

“If your dress gets missing, I shall buy one”: Compliments and Compliment Response Strategies in English in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

This study reports an analysis of compliments and responses to compliments by selected speakers of English in Ghana. The analysis is based on a combination of participant observer schedules and recall protocol questionnaire. The population for the study is drawn from speakers of English selected from a university in Ghana. The findings of the study show that in making and responding to compliments, speakers of English in Ghana show positive transfer of complimenting strategies from Ghanaian languages and cultures into the English language spoken in Ghana. These transferred elements, which are typical structures that are used to pay compliments in many Ghanaian languages, give the English language that is spoken in Ghana its distinctive pragmatic features.

1. Introduction

Compliments can be explained as favourable comments that a speaker makes to an addressee based on the speaker's admiration of a particular characteristic or possession of the addressee. Such favourable comments serve as assurances to the addressee that he/she is appreciated and admired; this is why compliments are said to be positive politeness strategies (Holmes 1996). The hearer feels appreciated because the compliment boosts his/her image. Although compliments are positive politeness strategies, it has also been argued that compliments can sometimes make the 'complimentees' or addressees feel uneasy or embarrassed, thereby creating a threat to their negative face (Holmes 1996; Manno, 2005). If a compliment implies envy, assumes an unwarranted degree of intimacy or is insincere, it may threaten the complimentee's negative face.

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There are instances when the compliment may be sincere but still contain face threatening elements. For instance, consider the following exchange between A and B:

A: *Your daughter is so pretty. She does not look like you at all. She looks more like her father.*

B: *Is that so?*

A's intention here may be to compliment the addressee on her daughter's appearance, but by saying that B's daughter does not look like her at all, A is by implication saying that B is not beautiful. It is this implication that threatens B's face. It may be argued that the head act itself is not a threat to the speaker's face, but a counter argument would be that the supporting moves together with the head act form the compliment here.

Several scholars have investigated compliments that are used in different cultures (Manes and Wolfson 1981; Manes 1983; Holmes and Brown 1987; Pomerantz 1978; Holmes 1988; and Holmes 1996). The findings from these investigations of compliments in different cultures have indicated that although compliments generally occur in different cultures, the strategies that are used to realize these compliments are not universal. In other words, there are cross-cultural variations in the use of compliment strategies. For instance, it has been observed that there are strategies that are more predominant than others in certain cultures. Manes and Wolfson (1981), for example, note that speakers of American English use a limited range of syntactic patterns when they perform compliments. The three syntactic structures that they found are:

I like NP.

That's ADJ NP.

NP is ADJ

I like your sweater.

That is a nice shirt.

Your hair is beautiful

They also observe that the topics that are often complimented are personal appearance, possessions and skills. Manes (1983), who studied compliments and compliment responses in American English from a sociological perspective, observes that compliment and compliment response behaviours reflect a particular society's norms and values.

The objective of this present study is to describe the formulae that speakers of English in Ghana use in paying compliments. In addition, the study aims at describing the topics on which Ghanaian speakers of English pay compliments the most. The study also seeks to describe the linguistic forms that Ghanaian speakers of English use in responding to compliments. The paper posits that since English is used along with other indigenous languages in Ghana, these languages are likely to influence the compliment realization of speakers of English in Ghana. In other words, the paper holds that speakers of English in Ghana are likely to transfer complimenting strategies which are used in their first languages into the variety of English that they speak. As a result, the compliments that emerge may have some characteristic features that can be described as "Ghanaian". This argument is made on the basis that there are speech act structures that are prevalent in Ghanaian languages that may get translated into the variety of English that is spoken in Ghana. Such speech acts can be understood as the speech acts they represent only by speakers of English in Ghana. For instance, in many Ghanaian languages, one way of expressing admiration for something which belongs to another is by saying, *If XYZ gets missing, I shall buy one*. An addressee who is not a speaker of Ghanaian English would find it very difficult to interpret this utterance as a compliment. It takes a speaker of Ghanaian English to understand that this is meant as a compliment and not as an attempt to rob the addressee of his or her possessions. This formula, which is used as a compliment in many Ghanaian languages, is translated from these Ghanaian languages into English.

There are several similar structures like the one above that are transferred into the English language spoken in Ghana. An example is, *If your dress gets missing, come and search for it in my wardrobe*, a variation of the example given above. Others are: *Your dress is not small*; *When you are done with wearing this dress, pass it over to me*; *When you go home and change your clothes, send these ones to me*; *I check your dress*; and *Your dress is ge*. These are typical structures that are used to pay compliments in many Ghanaian languages and they have been translated into English in Ghana. It is such distinct forms that give the English language that is spoken in Ghana its distinctive pragmatic features. On the basis of

these distinctive pragmatic features, one can argue that there is a distinct variety of English that can be described as “Ghanaian English”.

1. Review of Literature

Compliments have been studied extensively from different perspectives in a number of cultures. The earliest studies on compliments were undertaken by scholars such as Pomerantz, (1978); Manes and Wolfson, (1981); Wolfson (1981, 1983, and 1989); Knapp, Hopper and Bell (1984); Herbert (1989) and Holmes (1988). Pomerantz’s study, which investigated compliments and compliment responses in English, observes that speakers of English accept compliments readily. Pomerantz also observes that in agreeing with and accepting the compliment, the respondent must make sure he/she does not appear bashful even though society expects the respondent to accept the gift of solidarity. Findings from other studies show that there are cross-cultural differences in compliment responses. Some studies, for instance, have shown that the Japanese, the Chinese and the French reject compliments more often than they accept them (Daikuhara, 1986; and Chen 1993).

Another aspect of compliments that has been investigated extensively by scholars is the syntactic, semantic and lexical structures that are used to pay compliments in different languages. Manes and Wolfson (1981), who studied compliment behaviour in American English based on nearly 700 naturally occurring compliments, observe that the syntactic, semantic and lexical structures used for compliments in American English are highly formulaic. Findings from later studies in other languages and cultures have also confirmed the formulaic nature of the syntactic, semantic and lexical structures of compliments. For example, Holmes’ (1988) study on compliments in New Zealand English; Daikuhara’s (1986) on compliments in Japanese; Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk’s (1989) on compliments in Polish; Lee’s (1990) on compliments in Hawaiian Creole; Herbert’s (1991) on English and Polish compliments; and Ye’s (1995) on compliments in Chinese, all confirm the formulaic nature of the syntactic, semantic and lexical structures that are used to produce compliments. Herbert (1991), for example, notes that while English compliments use the

first, second and third person pronouns evenly, Polish compliments are made predominantly with second person pronouns.

Another interesting aspect of compliments that has received much attention is the topics that are complimented in different cultures. According to Manes (1983) and Holmes (1988), American English and New Zealand English speakers compliment addressees on personal appearance. Herbert (1991) however notes that Polish speakers compliment people more on their possessions. Nelson, Bakary and Al-Batal (1996) find that Egyptian Arabic speakers compliment addressees on personality, while Ye (1995) observes that Chinese speakers compliment addressees more on performance than on possessions or appearance. These findings show that the topics that speakers compliment vary and that such differences are due to the norms and values of the different societies.

Another important perspective from which compliments have been studied is the relationship between compliments and social factors such as gender, age and social distance. Several studies which have been undertaken to investigate sex-based differences in compliment behaviour show that women pay more compliments than men and that there are differences between the structures that are preferred by women and those that are preferred by men (Holmes 1988; Wolfson, 1983; Lee 1990; and Herbert 1990). Findings from some of these studies also show that women pay more compliments on appearance than on possessions or skills. Another important observation is that people of the same gender compliment one another more than people of different genders. Thus, more compliments occur between females than between males and females (Knapp, Hopper and Bell 1984; Holmes 1988; and Ye 1995). Again, women tend to use more intensifiers than men (Johnson and Roen 1992). In terms of social distance, the observation has been that more compliments occur among people of equal status than between those of high status and low status. In addition, people who are acquaintances of equal age tend to give lengthier and more compliments to one another than to people who are strangers (Wolfson 1989).

Some scholars have also studied how compliments are performed in a second language by speakers of other languages. Lui (2000), Cedar

(2006) and Al Falasi (2007) have all undertaken studies which show that learners of a second language sometimes transfer the strategies for complimenting from their first languages into the second languages that they are learning. Some of these studies have compared native speakers' performance of compliments to that of non-native speakers in the target language. The findings from these studies reveal that sometimes the L1 of the non-native speaker can intrude into the speech act performance in the target language. The findings from the studies undertaken by Cedar (2006) and Al Falasi (2007) show that the first language of Thai and UAE speakers of English intrude into their performance of compliments in English.

In spite of these numerous studies on different cultures, compliments and compliment responses in English in Ghana and in Ghanaian languages have not received much attention. The only study to date is Agyekum's (2005) on the ethno-pragmatics of Akan compliments. Agyekum identifies certain ethno-pragmatic contexts in which compliments are used by Akans. Some of the contexts are palace discourse, marriage contracts and donations at funerals. Akan compliments also occur as part of praise poetry for chiefs and politicians and in football commentary. Other situations in which compliments are made include hunting, the pouring of libation and the performance of female folk songs. Agyekum observes that the types of compliments that frequently occur among the Akans pertain to appearance, personality, performance and possession. According to Agyekum, "Akans place much premium on communalistic needs and on the Akan face concept, and the compliment expressions that are associated with them are based on these communal and societal needs" (Agyekum 2005:2). In Agyekum's view, "Akan compliment expressions strengthen the antipersonalistic and communal aspect of Akan culture" (Agyekum 2005:2). This study seeks to describe compliments in English in Ghana, to fill the void that is created by the dearth of literature on this subject and to demonstrate that a distinctive variety of English is emerging in Ghana through pragmatic transfers.

3. Data Collection: Method and Procedure

The techniques used in gathering data for this study were a combination of field note-taking, audio-recording of authentic speech and recall protocol questionnaire. These methods were used for validity and reliability. Compliment responses in general are not always verbal. Para-linguistic and non-verbal features such as facial expressions – smiles, frowns, blank stares; nods, hand waves, hugs and specific body movements which intensify verbal exchanges and which sometimes counter or emphasize verbal exchanges – are used. These are best observed in authentic speeches. The field note-taking and audio recording used the participant-observant procedures. The researchers observed naturally occurring speeches and recorded interactions on tape and non-verbal characteristics in note form. In addition, the researchers elicited information by asking respondents to remember the latest compliment they might have received or responded to. The recall protocol was a recall of actual conversations which respondents might have had recently; a questionnaire was used to guide the process.

The population for the study was drawn from speakers of English selected from a university in Ghana. Five hundred (500) respondents were involved in the data collection. The sample is made up of two hundred and forty males (240) and two hundred and sixty females (260). The first two hundred and fifty (250) respondents were used for the recall protocol and the rest were involved in the collection of the naturally occurring data. The researchers and their assistants listened to, observed and initiated conversations that included compliments and compliment responses. The compliments that were paid had true propositions, thus, the hearers had no reason to doubt the propositional content of the compliments. Participants who were complimented on ability and appearance actually had the attributes that were complimented.

Permission was sought from participants to use their compliments in this study. There were two ways in which permission was sought from respondents. In the first place, permission was sought from respondents only when recordings had been done, since it was thought that prior permission could influence performance. Secondly, some respondents

were informed that the investigators were undertaking a research study and that it was likely that their speeches would be used for this study without revealing their names. The respondents however did not know the exact aspect of their language use that the researchers were studying. Only respondents who granted permission for their responses to be used were included in the data sample. Compliments were paid on such topics as appearance, dressing, possessions, abilities, achievements and skills. The data from this method were compared to data from the recall protocol. The data were gathered under such situations as everyday mundane talk, which do not have any form of institutional structure except the conventions and norms that guide compliments and compliment responses in Ghanaian English. Therefore, priority was placed on interpersonal friendly interactions. Participants were purposively selected without recourse to any category other than sex. The recall protocol on the other hand was undertaken with the full consent of the respondents. The respondents were asked to respond to the questionnaire given them in the presence of one of the researchers so that further clarification could be given when necessary. The data gathered were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. The analyses were done while taking cognisance of investigations which focused on compliment topics and formulas employed in paying compliments.

A further classification was done to show whether the responses observed were agreements or non-agreements. This classification was done on the premise that Ghanaians generally agree with the propositional content of compliments before accepting the solidarity offered in the verbal gift. The framework for classification used in this aspect of the analysis is in consonance with the taxonomy developed by Herbert (1989). The framework is a three-tier taxonomy of responses with sub-classes. The three major categories of responses recognized here are agreement, non-agreement and other categories. The addressee may agree with the compliment by accepting it, by offering a comment or by transferring or re-assigning the compliment to a third person. When the addressee disagrees with the compliment, he/she may scale the compliment down, question the sincerity or appropriateness of the compliment, disagree with the compliment or give no indication that the compliment has been heard.

Finally, the addressee might interpret the compliment as a request instead of a compliment. Here are a few examples of the sub-divisions discussed:

I. AGREEMENT

A. ACCEPTANCE

1. Appreciation token: – A verbal or nonverbal acceptance of the compliment. The acceptance is not tied to the specific semantics of the stimulus (e.g., Thanks, thank you, [nods, smiles, laughs handshakes, hugs])
 2. Comment acceptances: – Addressee accepts the complimentary force and offers a relevant comment on the appreciated topic (e.g., Yeah, it's my favourite too)
 3. Praise upgrade: - Addressee accepts the compliment and asserts that the compliment force is insufficient (e.g., really brings out the blue in my eyes, doesn't it?)
- A. **COMMENT HISTORY:** – Addressee offers a comment (or series of comments) on the object complimented; the comment shifts the force of the compliment from the addressee (e.g., I bought it from Accra. It was not easy)

B. TRANSFERS

- 1 Reassignment: – Addressee agrees with the compliment assertion, but the complimentary force is transferred to some third person (e.g., my mother gave it to me; it is by God's grace.) or to the object itself (it really built itself)
- 2 Return –The praise is shifted or returned to the first speaker (so is yours; you do better than I)

II. NON-AGREEMENT

- A. **SCALE DOWN:** –Addressee disagrees with the complimentary force, pointing to some flaw in the object or claiming that the praise is over-stated (e.g., it’s really quite old; it is a borrowed glory; it is nothing)
- B. **QUESTION:** - Addressee questions the sincerity or the appropriateness of the compliment (e.g., do you really think so?; is that so?; really?)
- C. **NON-ACCEPTANCES**
 - 1. **Disagreement:** –Addressee asserts that the object complimented is not worthy of praise or the compliment is deemed insincere: the first speaker’s assertion is an error or a mockery (I hate it, don’t flatter me; get away)
 - 2. **Qualification:** – Addressee merely qualifies the original assertions, usually with “though”, “but”, “well”, etc (e.g., it’s alright, but Timmy’s is nicer)
- D. **NO ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:** –Addressee gives no indication of having heard the compliment; the addressee either responds with an irrelevant comment, silence or topic shift, or gives no response.

III. OTHER INTERPRETATIONS

- 1. **REQUEST INTERPRETATION:** – Addressee, consciously or not, interprets the compliment as a request rather than as a simple compliment. Such responses are not compliment responses per se, as the addressee does not perceive the previous speech act as a compliment (e.g., you want to borrow this one too?)

4. Discussion

1. Compliment topics and functions:

The compliments collected were classified under the following topics:

1. Appearance – This includes personal adornment, haircut or hairstyle, fashion designs and any other aspect which is reflected in the physical appearance of the addressee. Example: *You look simple and handsome, sweetie.*
2. Possessions -- This group includes personal traits (not physical) such as possessions or intangible things. Example: *I like your coat.*
3. Skills- These are special endowments and talents such as the ability to sing, cook or run. E.g., *You are a born singer.*
4. Performance – This group includes one slot performances such as attaining good grades, saying inspiring prayers or preaching sermons. An example is: *Wonder, you have done the work very well.*
5. Other – This group is made up of compliments that could not be put in any of the above. Such compliments include: *Des, you are expensive o! See the queue of people waiting to see you?*

Of these four broad topics [appearance, possessions, skills and performance], compliments on appearance were more frequent. The preference order of the topics in the recall protocol and the natural data were similar. Thus it is observed that respondents compliment one another more on appearance than on any other category. This means that speakers of Ghanaian English value appearance very much. Our findings also confirm those from various investigations, that compliments are given based on “only a few general topics”. These topics are appearance, possessions and performance, personality, ability, skills and achievement, among others (Ye 1995, Wolfson 1983). For instance, Wolfson (1983) observes that Americans pay compliments on appearance as a result of “deliberate efforts”, such as wearing new clothes, and ability such as good

cooking, a skilful games and athletics performance. Nelson et al (1996) also observe that Egyptians pay compliments on appearance, personality traits and skills/work. The findings of this study also corroborate findings from Agyekum (2005), who notes that appearance compliments occur very frequently in Akan commercial advertisements. Table 1 below shows the distribution of compliment topics observed in the study.

Table 1 Compliment topics

C	Recall Protocol Data		Authentic Data	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Appearance	123	49.2	91	36.4
Possessions	41	16.4	55	22.0
Skills	27	10.8	20	8.0
Performance	59	23.6	78	31.2

The recall protocol data recorded one hundred and twenty-three (123) compliments on appearance. This figure represents forty-nine percent (49.2%) of the total compliments under the recall protocol. Similarly, the naturally occurring data recorded ninety-one (91) compliments with appearance as the prime topic. This figure represents thirty-six per cent (36%) of the total compliments under the naturally occurring discourse. The next popular topic is performance. The recall protocol data recorded fifty-nine (59) of such compliments. This figure represents twenty-four per cent (24%) of the total compliments collected under the recall protocol. Seventy-eight (78) compliments on performance, representing thirty-one per cent (31%), were collected under the naturally occurring discourse. Compliments on possessions and skills are the least frequent among the four broad classifications. The recall protocol records forty-one (41) and twenty-seven (27) compliments representing sixteen (16%) and eleven (11%) percent, respectively, for the possessions and skills categories. Under the natural discourse data, there were fifty (55) and twenty (20) compliments, representing twenty-two (22%) and eight (8%), respectively, for the possessions and skills compliments.

The naturally occurring data revealed some compliments which could not be classified under any one of the categories given above. Here is an example:

(1) Two female friends met for a chat. One looked at the other's dress and remarked:

A: Do you know you are a brave person?

B: (looked surprised and smiled) why?

A: Look at your dress; the fishes in your dress are swimming upstream! It takes a lot of courage and strength to do that.

B: (laughs hilariously and lightly slaps the other at the back) oh you... you always surprise me...

In the exchange above, Speaker A is truly complimenting her friend but the compliment cannot be listed under a single topic. The compliment can be classified as a possession compliment as well as a skill compliment. In one sense, it could mean that Speaker A is admiring the dress, but in another sense it could also mean that Speaker A is admiring the design of the dress. In the second case, it is the skill that is involved in the designing of the dress that is being complimented.

Even though the trend in preference order of the compliment topics is similar in both of the methods employed in this paper, there are differences in occurrences. For instance, forty-nine percent (49%) of compliments from the recall data—almost half of the total compliments paid, are appearance compliments, but the naturally occurring data had thirty-six percent (36%). The next popular topic, performance, has a higher percentage from the natural discourse than the recall data. The natural discourse data records thirty-one percent (31%), but the recall data records twenty-four percent (24%). The analysis above lends credence to earlier findings that though the topics on which compliments are paid seem similar, there are cultural preferences. Such findings include Holmes' (1996) claim that 'acceptable' topics of compliments vary cross-

culturally. Anderson and Ossom (in prep) have also observed that among the Kɔ, a Dangme speaking people of southern Ghana, compliments are paid largely on appearance, possessions, skills and personal traits, in that order. Chinese speakers also pay compliments more on performance than on appearance (Ye 1995).

The high percentage of appearance compliments which occurred in the recall protocol data suggests to us that the compliments respondents remember most are the ones that are paid them on their appearance. Given the fact that such compliments manifest between friends, it can be deduced that the function of the appearance compliments is to enhance inter-personal relations; therefore, such compliments are hard to forget. From the data, appearance compliments are paid to close associates such as friends, and thus serve to deepen social ties. The compliments can be seen to have referential functions as well, since they inform the addressee about his/her looks at the particular time. This point corroborates the observation that the primary function of a compliment is affective and social rather than referential or informative (Holmes 1996, Cedar 2006).

Another important observation we made is that compliments on appearance generally manifest in interactions where social distance and unequal power are relatively minimal. In the data collected from both methods, the incidence of compliments on appearance is observed between intimates such as friends, classmates, colleagues and room-mates. A few compliments on appearance were however observed in non-congruent power interactions. Here are examples of such compliments:

1. *Two lecturers, a male senior lecturer and a female assistant lecturer met at the club and the following ensued:*

Male lecturer: Is that you, old girl?

*Female: Sir, (smiles) you look good. (Moves closer to him)
Permit me to commend you on your choice of colours.
They match and make you look younger.*

Male: Thanks (smiles and waves towards her) but that is my wife's taste, not mine.

(3) *A male lecturer complimented a female student out of class thus:*

Male: You are growing stylish these days

Student: (smiles) Sir, thanks.

The interactions above are initiated by the higher status persons. In the first example, the use of 'old girl' as a pet name (compliment) minimizes the social gap between speaker and addressee and gives impetus for deepening the interaction. However, the addressee does not lose sight of the unequal social distance; therefore, she uses verbal and non-verbal politeness strategies as signs of deference. In the first place, she addresses the senior lecturer as 'sir' and moves closer to him before continuing her speech. She also asks for his permission before paying him the compliment since the compliment can be a face threatening act (FTA) –i.e., the junior is intruding into the personal space of the senior. Even though the sequence of compliments exchanged in the interaction above allows the participants to deepen their social relations, due deference is given to the senior in the interaction. Such compliments are rather few. This situation supports earlier observations by Wolfson (1983) and Holmes (1988) that compliments upwards are fewer than compliments downwards.

However, the assertion that compliments upwards are initiated by the high status persons is debatable. The low status person can also initiate a compliment, as seen in (2) above. The personal relationship that exists between the high status person and the low status person is the most important factor that determines if the compliment can occur. We agree with Holmes that when compliments are directed upwards, it means the participants must have known each other and must have been in some friendly relationship. This is seen in (2); moreover, the familiarity gives the low status person the confidence to further compliment the high status person. In the second example [i.e., (3)], there is not much social interaction as observed in the previous example; therefore, the compliment can be considered to function as a praise more than a solidarity activity. The participant, especially the lower in power, does not lose sight of the non-congruent power at all; the lady's verbal response is preceded with a

deference marker, “sir”. This reinforces Holmes’ (1996) observation that compliments in non-congruent interactions can function as praises.

II. Compliment Formulae

The syntactic patterns observed from the recall protocol are not different from the patterns observed in the authentic data, but the authentic data revealed non-verbal forms which are absent in the recall data. Respondents in the recall data could not recall well the non-verbal aspects of the compliment paid them. Therefore, this section is based mostly on the data collected from the authentic discourse. Generally, the verbs used in explicit compliments are stative verbs. The SVC formula is the most prevalent (“You look beautiful”, “You are nice”, “You are a wonderful person”, “You are doing well”, “You are a hard working guy”). Stative verbs such as “look” and the copula “is” occur more than any other verb forms in the appearance compliments. The copula “is” construction is observed with all the categories of compliments collected. The prevalent use of adjectives such as “beautiful”, “nice”, “good”, “smart” and “wonderful”, also make the range of syntactic formulae employed in compliments few and predictable. In addition, the compliment utterances are short and crisp: *You are looking smart; You are nice; You are doing well; You are growing stylish these days.* Syntactic characteristics observed showed that there were limited syntactic patterns and the short nature of the explicit compliments emphasizes their character as speech routines.

Manes and Wolfson (1981) observe that “the speech act of complimenting is characterized by the formulaic nature of its syntactic and semantic composition”. This nature is seen in the range of the lexical items that carry the semantic meanings of the compliments. It has been observed that the syntactic structures and patterns employed in compliments are predictable. Compliments have become rituals as a result of their routine characteristic; moreover, their formulaic nature reduces the chance that a given compliment might be misinterpreted (Boyle 2000). According to Manes and Wolfson (1981), “two-thirds of English compliments use the adjectives ‘nice, good, beautiful, pretty, great’, and 90% make use of just two verbs, ‘like and love’”. The lack of creativity in the form and content of English compliments is related to their function in discourse. Since the

aim of a compliment is to make the hearer feel appreciated and approved of, the formulaic nature minimizes the chance that the compliment will be misinterpreted. Several socio-pragmatic studies (Herbert, 1990; Holmes 1988) have shown that compliments are routine formulae and employ a few syntactic patterns and a limited vocabulary that are specific in expressing admiration and praise.

In spite of these limited syntactic structures and vocabulary, there are instances of implicit and non-formulaic compliments. Implicit compliments in English in Ghana are mainly based on expressions and strategies that are transferred from Ghanaian languages to English. For example, our data showed that instead of explicitly saying he or she likes the addressee's hair style or dress, a speaker could simply say:

- (4) *Can you take me to your dress maker?*
- (5) *Who is your hairdresser? I want you to take me to her.*

The speaker does not explicitly say that the addressee's dress or hair style is nice, but by saying that she wants to be taken to the latter's hairdresser or dressmaker, he/she implies that the complimentee's dress or hair style is beautiful. Apart from such implicit structures, there are other structures which are directly transferred from indigenous Ghanaian languages. Typical examples of these structures are:

- (6) *If this dress gets missing from your wardrobe, I shall buy one.*
- (7) *If you cannot find this dress, come to my wardrobe.*
- (8) *I can see myself in this dress.*
- (9) *When you remove this dress, send it to me.*
- (10) *When you are done with wearing this dress, hand it over to me.*
- (11) *You have good eyes.*
- (12) *The next time you are going to the market, I shall ask you to buy me something.*

There are also instances where speakers pay compliments by simply using structures such as: *You are a man*, or, *You are a real woman*, to

compliment a man or woman for performing a task which is expected of a man or a woman in the Ghanaian culture. For example, *You are a man*, could be used to compliment a man who has succeeded in making his wife pregnant. Since child bearing is a highly valued activity in Ghanaian culture, a man is complimented when he is able to make his wife pregnant. In a similar fashion, *You are a real woman*, could be said to a woman who has given birth to a child or a woman who cooks well. These are activities that are expected from a woman in Ghanaian cultures. *You are living well*, could be said to a friend who has acquired some possessions; *You are showing us*, is mostly said by females in admiration of fashionable clothes worn; *As for this, remember us*, is said by friends in admiration of sudden favours gained; *It is ge* (i.e., genuine), means it is a good quality product; *I cannot try you*, when used as a compliment means that the attribute admired is a paragon. Such compliments are transferred from indigenous Ghanaian languages into English. Our data also revealed translated versions of some of the Akan appearance compliments which had been presented in Agyekum (2005). Here are a few examples that were used in the natural data we collected:

Akan Compliment (Agyekum 2005)	Ghanaian English Version (Natural data)
“Wo kyen Akyem polisi”	(13) “You are more than a weaver bird”
“Ahoɔfɛ ni”	(12) “What a beauty!”
“Ei, ahoɔfɛ na adware wo sei”	(13) “Ei, You are soaked with beauty”
“Ahoɔfɛ na ɛreku wo sei”	(14) “See how beauty is killing you”
“Wo ntoma yi deɛ, enyɛ small”	(15) “This your cloth is not small”

In some Ghanaian cultures, people are more likely to pay compliments indirectly, especially when the interaction is between unequal powers.

The current study revealed such implicit compliments. These are not formulaic and they range from exclamations such as: “Great show! *Good looking!*”, to other implicit compliments seen in the excerpt below:

- (16) *A lady bought a laptop computer and her friends admired the machine.*

A: It is a good machine o! It comes with a double ultra V port.

B: (smiles) thank God.

The speaker is indirectly complimenting the addressee on her possessions/achievement in (16) above.

- (17) *At a social gathering, a male student compliments a female friend:*

Male: Here comes Miss Ghana.

Female: (laughs) isn't that flattery? Thanks, anyway.

In (17), the speaker is comparing the addressee to someone of whom he thinks highly. He thinks she can be compared to a beauty queen, “Miss Ghana”. Understanding such compliments calls for indexical and shared background knowledge. The addressee has to know who the speaker is referring to as well as who a “Miss Ghana” is to make meaning of the utterance. Such compliments denote an intense personal involvement. It is believed that such implicit compliments give more intense and better effect (Bruti 2006 and Boyle 2000). Even though implicit compliments can be costly because of the likelihood of ambiguity and the time it takes to process the information to realize their import, they have far reaching effects. In the first place, the implicit compliment is novel, suggesting that the speaker took special care in crafting it for a special reason. Secondly, as a polite form in itself, it helps the addressee to balance the modesty maxims, that is, to avoid self praise and agree with the speaker easily.

A marked feature of compliments in English in Ghana is the use of pragmatic markers from the indigenous Ghanaian languages. Markers such as, *ei, o, fromo, ehe* and *ye/yei*, are transferred from indigenous Ghanaian languages into English in Ghana. From our native speaker

intuition, the following are the meanings of the pragmatic makers: *ei* is an exclamation which denotes surprise and, to some extent, disbelief; *o* is an exclamation which can mean surprise or exasperation; it is also used to end phrases and sentences as most Ghanaian indigenous languages do not have closed syllables; *ehe* is an exclamation which denotes a flicker of remembrance which the speech situation invokes and which explains certain aspects of the interaction. These markers show a transfer from the L1 into the L2. The focus marker, *dee*, which means “as for” or “really”, is used to isolate the quality which is being complimented. These makers occurred very frequently in the natural discourse data as we see in the following:

- (18) A student’s husband came to visit her on campus and her friends teased her.

A: The laughter has an added “semitone” which was not there before o!

B: (mimics a dance while still laughing)

- (19) A lady with a new hairdo went to her department, where she met a male colleague and the following ensued:

Male: (smiling) ei, I couldn’t see you o! You have changed; beautiful!

Female: (smiles back) it is my hairdo eh, thanks.

III. Compliment Responses

From the data, we observed that responding to compliments in English in Ghana is generally a blend of verbal and non-verbal behaviour. The responses to the compliments observed and gathered through the recall protocol and the authentic discourse can be classified into three categories:

1. Verbal: Under this category the addressee responds to the compliment using only words without any form of accompanying non-linguistic strategy.

2. Verbal plus non-verbal: this category consists of responses which use a blend of linguistic and non-linguistic strategies.
3. Non-verbal only: this group consists of responses which are made without words. Such responses are strictly silence coupled with the employment of facial expressions and other kinetographic gestures to show appreciation or disapproval of the compliment paid.

The pattern of responses is presented in the table below:

Table 2

Manner of Response	Recall Protocol Data		Authentic Data	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Verbal only	11	4.4	16	6.4
Verbal & non-verbal	228	91.2	211	84.4
Non-Verbal only	11	4.4	23	9.2
Total	250	100%	250	100%

Moreover, more than one non-verbal strategy can be employed in a single response. The responses are exemplified below:

- (20) During break time at a department seminar the following conversation was captured between two friends:

A: Fred, your paper is excellent.

B: (smiles) really? Thank you (gives a hand shake).

In the above instance, the addressee used two non-verbal responses: a smile and a handshake.

When the results for the first semester of 2007 were posted on the notice board, two friends conversed as follows:

- (21) *A: I said you carried away all the "A"; all of it!*

B: Really? (Smiles, does some dance steps and hugs the speaker).

In the above, the addressee uses three non-verbal strategies in a single response: a smile, dance steps and a hug.

- (22) *Compliment: You have really gone far on the project work; you are doing well.*

Response: (smiles) it is God's grace.

- (23) *Compliment: You have eyes indeed; the next time you are going to the market, I shall ask you to buy me some items. Your lady was my student at the training college. She is brilliant. (This is a compliment to someone who has a beautiful wife or girlfriend.)*

Response: (smiles broadly) Ehe! Thanks.

- (24) A: *Your hairstyle is beautiful.*

B: *(smiles) thank you; you are not bad either.*

“Thank you”, and “You are not bad either”, are the verbal responses here. The discussion so far signifies that politeness in interactions in Ghanaian English is not only a verbal feature. To get a total understanding of politeness in interactions in Ghanaian English, equal regard should be given to the non-verbal and the verbal strategies employed.

The Non-verbal Strategies: The favoured non-verbal strategies observed from both methods—the recall protocol and the natural data—are “smile” and “laugh”. Smile, the fleeting facial expression of friendliness, and laugh, the loud expression of happiness, characterize most of the responses. In addition, these non-verbal strategies have intensities. A smile, for instance, is observed as a “smile” or a “broad smile”; a laugh as a “light laugh”, a “heartily laugh”, a “giggle” or a “loud laugh”. These non-verbal strategies have their own meanings. A smile means a warm reception of whatever is said and a laugh means joy at what has been said. These are followed in preference by the tactile group – handshakes, hugs, pats and waves. It is observed that at certain times more than one non-verbal strategy are employed in a single response; moreover, the non-verbal strategies mostly precede the verbal strategies, as in the following

excerpts. Where more than one non-verbal strategy is used, the semantic classification is done according to the perceived intention of the addressee.

- (25) A student did editing work for a lecturer and the following conversation between the lecturer and the student was captured:

Lecturer: Wonderful; you have done the work very well.

Female student: (smiling) Thanks, sir.

- (26) A lady returned to campus with a new haircut and her friends complimented her thus:

A: (admiringly) what a nice haircut!

B: (smiles) are you sure?

A: The cut is splendid; I will have one too.

B: (laughs) Great, and it will suit you.

- (27) A class of students was waiting for their lecturer to arrive for a lecture. A male student walked in wearing sporty designer clothes and the following ensued:

A: Great show!

B: (smiles and shakes hand with the speaker).

Verbal Responses

The varied verbal response strategies employed can be grouped as follows:

- a. *Is that so?/are you sure?/really?*, or any other form that expresses doubt but could indicate acceptance.
- b. *Oh, it is nothing*, or any other form that plays down the effort/quality admired.

- c. *Thank you.*
- d. *It is by God's grace.*
- e. *You do better than I do,* or any other form that deflects the compliment to the giver.
- f. *Thank God/it is God* or any other form that deflects the compliment to a third person.
- g. *Oh, it is a borrowed one/it is an old one/I bought it in Accra/it was not easy.*
- h. Any other verbal form apart from the above.
- i Any forms of rejection- *get away, don't flatter me, and be careful.*

The "h" group of responses comprises mostly explanations such as, *Thanks*, or, *it is expensive*. It is observed that some respondents used more than one of the above in their response patterns. The following explains this point:

- (28) A lady entered her friend's room at the Hall of residence and remarked:

Compliment: This is a lady's room. (The implication here is that it is clean or tidy.)

Response: (laughs lightly) is that so? But your room looks tidier than here.

In the response above the respondent uses a combination of "a" and "e" categories.

- (29) *Compliment: Ei Abena, where have you been... you look smart and your body....!*

Response: My sister, let's thank God; but you are not bad either.

The last response also combines the “f” and “e” categories. This pattern is also seen in the responses collected from the natural discourse. The common verbal strategy recorded from both the recall protocol and the natural data is the appreciative token of “thank you”, or “thanks”, with or without any other strategy which implies appreciation. Witness the following:

- (30) Two students met at a social gathering and one complimented the other thus:

Female: Nowadays, you are looking handsome.

Male: (smiles) Yei, thank you.

- (31) At a department seminar, during the break period the following conversation was captured:

Male: Fred, your paper is excellent.

Response: (smiles) really? Thank you (gives a hand shake).

Here “thank you” occurs after a question. However, “thank you” hardly occurs alone; other phrases are typically added. The excerpts below further illustrate this point:

- (32) *Compliment: The last time I met you, you were ten years older.*

Response: I am honoured, thanks.

- (33) *Compliment: I like your haircut; it is cute.*

Response: (smiles) really? Thanks, you are the first to say it.

Thus, other comments are added to “thank you” when it occurs in Ghanaian English. This situation makes semantic classification difficult. The ultimate classification is done according to the order of precedence order of the verbal strategies, so that in (32) above, “I am honoured” is given precedence over “thanks”. Other forms of responses observed

include questions such as: “*is that so?*”, “*really?*” and “*are you sure?*”. These can be seen in the following excerpts. The first was captured in an interaction between a female and a male, the second in a conversation between females on their way to church:

(34) *Female: Your hairstyle is nice; in fact, you are my man on campus.*

Male: (smiles and hugs the lady) is that so?

(35) *A: The perfume you have used is very pleasant.*

B: (smiles) Is that so? It is very expensive.

This mode is the second most popular in both the recall and natural discourse data. On the surface, the questions look like rejections, but they are not. The questions normally co-occur with smiles, so that in effect they do not question the sincerity of the speaker but seek re-affirmation of the truth value of the compliment and constitute a modesty strategy. By requesting the speaker to reaffirm the compliment, the addressee is according the speaker the benefit of being an absolute judge, thus directly minimizing praise of self and maximizing praise of the other. This action enhances the face of the speaker and makes him/her share the glory of the compliment. As a result, the social tie between the speaker and the addressee gets strengthened.

Other forms of verbal responses include expressions which deflect the compliment to the speaker, a third person or God. In both the recall and discourse data, the various forms of deflection outnumber the prime “thank you”. The following examples of deflections reveal the principles behind such speech behaviour.

(36) A female student visited some friends in their room and the following ensued:

A: Jane, you people can really keep your room tidy; I love it.

B: (laughs) how about your room? Thanks, anyway.

- (37) A female student met a colleague walking along with a baby and the following took place:

A: *That's a beautiful baby; he looks well kept.*

B: *(laughs lightly) it is God's grace.*

- (38) Two female post graduate students met on campus and the following compliments were paid:

A: *My dear, you are ravishing, ravishing like that!*

B: *(smiles) Really! Thanks. You are not bad also in that blue jeans o!*

A: *oh, it is an old "reach me down" from my sister (laughs lightly).*

In example (36), the speaker tells the addressee that their efforts at keeping their room tidy are recognized and admired. In example (37), the speaker is indirectly praising the mother's childcare skills, while example (38) is a typical appearance compliment. In addition, in all the instances the speakers imply that they are friends to the addressees. In responding to the compliments the way they do, the addressees are guided by culturally informed assumptions about politeness. These authors are of the view that speakers of English in Ghana typically draw on the rules of politeness of their L1 in interacting with one another in the L2, even though there are adjustments to suit each situation. This view is based on the assumption that as the English Language is used in the L2 environment to satisfy socio-cultural needs of the L2 speakers, the norms of the L1 will influence patterns of interaction (Hondo and Goodman, 2003).

Categorizations of the Responses: The compliment responses observed are discussed in the light of Herbert's (1986) Taxonomy of Responses. His taxonomy is based on the realization that addressees' responses are simultaneous answers to the positive evaluation as well as the "verbal gifts" offered. He realizes that the addressee agrees first with the propositional content of the compliment before accepting it. Therefore, he classifies responses as:

1. Agreements 2. Non-agreements 3. Other interpretations

Within each of the three categories are sub-divisions. The agreement category, for instance, has sub-divisions like Acceptance, Comment History and Transfers. These are shown below:

Table 3

	<i>Recall Protocol Data</i>		<i>Authentic Data</i>	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Appreciation Token	93	37.2	73	29.2
Comment Acceptance	7	2.8	14	5.6
Praise Upgrade	4	1.6	13	5.2
Comment History	9	3.6	32	12.8
Reassignment	58	23.2	24	9.6
Return	18	7.2	25	10
Scale Down	9	3.6	14	5.6
Question	47	18.8	30	12
Disagreement	1	0.4	14	5.6
Qualification	3	1.2	3	1.2
No Acknowledgement			7	2.8
Request Interpretation	1	0.4	2	0.8
Totals	250	100%	250	100%

It can be seen from the analysis of data collected that speakers of English in Ghana generally agree with and accept compliments. More than two thirds of the total responses fall within the first category of Herbert's taxonomy of responses. The Appreciation tokens, both verbal and non-verbal, are the most frequently used of all the strategies. Generally, the appreciation tokens are blends of the verbal "thank you" with smiles or laughter. In certain instances, it is only the non-verbal strategy or the verbal strategy—"thank you"—that occurs. The transfers which manifest as Reassignments and Returns are the next most used forms of response. The recall protocol records seventy-six (76) of such responses, which constitute thirty percent (30%) of the total responses. The natural data

reveals forty-nine (49) responses in this category, representing nineteen point six per cent (19.6%) of the total responses. Despite the fact that there is disparity in the extent of occurrence, the trend is the same: both methods reveal this group as the second most used form of responses. However, Reassignments outnumber Returns; the recall protocol reveals fifty-eight (58) Reassignments and the natural discourse data reveals twenty-five (25).

The reassignments generally are towards God or God's Grace. These forms of responses reveal the religiosity of the Ghanaian. The Return group manifests as strictly returning the compliment to the speaker. The Transfer category, in general, reveals the politeness orientation of the Ghanaian speaker of English. The Transfers manifest a blend of the Agreement and Modesty maxims. The Praise Upgrade group reveals differences in data from the two methods. Whereas the recall protocol records just four (4), the natural discourse reveals as many as thirteen (13), a figure that represents four per cent (4%) of the total responses. This discrepancy could be the result of the unreliability of the memory in recalling past occurrences. The respondents could recall that the compliment was accepted but could not recall the comments. However, the natural discourse data which was collected through participant observation and which used audio recording and note-taking procedures could be fairly reliable. The praise upgrade can be seen in the following:

(40) Two male lecturers, one of whom had just returned from study leave in America, met at the club and conversed as follows:

A: You are wonderful; you worked really hard!

B: (laughs) Charlie, it wasn't easy.

The response above upgrades the feature of hard work which is the propositional content of the compliment. The response not only accepts that "he worked hard" but goes on to qualify the words of praise with, "it was not easy", which emphasizes the compliment.

- (41) There was an interaction between two females at an End-of-Year party thus:

A: Madam Treasurer, who made the pie you served? It is very tasty.

B: (smiles) that is good news; I made them myself.

This response upgrades the proposition in the compliment that “the person who made the pie must be a good cook”. The addressee, by saying “I made them myself”, publicly praises her culinary skills. This verbal response could be said to be impolite, but the nonverbal “smile” smoothens its effect. In the first place, the non-verbal reaction carries the semantic aspect of the response. The smile, on its own, indicates agreement with the compliment and acceptance of the camaraderie implied in the remark, so that it can absorb the “brag” of the verbal aspect. It can be argued that the occasion—a party—and also the feeling of achievement on the part of the addressee, made her respond the way she did. Moreover, the interaction is between colleagues where there is neither social distance nor non-congruent power effects. However, Herbert’s classification of “question” as a non-agreement strategy is contrary to the situation observed. Questions such as, “is that so?” and “really?”, when used as responses in Ghanaian English, are not non-agreement strategies; they are best seen as requests for affirmation. They are most often accompanied with non-verbal strategies which carry the semantics of the response. The non-verbal strategies include smiles and laughs. In addition, some of the responses end with thanks, as observed in the exchange below:

- (42) At a department seminar, during the break the following conversation was recorded:

A: Fred, your paper is excellent.

B: (smiles) really? Thank you (gives a hand shake).

If the question, “really?”, expressed doubt of any sort, it would not be followed with an appreciation token, “thanks”.

The Non-agreement group is minimal. It consists of disagreements, no acknowledgements and scale down responses. There are nine (9) scale down responses from the Recall data but fourteen (14) from the Natural discourse data. There is only one (1) disagreement from the Recall data but fourteen from the Natural data. The non-verbal strategies which accompany disagreements are frowning, avoiding eye contact with the speaker and remaining silent. These can be seen in the following excerpts:

- (43) At a get-together on campus the following was recorded:

Male: Wow! Nice dress! It is gorgeous!

Female: (looks away) do not flatter me.

- (44) A male student met a lady with whom he was not on friendly terms:

Male: Lovely hair.

Female: (frowns) be careful!

- (45) A gentleman met a male friend who was walking with a lady and the first man tried to compliment the lady:

Male: Who is this beautiful lady? She is lovely. Will you be my gal?

Female: (silence)

There are seven (7) no acknowledgements from the natural data but none from the recall data. All together, there are only twenty-four (24) non-agreement responses from the natural discourse data and thirteen (13) from the recall protocol. These show clearly that speakers of English in Ghana generally agree and accept compliments. The Request Interpretation category which interprets compliments as requests has only two (2) responses from the natural discourse data but none from the recall data.

Conclusion

Generally, compliments are speech acts which function to promote and strengthen social relationships between people in the speech community. Ghanaians compliment each other on “appearance” more than on any other topic. The compliments observed manifest mostly in congruent interactions such as between friends and colleagues. A few of the compliments have been observed between non-congruent interactions where due deference is given to the senior in the interaction. Such compliments are rather few. This situation gives credence to earlier observations by Wolfson (1983) and Holmes (1988) that compliments upwards are fewer than compliments downwards. The study also observes that factors such as social distance and power do affect the complimenting behaviour in English in Ghana. However, formality does not seem to affect compliments as inter-personal encounters.

The study further revealed that compliments are mostly direct and explicit. Generally, the verbs used in the compliments are in the active voice. The SVC formula is the most prevalent (“You look beautiful”, “you are nice”, “You are a wonderful person”, “You are doing well”, “You are a hard working guy”). Stative verbs such as “look” and the copula “is” occur more than any other verb form in the appearance compliments. A marked feature of compliments in Ghanaian English is the use of news markers. Such news markers are “*ei, ye, oh, o, ehe*”. The fact that these news markers are involuntary exclamations, coupled with the fact that they come from Ghanaian languages, clearly demonstrates that speakers of Ghanaian English use interactional strategies of the L1 as mind sets in interactions in the L2.

Responses to compliments in English in Ghana are a blend of non-verbal and verbal strategies, very often with the non-verbal strategy carrying the semantics of the responses. Ghanaians generally agree and accept compliments when they deem the propositional content of the compliment true. Compliments are rejected when the propositional content is considered untrue or the addressee thinks the speaker is insincere. The favoured non-verbal strategies observed are “smile” and “laugh”. Smile, the fleeting facial expression of friendliness, and laugh,

the loud expression of happiness, characterize most of the responses. In addition, these non-verbal strategies have intensities. Smile, for instance, is observed as a “smile” or a “broad smile”; laugh as a “light laugh”, a “heartily laugh”, a “giggle” or a “loud laugh”. These non-verbal strategies have their own meanings. A smile means a warm reception of whatever is said and a laugh means joy at what has been said. These are followed in preference by the tactile group—handshakes, hugs, pats and waves.

The popular verbal strategy recorded from the study is the appreciative token of “thank you”, or “thanks”, with or without any other strategy which implies appreciation. However, “thank you” hardly occurs alone; other phrases are added. Sometimes, more than one verbal cue is employed in the response. “Thank you, you are not bad either”, is a typical verbal response. Other forms of responses observed include questions such as: “*is that so?*”, “*really?*” and “*are you sure?*”. The questions normally co-occur with smiles, so that in effect they are not questioning the sincerity of the speaker but seeking reaffirmation of the truth value of the compliment and serving as a modesty strategy. By requesting the speaker to reaffirm the compliment, the addressee is according the speaker the benefit of being an absolute judge, thus directly minimizing praise of self and maximizing praise of the other. This action enhances the face of the speaker and makes him/her share the glory of the compliment. It is a modesty strategy since in the end the speaker is glorified more than the one who responds. As a result, the social tie between the speaker and the addressee gets strengthened. Other forms of verbal responses include expressions which deflect the compliment to the speaker, a third person or God.

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