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Communicating Culture through Online Compliments

Çevrimiçi İltifatlar Aracılığı ile Kültür Etkileşimi

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Abstract

Over the last decades, the expressive speech act of compliments has been the focus in quite a few studies. Most of these studies focused on the structural patterns and/or the topics of compliments. However, the excessive use of social media tools and the increase in the use of compliments in these settings made it necessary to dig into the cultural elements in compliment exchanges and analyse how the faces of *self* and the *other* are co-constructed paying the compliment and responding to it because this new mode of communication creates a setting where boundaries are vanished and borders are blurred in interpersonal communication. This cross cultural understanding can help understand how culture comes into being in online language use. Compliments in online interaction have become an important research area in different languages. However, the number of such studies is still quite very limited. This leads to overgeneralized misconceptions on compliments which undermine the cultural load of this speech act. This study, using a bilingual corpus made up of 200 compliments collected from 100 participants, analyses the cultural elements in compliment exchanges and discuss how these cultural elements reflect themselves in Turkish and American English using quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

Keywords: Functions of compliments, the relationship between compliments and culture, language on social media.

Öz

Son yıllarda, anlatımsal (expressive) bir söz edim olan iltifatlar birçok çalışmanın odak noktası olmuştur. Bu çalışmaların birçoğu iltifatların yapısal örüntüleri ve/veya konularına odaklanmaktadır. Ancak, sosyal medya araçlarının yaygın kullanımı ve bu mecralarda iltifat kullanımının artması, iltifat içeren iletişimlerdeki kültürel öğelerin incelenmesini ve (kendi) yüzlerinin ya da diğer konuşmacıların yüzlerinin, iltifat ederek ya da yanıtlayarak, nasıl yeniden yapılandırıldığını incelemeyi zorunlu kılmıştır; çünkü bu yeni iletişim şekli, bireylerarası iletişimde çizgilerin ortadan kalktığı, sınırların bulanıklaştığı bir dünya yaratmaktadır. Kültürlerarası bu anlayış, kültürün çevrimiçi dilde nasıl var olduğunu anlamaya da yardımcı olacaktır. İltifatlar, çevrimiçi etkileşimde farklı dillerde önemli bir çalışma alanı oluşturmuşlardır. Ancak, bu çalışmalar hala sayıca oldukça yetersizdir. Bu tip çalışmaların azlığı, bu söz edimin kültürel yoğunluğunu azımsayan fazlaca genellenmiş yanlış yargılara sebep olmaktadır. Bu çalışma, toplam 100 katılımcıdan elde edilen 2000 iltifatla oluşturulmuş iki dilli bir derlem kullanılarak, nicel ve nitel veri analizi yöntemleri ile iltifat kullanımlarındaki kültürel öğeleri inceleyip, bu kültürel öğelerin Türkçe ve

Amerikan İngilizcesi olmak üzere iki farklı dilde nasıl yansıtıldığını tartışmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İltifatların işlevleri, iltifat kültür ilişkisi, sosyal medya dili.

Introduction

Yule defines pragmatics as “the study of speaker meaning, the study of contextual meaning, the study of how more gets communicated than is said and the study of the expression of relative distance” (21). Knowing a language does not only mean knowing vocabulary, being able to pronounce words or knowing its grammar. Knowing a language entails the ability to use appropriate language in appropriate contexts. In the course of communication, one needs to decipher the underlying meaning and the communicative function of an utterance. Contextual clues and knowledge of the background add to the meaning of utterances (Blum-Kulka and Michael Hamo 437).

The fathers of pragmatics, John Austin, John Searle and Paul Grice, are three cornerstones of the field. Austin and Searle developed the idea that speech is an act. They focused their attention on what the speakers mean and what they achieve more than what they actually say (Austin 5; Searle 1). On the other hand, Grice contemplated on how hearers deduce meaning from utterances and how conversation is co-constructed. Later on, many theories on *politeness* and *face* (Goffman 2-14) have been put forward, adding new cornerstones to the field.

Facebook, after being introduced in early 2000s, has created a new platform on which people had faces and managed them. Therefore, integrating Facebook in studies on politeness and face has turned out to be a promising way to study language and face.

Cultural variation is one of the major determiners in the way people interact with each other. People brought up in different cultures often carry different norms and patterns when dealing with pragmatic issues and these different norms are deeply rooted in their cultural being (Wierzbicka 3). Cross-cultural pragmatics studies this difference, and how these differences reflect in inter-culturally or intra-culturally different contexts. It deals with both pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic strategies which cover pragmatic competence, knowing how to use appropriate language to mean what the speaker really means, and sociological competence, meaning the ability to use language that is appropriate for social contexts, norms, etc.

Cross-cultural studies are often contrastive by nature. These cross-cultural studies can shed light on the assumptions of universality of politeness or specifically certain speech acts. Although the idea of universality has attracted much enthusiasm and excitement on the part of many, there are some researchers and

theoreticians who believe that human interaction does not depend on universal principles (Wierzbicka 3). Though the debate on whether or not speech acts or some pragmatic norms are universal is still contentious, many scholars claim that speech acts are universal. On the other hand, it is accepted by many that the manner in which speech acts are used, both the norms and the forms, vary among cultures (Yu 1679; Blum-Kulka and Michael Hamo 437).

Many studies aim at providing frameworks to study and analyse interactions among people. Still very few of them consider the nature of online communication and the frameworks for the analysis of online communications are barely established or sufficient. With the knowledge of this gap in this research field, this paper aims at pointing some findings on the cultural load of the speech act of compliments and compliment responses in Turkish and American English, which makes this speech act challenging and promising to study.

Previous literature

Compliments are turning out to be an indispensable part of everyday lives especially through social media conversations. Social media portrays a use of language which is neither written nor spoken. In this semi-written semi-spoken language, compliments are the most widely used speech acts especially when it comes to photo comments. Therefore, the functions and the definitions of compliments have gone under a drastic change after the spread of social media tools. In line with this changing trend, compliments have been able to attract attention as a topic of research in the last decades.

One of the pioneering and ground-breaking studies on compliments, by Manes and Wolfson, reported that 85% of compliments in American English are paid using only three syntactic structures and 42,5% are constructed with only two adjectives. This syntactic and semantic formulaicity of compliments led Manes and Wolfson to claim the easiness of defining what can be considered as a compliment. In addition to this study, much of the following research claimed a similar type of formulaicity in a couple of different languages. Boori reported a similar syntactic and lexical formula in Persian. Similarly, Şakırgil and Çubukçu underlined a formula in Turkish compliment exchanges but it should be noted that the formula they mentioned is about adjacency pairs and is not a syntactic or lexical formula as mentioned by Manes and Wolfson. Ruhi, studying complimenting women in Turkish mentioned some commonly used syntactic patterns and vocabulary; however, she emphasized that Turkish is far from the formulaic compliment structure reported by Manes and Wolfson.

When it comes to the studies on compliments, the topics and topic-gender relations have been studied a lot in mostly American English. Very rarely was Mandarin Chinese studied (Chen 157-184; Ye 207-302; Guo et al. 347-373; Matsuura 53-66; Hiroko Matsuura 147-170). This linguistic and cultural bias in

the field resulted in culturally-biased set of findings which were, in many cases, overgeneralized. Also, the differences encountered between Mandarin Chinese and American English have been mistaken as differences between east and west in a very dichotomous manner. Such a dichotomous world view results in serious drawbacks in many fields of study like language teaching and translation/interpretation studies, which are directly related with the cultural implications.

Methodology

This study is a data driven study based on a corpus of compliments on Facebook photo comments, Facebook Compliment Corpus (henceforth FBCC), with two sub-corpora: FBCC-T for Turkish and FBCC-AE for American English. This study has four different informant groups: female native speakers of Turkish, male native speakers of Turkish, female native speakers of American English and male native speakers of American English. Each informant group consists of 25 participants. The latest 20 compliments paid to them were imported from the Facebook page.

In the scope of this research, compliment exchanges in the pages of all four groups are collected with an aim to answer the following questions.

1. Are social media compliments in Turkish/American English formulaic?
2. What are the cultural issues that reflect in online compliments?

To be able to answer these questions, a qualitative analysis has been conducted by using Nvivo 11. This software program helped the researcher to import social media pages, categorize and analyse them.

Data sources and ethical issues

Selecting the data is a very fundamental step in the research design as the sample selected from the population is claimed to be the representatives of a larger unit, if not the universe (Dörnyei and Taguchi 17-19). In cross-cultural studies, the more variables are considered, the more reliable findings may be gathered. Therefore, it can be claimed that age, gender, ethnic background and demographic information such as the educational level are important indicators of cultural behavior; the inclusion of these strengthens the findings and discussions built on these findings.

Being unable to consider all these variables and being unable to research the possible effects of them on compliments, this research limits the age and education level of the participants so that the effects are minimized.

In order to be able to obtain reliable data from real Facebook accounts, the participants were selected according to an *Exponential Non-Discriminative Snowball Sampling* methodology. Using this technique, a new Facebook account

was signed up and a small information announcement was prepared. The possible participant group was defined and friends with the friends of friends were added.

The data in this study are collected from four groups of informants. Every informant in this study (n=100) is a university graduate between the ages of 25 and 35. As a natural consequence of the data collection technique, the power relationships between participants cannot be used as a variable; nevertheless, it can be claimed that the power relationship is mostly equal to equal as social media tools make everyone *friends*.

The participant recruitment process in computer mediated communication is one of the most difficult parts because of the ethical issues. Obtaining written consent from the informants may be problematic, especially if the researcher is conducting the research overseas. There are two opposing views regarding this informed consent issue. Some argue the importance of personal written consent, while others argue that informing them is sufficient. If there are no objections, it is ethical to use the information, as it is already available for everyone (including *non-friends*).

In this research, a new Facebook account was created. The prospective participants were added and they were sent a short message informing that the photo comments on their page were going to be used for a linguistic study on compliments. Additionally, they were asked whether they had any objections. Except for two potential participants, there were no objections. The same information was posted on the wall of the research account. Thus, the ethical concerns were eliminated.

Data analysis

The main aim of this research can be summarized as an attempt to understand the cultural load of the compliments in Turkish and American English. To achieve this, the Facebook pages with comments that include compliments were exported on Nvivo11 as PDF documents. If some qualitative data are to be classified and the relationships between them are to be shown, Nvivo works on the same logic as syntactic trees. The next step for the researcher here is to choose and classify the compliments in the PDF files according to the nodes. A node called *Cultural Elements* was used to analyse the data and as the study is a data-driven one, sub-nodes were formed during the data analysis. The qualitative analysis conducted revealed some important results about cultural elements on compliments.

Also quantitative analysis has been conducted using SPSS 20.0. T-test analysis was used to make a cross-cultural comparison especially about the topics of compliments paid in each culture.

Results

The results of the analysis indicated that compliments carry a lot of cultural elements in both cultures; however, it can be said that in Turkish the cultural load is more observable because of the intensified nature of compliments, which is very different from the formulaic nature of this act in American English. The findings on the cultural elements can be categorized in three aspects of compliments:

What to pay the compliment on as a cultural aspect

What the complimenters choose to pay the compliment on is definitely a cultural issue. It is not surprising that some topics of compliments are common in some cultures while some others are less common domains. Moreover, when the genders of the interlocutors are also taken into account, it should be noted that cultural boundaries turn out to be very clearly drawn in terms of topics of compliments.

The findings of this study indicate some cross-cultural similarities as well as differences. Among the many studies conducted on compliments, without any exceptions, all studies reported appearance as the most common topic (Parisi and Wogan 21-29; Ruhi, "Complimenting Women in Turkish" 401-427; Rees-Miller 2673-2688; Şakırgil and Çubukçu 1126-1135). In line with the findings of previous research, this study indicates that physical appearance is the most commonly complimented topic. Although literature verifies this finding, the nature of data, social media photo comments, may also have an influence in such an overuse of appearance compliments.

Table 1
Comparison of topics of Compliments in FBCC-T and FBCC-AE

TOPICS	T -n	T-Mean	AE-n	AE-Mean	Sig
Appearance	564	22,8	323	13,04	0,0
Photo	131	5,24	270	11,04	0,0
Possessions	115	4,6	123	4,96	0,494
Personality	41	1,64	13	0,52	0,001
Performance	37	1,48	26	1,24	0,493
T-Combination	42	1,64	68	2,68	0,02
Unclear	70	2,76	177	7,16	0,0
TOTAL	1000		1000		

Significance level is $\alpha = 0.05$

Despite the similarity in the choice of topics of compliments, the way these topics are conveyed change culturally. A striking and unique example that is totally cultural and has never been reported in a previous study is the notion of being an "adam" [man] as a topic of compliment. In Turkish, there are a number of idioms

and phrases that use the word “adam” as equal to “insan” [human]. A most commonly used expression is “adam ol” which means “to be a man” in word for word translation and means “to act properly”. This may be used as an imperative to a person who misbehaves to ask him/her to “act as a man”, that is, to act in the correct and ideal manner. Namely, being correct in manner or attitude is measured by how “manly” you can behave. The word “man” covers being fair, just, ethical, forgiving, manful and many other positive adjectives. See the examples of “manly” compliments.

Sample 1

(Photograph: A portrait of a young man)

Complimenter (Male): Adamsın [You are ¹a man.]

Complimentee (Male): (uses the like button)

Sample 2

(Photograph: A full body shot of a young man)

Complimenter (Male): Alem adam görsün [Everyone should see this/the man!]

Complimentee (Male): (uses the like button)

(FBCC)

In both examples, the compliment is on some personality traits that are associated with the complimentees’ gender. That is, the gender and the stereotypical traits attributed to this gender can be considered as a compliment. Although American English bears similar examples of stereotypical language use, FBCC does not provide any examples of such in American English, which shows that there is a cultural difference in this respect.

The cultural aspects about the topics of compliments can be observed in the ones paid to the family. In the examples of Turkish compliments in FBCC, family, kids and even the spouses are complimented a lot more than the American ones. This also definitely has cultural implications about the idea of family and how much *being a family* is valued.

Another important cultural aspect is using ballads or poetry in Turkish compliments. See the example below:

Sample 3

(Photograph: The portrait of a young woman as a profile photo on Facebook)

Complimenter (Male): @gamze, Sevgili Gamze; “Gözlerin, gözlerin, gözlerin / İster hastaneme gel, ister hapishaneme / Gözlerin, gözlerin, gözlerin / Hep güneşte...” diye devam eden Nazım Hikmet’in bir şiiri var. Nazım Usta o şiiri, senin dünyaya önceki gelişinde bu fotoğrafı görerek mi yazmıştı?

¹ In the translations, word for word translations were used so that the lexical meaning-culture relationships can be more clearly portrayed.

[Dear Gamze, “Your eyes, your eyes, your eyes/ Come to my hospital room if you like or my prison visit/ Your eyes, your eyes, your eyes/In the sun always they sit...” is a poem by Nazım Hikmet. Did Nazım Usta write the poem by seeing you in your previous life?]

Complimentee (Female): - (No response)

(FBCC)

As can be seen, the compliment seems formulaic because it is paid on appearance but when looked closely, a very unconventional compliment structure is observed. Such uses make compliments in Turkish more intensified with both emotions and cultural elements. Also, not only the poem but also the reference to some background information makes it culturally loaded.

Why to pay the compliment as a cultural aspect

Not only the topic of compliments but also the drive behind paying them is an important area of research because, despite huge similarities between cultures and genders when overlooked, there are important culturally unique functions that this speech act serves for.

Before getting deep into the functions of compliments, the close relationship between the topics and the functions of them need to be underlined. What is complimented is the topic of them while why it is complimented is the function. Though the difference sounds clear, in some studies, the topics are classified according to the functions. To make such a distinction clear a comprehensive study on the functions of compliments was carried out by Manes & Wolfson. They made a very detailed list of reasons why people pay compliments in different contexts. The functions they identified are as follows:

- (i) to establish solidarity between speaker and addressee (ii) to express approval or admiration toward the listener (iii) to strengthen or replace other speech acts like apologizing, greeting (iv) to strengthen or replace other speech acts like apologizing, greeting, reprimanding, or thanking, request reprimanding, or thanking, request (v) to soften acts such as criticism (vi) to offer praise, to reinforce or encourage the desired behavior in specific situations, such as teaching and learning (vii) to offer praise, to reinforce or encourage the desired behavior in specific situations, such as teaching and learning (viii) as sarcasm (ix) as conversation opener (x) to show interest in the issue at hand for example by asking follow-up questions (Manes and Wolfson 102).

This list, being very comprehensive, can cover many occurrences in different contexts and cultures. However, it is not adequate to cover the newly emerging media that have their unique norms and etiquettes. This paper reports the existence of some common and culture-unique functions of compliments on social

media while adding upon the list with some unique uses that can only be observed in Turkish on this new virtual language use.

This study reports that on Facebook, approval and admiration are the most common functions in both Turkish and American English. Apart from admiration and approval, people, especially Turkish participants, are reported to pay compliments to emphasize solidarity. Utterances paid to emphasize the closeness and connection between the interlocutors are more common in Turkish corpus while in American one fewer examples do exist. The other functions reported by Manes and Wolfson are either very rare or non-existent in FBCC.

Remembering the list of functions of compliments elaborated by Manes and Wolfson, some important functions reported in the literature may not exist in the social media tools because of the nature of this new multi-observer and multi-interlocutor type of communication. In online communication, the utterances are made on a public (everyone can see) or semi-public (only the allowed users can see) domain. This content-wise private but occurrence-wise public use of language bears very different face concerns when compared with face to face communication. There are innumerable observers and (if they choose to be so) interlocutors. Therefore, the face concerns of both interlocutors are expected to be different from face to face communication, which might be leading to more hesitant and more formulaic use of language.

On the other hand, FBCC provides a lot of examples of variation between the two languages, in Turkish negative and violent vocabulary as well as sarcasm are used to pay compliments. The basic function is to show how intense the emotions of the complimenter is. A good example is “yerim ben bu çocuğu, ısırırım yanaklarından” [I eat this kid; I bite his/her cheeks] (FBCC). In English, and in any other language studied so far, such violent vocabulary has not been reported. Also a word-for-word translation of such a compliment would fall short in conveying the underlying meaning of this emotionally intense compliment on how cute the kid is. That is, negative vocabulary and sarcasm are evident in Turkish compliments and they can be considered as unique elements in the culture.

Another cultural use is about how the complimentee is being appreciated. In some cases, the complimentee is appraised by being likened to a famous person. Such an example does not exist in previous literature. Depending on the physical appearance, the look, the activity or the context of the photo, the complimentee can be likened to a politician, a singer or an artist. See the example below:

Sample 4

(Photograph: a group of friends enjoying around a table.)

Complimenter (Male): Maşallah Atatürk gibi bakmış benim can arkadaşım
[Maşallah You look like Atatürk, my bosom friend]

Complimentee (Male): Eyvallah [Eyvallah]

(FBCC)

As can be seen from the example above, the complimentee is likened to a famous person as a compliment and it is accepted by the word “eyvallah”, a sign of thanking.

Another striking point in the exchange above is the use of vocabulary like “maşallah” and “eyvallah”. This finding is similar to what was reported by Sidraschi (225) in a study conducted in two villages in Italy. What was shattering about that study was the claim that compliments are not always positive speech acts. They might have negative connotations like jealousy and they may bring negative outcomes like the loss or damage to the complimented item/person. Therefore, being complimented may not be as desired as one could imagine in some contexts. In such cases, people who are complimented respond using a specific word to protect themselves.

Similar to what Sidraschi found about the possible threat being complimented bears, in Turkish culture compliments are not absolute positive acts because of the belief in evil eye. The underlying illocutionary force can sometimes, though not always, be regarded as jealousy or envy. Therefore, this underlying negativity can reflect itself with a negative outcome of the compliment act, like the loss of the complimented item or decline in the complimented positive aspect. In order to deal with this threatening nature of compliments, the interlocutors add the word “maşallah” [*May God protect you from the evil eye*] to their utterances. In some cases, the response includes the same word as an acceptance strategy. See the example below:

Sample 5

(Photograph: A couple standing by the pool)

Complimenter (Male): maşallah ne güzel olmuşsunuz çirkinler;))))

[Maşallah, How nice you, the uglies:)))]

Complimentee (Female): (no response)

(FBCC)

The idea of evil eye reflects itself not only in the use of “maşallah” but also in the use of negative words for positive meanings. In FBCC, there are many cases of negative words used for positive connotations. As can be seen in the example above, the couple is complimented for being “ugly”. This is another indication of the belief in evil eye. By using vocabulary with negative meaning, the negative energy that results in negative outcomes is thought to be blocked.

Another cultural use in compliments is the use of idioms and cultural references in compliments. This increases the creative structures and uses in compliments. See the example below:

Sample 6

(Photograph: A young woman studying)

Complimenter (Male) araba 6. viteste gidiyor. gazı kesme :::)))

[The car is going on the 6th gear. don't slow it down :::)]

Complimentee (Female): (uses the like button) ☺

(FBCC)

In the example above, the photo shows a woman studying and, apparently, her studies are facilitated in the compliment which claims that “the car” is going extremely fast (6th gear is the ultimate a regular car can go by) and the person who posts the comment explicitly facilitates the desired behaviour.

All these functions underline how culturally loaded compliments are. Therefore, any claim of universality in compliment exchanges need to be approached with caution.

Responding to compliments as a cultural representation

The most widely and cross-culturally studied aspect of compliment exchanges is the study of compliment responses and the studies have shown that there are striking differences in the way people in different cultures respond to the compliments paid to them.

By nature, compliments are the speech acts that express appreciation and admiration to the other interlocutor about some quality s/he has or bears. Therefore, acceptance can be considered as the expected response to any act of such. In a cross-cultural study, Daikuhara reported a comparative finding on similarities in compliment responses. An analysis between a group of American and Japanese interlocutors revealed that both groups used similar strategies in their responses. Both groups downplayed the compliments and used the appreciation token “thank you”. However, quite a few other studies (Golato 90-121; Guo et al. 347-373; Ruhi 43-101) have shown that acceptance is not the default response in compliment exchanges and even acceptance has different levels of intensity. Golato showed that Germans *overwhelmingly* accept them while Chen and Yang indicated that rejecting compliments is the most common strategy in Chinese. However, in their 2010 study, Chen & Yang reported a change in Chinese culture towards more western strategies (1951-1963). The authors attribute this change to the influence of western culture.

Ruhi in her pioneering study, “Politeness in Compliment Responses,” worked with a data-set collected through field observations. Field workers were provided with a form on which they wrote the compliment exchanges they encountered; and they took notes on the possible important issues in the case of the compliment. Her research on compliment responses in Turkish shows that native speakers of Turkish accept compliments 61% of the time, reject them 23% of the time and deflect/evade them 16% of the time. This study also shows that responses to compliments are culture-bound acts.

With the introduction of social media tools, the norms of responding to compliments are also reshaped. Facebook and many other social media tools provide their users with opportunities to respond to any comments verbally or

with any emoticons they can choose among the provided hundreds to use as non-verbal elements in their communications. In addition, Facebook has a token “like” that is symbolized with a “thumbs up”. This image and/or the “like” is a very promising area of research because the “like” is not only *like* any more. Some news about a funeral or a child abuse can be “liked” thousands of time. Therefore, it can be claimed that *like* is not only an appreciation or approval but also a recognition token.

This study reveals that in both American English and in Turkish, like is the most commonly used strategy to respond to a compliment. This similarity in responses between the two cultures might be because of three reasons: i) it is technically easier to respond with a like ii) social media is turning out to be a new and broader culture in which behaviours are getting more and more alike iii) like is neither a strong rejection nor a strong acceptance, not strongly challenging modesty or agreement maxims of Leech.

Sample 7

(Photograph: The portrait of a young woman as a profile photo on Facebook)

Complimenter(Female): çok güzelsin en güzelsin... [You are beautiful; you are the most beautiful...]

Complimentee (Female): - (No verbal response) (uses the like button)
(FBCC)

In the example above, the compliment is accepted in a very mild manner. The like button helps the complimentee recognize and appreciate the compliment without directly and explicitly accepting it.

Also, the analysis of verbal compliment responses indicate similarity between the two cultures. In both cultures, the compliments can be left unresponded or mostly a mild appreciation token like “thank you” is used as a response. The use of explicit verbal acceptance does not indicate statistically significant cultural differences between American English and Turkish data.

Revisiting the notion of compliments

The results of the study show that compliments are culture-bound language uses rather than formulaic expressions of appreciation. As Sidraschi put it compliments can even be considered as negative acts. FBCC also offers similar examples in which complimentees are protected from *the evil eye* by some words like *maşallah*, which implies that these speech acts may carry the representations of negative illocutionary forces.

Furthermore, the increase in the number of languages and contexts being studied results in a change in the notion of compliment exchanges. There have been a couple of studies that challenged some widely accepted norms about compliments bringing up question marks about the compliment exchanges and even the

definition of a compliment. The first ground-breaking study was Adachi, challenging the notion of the initiation of compliment exchanges (16-20). Up to this study, the utterance of the compliment was considered as the starting point of the adjacency pairs including the compliment and the response to it. However, Adachi claimed that it is not the complimenter but the complimentee that calls for the speech act (fishing for it). The topic of the compliment is, in most cases, fished by the complimentee. This study is striking because for the first time the initiation of a compliment has been considered as an act of the complimentee, the knowledge of which leads current studies focus more on the complimentee while studying the illocutionary force behind the compliments (14-20). The data sources of this study, Facebook photo comments, also confirm what Adachi found. The initiation of the compliment exchange starts not with the act itself but with the post of the complimentee. This can be considered as a fishing as well.

These ground-breaking findings and the indication of cultural differences reflected in compliment exchanges necessitate a revisit of the notion of compliments. More studies are needed from a variety of cultures to be able to reach a cross-cultural perspective on what a compliment is. Even the definition needs to be revisited with the changes in language use and research world.

Summary and Conclusion

Cross-cultural studies underline a need to look deeper into a variety of different cultures other than the ones dominating the speech act studies so that universal norms and cultural differences, if there are any, are recognized and appreciated in cross-cultural and intercultural settings, the number of which is increasing day by day. Unsettling the already accepted definitions of compliments makes it necessary to make more culture-specific ones in order to cover the basic cultural premises they comprise.

This study reports on cross-cultural similarities and differences in a corpus of compliments collected through a social media tool. The quantitative and qualitative findings indicate many similarities as well as differences.

The points pondered in this study opens the way for further research in both cross-cultural and inter-cultural pragmatics. Inadequate number of studies in Turkish and many other languages cause some biased findings to be overgeneralized. Therefore, more studies in a variety of languages are also needed.

Moreover, in the last decades, social media tools have created not only a new language but also a unique set of norms in which a common culture is represented. This newly flourished culture in which different norms of behaviours and language uses exist is to be elaborated and such studies have much to offer many fields of linguistics.

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