

## Sex-Based Difference of Compliments

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**Abstract:** The compliment is frequently and widely used on various occasions in America . It now plays an important role in successful conversation as it serves as a way for people to establish and maintain good relationship with each other. As one aspect of the compliment, sex-based compliment boasts distinctive features. The paper will explore it from 5 different aspects to fully illustrate its features.

### 1. Introduction

A compliment is not only used to make people feel pleasant, but a positive evaluation of people or their things. It will create harmonious atmosphere in the community, establish a relationship of rapport, and give others confidence. An appropriate way to give a compliment tends to be of great importance for a successful communication. This paper will attempt to analyze the sex-based difference of compliments from 5 different aspects to disclosure the characteristics of compliments in the conversations between those of the same or opposite genders. After having a sharp insight into those characteristics, we will be able to make the conversations go smoothly and successfully.[1][2]

### 2. Five Different Aspects

When giving a compliment in the conversation, females and males seem to have watershed-clear language to express it. They will choose different vocabulary in giving a compliment, will contribute different amounts of compliment in the conversation, focus on different targets, use different syntax forms and make different responses.

#### 2.1 Different Vocabulary Used

According to observations of conversations between 28 Americans for one month last year, I noticed that the female would choose more adjectives and adverbs than the male when giving a compliment. Such words as gorgeous, lovely, cute, adorable, sweet, charming were often uttered by women. In contrast, men only said a few words, like, very, really, etc.

Thanks to my curiosity of such a phenomenon, I interviewed some of those people about this and got the answer that women enjoy hearing this kind of compliment from their counterpart. However, most men are not so eager to hear this sort of compliment.

Admittedly, most women want to be told that they are beautiful and charming, but it is not the case with most of the men.

#### 2.2 Different Amounts of Compliments Paid

The research carried out by Coats in New Zealand, America and Britain shows that women pay a lot more compliments to others and receive more compliments from others [3]. Holmes also got the same result through analysis of the questionnaire carried out in New Zealand [3].

Here is a conversation between two Americans of opposite sexes.

A: *Oh, today you look terrific, like a movie star.*

B: *Thanks. You look good.*

A: *Your suit is amazing! Where did you buy it?*

B: *Oh, I bought it at Hengda.*

A: *Very cool!*

It will take little effort in distinguishing the different sexes of those two speakers. It can safely be asserted that women would be in favor of the milk of human kindness and making expressions replete with emotions. However, men will pursue objectivity and conciseness in the conversation [4]. That is to say, in the compliment, the female puts high emphasis on emotions and feelings exchange, while the male on information delivery.

### 2.3 Difference in Target of Compliment

From the viewpoints of Wolfson and Manes [5], the topics or contents of compliments will be safely divided into two types. One type is based on appearance or belongings and the other on achievements or abilities.

In American culture, it is very common for people to pay compliments on appearance or the belongings of the other people around them, especially to the appearance of the ladies [6].

*"What a beautiful dress you are wearing!"*

*"You look gorgeous!"*

*"You look pretty! And the dress is awesome! Where did you get it?"*

*"I was amazed by what you have done!"*

These four sentences were frequently expressed during my stay with those Americans. The first three sentences were the compliments paid to a female while the last sentence to a male. In this regard, they will attest to a fact that people mainly focus on physical appearance when giving a compliment to a female and on the achievements, abilities, and personalities for a male.

Why will people give compliments from different viewpoints when directed to different sexes?

It is without suspicion and partially by discrimination. In the etymology of the English vocabulary, there is one-and only one- semantic area in which the masculine word is not the base or more powerful word. This is the area dealing with body and sex. Here it is the feminine word which is dominant [7]. However, it is not the main reason.

It is society that determines the different focuses when giving a compliment. Even today many people in the US still admit that women should spend more time at home than men. And there are a lot of American women who are willing to stay at home to do housework. Since civilization began, men are out to work most of time and women can stay at home. Since they have much spare time, women can care for their appearance. Gradually, they came to an opinion that make-up is very important. Men, however, should earn money to support the family. As a result, achievements determine as a touchstone whether the man is successful and powerful.

### 2.4 Different Syntax Forms Used

Wolfson, Manes and Holmes once did further investigation and research on compliments between different sexes and arrived at the conclusion that 80% of compliments are presented in the following form [3].

(1) NP is / looks (really) ADJ. over 40 %.

*Your blouse is beautiful.*

(2) I (really) like love NP. over 16.1 %.

*I really love your car.*

(3) PRO is / Verb (really) (a) ADJ. over 14.9 %.

*That is a nice wall hanging. You have lovely eyes.*

Statistics show that females often use the first two types when paying a compliment and males prefer to use the third type. That is to say, the female is prone to choose the first and second person: "I like your new suit!" "You played very well in the football match." The male on the other hand often uses the third person: "It's wonderful!" "Nice haircut!"

### 2.5 Different in Response

After a slight change of the questionnaire on agreement maxim carried out by expert Leech [4], I posted the questionnaire on the different compliments in males and females on the website called

“offtopic forums”. 86 people across the world were involved in the questionnaire. The relevant data is displayed as follows:

<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	
Accepting the compliment:	92.4%	91.6%
Returning the compliment:	99.3%	70%
Accepting and Evaluating the compliment:	93%	35.6%

It is clearly presented that females often accept the compliment, then return and evaluate it but males often accept the compliment and will not add unnecessary comments on it. The following examples will embody the statements above mentioned.

### 3. Woman a: Bill, You Look So Nice Today!

*Male B: thanks! You too!*

### 4. Woman C: Gorgeous! Your Dress Looks So Nice!

*Woman D: Thanks! It is nice of you! I really like this color (pointing at her dress)*

*Woman C: Where did you get it I also wanna get one some day.*

*Woman D: Oh, yes. At First Department. It is very cheap for the quality.*

It is true that both female and male will accept the compliment regardless of its authenticity as it is a polite manner in the conversation. But for the female, they not only just accept the compliment, but pay a compliment to the other person and possibly evaluate the belongings of both of them. Females regard the compliment as the way to encourage the other side to continue the conversation; males on the other hand look at this as the way of information exchange. As for conversation itself, adding more compliment and things like that will be necessary, but it requires precision and conciseness for the purpose of information exchange in the conversation.

### 5. Conclusion

A lot more differences exist in the compliments between female and male. The paper is intended to stimulate a deeper examination and appreciation of the sex-based difference of compliments so that people, especially those from non-English-speaking countries like China, will have fewer barriers in conversations with native speakers. During teaching, the teacher and students should not just emphasize the four language skills but look into their culture and society. Only by connecting the language with its culture or society the language learning can teaching be successful and can students avoid some taboos and thus communicate with each other effectively.

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