



Religion and Language: A Sociopragmatic Study of Religious Expressions in Algerian Speakers' Compliments and Compliment Responses

Saida Tobbi

Batna 2 University; Algérie

s.tobbi@univ-batna2.dz

Received: 15/ 05/ 2019

Accepted: 25/ 10/ 2019

Published: 31/ 01/ 2020

Abstract :

Although previous studies have shown that religion and language are two cultural components that are tightly linked, there is hardly any pragmatic research on how religion influences the actual use of language. The present study aimed at investigating the effect of Islam on the Algerian speakers' realization of two speech acts: complimenting and responding to compliments. It sought to answer the following questions: What are the sociopragmatic functions of religious expressions used by Algerian speakers when performing compliments and responding to them? Is the use of these expressions religiously motivated? If yes, what are the religious motivations behind such use? To answer these questions, data were collected from 86 participants using role plays and interviews. Findings showed that religious expressions were intensively used and they have a great importance in realizing the speech acts in focus. Moreover, it was found that many religious beliefs and values stand behind such use.

Keywords:

Islam; religious expressions; invocations; compliments; compliment responses.

الملخص:

على الرغم من أن الدراسات السابقة أظهرت أن الدين واللغة عنصران ثقافيان يرتبطان ارتباطاً وثيقاً ، إلا أنه لا يكاد يوجد أي بحث عملي سوسيوثقافي حول كيفية تأثير الدين على الاستخدام الفعلي للغة. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة كيفية تأثير الإسلام على أداء المتحدثين الجزائريين لفعليين في الكلام: المجاملة والرد على المجاملات. تحديداً، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى الإجابة عن الأسئلة التالية: ما هي الوظائف الاجتماعية-



التعبيرية للعبارات الدينية التي يستخدمها المتحدثون الجزائريون عند أداء المجاملات والرد عليها؟ هل استخدام هذه العبارات له دوافع دينية؟ إذا كانت الإجابة بنعم ، فما هي الدوافع الدينية وراء هذا الاستخدام؟ للإجابة على هذه الأسئلة ، تم جمع البيانات من 86 مشاركاً باستخدام تمرين أداء الأدوار والمقابلات. أظهرت النتائج أن العبارات الدينية تُستخدم بكثافة ولديها أهمية كبيرة في أداء أفعال الكلام التي تطرقت إليها الدراسة. علاوة على ذلك ، وجد أن العديد من المعتقدات والقيم الدينية تقف وراء هذا الاستخدام.

الكلمات الدالة:

الإسلام؛ العبارات الدينية ؛ الأدعية ؛ مجاملات ؛ ردود مجاملات.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ninety-seven percent of the Algerian population is Muslim. The vast majority of Muslims adhere to Sunni Islam of Maliki school. Islam provides the society with its central social and cultural identity and gives most individuals their basic ethical and attitudinal orientation. One aspect in which religion impacts Algerian people's daily life is the use of religious expressions and invocations when performing compliments and responding to them. These widely used expressions must serve some communicative functions. Furthermore, the importance of religion in the Algerian society makes it highly probable that such use could have a religious foundation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Effect of Culture on Language Use

Ever since the introduction of the moderate version of Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (linguistic relativity) which claims that difference in language equals difference in thought i.e. language shapes people's higher cognitive processes such as social influences and value judgments thanks to its inherent involvement in the process of acquiring cultural practices, the relationship between language and culture has attracted communication researchers' close attention (Kashima & Kashima, 1998). However, this unidirectionality of the linguistic relativity is unsuitable for the present study which probes into the influence of culture (and more particularly, religion, as a part of culture) on the realization of speech acts. Therefore, the bidirectional relationship between the two concepts should be addressed.

The influence of culture on language lies in the fact that language is always used in its sociocultural context. In this regard, Nida (1998) maintains:



[L]anguage and culture are two symbolic systems. Everything we say in language has meanings, designative or sociative, denotative or connotative. Every language form we use has meaning, carries meanings that are not in the same sense because it is associated with culture and culture is more extensive than language. (p. 29)

The quotation above suggests that the same linguistic items might connote different meanings or concepts. The word *dog* can be taken as an example. In the Arabic culture, it is associated with defilement and noise, both negative concepts (Qanbar, 2011). By contrast, in western cultures, it is associated with loyalty and friendship. King Frederick's quote 'a dog is man's best friend', and idioms like 'lucky dog' are good proofs. Likewise, the noun *owl* is associated with wisdom in western cultures and ugliness as well as bad omens in Arabic ones (Al-Jabbari, Sadeq, & Azmi, 2011). Being an influential component of culture, religion influences these meanings. This proves the tight relationship which exists between language, culture, and religion. The Islamic instruction: "if a dog licks a container, the container must be washed seven times" (Al-nawawi, 1996), for instance, contributes to the negative connotation of the noun *dog*.

The different "selves" manifested in the different cultures in another example that clearly reveals the impact of culture on language use. Triandis (1989) highlights the effect of the cultural environment on individuals' alignment with 'selfness' through the usage of some first-person pronouns and adjectives such as 'I', 'me', 'my' and 'mine'. People from collectivistic cultures, such as China or Japan, express themselves collectively (e.g. "my friends/family say that I am kind"), while those from individualistic cultures tend to express themselves in individualistic terms (e.g. "I am kind"). Moreover, if you ask a person from a collectivistic culture to finish the sentence "I am ...", s/he is likely to say, "I am a good husband/wife/friend/employee, etc." By contrast, one from an individualistic culture is likely to describe himself/herself by saying, "I am determined/successful/loyal/punctual/etc." This happens because in collectivistic cultures, relationships are thought to be more essential than self-definition (De Andrea, Shaw, & Levine, 2010).

2.2. Effect of Religion on Language Use

Religion has a direct effect on the actual use of language as a communicative behavior of interlocutors. This influence appears at the level of some linguistic concepts, such as blessing, cursing and blasphemy (Apte,



2001). To start with, blessings are specific religious expressions that imply the conferment of the divine and exemplify how their users, who are mainly religious people, believe in their (religious expressions) power. In some religions such as Christianity, people who pronounce blessings are generally priests or bishops. However, in Islam, blessings are not restricted to particular individuals because Islam does not have a clerical system (Towns, 2003). Thus, Muslims use blessings more frequently. Algerians, for instance, often utter the phrase “allahuma salli ala Muhammed” (God bestow blessings upon Mohammed) for various communicative purposes. They might be literally invoking God’s blessing upon the Prophet or protection of addressee or any of his/her admired belongings from the evil eye. Moreover, expressions such as “May God bless you/your children, etc.” are pervasive in Algerians’ daily speech. Furthermore, they are appreciated by the recipients who usually say, “These nice blessings are all I need”. Blessings can be found in different speech acts such as greetings. Muslims say, “assalamu alai-kum wa rahmatu Allah wa Barakat-uh” (Peace be upon you and God’s mercy and His blessings). They are also used in response to sneezing “Yarhamuka Allah” (May God bless you).

Religious acts do not constitute of blessings only but cursing too. It is invoking a supernatural power to target a person or a group of people. While in the Arabic world, cursing retains both its religious and communicative function, in the western culture; however, it lost its religious form and function and retains only its function as a means of swearing and expressing anger due to secularization (Abdel-Jawad, 2000). Blessing and cursing are speech acts that reflect the effect of religion on the use of language whereas “blasphemy reflect[s] the effect of religion on the non-use of specific linguistic behaviors” (Alsohaibani, 2012: 57). Pickering (2001) defines blasphemy as a linguistic behavior that demonstrates irreverence towards God or sacred figures, objects, or places. In fact, the degree of permissiveness with blasphemy differs from one culture to another. While in western societies, religion does not prohibit blasphemy in society (Asad, 2008), it still has the authority to legislate against blasphemy in Islamic ones. The tremendous denouncement of blasphemy that was issued against a Danish newspaper which published an article in 2005 containing cartoons mocking the Prophet Muhammad is a good example which evidences that blasphemy is totally prohibited for Muslims (Asad, 2008).

2.3. Speech Act Theory



The Speech Act Theory was firstly proposed by the British philosopher John Austin in 1962. He put forward the concept of performatives for the first time and attempted to distinguish between performatives and constatives. However, his distinction turned out to be untenable because he found that some performatives can also be verified as true or false and some constatives also have the problems related with felicity or infelicity. In other words, there is no essential difference between performatives and constatives but both sentences can be used to perform speech acts. Therefore, Austin gave up differentiating performative utterances from constatives and “began by distinguishing a whole group of senses of ‘doing something’ which are all included together when we say” (Austin, 1962: 94).

Using the abstract methodology, Austin classified speech acts into three levels: A locutionary act, an illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. Locutionary act refers to the movement of vocal organs to produce a stretch of meaningful sounds. Illocutionary act refers to the making of a statement, offer, promise, etc. to fulfill the purpose of speaking. Perlocutionary act indicates its actual effects left on the audiences such as persuading, convincing, scaring, etc. Among the three levels of acts, illocutionary act is the central concept and also the focal point of pragmatic research because it performs the speakers’ communicative intention. However, Austin presumed that there is one-to-one correspondence between illocutionary act and performative verbs. Therefore, his classifications of illocutionary acts are by the criteria of the performative verbs, which only belong to the explicitly expressed illocutionary act and cannot stand serious scrutiny.

2.4 Compliments and compliment responses

Ye (1995) defines compliments as positive evaluations, which explicitly or implicitly attribute credit to someone for something valued positively by the speaker or even the speech community. Wierzbicka (2003) maintains that they imply implicit friendliness; therefore, it seems feasible to regard them as interpersonal speech acts that are used for rapport instead of report and for cooperation instead of competition (Tannen, 1996). The speech act of complimenting is both complicated and confusing cross-culturally and within the same cultural group. Indeed, how to recognize compliments and respond to them appropriately is an important aspect of communicative competence that everyone should master in order to avoid sociopragmatic failure (Holmes & Brown, 1987).



Compliment responses are as important to study as compliments themselves. Pomerantz (1978) claims that in American English, “the recipient of a compliment faces two conflicting conditions that pose a dilemma when responding to it: (A) Agree with the speaker and (B) Avoid self-praise” (pp. 81-82). In a more recent study, Holmes (1986, 1988) develops three main categories of compliment responses: Accept, Reject, and Deflect or Evade and data from her investigation revealed that Accept is the most frequent response to compliments. More importantly, Herbert’s (1989) study shows that the discrepancy in compliments’ responses is culturally based. He states, “the patterned use of language is culturally variable and these patterns may be linked to such larger aspects of sociocultural organization as religion, politics and ecology” (p. 82). To illustrate, English and South African speakers are more likely to accept compliments than their American counterparts (Herbert, 1989; Herbert & Straight, 1989; Nelson, Al-Batal, & Echols, 1996). East Asians such as Chinese, Japanese, Malaysians, and Thai tend to reject compliments more than English do (Daikuhara, 1986; Shih, 1986; Chen, 1993; Gajaseni, 1994).

Although compliments’ use is influenced by sociocultural factors as already shown, there are hardly any studies which investigate the impact of religious values and beliefs on their use. This can be understandable in some secular societies but not in Algeria where religion affects almost every aspect of daily life. Therefore, the present study attempts to shed light on the religious foundation of Algerian speakers’ compliments and compliment responses by answering the two following questions.

1. What are the sociopragmatic functions of religious expressions used by Algerian speakers when realizing compliments and responding to them?
2. What are the religious values that stand behind the use of such expressions?

Here, sociopragmatics refers to “the sociological interface of pragmatics” (Leech, 1983: 10). It examines interlocutors’ beliefs based on relevant social and cultural values.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Participants

Eighty-six (86) participants took part in the present study. They are undergraduate and graduate students who major in different fields in Batna 2 University, Algeria. Examples of these majors are: math and computer sciences, biology, physical education, technology, French, English, etc. All



of the participants are middle-class Muslim Algerians whose first language is either Algerian Arabic (Darja), Chaoui, or Kabyle according to the general information got from them. They are aged between 18 and 53 years old. Forty-seven participants (54.65%) are females while thirty-nine (45.35%) are males. They were selected randomly from among those of the researcher's friends, relatives, acquaintances, and students who were willing to participate in the present study. The type of sampling used is non-probability sampling. The sample is small and not representative but since this study belongs primarily to in-depth qualitative research—a feature of which is that the sample is often small—it can be accepted (Wilmot, 2005). As Wilmot (2005) maintains, a sample of 20 to 50 participants is expected for interviews and role plays involving one-to-one investigation. Another reason that justifies the unrepresentativeness of the sample is that this investigation does not aim at producing a sample that is statistically representative of the larger population. It rather attempts to draw an inference from the tendencies and patterns that appeared in the sample. Although the sample involves educated middle-class participants of both genders who belong to different age groups, these factors are not considered variables in the present study. In other words, the researcher does not aim at examining the influence of factors like social class, educational level, gender, and age on participants' realization of compliments and compliment responses.

Prior to commencing the process of data collection, the researcher got the participants' consent. She explained to them the nature of the research and confirmed that their participation is completely voluntary and anonymous. She also told them of their right to withdraw at any stage. They were asked a number of demographic questions pertaining to this research.

3.2 Research instruments and data collection procedures

3.2.1 Role play

The present study employed the role play as a data gathering tool because it enables the researcher to collect compliments and compliment responses simultaneously. Moreover, this tool, unlike naturally occurring data collection methods, allows the researcher to control the occurrence of the speech acts in focus (Houck & Gass, 1999; Tran, 2004).

The researcher divided the participants into dyads based on their availability at the university. For each dyad that she met separately at her office based on prior arrangements, the researcher explained the four



scenarios that it (the dyad) has to act out freely as if they were in real life. The four compliment situations are: **Situation 1:** at a friend's new house complimenting it; **Situation 2:** in/at a street, bank, party, etc. complimenting a friend's/colleague's/relative's/neighbor's beautiful children; **Situation 3:** in someone's house complimenting his/her food; **Situation 4:** in/at a café/cafeteria/library complimenting a friend's/classmate's good character. Variety of situations was intended to see how participants would perform the specific speech acts using religious expressions in different social contexts.

In order to ensure the validity of the role play scenarios, two senior university lecturers at the Sociology Department of Batna 1 University confirmed that the scenarios are able to elicit compliments and compliment responses. They also approved the clarity of the situations and their sociocultural relevance to real life. This step is deemed to be necessary because participants' understanding of the situations and more importantly their subsequent performance of the speech acts in focus can be influenced by any ambiguity of the language and unfamiliarity with the situations (Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986; Moser & Kalton, 2004). All the dyads' role plays were audio-recorded using a digital voice recorder. Even though the researcher was aware that video recording is better than audio recording in terms of capturing the non-verbal conversational features, it was not used due to the following reasons: First, video recording can cause participants to feel uncomfortable and/or distracted by nonlinguistic issues, thus affecting their performance negatively (Chang, 2006; Nurani, 2009); second, video recording could have been a sensitive issue as female participants took part in the present study. Each dyad took 4-5 minutes to act out the four scenarios. Data from the whole participants were collected over a period of 1 month in March 2019.

3.2.2 Follow-up interviews

In addition to role plays, semi-structured follow-up interviews were used as a supplementary approach to answer 'why' questions i.e. the participants' religious beliefs as well as motivations behind the use of religious expressions in the speech acts investigated. An example of previous studies that used play back interviews in combination with role plays to investigate speech act strategies is Takahashi and Dufon's (1989). Combination of the language production approach and the language perception approach (metapragmatic) is beneficial in speech act research as it provides "an empirical basis for explaining observed patterns of speech act



realization and politeness value language users attribute to different linguistic means and strategies” (Kasper, 2000: 238). Moreover, triangulation in the current study strengthens the validity and credibility of the findings, as Gomm (2004) asserts, and broadens our understanding of the influence of religious factors on the linguistic phenomenon.

Semi-structured interviews were opted for because their open-ended format allows the participant (interviewee) to elaborate on his/her responses (Dörnyei, 2007). After each dyad finished the role play activity, the researcher played back the role plays them with each participant attending at a separate time and asked why such a phrase was employed in order to establish whether any significant religious motivation was present. During the probe method, the researcher took care not to ask any leading questions, and focused on being as indirect as possible. More precisely, the question was: “Why did you use this expression? rather than “Did you use this expression because of some religious motivation/reasons?” The interview lasted 5-7 minutes for each participant.

3.3 Data transcription, translation, and coding

After data were collected, they were transcribed. Conversation Analysis were used to transcribe the role plays’ data. Jefferson’s (2004) transcription style was employed as it provides “details that contribute to the organization and intelligibility of talk [and] it helps to retain features of prosody and turn positioning in the transcription” (Mazeland, 2006: 153). After transcription, data were transliterated i.e. the Arabic words were written in Latin letters to enable readers who cannot read Arabic-language scripts to read them. After transliteration, data were translated into English and then coded. The coding scheme for the patterns of the interviews was based on yes or no from the participants’ responses (e.g. religious motivation of using religious expressions: yes or no).

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This section starts with a brief qualitative analysis of the occurrence of religious expressions in compliments and compliment responses. Then, it examines their functions in the speech acts in focus with reference to the existing theoretical concepts: Austin (1962), Brown and Levinson (1987[1978]), Searle (1969; 1975; 1979), and Leech (1983). It also discusses the interviews’ data to detect the relationship between the use of religious expressions and religious motivation of the participants. This section ends with linking those motivations to a number of theological references.



4.1 Occurrence of religious expressions in compliments and compliment responses

Before analyzing the sociopragmatic functions of compliments and compliment responses, it is necessary to examine their occurrence in the role plays performed. There was a total of 143 religious expressions in 164 realized compliments (occurrence percentage = 87.19%), and 107 ones in 164 compliment responses (occurrence percentage = 65.24%). Repeated religious expressions in one compliment or compliment response are deemed to be only one religious expression and hence counted once. In the four situations, the majority of the complimenting speech acts included God-venerating expressions and/or invocative acts. Examples of the former are “Ma shaa Allah” (It’s God’s will), “Bismi Allah, ma shaa Allah wa Allaho akbar” (In the name of God, it’s God’s will, Allah is the greatest” and “Tabara Allah” (Blessed is God). The participants also invoked God to protect and preserve the addressee’s possessions, appearance, ability and personality using expressions as: “Allah ybarek” (May God bless). The following conversational extracts chosen randomly from the present study’s data demonstrate the use of such expressions.

Complimenting possessions

Extract from dyad 3’s role play

A: *Darak wasa3a yal3ab fiha alkhayl, Allah ybarek =*

B: *Ih, wasa3a, alhamdulillah, Rabi yjazik incha’Allah =*

Translation: A: Your house is big that horses can play in. May God bless.

B: Yeah, it is. Praise be to God. May God reward you with goodness

Complimenting appearance

Extract from dyad 7’s role play

A: *Wladek zaynin kifak, Bismi Allah Ma shaa Allah wa Allaho Akbar (.) Rabi yahfadhumelek w yaslah fihem*

B: *Amen. Asalah howa kolch, Rabi yahafdek*

Translation: A: Your children are beautiful like you, in the name of God, it’s God’s will, Allah is the greatest (.) May God preserve them for you and redress them

B: Amen. Redress is the most important of all, may God bless You.

Complimenting ability

Extract from dyad 11’s role play



A: Ta3arfi taybi, le plat ja bnin bezaf, Mashaa Allah

B: Merci, jarabt recette jdida

Translation: A: You can cook really well, this dish is very delicious, God willing.

B: Thanks, I tried a new recipe.

Complimenting personality/character

Extract from dyad 9's role play

A: *Allah ybarak andek irada kawya (.) Incha' Allah tabka daymen kima hak*

B: *Rabi ykadarna*

Translation: A: Good bless, you have a strong determination, I hope that you continue in this way with God willing

B: May God give us strength.

Observing these extracts, we can see that the participants used a variety of religious expressions to realize their compliment acts. Most of the time, these expressions went hand in hand with invocative utterances that differed semantically as they accorded with the object complimented. Data reveal that the frequency of religious expressions and the intensity of invocative illocutions differ considerably depending on the compliment situation, but discussing the factors of variation goes beyond the scope of this paper. As far as the speech act of responding to compliments is concerned, data analysis show that the majority of the participants realized it using religious expressions with semantically varied invocative utterances as an indication of compliment acceptance with gratitude and appreciation.

4.2 Functions of religious expressions in compliments

After the previous section answered the quantitative question of religious expressions' frequency of occurrence in the speech acts in focus, this qualitative one attempts to account for their sociopragmatic functions and relate them to religious impulses. Participants' answers of the interview's open-ended question: "What did you use religious expressions and invocative utterances in your compliments?" show that they serve two different but closely related functions: 1. Avoiding the evil eye and 2. saving the complimentors' face as complimenting is a face-threatening act.

4.2.1 Disabling the effect of the evil eye

The participants' intensive use of religious expressions is meant to defuse the negative effect of the evil eye. Dundes (1980) defines the evil eye as "the idea that an individual, male or female, has the power, voluntarily or involuntarily, to cause harm to another individual or his property merely by



looking at, or praising, that person or property. The harm may consist of illness or even death or destruction” (p. 93). It is believed that this active and negative effect of the evil eye is a result of the ‘innate’ quality of envy that can exist in any individual, and is believed to appear both advertently and inadvertently as Kamel (1993) states.

The concept of the evil eye in relation to complimenting has already been outlined in previous research. Kamel’s (1993) study reveals that in Egypt, there is a tendency of people intentionally hiding anything good that can be subject to compliment in order to avoid potential envy of complimentors. Also, Alsohaibani’s (2012) investigation shows that compliments can be interpreted as envy in Arabic and Islamic cultures. In these cultures and many similar others, compliments can be perceived negatively by the addressee. This negativity lies in the perceived relationship between envy and the production of compliment utterances. Holmes (1988), for instance, asserts that in some communities, compliments may imply that the complimentor envies the complimentee “in some way, or would like to have something belonging to the addressee” (p. 448). It can be understood, then, that the present study participants’ use of certain religious aimed at redressing the possible negative envious effect on the complimentee.

4.2.2 Saving the complimentor’s face

Although compliments are supposed to function as positively affective speech acts that are usually exchanged as an effort to keep relationships solid (Holmes, 1988), they can be perceived as tokens of bad will by the complimentees if complimentors do not express them appropriately, especially in cultures where they might be associated with envy (Alsohaibani, 2017). In other words, the complimentors might be thought of as envious. Therefore, they usually save their faces by using religious expressions that imply that they retain full awareness of the negative effect of the evil eye and that they seek God’s protection. Sometimes, God’s protection is sought using invocative utterances—*independent directive illocutionary acts* employed to enhance the positivity of complimenting as a social act. In fact, the use of such expressions, be they God-venerating expressions or invocative acts, entails a highly sociopragmatic function—*establishing and maintaining solidarity and positive interpersonal relationships*. In case they are not used while complimenting, intentionally or unintentionally, and this was followed by harm, this can have a negative influence on the interlocutors’ relationship as complimenting may be



considered envying. The participants' answers reveal this viewpoint. One of the interviewees, for instance, said:

One sometimes feels that his face and his good will are threatened when he compliments others. It's because they might be thought of as envious. That's why the use of some phrases such as "Allah Ybarek" [Good bless] puts him on the safe side, and proves to the complimentee that the complimenter wants God to preserve his good thing.

4.3 Function of invocative utterances in compliment responses

As already mentioned in 4.1, out of 164 realized compliment responses, 107 ones contained invocative acts (occurrence percentage = 65.24%). The thematic analysis of the participants' post-role play responses showed that they serve the functions demonstrated below.

4.3.1 Accepting the compliment modestly and politely

As already mentioned, responses to compliments fall between accepting or rejecting, with a third strategy being avoiding either (Pomerantz, 1978; Herbert, 1986; Tran, 2010). The cultural context of the speech community plays an important role in the acceptance or denial of responses to compliments (Herbert, 1991; Chiang & Pochtraeger, 1993; Chen, 1993; Gajaseni, 1994; Baba, 1999; Golato, 2002; Yoko, 2003). While studies of eastern speech communities (i.e. Chinese (Chen,1993), Japanese (Baba, 1999; Yoko, 2003) and Korean (Han,1992)), reveal that complimentees tend to express denial of compliments, studies on cultural contexts relatively similar to that of the current study (namely: Syria, Jordan and Egypt) establish that acceptance is the prevailing pattern among complimentees when responding to compliments (Morsy, 1992; Nelson, Al Batal, & Echols, 1996; Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001).

Leech (1998) maintains that complimentees find themselves obliged to adhere to one of the two maxims: Modesty or Agreement. Invocative illocutions provide a solution to the dilemma of saving the face of the complimenter and agreeing with him/her in a way that might seem arrogant, or avoiding self-praise and disagreeing with him/her in a way that might seem impolite. In other words, invocations are a compromise for conflicting maxims.

4.3.2 Reciprocating the positive assessment of the complimenter

Invocative utterances are not only tokens for performing the illocutionary act of acceptance, but their use also allows the complimentee to



reciprocate the positive assessment of the complimenter by repaying him/her with an invocation.

4.4 Complimentors' theological motivation of using religious expressions

The participants' responses to the question of "How does religion affect your performance of compliments?" showed that compliments' performance is religiously grounded. Most of the respondents reported that Islam said that if compliments are to be produced, they should be performed with the use of religious expressions. In other words, they were aware of the existence of the evil eye and the performativity of religious expressions and invocations to ward it off. The two major religious resources that they referred to in their answers are the Holy Quran and the Prophet's sayings. The following extracts demonstrate this:

It's very important that God's name is uttered whenever something is complimented. God said in one of the suras "when you entered your garden, you should have said: it is God's will; there is no power but in God." (Extract from interviewee 18).

The evil eye is a reality that exists. It is even mentioned in religion. Our prophet peace and blessing be upon him said "If any one of you sees something he likes in his wealth, himself or his brother, he should invoke for him with blessing" and in another Hadith, "If any one of you sees something he likes in his wealth, himself or his brother, he should invoke for him with blessing". That's why we must always say "Masha'Allah" or I mean ... any name of God whenever our eyes fall on something nice. (Extract from interviewee 53).

These extracts show that the respondents' motivation to use religious expressions in compliments is deeply rooted in religion.

Theologically speaking, belief in the evil eye is rooted in many Quranic and prophetic discourses. To recall some, the Prophet said, « The evil eye is real, and if anything were to overtake fate, it would be the evil eye » (Muslim, 1954: 2188). In showing its disastrous power on people, he said, « The evil eye is real, and if anything were to overtake fate, it would be the evil eye » (Muslim, 1954: 2188). He also said, « The evil eye is real, and it can take a man to his grave and a camel into the cooking pot » (Alalbani, 1988: 4144). These are examples from the many religious texts that justify the present study participants' motivation to use religious expressions in compliments' performance.

5. CONCLUSION



The discussion above demonstrates the importance of religious expressions and invocative utterances in performing compliments and compliment responses. In the Algerian culture, which is the context of the present research, religious beliefs and concerns are given greater significance when performing compliments and responding to them. In other cultures, however, facework and politeness are the most important concerns. The present study shows that the speech act of complementing in the Algerian culture is different from the general perception expressed by a number of scholars such as Austin (1962), Searle (1969, 1976), and Barnlund and Akari (1985) who maintain that complimenting is always a desirable act which expresses a “positive evaluation concerning the qualities or behaviours of another person without manipulative intent” (Barnlund & Akari, 1985: 12). It showed that in certain contexts, as Holmes (1988) indicates, compliments can be negatively realized, specifically when religious expressions are not employed. Their negativity stems from the possible effect of the evil eye. On the whole, the present study confirms that language and religion are closely related.

6. Bibliography List:

- Abdel-Jawad, H. (2000). A linguistic and sociopragmatic and cultural study of swearing in Arabic. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 13(2), 217-240.
- Alalbani, M. (1988). *Saheeh aljam'e*. Damascus: AlmaktabAlislami.
- Al-Jabbari, E., Sadeq, A., & Azmi, J. (2011). Cultural gaps in linguistic communication with reference to English and Arabic language communities. *Zarqa Journal for Research and Studies in Humanities*, 11(1),60-64.
- Al-Nawawi, A. Z. Y. (1996). *Sharh sahih Muslim*. Beirut: Daral-Ma'rifa.
- Alsohaibani, A. (2012). The acquisition of intercultural communicative competence: A contrastive study of the speech act of compliment responses of Saudi learners of English in the UK and in Saudi Arabia. Unpublished Master's dissertation. University of East Anglia.
- Alsohaibani, A. (2017). Influence of religion on language use. A sociopragmatic study on the influence of religion on speech act performance. Doctoral thesis. University of East Anglia.
- Apte, M. (2001). Taboo words. In J. Sawyer and J. Simpson (Eds.). *Concise encyclopedia of language and religion*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 315-319.
- Asad, T. (2008). Reflections on blasphemy and secular criticism. In H. de Vries (Ed.). *Religion: Beyond a concept*. New York: Fordham University Press, 580-609.
- Austin, J. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baba, J. (1999). *Interlanguage pragmatics: Compliment responses by learners of Japanese and English as a second language*. Newcastle: Lincom Europa.



- Barnlund, D., & Akari, S. (1985). Intercultural encounters: The management of compliments by Japanese and Americans. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 16(1),9-26.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In E. Goody (Ed.). *Questions and politeness: Strategies in social interaction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 56-311.
- Chang, Y. F. (2006). An inquiry into pragmatic data collection methods. *ERIC*, 29,1-22.
- Chen, R. (1993). Responding to compliments: A contrastive study of politeness strategies between American English and Chinese speakers. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 20, 49-75.
- Chiang, B., & Pochtrager, F. (1993). A pilot study of compliment response of American-born English speakers and Chinese-born English speakers. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED347803.
- Daikuhara, M. (1986). A Study of Compliments from a Cross-Cultural Perspective: Japanese vs. American English. *WPEL: Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 2(2), 103-134.
- De Andrea, D. C., Shaw, A. S., & Levine, T. R. (2010). Online language: The role of culture in self-expression and self-construal on Facebook. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 29(4), 425-442.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dundes, A. (1980). *Interpreting folklore*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Eisenstein, M., & Bodman, J. (1986). I very appreciate: Expressions of gratitude by native and non native speakers of American English. *Applied Linguistics*, 7(2), 167-185.
- Farghal, M., & AlKhatib, M. (2001). Jordanian college students' responses to compliments: A pilot study. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33, 1485-1502.
- Gajaseni, C. (1994). How Americans and Thais respond to compliments. International Conference on Pragmatics and Language Learning (8th, Urbana, IL, March 31-April 2, 1994).
- Golato, A. (2003). Studying compliment responses: A comparison of DCTs and recordings of naturally occurring talk. *Applied Linguistics*, 24(1), 90-121.
- Gomm, R. (2004). *Social research methodology*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Han, C. H. (1992). A comparative study of compliment responses: Korean females in Korean interactions and in English interactions. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 8(2), 17-31.
- Herbert, R. K. (1989). The ethnography of English compliments and compliment responses: A contrastive sketch. In W. Oleksy (Ed.). *Contrastive pragmatics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 3-35.



- Herbert, R. K. (1991). The sociology of compliment work: An ethnocontrastive study of Polish and English compliments. *Multilingua—Journal of Cross-Cultural and Interlanguage Communication*, 10(4), 381-402.
- Herbert, R. K., & Straight, H. S. (1989). Compliment-rejection versus compliment-avoidance: Listener-based versus speaker-based pragmatic strategies. *Language and Communication*, 9(1), 35-47.
- Holmes, J. (1986). 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(4), 445-465.
- Holmes, J., & Brown, D. F. (1987). Teachers and students learning about compliments. *TESOL Quarterly*, 21(3), 523-546.
- Houck, N., & Gass, S. M. (1999). Interlanguage refusals: A cross-cultural study of Japanese-English. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- Jefferson, G. (2004). Glossary of transcript symbols with an introduction. In G. H. Lerner (Ed). *Conversation analysis: Studies from the first generation*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 13-31.
- Kamel, A. M. (1993). *A sociolinguistic analysis of formulaic expressions in Egyptian Arabic. Doctoral dissertation*. George town University.
- Kashima, Y., & Kashima, E. (1998). Culture and language: The case of cultural dimensions and personal pronoun use. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 29,461-486.
- Kasper, G. (2000). Data collection in pragmatics research. In H. Spencer-Oatey (Ed.). *Culturally speaking: Managing rapport through talk across cultures*. London: Continuum,316-341.
- Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman.
- Leech, G. (1998). *Principles of Pragmatics*. New York: Longman Group Limited.
- Levinson, S. C. (1983). *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: CambridgeUniversityPress.
- Mazeland, H. (2006). Conversation analysis. *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, 3, 153-162.
- Morsy, E. (1992). Sex differences in complimenting behaviour: A contrastive analysis between Egyptian Arabic and American English. Unpublished Master's thesis. The American University in Cairo.
- Moser, S., & Kalton, G. (2004). Questionnaires. In C. Seale (Ed.). *Social research methods: A reader*. London: Routledge, 73-87.
- Muslim, A. (1954). *Saheeh Muslim*. Beirut: Dar Ihyaat Attourath Alarabi.
- Nelson, G. L., Al Batal, M., & Echols, E. (1996). Arabic and English compliment responses: Potential for pragmatic failure. *Applied Linguistics*, 17(4), 411-432.
- Nida, E. (1998). Language, culture, and translation. *Foreign Languages Journal*, 115(3), 29-33.



- Nurani, L. (2009). Methodological issue in pragmatic research: Is discourse completion test a reliable data collection instrument. *Jurnal Socioteknologi Edisi Tahun*, 17(8), 667-678.
- Pickering, W. (2001). Blasphemy. In J. Sawyer and J. Simpson (Eds.). *Concise encyclopedia of language and religion*. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 240.
- Pomerantz, A. (1978). Compliment responses: Notes on the cooperation of multiple constraints. In J. Scheukein (Ed.). *Studies in the organization of conversational interaction*. New York: Academic Press, 79-112.
- Qanbar, N. (2011). A sociolinguistic study of the linguistic taboos in the Yemeni society. *Modern Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 3(2-3), 86-104.
- Searle, J. (1969). *Speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. (1975). Indirect speech acts. In P. Cole and J. L. Morgan (Eds.). *Syntax and semantics*. New York: Academic Press, 59-82.
- Searle, J. (1979). *Expressions and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.
- Shih, E. (1986). *Conversational politeness and foreign language Teaching*. Taipei: Crane Publishing Co.
- Takahashi, S., & Du Fon, P. (1989). *Cross-linguistic influence in indirectness: The case of English directives*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii.
- Tannen, D. (1996). *Gender and discourse*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Towns, E. (2003). *God bless you*. Ventura, CA: Gospel Light/Regal Books.
- Tran, G. (2004). Previsioning methodologies in cross-cultural and interlanguage pragmatics. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 4(1), 25-49.
- Triandis, H. C. (1989). The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *Psychological Review*, 96(3), 506-520.
- Wierzbicka, A. (2003). *Cross-cultural pragmatics: The semantics of human interaction*. Berlin: Moutonde Gruyter.
- Wilmot, A. (2005). Designing sampling strategies for qualitative social research. In J. Jones, C. Bycroft and A. Dewar (eds.). *Survey methodology bulletin*. London: Office for National Statistics, 53-65.
- Ye, L. (1995). Complimenting in Mandarin Chinese. In G. Kasper (Ed.). *Pragmatics of Chinese as native and target language*. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii, 207-295.
- Yoko, U. (2003). Japanese compliment responses: A comparison to American English norms. *Japan Journal of Multilingualism and Multiculturalism*, 2, 116-128.