessness and are prepared to cooperate with others. Daily communication involves the employment of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs), most of which by nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The tenet, therefore, provided a deeper understanding of the reasons for the use of compliments as linguistic PSs during classroom interaction. Speakers attempt to choose the most effective course of action to avoid conflict with hearers, while minimising the imposition and the cost of losing their face.

This theory has also been acknowledged by Mapunda and Somer (2018) as the most popular theory to be used in studying politeness. This means that the need to defend the face of the interlocutors is still



relevant. It is because of its relevance a number of studies have been conducted in different cultures and contexts. Such studies, as discussed elsewhere, include Jiang (2010) and Peng *et al.* (2012) in China, Senowarsito (2013) in Indonesia, Sulu (2015) in Turkey, Soheim (2014) in Egypt, Nene (2017) in South Africa, and Mapunda and Sommer (*ibid*) in Tanzania.

Generally, the perspectives of the politeness theory are applicable to addressing questions related to the study on the compliments as linguistic PSs the teachers employ during classroom interaction. Therefore, the politeness theory has helped the researchers to identify various compliments and discuss the effects these compliments had on classroom interaction.

### **Speech Act Theory**

The present study is also grounded in the Speech Act Theory. The theory is usually credited and attributed to the Oxford philosopher John Langshaw Austin (1962) and later the American philosopher John R. Searle (1969). Basically, the central tenet of the Speech Act Theory is that uttering a sentence is or is part of an action within the framework of social institutions and conventions. If it were put in slogan form, the tenet states that saying is (part of) doing or words are (part of) deeds. Austin (*ibid*) observes that, when a speaker says something, he or she is doing something. In every utterance, the speaker performs such acts as stating a fact or opinion, confirming or denying something, giving advice, asking a question, thanking, or greeting. The condition of doing something in saying something is what the linguist refers to as a speech act.

Consequently, utterances are defined by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) as involving three types of acts or dimensions. The first dimension is the locutionary act which is the basic act of producing grammatical and meaningful utterances. The second dimension is the illocutionary act which refers to the act performed in saying something. This means that speakers produce utterances with some communicative functions or purposes in their minds. The third aspect is the perlocutionary which means the resulting act from saying something. This means that speakers form utterances with certain purposes in their minds while intending that those utterances should have some effects on addressees (Yule, 1996).

Speech Act Theory was employed by Wise (2011) whose study sought to analyse the ways in which pragmatic politeness was used in certain speech acts in Spanish and English magazine advertisements in the United States (US). In the course of her study, models of politeness

including those of Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983) were applied to directive and commissive speech acts, as defined by Searle (1976). The aim was to determine how these speech acts were carried out in magazine advertising, how PSs were reflected in these speech acts, and whether there were any differences in the use of speech acts and linguistic PSs between Spanish and English. The study reveals that the speech acts within the Spanish and English advertisements were inclined to employ positive PSs.

### **Semiotic Theory**

The main proponents of the Semiotic Theory were Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913), a Swiss linguist who studied the meaning of signs within a particular group or society and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) an American philosopher and a logician who studied how signs shape individual understanding of physical reality.

The theory has been used extensively. For example, Qadha and Mahdi (2019) used semiotic materials such as illustrations, everyday objects, and gestures to make language learning more interesting and effective. Earlier on, Ollerhead (2018) observed that immigrant English language learners in Australia who were taught with the aid of colours, emoticons, and other educational materials improved their English vocabulary and learning engagement meaningfully. In this study, the theory is employed to assess signs that are employed to communicate politeness by the teachers involved.

### **Methodology**

The researchers specifically conducted this study in Dar es Salaam Region, Tanzania. The researchers obtained the data for this study from 16 purposively chosen teachers. The participant teachers are pseudo-named as T (teacher) 1 to T (teacher) 16 for anonymity reasons. The teachers were teaching in four selected secondary schools in Dar es Salaam. The schools have been identified by pseudo-names, namely School A, School B, School C, and School D for anonymity purposes (cf. Mapunda & Sommer, 2018). The schools were in Kinondoni, Ubungo, Ilala, and Temeke municipalities in Dar es Salaam Region. Table 1 provides the profiles of the teachers involved in this study.



**Table 1: Teachers' Profiles**

Participant	School	Municipality	Age	Sex	Education Level	Subject
T1	A (Private)	Ubungo	38	F	Master's Degree	English
T2	A (Private)	Ubungo	36	M	Master's Degree	Accountancy
T3	A (Private)	Ubungo	49	F	Master's Degree	Biology
T4	B (Public)	Ilala	40	M	Master's Degree	History
T5	B (Public)	Ilala	42	F	Bachelor's Degree	Physics
T6	B (Public)	Ilala	44	F	Bachelor's Degree	English
T7	D (Public)	Temeke	36	M	Bachelor's Degree	Economics
T8	D (Public)	Temeke	50	F	Bachelor's Degree	Mathematics
T9	D (Public)	Temeke	37	M	Bachelor's Degree	Geography
T10	B (Public)	Ilala	52	F	Bachelor's Degree	Chemistry
T11	C (Private)	Kinondoni	38	M	Bachelor's Degree	English
T12	C (Private)	Kinondoni	30	M	Bachelor's Degree	History
T13	C (Private)	Kinondoni	36	M	Bachelor's Degree	Chemistry
T14	C (Private)	Kinondoni	55	M	Bachelor's Degree	English
T15	C (Private)	Kinondoni	32	M	Master's Degree	Commerce
T16	A (Private)	Ubungo	38	M	Master's Degree	G/Studies

Table 1 provides the profiles of the 16 teachers who participated in the present study. The teachers were those who were teaching different subjects in the four secondary schools, two (50%) public schools and two (50%) private schools. There were ten male teachers (56%) and six female teachers (44%). At the same time, 10 teachers (56%) were holders of the Bachelor's degrees and six (44%) were holders of Master's degrees. This implies that the teachers were qualified enough to teach at an advanced level of education.

In collecting the data two methods of data collection were employed. First, non-participant observation was the principal method used in this study. In this study, the researchers attended 32 sessions to make observation and record some of the acts and utterances in a note book. This means that the researchers had to make repeated observations, in which case each of the 16 participants was observed twice. Thus, the researchers gained deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

The second data collection method used in this study was follow-up interview. Since observation alone could not provide all the data needed, the researcher interviewed the teachers. The interviews were also conducted to hear the teachers' views regarding the use of compliments as linguistic PSs during classroom interaction. The data gathered through the interviews supplemented the information collected during classroom interaction. The follow-up interviews comprised unstructured and open-ended questions intended to elicit the participants' perspectives and views. Each interview session lasted for half an hour. The interviews focused on the utterances with compliments the teachers used during classroom interaction and their influence on students' interactional behaviour.

The researchers carried out the analysis by taking extracts and tables from fully-transcribed lessons. The researchers did so to ascertain whether the teachers produced utterances which contained compliments during classroom interaction. The data were analysed qualitatively to a large extent and quantitatively as well. The aspects of opinions and views in various data made the researchers largely use the qualitative approach. The remaining data were tallied and converted into frequencies and percentages. The analysis of the data was grounded in Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory, Speech Act Theory by Austin (1962) as well as Semiotic Theory by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1939-1914).

### **Data Presentation and Discussion**

This section presents and discusses the findings in relation to the compliments the teachers use as linguistic PSs during classroom interaction and the influence the compliments have on the students' interactional behaviour.

### **Compliments Secondary School Teachers Used as Linguistic PSs during Classroom Interaction**

The findings in this study show occurrences in which the teachers gave compliments to their students. The teachers were friendly enough to express compliments with regard to their students during classroom interaction. This act contributed to bridging the gap between the

teachers and the students. Table 2 shows how teachers made use of compliments as sub-strategies of politeness when talking to the students in the course of classroom interaction.

**Table 2: The Use of Compliments as Positive PSs by Teachers**

Forms of Compliments	Frequency	%	Representative Examples
Compliments only	20	74	T4: Yes. It is very good trial! ( <i>Smiling and speaking with an exaggerated intonation</i> ) T6: Yes. Very good! ( <i>Smiling</i> ) T8: That is great! ( <i>Smiling</i> ) T10: That is very nice. Being new to class yet responding adequately! ( <i>Smiling and speaking with an exaggerated intonation</i> ) T13: Okay. That is very good class! T14: That is very good my friend! T15: You are a gift to this class! ( <i>Smiling and speaking with an exaggerated intonation</i> )
Compliments +Gratitude	4	15	T1: Good point! That is very nice. Thank you. ( <i>Smiling and shaking hands with the student</i> ) T6: Yes. Very good and thank you so much. ( <i>Smiling</i> ) T7: That is a very good question. Thank you.
Compliments + Congratulations	3	11	T9: That is very good. Congratulations! ( <i>Smiling</i> ) T13: Yes. That is very good class. Congratulations! ( <i>Smiling</i> ) T15: What a great job. I really congratulate you on such a wonderful presentation! ( <i>Smiling, speaking with an exaggerated intonation, and shaking hands with the presenters</i> )
<b>Total</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100</b>	

Table 2 provides utterances the teachers made when giving compliments during classroom interaction in this study. From the findings, it is evident that during classroom observation, the teachers used compliments as one of the ways of maintaining the students' positive face. What is remarkable from the findings is that giving compliments was accompanied by the paralinguistic features by the teachers in terms of smiling and speaking with exaggerated intonation and at times shaking hands with students which brought in friendliness in the

teachers' talks. The use of such non-verbal signs as smiling, exaggerated intonation, and shaking hand finds its support in the Semiotic Theory which proposes that such use communicates something. As such, giving compliments could precisely be considered an effective Face Saving Act (FSA) in accordance with the Politeness Theory. During the follow-up interviews the English teacher (T1) had the following to say:

Because I normally relate to them very friendly, my students listen to me very attentively. You might have seen them concentrating very seriously, nodding their heads all which shows that they never wander mentally. I think this is contributed by the compliments and jokes I apply and the real-life examples I bring before them during class session. If I had not been doing so, there is a possibility that they could start thinking about some other things other than the on-going lessons. **T1**

From the excerpt, it could be said that the teachers' tendency to speak politely was deliberate and strategic. This implies that in the context of classroom interaction teachers do not have to make use of bullying approaches in order for them to gain respect from their students. The reason for this is that polite ways of treating students appear to be capable of harmoniously bringing about positive results.

Like the findings in the study by Wolfson (1989), in the present study the teachers employed both compliments minus gratitude expressions (74%) and compliments plus gratitude (15%). It implies that by giving compliments, the teachers noticed and attended to the students' needs and interests to make the students feel good.

As opposed to the study by Wolfson (*ibid*), the present study reports another form of compliments in which compliments are used in combination with congratulations. For example, in this study the Chemistry teacher (T13) from School C was heard saying 'Yes. That is very good class. Congratulations!' and the Commerce teacher (T15) from School C was quoted saying, 'What a great job! I really congratulate you on such a wonderful presentation!' In this regard, the use of all the three forms of compliments was intended to boost the students' positive face even further.

The findings show that the teachers in this study complimented their students wherever it was appropriate. One way the teachers did was by highlighting what the students performed correctly. This is in line with Wolfson (1983b) who observes that the great majority of compliments, which transpire in interactions between status asymmetrical, are in

some sense performance-related. It is, thus, not unexpected that when a status is asymmetrical, most compliments focus on ability, and that these are most of the time given by the person of upper status who is frequently expected to make assessment with regard to abilities demonstrated in performing assigned tasks.

The teachers in this study seemed to be delighted in looking for things that were right and good within the students. By complimenting their students, the participant teachers conveyed to their students that they liked and approved of them. Consequently, the bonds of friendship between the teachers and their students in this study were built even further as a result of the compliments by the teachers to students during classroom interactions. By so doing, the participant teachers satisfied the students' positive face. That is to say, the teachers should be looking for the positive in students they teach and acknowledge them as in the hope of triggering a friendlier environment hence enhancing students' positive face in line with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory.

This means that in each student, teachers ought to be looking for the best. It is evident from this study that successful classroom interactions are largely dependent on teachers' ability to see the best in students and boost their positive face. There is evidence that compliments are basically not only face-boosting but also face enhancing (cf. Herbert, 1990; Bayrsktsroglu, 1991 & Sifianou, 1995). That is why one could argue that in some contexts it is the lack of compliments rather than the offer of compliments which may be interpreted as an FTA, implying envy (Leech, 1983 & White, 1989).

The findings are in line with those of Penget *al.* (2014) who argue that teachers may utilise linguistic PSs that involve complimenting students in order to aid them identify themselves as successful people. The trio, for instance, point out the way the teacher in their study never forgot to commend students with such affirmative words as *well-done*, *impressive*, *awesome*, and *excellent*. In the same way, Lakoff (1973) comments that polite behaviour is generally associated with a desire on the part of the speaker to make the listener feel good.

### **Perlocution of Compliments Secondary School Teachers Use on Students' Interactional Behaviour**

This section presents the findings analysis and discussion of the perlocution of the compliments secondary school teachers use on students' interactional behaviour based on the Speech Act Theory by Austin and Semiotic Theory by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1939-1914).

### **Students' Motivation Promoted**

Following Jiang (2010), motivation refers to illocutionary acts aimed at activating students. According to him, it includes stimulating students' participation, academic questions, and initiative feedback. In connection to this, the use of compliments was useful as students were motivated. The motivation was observable through the way the students in the present study paid attention, and they were able to begin working on tasks given by the teachers instantly. As a result of motivation which seems to be attributed to the teachers' use of compliments, the students were capable of asking questions, answering questions, timely performing the tasks given, and sometimes demanding for some more tasks to perform. More importantly, smiling faces and cheerfulness among students demonstrated how powerfully the students in the observed classrooms were motivated. These findings are in consistency with the Semiotic Theory which advocates that signs such as facial expressions are capable of communicating something.

It was noted that the students were always ready to participate in classroom interaction. They were also always ready to volunteer to give answers, and they appeared to be pleased and enthusiastic all the time (cf. Elisdawati, 2018). With regard to this, T10 was quoted saying, "When a student knows that you compliment them, they will always try and struggle even if they are not sure. They will be able to at least try and attempt contributing to classroom talks". This is consistent with Nene (2017:100) who says that "teachers, lecturers, tutors, and administrative staff members in institutions have the power to motivate students." With regard to this, speaking about the effect compliments have in classroom interaction, for instance, the Chemistry teacher (T10) from School C had the following to say:

This is one of the rewards a teacher can offer to his or her students. You know by nature human beings want to be recognised. Students become confident and become motivated to ask questions and respond to questions simply because of the compliments given.

In light of the extract above, it is obvious that compliments as linguistic PSs seem to be one of the most important aspects that provide students with the momentum with which to continue working hard in classroom activities (cf. Nene, 2017). The study, therefore, agrees with Anderman and Anderman (2010) who mention that teachers play a major part in increasing students' motivation. However, this study has proven that this is even more possible when teachers employ linguistic PSs, one of which is the use of compliments during classroom interaction.



Similarly, Koestener and McClelland (1990) observe that motivation is likely to be great in circumstances where feelings of competence and self-determination are fostered. The authors further argue that when somebody is told to have done a task very well, intrinsic motivation is likely to increase. The findings are also similar to those of Penget *al.* (2012) in which the teacher deployed positive PSs such as praising and complimenting her students which facilitated bridging the gap between the teacher and the students and in building rapport between them. In the same way, Abisoye and Tunde (n.d) report that the teachers employed compliments during classroom interaction because of the awareness that students sometimes needed their responses, acts, and opinions to be approved of. Generally, the implication for these findings is that teachers should be alert of the fact that sometimes students require their responses, acts, and views to be approved by their teachers during classroom interaction.

### **Students Considering Teachers their Friends**

The findings of this study show that that the teachers' use of compliments during classroom interaction made the students consider their teachers friends. This was possible because the social distance between the teachers and the students was reduced following the use of various compliments. As it has been mentioned elsewhere, the teachers are always considered people of higher status, so one could expect that the social distance could be maintained during classroom interaction. Speaking about the friendliness during classroom interaction, the English teacher (T1) from School B, the Biology teacher (T3) from School A, and the Economics teacher (T7) from School D had the following to say:

I am glad to witness that my students aren't afraid of me. They come to class and enjoy the lessons. I do give them opportunities to freely talk to me and they use the opportunity very extensively. I am always both a teacher and a friend to them. So, we laugh together and they freely crack jokes to me. I compliment them whenever they perform or attempt performing very well. The class is always enjoyable. (T1)

Because I speak to them in friendly manner and I make use of compliments when talking to them, my students consider me their friend. That is why you could see that that they were able to ask me questions, bring in challenges quite freely and respond to my questions happily. (T3)

Why should your student afraid you? My students do not afraid of me. I never go to class while angry or with a frown face.

Therefore, they end up smiling at me as well and we do many things together in class. (T7)

Interestingly, what can be inferred from the extracts above is that in this study the social distance between the teachers and the students was reduced as a result of using compliments among other sub-strategies by the teachers. That is to say, the teachers in this study placed the students and themselves on the same social plane so that they were hierarchically alike. Having been done by the teachers, this showed interest and concern for the students and it strengthened their relationship. In this way, the utterances the participants produced during classroom interaction carried the teachers' intentions with them and ended up influencing students' interactional behaviour in accordance with the Speech Act Theory.

The findings of the current study are also in consistency with the earlier studies by Adel *et al.* (2016) and Vinagre (2008) in which teachers attempted to reduce social distance with the students by using compliments, making it possible for students to consider them their friends. In much the same way, Abisoye and Tunde (n.d) assert that compliments during teacher-student classroom interactions enhance the teaching and learning process by creating a more lively and friendly impression for learning. In much the same way, Lam (2011) points out that displaying of politeness via compliments, among linguistic politeness strategies, can influence how likeable and trustworthy people are perceived to be. Possibly, that is why Mao (1994) argues that when a person mitigates FTAs for others, he or she is not just saving face for them, but they are also promoting their own face.

### **Students being Helped to Relax and Feel at Ease**

The findings of this study indicate that the use of compliments as linguistic politeness strategies by the teachers contributed a great deal to making students feel more relaxed and at ease as the classroom atmosphere was relaxed too. The teachers made sure that the classroom environment was friendly enough to make students relaxed and comfortable. To create such environment, the teachers used compliments during classroom interaction. The use of compliments by the teachers during classroom interaction made the classroom atmosphere comfortable and relaxed for every student in attendance. The relaxations and easiness among the students was evident through happy faces of the students which were evidenced through their smiling faces. These findings find support in the Semiotic Theory in which case the signs the teachers and the students demonstrated during classroom interaction had much to say about the interaction that took place.

This argument is compatible with Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory which insists on taking care of the other person's positive face. This is also to be in line with Subertova (2013) who points out that by expressing positive politeness, teachers can engender a relaxing atmosphere in a classroom that is enjoyable for both the teacher and, more prominently, the students.

### **Students Feeling Being Admired**

The classes observed indicated that the use of compliments as one of the positive politeness strategies by teachers ensured that the students' positive face was maintained and promoted. That is to say students' need to be accepted, liked, connected, and the awareness that their wants were shared by the teachers were fully met (cf. Yule, 1996). This was possible through the polite use of language which included compliments by the teachers. Their use of compliments made the teachers look human. As a result, the current researchers observed that the teachers accepted their students and in turn the students accepted their teachers too. This was evidenced, for example, when the participant teachers smiled at the students and the students smiled back at the teachers. At the same time, the students were happy when they felt that each one of them was recognised by the teachers via such means as compliments. During the follow-up interview, the Chemistry teacher (T10) from School B had the following to say:

As a teacher when you happen to praise and applause the students, the students become happy as they know that you are concerned with their performance. So, in my case, my students end up feeling that I love them. They also demonstrate that they love me openly.

The extract points to the effect of compliments in classroom context. It seems that when the teachers properly use compliments as positive linguistic politeness sub-strategies in the classroom context, both teachers and students are likely to appreciate each other. That is to say, the teachers managed to adjust themselves towards the students' positive face. They did so by employing compliments, which appeal to the hearer's desire to be liked and approved of (cf. Brown & Levinson, 1987; Sulu 2015). The findings are in line with those by Gragicin (2017) who reports that by complimenting students' answers, the teachers, in his study, conveyed to their students that they liked them and admired them. This is quite possible because the use of compliments during classroom interaction appears to foster friendship and decrease bullying. Thus, a family-like environment is created in the classroom. This implies that teachers have a responsibility to create a harmonious

environment during classroom interaction as this is likely to boost students' face even further.

### **Compliance Promoted**

As a result of polite use of language involving compliments by the teachers, the current researchers noted that the teachers gave order for students to comply and the students complied. This was witnessed by the way the students responded positively to the teachers' orders. The compliance to the teachers' order could be attributed to the teachers' use of compliments during classroom interaction. The use of compliments by the teachers made it natural for the students to conform to the teachers' instruction (see, for example, the indirect expression by the Accountancy teacher (T2) from School A: 'Would you mind opening the windows, dear great friends of mine? It is hot in here'). Such a polite question was followed by the students scrambling to do what the teacher asked from them. That is to say that the students demonstrated willingness to comply due to polite expressions employed by the teachers when addressing them.

### **Promotion of Students' Active Participation in Lessons**

In this study, the students actively participated in classroom interaction because the teachers employed a number of compliments. For example, as stated elsewhere, the teachers' complimentspoliteness sub-strategies prompted further participation of the students. The students were called upon to respond to questions by the teachers who used compliments and in turn the students responded positively. Thus, in the process of answering questions posed by the teachers, students found themselves answering questions, commenting, and asking questions as well. This was evident in this study as students were witnessed when contributing to on-going class talks, they could raise hands ready to ask questions in case they did not understand certain concepts.

Again, this became even more evident when students timely worked upon every task given during classroom interaction. The willingness to participate in classroom interaction was greatly contributed by the teachers' polite approaches in relating to the students during classroom interaction. This implies that the habit of being polite by the teachers makes it possible for the students to enjoy the lessons and participate fully during classroom interaction. Such an act promotes students' positive face so greatly as witnessed in the present study in accordance with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory. The findings in this study are in consistency with those by Subertova (2013), Jiang (2010), Sulu (2015) and Penget *al.* (2014) in whose research studies the use of positive politeness which involved complimentsmotivated students to

participate in classroom activities without the fear of embarrassment for their mistakes.

### **Drawing Students' Attention**

The current researchers noted that the participant teachers employed certain compliments during classroom interaction that helped the students to stay alert. Consequently, the students were able to participate fully and pick up important points from the teachers' talks. The students were now able to concentrate better and actively involve in the learning processes. That is to say, the compliments were of great significance in ensuring students' attentiveness during classroom interaction.

In other words, the compliments the participant teachers employed helped their students concentrate on the on-going class activities. The compliments the teachers used played a great role in ensuring that the students did not drift at least mentally while in the classroom. The compliments were of great significance in drawing students' attention towards teachers and classroom programmes. As result, the students were witnessed listening to teachers attentively, taking notes, nodding, and smiling at them. During the follow-up interviews the English teacher (T1) and the Commerce teacher (T2) had the following to say:

Because I normally relate to them very friendly and I praise and commend them whenever they do well, my students listen to me very attentively. You might have seen them concentrating very seriously, nodding their heads all which shows that they never wander mentally. I think this is contributed by the compliments I give during class session. If I had not been doing so, there is a possibility that they could start thinking about some other things other than the on-going lessons. **T1**

As you know uh uh teachers like feedback because we are also assessed at the end. Uh uh I use compliments and jokes when I consider and see that students are tired. Therefore, after some compliments and jokes, the students pay more attention afresh. That means after every comment, students become more active and attentive. **T2**

Consequently, the students provided both verbal and non-verbal responses (such as yelling 'yes' 'ooooh' and 'yeah', as well as nodding) all of which indicated lively attention during classroom interaction. Besides, the students were always seen watchful as apart from actively listening they could also take notes. Similarly, Marcus (2011) reports the teachers managed capturing the attention of the students as a result

of the use of linguistic politeness strategies such as compliments. In the same way, White (1989) posits that in her study the teacher managed to get the attention of her students as she employed such linguistic PSs as compliments.

### **Raising Students' Confidence**

Kapena (2008:52) explains that “you are said to have confidence when you believe that you are capable of doing something worthwhile. Confidence is belief in one’s capabilities.” Some of the linguistic PSs employed in this study played a great role in enhancing confidence among students. In the classrooms observed, the students were evidenced boldly walking upfront and fearlessly expressing themselves during presentations. The students’ confidence was also evident through the way they were excited and they frequently asked questions. That is to say, the teachers helped their students overcome all sorts of anxiety. This was facilitated through a number of sub-strategies.

For example, the General Studies’ teacher (16) said that ‘By nature, every human being likes being uplifted, praised, and recognised. Our students admire being praised and acknowledged whenever they do something good. Having known this, I usually give compliments to my students and call each of them by their own names and this makes them more confident’. At the same time, the Commerce teacher (T15) from School C stated that as a result of using compliments as one of linguistic politeness sub-strategies students’ confidence was triggered even further.

During the follow-up interview, talking about the use of compliments, T15 said: “I consider this as a way of building confidence among students as they become in a position to more confidently talk about the concepts having been applauded and praised.” The findings seem to mirror the assertion by Subertova (2013) who argues that students can feel confident, unthreatened, and motivated to get involved in various classroom activities in an atmosphere where teachers employ linguistic politeness strategies, of which is the use of compliments, as they interact with students.

Likewise, White (1989) asserts in her study that the teacher made students feel confident as a result of employing linguistic PSs such as compliments in her class. The author says that the students in the researched class were made to feel confident enough to consider themselves social equals during classroom interaction. In this regard, teachers should always make sure that they help each student make their unique contributions without undue compassion for others, so that they may not be lacking confidence. This is likely to build up students’



face even further in accordance with Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory.

### **Building Cooperation and Companionship**

Leech (2014) defines cooperation as the phenomenon of human being acting jointly in quest of attaining common goals. The polite use of language can signal the existence of cooperation between/among interlocutors. For example, writing on the use of compliments, Filimonova (2005) points out that compliments induce a sense of harmony and rapport between a speaker or a writer and his or her addressees. In this study, the findings show that the polite language by the teachers encouraged cooperation and companionship.

The teachers employed linguistic PSs such as the use of compliments through which the sense of cooperation was achieved. The students were co-operative as they could respond to the teachers' questions and do whatever the teachers requested them to do. As a result, the role of the teacher as a dominant person in the classroom context was diminished. This is because the students were closely involved. For example, this was successfully depicted by the fact that in the observed classrooms, both the teachers and students led the classes into various discussions. This means that there were times when the teachers could lead the students in the course of classroom discussions and there were times when they could sit down in the midst of the students and the certain students could lead the entire class into discussing several concepts.

This is echoed by Bailey (1992) in whose study participants demonstrated 'cooperative ethos' rather than competitive 'ethos' via their use of compliments. That is to say, the student's positive face (the need to be connected and being treated as a member of the same group) was met in the course of this study, thus fulfilling the proposition of Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory.

### **Conclusions**

The use of compliments as linguistic PSs was exceedingly instrumental in enhancing classroom interaction in the present study. This study, therefore, supports Brown and Levinson's notion that different compliments as linguistic PSs should be employed in interaction because they render different effects. On the other hand, these findings do not concur with the notion by Baxter (1984), Ya'Allah and Laheebi (2014), and Dozie and Otagburugu (2019) who maintain that persons with power use less politeness than less powerful persons. The teachers in this study, though they had greater power in the classroom context, demonstrated a great deal of politeness. Hence, this study provides an opportunity to question previously established claims on the use of

linguistic politeness. Generally, this study supports the Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory that the use of linguistic PSs including compliments renders different positive effects. Therefore, because of their usefulness as they are very good FSAs from both pragmatic and pedagogical perspectives, compliments should not be legislated out of classroom interaction.

### **Declaration of conflicting interests**

The authors declared no conflict of interest(s) with respect to the research, authorship and/or publication of this paper.

### **Funding**

The authors declared that he received financial support for the research from the University of Dar es Salaam.

### **References**

- Abisoye, B. G. & Tunde, A. O. (n.d). Politeness among Secondary school Teachers and its Effect on the Learning Process in Selected Secondary Schools in Ibadan, Lagos State Polytechnic & University of Ibadan.
- Bayraktaroğlu, A. (1991). Politeness and Interactional Imbalance. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 92: 5–34.
- Bergqvist, T. (2009). Compliment Responses among Native and Non-native English Speakers: Evidence of Pragmatic Transfer from Swedish into English. Bachelor Degree Project. StockholmsUniversitet.
- Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Usage*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Culpeper, J. (2011). Politeness and Impoliteness. In G. Andersen & K. Ajimer (Eds.). *Pragmatics of Society*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 391–436.
- Goffman, E. (1955). On Facework: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction. *Psychiatry*, 18, 213–31. DOI: org/1080/00332747.1955.110223008
- Ho, D. (1994). Face Dynamics: From Conceptualization to Measurement. In S. Ting-Toomey (Ed.). *The Challenge of Facework: Cross-cultural and Interpersonal Issues*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 269–285.

- Ho, V. (2011). Rapport: How the Weight it Carries Affects the Ways it is Managed. *Text & Talk*, 31(2), 153–172. DOI: org/10.1515/text.2011.007
- Holmes, J. (2000). Politeness, Power, and Provocation: How Humour Functions in the Work-place. *Discourse Studies*, 2(2): 159–185. DOI: org.10.1177/1461445600002002002
- Holmes, J. (1988). Paying Compliments: A Sex-preferential Politeness Strategy. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 12(4): 445–465. DOI: org/10.1016/0378-2166(88)9005-7
- Jiang, X. (2010). A Case Study of Teacher's Politeness in EFL Class. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1: 651–655. DOI: org/10.4304/JLTR.1.5.651-655
- Lakoff, R. (1973). *The Logic of Politeness; or Minding your p's and q's*. Papers from the Ninth Regional Meeting of the Chicago Linguistic Society. Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 292–305.
- Leech, G. N. (1983). *Principles of Pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Leech, G. N. (2014). *The Pragmatics of Politeness*. Jericho: Oxford University Press.
- Mapunda, G. & Sommer, G. (2018). When Shikamoo Mama/Baba Replaces Tukuwoni Mawu/Dadi: An Account of Shifting Access Rituals among the Ngoni of Tanzania. *Linguistik Online*. DOI: org/10.13092/lo.843847
- Mao, L. R. (1994). Beyond Politeness Theory: Face Revisited and Renewed. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 21(5): 451–486. DOI: org/10.1016/0378-2166(94)90025-6
- Matiki, A. J. & Kgolo, N. N. (2017). A Socio-pragmatic Analysis of Compliments among Students at the University of Botswana. *J. Humanities (Zomba)*, 25(2): 62–89.
- Monsefi, M. & Hadidi, Y. (2015). Male and Female Teachers' Politeness and their Effects on the Learning Process and Teacher Student Interaction. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*, 3(2): 1–13.
- Nene, O. J. (2017). Investigating Politeness among Isizulu Mother Tongue and Non-mother Tongue Speakers in Higher Education Open Distance Learning Environment. A Published PhD Thesis, University of South Africa.

- Peng, L., Cai, L. & Tan, X. (2012). Research on College Teachers' Politeness Strategies in EFL Classrooms. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 3(5): 981–991.
- Peng, L., Xie, F. & Cai, L. (2014). A Case Study of College Teachers' Politeness Strategies in EFL Classroom. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 4(1): 110–115.
- Senowarsito, S. (2013). Politeness Strategies in Teacher-student Interaction in an EFL Classroom Context. *TEFLIN Journal*, 24(1): 82–96.
- Soheim, Y. M. (2015). Teacher Politeness: A Cross-cultural Comparison in ESL Classrooms. American University in Cairo, Master's Thesis, American University in Cairo.
- Spencer-Oatey, H. (2008). Face (Im)politeness and Rapport. In H. Spencer-Oatey (Ed.). *Speaking: Culture, Communication and Politeness Theory* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Continuum, London/New York, 11–47.
- Sulu, A. (2015). Teacher's Politeness in EFL Class. *International Online Journal of Education and Teaching* (IOJET), 2(4): 216–221. DOI: org./20.4304/1p/k1.1.110.115
- Wise, L. E. (2011). Speech act and Politeness in Spanish and English Magazine Advertising. MA Thesis, University of Georgia.
- Yu, N. (2001). What does our Face Mean to us? *Pragmatics and Cognition*, 9(1): 1–36. DOI: org/10.1075/pc.9.102yu

### **Author Biographies**

Ishmail Mwambapa is Assistant Lecturer in Pragmatics and Applied Linguistics at the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. His research focuses on Pragmatics, Phonology and Second Language Acquisition. His recent publication is *The Influence of Kiswahili in the Acquisition of ESL: A Case Study of Phonological Transfer* (Lambert Academic Publishing, 2019). He is currently pursuing a PhD in linguistics at the University of Dar es Salaam.

Erasmus Akiley Msuya is Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics, University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. His research interests are in language assessment, stylistic analysis and sociolinguistics. His recent publications include

*Kiswahili Use as a Factor for First Language Lexical Attrition among Chasu Speakers* (Kiswahili, 2021), *Ethno-linguistic Analysis of Names and Naming in Northern Chasu* (Kioo cha Lugha, 2022) and *Linguistic-Stylistic Analysis of Text Messaging: A Case Study of University of Dar es Salaam Undergraduate Students* (*Journal of Linguistics and Language in Education*, 2022).