A Contrastive Study of Facebook Compliments in English and Arabic with Reference to Translation

Lecturer Omar Dawood Omar

Dep. of English

College of Basic Education

University of Mosul , Iraq

Abstract:

This study is an attempt to investigate the similarities and differences regarding English and Arabic facebook compliments; namely, lovely expressions. As English and Arabic are neither genetically cognate nor are related culturally, facebook complimenters inevitably commit mistakes in this regard. The study comes up with the fact that the Arab coplimenters opt for exaggeration more than the English people do.

الملخص:

تتناول الدراسة الحالية أوجه التّشابه والاختلاف فيما يتعلق بالمجاملات في اللغتين العربية والانجليزية على موقع التواصل الاجتماعي (فيسبوك). وعلى وجه الدقة عبارات المحبة. وبما أن اللغتين الانجليزية والعربية ليستا من أصل واحد. بل ومتباعدتان ثقافيا. فلا مناص من ارتكاب الأخطاء من قبل المجاملين على الموقع المذكور. هذا وتخلص الدراسة إلى أن المجاملين العرب في هذا المجال يميلون نحو المبالغة أكثر من المجاملين الانجليز.

1. Introduction:

As Facebook is realized as an online means of communication, it helps people to express their ideas, exchange information or feelings. Language is one of the most significant devices of social behavior. So, paying compliments is commonly used in all languages. Each language has its own way(s) to compliment. English and Arabic are not an exception.

Compliment is a speech act which almost explicitly gives special prestige to the addressee via praising (Holmes, 1988:485). Wolfson and Judd (1983: 85) view that compliment is used to provide a reward to encourage a certain situation. In other words, it can be regarded as an expression of approval and admiration. Pragmatically speaking, Holmes (1988:485) points out: [compliment is] "a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some good (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer". Thus, paying compliments is a very common expressive speech act that in case the complimenter fails to achieve his/her goals by misusing compliments, communication failure inevitably occurs. Similarly, Rizk (2003:404)

views that pragmatic transfer is "the influence of learners pragmatic knowledge of language and culture other than the target language on their comprehension, production, and acquisition of L2 pragmatic information". This means that communication across cultures is a complex process since it requires linguistic and pragmatic competence equally. Investigating the definition of compliments according to Donald O. B. et al, 1992:200): "a verbal expression of courteous praise// an action showing praise and respect// a formula of greeting", one can find that that this definition looks at the topic from one angle, verbal compliment. Digging deeper, this study divides compliment into two main categories: verbal and non-verbal compliments. On their part, Brown & Levinson (1987, 74-5) in their politeness model regard compliments as "redressive action" counteracting the fundamental face damage of a face threatening act.

Compliment formulas require adjectives to indicate the sender's positive evaluation. The most recurring adjectives employed to indicate praising are: *Nice*, *beautiful, pretty*, and *great*. Frequently, such verbs as *like* and *love* are used to indicate positive evaluation regarding what's being said or written.

Meanwhile, some compliments which do not make use of an adjective or verb, praising is conveyed via such nouns as *genius and angel* or an adverb *well* (Wolfson and Judd, 1983:90).

2. Previous Studies:

Most of the previous works on compliments have been explored from one perspective, verbal behavior. Manes and Wolfson (1981: 117) investigated the complimenting aspects in American English. They found that the predominant patterns of compliments are realized in set of adjectives and verbs. 80% of the compliments in the American English fall into certain syntactic patterns. Also, they concluded that 2/3 of the adjectival expressions employ fixed adjectives.

Holmes (1986:490) selected 200 polite expressions in New Zealand.The study came up with the fact that almost 80% of the data in question belong to certain syntactic patterns, besides some fixed adjectives. Skill and personal appearance are the most recurring praised attributes.

Focusing on anthropology, Herbert (1990: 207) tackled American compliments for praising, compliment forms, and relationships between the complimenter and complimentee. Performance and appearance are the most commonly praised attributes.

On their part, Nelson and Al-Batal (1996: 300) drew a distinction between the American and Egyptian compliments. They argued that both American and Egyptian compliments opt for adjectival; personal appearance is the most recurring attribute. Stylistically speaking, Egyptian compliments are longer than the American ones, and reflect more comparative forms. What's more, metaphorical expressions are predominant. Americans tend to compliment more frequently than Egyptians. Egyptians tend to compliment personality traits, whereas Americans tend to compliment skills and work; and both Egyptians and Americans prefer direct rather than indirect means of complimenting. Again, the study did not refer to social variables and its effect on the production of a compliment expression.

Ye (1995) conducted a discourse completion task to 96 native speakers of Chinese in China. Ye investigated compliment structure, focus, and response strategy. Some distinctive features of Chinese compliment emerged: the most frequently used positive semantic carriers in Chinese compliments are adjectives, stative verbs and adverbs. The Chinese culture prefers

paying compliments on performance rather than appearance. There are some limits to paying compliments on genders because, while giving compliments in Western cultures is seen as a courtesy; in Chinese it can be regarded as a violation of social order.

Lee (2009) examined the act of complimenting and responding to compliments among Singaporean Chinese using 300 compliments. The study focused more on responses to compliments, and did not present a comprehensive analysis of the compliments among Singaporean Chinese.

The above-mentioned studies, however, did not explore the semiotics of compliments which are commonly used nowadays among interlocutors on social media to highly appreciate each other. Besides, most of the previous studies focused on the responses to compliments only. Furthermore, the translational aspect of compliments has not been examined.

3. Methodology

The ethnographic method for collecting data in this study is thought to be the most reliable way since it investigates the social relationships between the complimenter and complimentee. The data in question were classified into two classes: Arabic and English. 500 Arabic and English compliments were selected, divided equally and translated into both languages by the researcher.

4. Compliments in English:

Compliments in English are classified into three categories: verbal, non-verbal and non/verbal. The first is associated with such topics as endearment, diminution, litotes, hyperbole, financial terms, religious terms, simile, left-handed compliment, flashback, metonymy or abbreviations. Non-verbal compliments, however, are realized in such icons as kissing, shrilling, dancing, heart spreading, kneeling or rose – spreading. The third type is manifested in amalgamating the verbal and non-verbal to form a hybrid type, non/verbal.

4.1. Verbal:

4.1.1. Endearments: expressions indicating intimacy among the participants. They are realized in such phenomena as diminution, metaphor, litotes or hyperbole.

- Diminution: baby, sweety, sweetie, sissy, little doll, or little princess.

- Litotes: nice, beautiful or I like this.

- Metaphor: bird, honey, moon, angel or princess.

- Hyperbole: send a search team because I lost in those eyes, one word for you 'flawless', smashing, extraordinary, so cute, looking unreal, super sweet, looking terrific, stunning, darling or sweetheart.

4.1.2. Financial Terms:

Million dollars smile !

4.1.3.Religious Terms:

O(h)! My God!, Divine Sarah, praying for you, I hope all is well with you, our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family, all the best, or my heart and thoughts are with you.

4.1.4. Simile:

Like angels, honey, moon or baby or if I were a ninja turtle, you would be my April O'Neal.

4.1.5.Left-handed Compliment:

Pretty eyes where is your smile?, or I miss your smiling face!

4.1.6. Flashback:

You make me nostalgic to the old good days! or you brought beautiful memories to so many hearts!

4.1.7. Metonymy:

Touch me not, a rose of Tralee, forget me not, I love the curls, or model, the sky is high, and the fish cannot fly!

4.1.8. Abbreviations are shortened forms of word(s) used for economy in effort. As far as compliments are concerned, they can be classified into four categories: religious, admiring , expressing attitude and clipping. They are as follows:

- Religious: OMG = O(h) my God!

- Admiring: gr8 = great, nyc = nice, lol = lots of love, or 2qt = too cute.

- Expressing attitude: ILY = Ilove you, x = kiss, or ox = hug and kiss.

- Clipping: fab hon = fabulous honey, or nyc pic = nice picture.

4.2. Non-verbal:

Rose/ heart spreading, shrilling, dancing, clapping, laughing, etc.

4.3.1 Non/verbal:

Those eyes + ☺ + x, a little mini version of you + ♥, or divine Rose + ox

5. Compliments in Arabic:

The theoretical background of compliments has been elaborated in the previous section, with examples from English. The present section, however, tackles facebook compliments compliments in Arabic. This includes contrasting and comparing the complimenting devices and their use in the languages in question.

In Arabic, compliments are classified into three main classes: verbal, non-verbal and non/verbal. The first is associated with such topics as honorifics, endearment, financial terms, religious terms, simile or transliteration. Non-verbal compliments, however, are realized in such icons as kissing, shrilling, dancing, heart spreading, kneeling or rose –spreading. The third type is apparent in amalgamating the verbal and non-verbal to form a hybrid type, non/verbal.

In Arab culture, face plays an essential role in regulating people's speech behaviors. Religious beliefs and emotional acts to self-image and to the image of others pose individuals to make constant conscious and unconscious behaviors to take face into consideration in their interactions. This is why Arabs find it shameful to refuse a request bluntly by saying 'No' or 'I can't'. Instead, their replies usually are associated with elaborating, lengthy, and convincing justifications not only to save their own face but also to protect the face of others.

5.1. Verbal Compliments:

5.1.1. Honorifics are conventionalized forms employed by addressers to express their respectful attitudes towards the addressees. In this connection, Brown and Levinson (1987: 179) pointed out that honorifics are "direct grammatical encodings of relative social status between participants and persons or things referred to in the communicative event". As far as verbal compliments are concerned, Irvine (1995: 1) points out that "linguistic honorifics are forms of speech that signal social deference, through conventionalized understandings of some aspects"

Notably, some scholars view honorifics as highly associated with 'power' more than 'solidarity'. For example, Agha (1994: 294) demonstrates that the honorifics in all languages are governed by the social status of the addressees.

Socially speaking, the above-mentioned scholar tries to generalize that the degree of respect is confined to 'power'. This study, however, refutes this view since most of the social media friends are not governed by self-interest, kinship or the like. They, however, express politeness towards each other. To demonstrate this, consider the following:

منور دكتور (shining Doctor))

(علي) منور دكتور+ الاسم (shining Doctor)+name(Ali)

Superlative form+ title (احلى استاذ)

Superlative form+ title+name (احلى) قاسم استاذ

Notably, honorifics in Arabic are commonly manifested in teknonyms, a man is called by the father of his first child (see: Al-Niaymi, 2007: 11). Regard the following example:

وردة ابو سالم (As lovely as a rose, Abu Salim).

5.1.2. Endearments: statements referring to intimacy among the locutors. They are realized in such phenomena as diminution, metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, superlative degrees and/or emphasis. To demonstrate so, consider the following expressions:

أحلى حمودي (the most handsome, Hammoody)

Superlative + diminutive form.

القمر يخجل منك (you are more beautiful than the moon).

Metaphor

والله انت قمر (By God, you are moon).

Metaphor + emphasis

أحلى ضلع (my best dude ever).

Metonymy + superlative form

ورد لازم ورد (Rose catching rose).

Metonymy

أنت عاصمة نساء العالم بسحر جمالك (like angels),

Hyperbole

5.1.3. Indirect Praise:

عسل (honey), قمر (moon), ذهب (precious), وردة ربيع بنيسان (rose), قمررر (moooon), اطلالة جميلة (looking good), لطيف (nice), جميل (shining), شمعة (beautiful/handsome), أنيق (elegant), رائع (gorgeous), etc.

5.1.4. Request:

ممكن نتعارف بجد واخلاص؟ (may I introduce myself?)

Greeting + hyperbole:

صباح الفل/صباح العسل (good morning, hello, hi, etc.).

مساء الفل والياسمين (good afternoon, hello, hi, etc.).

5.1.5.   Financial Expressions:

ألا بشدة ! (priceless)

ألف مبارك (congratulations)

مليون مبارك (congratulations).

5.1.6.   Religious Terms:

نور على نور (Light upon light)

ما شاء الله (That which Allah wills)

تبارك الله (blessed be Allah)

الله أكبر (Allah is the Greatest)

5.1.7.   Religious term + loan word:

ما شاء الله برنسيسة (princess)

تبارك الله كوين (queen).

5.1.8. Transliteration:

كوول (cool)

برنسيسة (princess)

كوين (queen)

Jameelun jiddan (very good)

5.1.9.   Simile:

كالبدر ليل الست بعد ثمان (like full moon).

5.2. Non-verbal:

Rose/spreading, heart, shrilling, dancing, clapping, laughing, etc.

5.3. Non/verbal:

أحلى دكتور زيد ♥

Honorific term + Name + ♥

♣ أجمل ضلع♣ (my best dude ever)

Superlative   form   +noun   +   lovely iconicity

أحلى حمودي ♥ (The most handsome Hammoody)

Superlative form +diminutive form + lovely iconicity

5.3.1. Indirect Praise realized in Metonymy + lovely icon

♣ وردة ربع بنيسان ♣ (rose ♣).

Transliteration:

♣(cool ♣) كوول

♥(cute ♥). كيوت

Conclusion:

Although both English and Arabic employ the main types of compliments: verbal and non/verbal, the languages under investigation uncover marked differences in their utilizing of such devices. In other words, both English and Arabic use complimentary expressions, but they differ in using the subtypes. Notably, these differences can be attributed to two points: distribution and frequency. Consider the following examples:

1. For the sake of praising and complimenting, Arabic opts for using such grammatical constructions as superlative degrees followed by honorific expressions to highlight the situation. English, however, does not employ honorific expressions when commenting on a given post or photo: منور دكتور(shining Doctor)

منور دكتور+ الاسم (علي) (shining Doctor)+name(Ali)

Superlative form+ title (احلى استاذ)

.Teknonyms which are widespread address forms in Arabic , a man is called by the father of his first child, is

commonly used in Arabic. Consider the following example:

'وردة ابو سالم' 'As lovely as a rose, Abu Salim'. English, however, does not permit so.

2. Endearments in Arabic cannot be achieved without accompanying some grammatical constructions (superlative form) or figures of speech such as metaphor, metonymy, hyperbole, etc. The following complimentary expressions are representative:

أحلى حمودي(the most handsome, Hammoody)

Superlative + diminutive form.

القمر يخجل منك(you are more beautiful than the moon).

Metaphor

English, on the other hand, tends to use the diminutive forms alone as in: sweety, sweetie, baby, and so on. Occasionally, such figures of speech as metaphor, metonymy or hyperbole can be used in this regard as in: bird, honey, moon, or I like the curls.

3. Regarding the indirect praise which is realized in mentioning some good attributes like 'beautiful, 'handsome', 'nice', great' and the like , both languages

employ the same devices equally. The major difference between them is that Arabic tends to use some request for self- introducing as in:

ممكن نتعارف بجد واخلاص؟ (may I introduce myself?). This does not exist in English compliments.

4. Both languages use complimentary religious expressions, but they differ in the way of expressing solidarity to the complimentee(s). Arabic, for example, opts for using interjection/transliteration as in:

نور على نور (Light upon light)

ما شاء الله (That which Allah wills)

تبارك الله (blessed be Allah)

الله أكبر (Allah is the Greatest)

ما شاء الله برنسيسة (princess)

تبارك الله كوين (queen).

English, on the other hand, tends to focus on litanies and supplication to the addressee as in:

praying for you, I hope all is well with you, our thoughts and prayers are with you and your family, all the best, or my heart and thoughts are with you.

5. Transliteration: this technique, though less frequently used, seems to be restricted to individuals speaking English or influenced by English. Look at the following:

ما شاء الله برنسيسة (princess)

تبارك الله كوين (queen).

كوول (cool)

برنسيسة (princess)

كوين (queen)

Jameelun jiddan (very good)

As for English, there is no transliteration.

6. In terms of financial expressions, both languages behave equally.

7. Regarding the left-handed compliment, unlike Arabic, English to some extent opts for this technique as in:

Pretty eyes where is your smile?, or I miss your smiling face!

8. Concerning flashback, unlike Arabic, English tends to use some expressions indicating flashback to remember some old good days for him/her. Consider the following:

You make me nostalgic to the old good days! or you brought beautiful memories to so many hearts!

9. Rarely does the current study reveal using abbreviations in Arabic. English, however, is frequently abundant with abbreviations in this regard. To demonstrate so, look at the following:

- Religious: OMG = O(h) my God!

- Admiring: gr8 = great, nyc = nice, lol = lots of love, or 2qt = too cute.

- Expressing attitude: ILY = Ilove you, x = kiss, or ox = hug and kiss.

- Clipping: fab hon = fabulous honey, or nyc pic = nice picture.

10. Culturally speaking, both languages opt for different signs due to the fact that they belong to different origins. Arabic, on one hand, for example uses: وردة ربيع بنيسان (rose) to indicate beauty. English, on the other hand, is in favor of such expressions as ' Touch me not, a rose of Tralee, forget me not, and the like praising. As for non/verbal complimenting devices, both languages behave equally.

REFERENCES:

Agha, A. (1994): "Honorificantion". In: Annual Review of Anthropology, 23, pp 277-302.

Al-Niaymy, H. S. (2007). Honorific Expressions in Arabic and English with reference to other languages. Tikrit University Journal for Humanities, vol. 14, No. 3, pp: 1-14.

Brown, P. & Levinson, S. (1987). Politeness: Some universals in language usage. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Donald O. B. et al (1992) New Webster's Dictionary and Thesaurus of the English Language. Lexicon Publications, INC.

Herbert, R. (1990). Sex-based differences in compliment behavior. Language in Society,19, 201-224

Holmes, J. (1988). Compliments and compliment responses in New Zealand English. Anthropological Linguistics, *28*(4), 485-508.

Holmes, J. (1988). Paying compliments: A sex-preferential politeness strategy. Journal of Pragmatics, 12: 445-465.

Irvine, J. T. (1995): "Honorifics". In: J. Verschueren et al. (eds.), Handbook of Pragmatics, Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins, pp 1-22.

Lee, C. (2009). Compliments and responses during Chinese New Year celebration. Journal of Pragmatics, 19(4), 519-541.

Manes, J.& Wolfson, N. (1981). The compliment formula. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), Conversational routine (pp. 115-132). The Hague: Mouton.

Nelson,G., Bakary, W. &AL Batal, M. (1996).Egyptian and American compliments: Focus on second language learners. In S. M. Gass &J. Neu(Eds.),Speech acts across cultures: Challenges to communication in a second language(pp. 109-128). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Rizk, S. (2003). Why say "NO!" when you refuse? TESOL Arabia 2002 Conference Proceedings, 7, 401431.

Wolfson, Nessa and Elliot, Judd. 1983. Sociolinguistics and Language

Acquisitions. Massachussetts: Newbury House Publishers Inc.

Ye, L. (1995). Complimenting in Mandarin Chinese. In G. Kasper (Ed.), Pragmatics of Chinese as a native and target language(pp. 207-295). Manoa, Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i Press.