



COMPLIMENTS BY MALE AND FEMALE CHARACTERS IN *ME BEFORE YOU* MOVIE

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Abstract

Compliments are common in daily communication as they serve to build solidarity. They are given within speech communities depending on the extra-linguistic factors, such as gender and the relationship among the speakers. The current research focuses on how male and female characters in the movie “Me Before You” express compliments. This study elaborates real examples on how compliments are used to serve particular social functions. This research employed a descriptive qualitative method in analyzing the data from the subtitle of “Me Before You” movie using a framework by Herbert, Manes, and Wolfson. The researcher found there were four compliment functions that were used by male and female characters in the movie, namely expressing admiration, solidarity, conversation strategy and reinforced desired behavior. However, in the movie, we did not find the compliments to replace other speech acts and soften criticisms as the language used in the movie is highly influenced by the main characters that tend to be straight forward. The use of compliments is highly affected by the traits of the characters and the plot narrating how the lead male character undergoes the transitions to be a better person.

Keywords: gender, compliments, characters

INTRODUCTION

Compliments are common in daily language. They are used to express rapport and build solidarity between the compliment givers and receivers (Holmes, 1995). They can be expressed directly and indirectly (Wu, 2008, Sun, n.d.) to attribute credits to others. Compliments express admiration to others' appearance, possessions, abilities or personality (Manes & Wolfson, 1980; Placencia & Lower, 2013; Dirgeyasa, 2015).

People might use different expressions in giving compliments. Mannes and Wolfson (1980) classified three dominant

syntactic structures of compliments. Around 85% of those patterns are [NP + ADJ] as in the sentence “*The food is so delicious*”, [I+love/like+NP] as in the sentence “*I love your style*”, and (Pron+really+Adj+NP] as in the sentence “*It was a really great trip.*” From the examples we can see that positive adjectives such as adorable, wonderful, or great are used in giving compliments. Verbs showing positive markers can also be used, such as love, like, admire, or amaze.

Socio-cultural context within speech plays an important role in expressing compliments (Rose, 2001, Dirgeyasa,

2015). The factors are context, cultural protocols, and individual interpretation (Tang & Zhang, 2009; see Dwiniasih, 2018). Moreover, Zhihui (2001, p.8) states that social and situational factors influence the study of act behavior. Extra-linguistic factors that can influence the use of speech acts are gender, age, levels of education, social distance, social relationship, style, and ethnicity.

One of the extra-linguistic factors that can influence the use of language including compliments is gender. A sizable literature investigates the link between gender and language (Alrausan, Awal, Salehuddin, 2016; Gavenila, Arsa, & Pasaribu, 2019; Pasaribu, 2017; Yusof and Hoon, 2014), although the relationship is not always straightforward. Considering this factor, the study is interested in knowing how male and female characters with their own characteristics compliment others. According to Coates (1991: 64) "Female speakers will use a higher proportion of prestige forms than male speakers. In other words, the prestige norms seem to exert a stronger influence on women than on men." Holmes (1995) and Herbert (1990) find that males and females are different in using syntactic patterns and choosing lexical items. Holmes (1988) reveals that females tend to give more compliments than males do. Another project by Wu (2008) states that in giving compliment females tend to avoid direct statements and tend to convey hesitation or uncertainty. Furthermore, Wu (2008) also states that it is because females like to use psychological state more often while males are more direct or straight to the points to avoid hesitation or uncertainty.

While other studies seek how gender differences affect the use of compliments between men and women, in this present research we are intrigued to know the functions of compliments used by both male and female characters. Yusof and

Hoon (2014) studied compliments and compliments responses in Twitter. They suggest that there are noteworthy differences among male and female participants in compliment and compliment responses. While women tended to compliment appearance, men tended to praise possessions. In responding to compliments, female speakers accept the compliment to give positive face, while male tended to use comment acceptance. In responding to the compliments, Heidari et. al. (2009) noted that teenage Iranian females tended to reject compliments rather than the opposite gender. However, Cai (2012) in his preliminary study found out that Chinese female students have more tendency to accept compliments than male students. This gap suggests that further studies on compliments and gender are necessary.

There are several types of compliments based on their functions (Herbert, Wolfson, and Manes in Yusof and Hoon, 2014). The first one is to express admiration. The speakers want to express admiration, approval of receivers' appearance, taste or work to the receivers. The speakers usually give these compliments spontaneously to the receivers because they are amazed to the receivers (Herbert in Yusof and Hoon 2014). Secondly, one of the most important functions of compliment is to establish the solidarity. By giving compliments to others, the speakers can maintain good relationships with the receivers. It can be used as a method to establish a good relationship with others (Wolfson, 1989). Compliments can also be used to replace the speech formulas, such as thanking, apologizing and greeting. Other compliments are used to soften face threatening acts. This function is used by the speakers when the speakers want to express personal opinions to the receivers but the speakers still want to maintain good relations with

the receivers. This compliment is usually used when people want to express apologies, requests and criticisms. Therefore, the speakers usually use the words “but” and other contrary conjunctions. Compliments can also be used as strategies to start conversations because compliments can serve simple and neutral topics. Furthermore, compliments also play some roles in giving encouragements to reinforce the receivers to keep doing the desired behavior (Manes, 1983). This compliment is usually used by the teachers to encourage the students in the class as a positive feedback. The expressions are *excellent, good job, or well done*. Therefore, within limited corpus, we analyzed how male and female characters express compliments in the movie “Me before You” based on their extra-linguistic functions.

METHOD

This research belongs to descriptive qualitative research. Qualitative research is research that refers to a social and cultural oriented phenomenon. The qualitative method requires the

researcher to deal with data in the form of words than the statistic. We analyzed the data by examining the dialogues in the movie. Glen (2009) states that document or content analysis involves documents, both printed and electronic document. After examining the dialogues containing compliments, we coded the data using these codes: Ad (to show admiration), Sol (to show solidarity), ST (to soften threat), CS (to be a conversation strategy), Rep (to replace other speech act formula), and Re (to reinforce desired behavior). We used a classification table to list the compliments that were used by male and female characters in *Me Before You* movie. The data in the tables were categorized based on the chronological order and we classified the data according to the compliment expressions (Herbert, Wolfson, and Manes in Yusof and Hoon, 2014) and gender.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Result

After examining the data from the movie, we found compliments that have several functions as seen in Table 1.

Table 1 Compliment Functions Frequency Find in *Me Before You* Movie

Function of Compliments	Male Characters	Female Characters	Total
To Express Admiration	15	16	31
To Establish Solidarity	12	4	16
To be a Conversation Strategy	3	1	4
To Reinforce Desired Behavior	2	2	4
TOTAL	32	23	55

Table 1 reveals the compliment functions that are used by male and female characters in *Me Before You* movie. There are 55 compliments found in this study. From 55 compliments, the male characters have 32 compliments and female characters have 23 compliments. Based on the data analysis, there are four compliment types that are used in this

movie, namely expressing admiration, establishing solidarity, conversation strategy, and reinforcing desired behavior. The results of this research show that male characters tend to give more compliments than female characters do. Male characters give more compliments than female characters because it is influenced by the plot of the story.

Discussion

The main male and female characters in the movie employ four compliment functions, namely expressing admiration, maintaining solidarity, replacing other speech act formulas, conversation strategy and reinforcing desire behavior.

To Express Admiration

One of many ways to express an admiration to someone is by giving a compliment to the receiver. The compliments are usually given spontaneously and sincerely to receivers to show that the givers really adore the receivers (Herbert, Wolfson, and Manes in Yusof and Hoon, 2014). In this movie, the male and female characters also use compliments to show admiration to others. Female characters express more admiration than male characters. It is affected by the character that main female character has.

Excerpt 1 shows a compliment to express an admiration. The first example happens when William is invited to Louis's house to have birthday dinner with Louisa's family. Josie, Louisa's mother, cooks the food for the birthday dinner. It is the first time for William to come and have dinner in Louisa's house. William thinks that the food is so delicious and he gives a compliment to Josie.

Ex 1.

William: "This is delicious, Mrs. Clark."

Josie: "Ohh! Josie, please."

(01:00:17)

Excerpt 1 shows that William likes the food that is cooked by Josie. William gives a compliment right after the first time he tries the food. He directly says, "This is delicious Mrs. Clark" after he tries the food. The way William looks at Josie and the facial expression shows an admiration to the food that Josie, cooks. Besides, William chooses to use a positive adjective word that is "delicious". According to Cambridge Dictionary, the word "delicious" means "having a very

pleasant taste" (cambridgedictionary.org) which can be classified as a compliment to express an admiration. The positive statement is direct and straight forward. Pour and Zarei (2017) also suggest that people have the tendency to be direct in paying compliments. The next example, Excerpt 2, shows another direct compliment by a female character:

Ex 2.

Louisa: "Only the best pair of tights ever!"

William: *smiling*

(01:03:02)

The dialogue in Excerpt 2 takes place in the Louisa's living room when Louisa opens the birthday present that is given by William. Previously, Louisa told William that she really loved stripy tights that are given by her parents in her birthday when she was younger, but she couldn't wear it again because she grew older. Then, William gives stripy tights as a birthday present to Louisa. Louisa is surprised to receive the birthday present. She screams and looks so happy when she knows that the present that is given by William is stripy tights. Louisa says "Only the best pair of tights ever!" with happy face.

From the dialogue above, it is very obvious that Louisa really admires the tights that are given by William. It can be seen from the way Louisa expresses her feeling by using the superlative form, "best". According to Cambridge Dictionary, "best" means "of the highest quality, or being the most suitable, pleasing, or effective type or thing or person" (cambridgedictionary.org).

Establish Solidarity

Compliments are employed to establish the solidarity. It happens because compliments can build closer relationships among the speakers and the receivers. If speakers and receivers have a good relationship, they can establish solidarity by giving compliments (Wolfson & Mannes, 1980). Compliments

that serve as means to establish solidarity occurred 16 times in the movie.

Ex 3.

William: There's something for you in my bag as well

Josie: You got Lou a present? That is very kind of you!

From the dialogue above, Josie gives a compliment to William because she wants to maintain the solidarity with William as it is the first time William and Josie meet. Moreover, Louisa, Josie's daughter, works for William family, taking care of William. It can be seen from the compliment that is given by Josie to William which uses intensifiers "very". She uses the intensifiers because she really wants to have a good relationship with William as a working partner for her daughter. This compliment can be categorized as a compliment to establish the solidarity because of the purpose of the compliment. In other examples, the main male character tries to rebuild a good relationship with his old friends because he is hard to open up since the accident. He uses compliments as a tool to maintain relationship with his old buddies.

Be a Conversation Strategy

According to Wolfson (1983), compliments with simple and neutral topics can be used as strategies to start conversations. Compliments can also be used to establish a conversation with strangers. Male characters in the movie complimented the female characters to start the conversation. They use compliments to the female characters to get female characters' attention before starting the conversation. This conversation strategy occurs when William and Louisa are talking in the park.

Ex 4.

William: "Interesting choice of footwear."

Louisa: "Patrick says they make me look like leprechaun drag queen."

William: "He was being nice."

(00:40:17)

Excerpt 4 shows that William gives a compliment to Louisa about her footwear. William says, "Interesting choice of footwear" because he wants to start conversation with Louisa. In that sentence, there is a positive adjective word that is "interesting". According to Cambridge Dictionary, the word "interesting" means "someone or something that is interesting keeps your attention because he, she, or it is unusual, exciting, or has a lot of ideas" (cambridgedictionary.org). This sentence can be categorized as a compliment because it has a positive adjective word. This compliment can be categorized as a conversation strategy because it has a very simple and neutral topic that leads to other topics of conversations.

Reinforce Desired Behavior

Compliments can be used to reinforce desired behavior. According to Manes (1983), compliments can be used as encouragement in English speaking community. Excerpt 5 takes place when Rupert and Alicia visit William after he has an accident.

Ex. 5

Rupert: "So how's the physio and stuff? All coming on? Any improvements?"

William: "No."

Rupert: "Well, you look great."

Alicia: "Yeah."

(00:20:01)

In this dialogue above, Rupert tries to give support or encouragement to William. Rupert gives encouragement to William by saying "Well, you look great" even he knows that there is no improvement in William even after physiotherapy. Rupert's saying contains a positive adjective word that is "great".

This compliment is expressed to reinforce desired behavior. The speaker wants to encourage someone to think better. Both male and female characters in the movie use compliments to support others.

Besides these four factors, compliments can also be used to replace other speech acts formula and soften threats. Wolfson (1989) states that thanking, apologizing, and greeting that are considered as speech formulas can be replaced by using compliments. However, the compliments serving these functions are not found in the movie as the language used in the movie is highly influenced by the characters that tend to be straight forward. They do not use compliments to replace speech acts to share their feelings, thoughts, and opinions to others.

CONCLUSION

In *Me Before You* movie, the male and female characters use four compliment functions, namely expressing admiration, maintaining solidarity, replacing other speech act formulas, conversation strategy and reinforcing desire behavior. From those functions, the most frequent compliment function used by male and female characters is admiration. Compliments are used to express admiration to the receivers; this phenomenon shows positive relationships among the characters. However, in the movie, we did not find the compliments to replace other speech acts and soften criticisms as the language used in the movie is highly influenced by the main characters that tend to be straight forward. The results also show that male characters tend to give more compliments than female characters. The use of compliments is highly affected by the traits of the characters as well as the plot of the story which narrates how William changes his personality along the way to be more open. He tries to rebuild relationship with his old friends. He also

admires Louisa who can change him to be a better person. William uses compliments as a tool to maintain relationship with his old friends and also to express his admiration to Louisa. The results of this study should be considered with the limitations. Considering the limited corpus, larger data may produce different outcomes. Future researchers can investigate compliments used in natural data such as the compliments used in EFL classes.

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