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## COMPLIMENTS IN THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION: COMPLIMENTS AMONG INDONESIAN STUDENTS OF ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

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### **Abstract**

This paper investigated how Indonesian people give compliment to others in English to find the formula of the compliment the students use. The subject of the research is 27 Indonesian students of English Department from three universities. The data are collected by giving questionnaire to the students using the Discourse Completion Task. Students are asked to complete the sentences for giving compliment. The compliments requested are about appearance which consists of hairstyle, dress and figure; and ability and performance which consists of test result, getting the scholar and cooking ability. The result shows that for appearance, the most used formula is by using the word *look* then the use of *be+adj*. For ability and performance, students use the word *congratulation* and *be+adj* for cooking ability. However, some students give compliment based on Bahasa Indonesia form, not English form by giving some statements which are not related to the context. It is affirmed that compliment is influenced by the language that the people use and it is different from one culture to another.

**Keywords:** dicsourse completion task, compliment, compliment formula

### **Introduction**

Compliment is a remark that says something good about someone or something (Merriem-Webster dictionary). People tend to compliment other people in their daily conversation. Compliment is sometimes considered as a way to establish a communication. It is a speaker's expression of a positive stance toward some referent attributable to her/his addressed recipient (Pillet-Shore, 2015). However, compliment is not always expressed in verbal communication. It can also be an action which expresses admiration or approval (Merriem-Webster dictionary). Holmes argues that 'a 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', and she also asserts that 'compliments are generally regarded as the paradigm of a positive politeness strategy' (Holmes, 1986, cited in Holmes, 2015:117). It is a type of speech acts which maintain good feeling for the hearer. A genuine compliment always makes

others feel good. It can reduce the social distance between the speaker and hearer (Holmes, 2015).

When conducting her research in New Zealand, Holmes even found that women do compliments more than men. They use compliments to maintain the solidity and solidarity between the speaker and hearer. Oppositely, amongst men, compliments are mostly face threatening. They use mock insulting and sparring to cement their friendships. Looking at this situation, Coates even says that complimenting is one of the women's linguistic behaviour beside apologizing and it is a part of our communicative competence (2013:86).

Manes and Wolfson (1981), cited by Aijmer (2014), show that compliments can be used to begin a conversation. It can function as a greeting. The response of the compliment can be used to continue the communication. Even when the interlocutors just meet for the first time. Compliment on the neutral subject can engage to a continuation when it is responded. It can even continue to come to an agreement or appointment.

Further, Manes and Wolfson explain that compliments can be used as thanking. When a person says 'You are such a good man.', he sometimes says it as an expression of thanking. Compliment is mostly used for new things, such as new car, dress or even a hairdo. It can also be used to reestablish the friendship when two friends meet after long time of being separated.

Complimenting, as other speech acts, is contextually dependent. It very much depends on the context. People sometimes find themselves different in expressing compliment. Some people, like Americans, use verbal compliment more often than other people, such as Japanese. On the contrary, Japanese sometimes feel more comfortable to express their feeling through action than verbal utterance including in complimenting others (Takahashi, 2009). People are using compliments more and more in their daily life. Compliments can be produced, in some extent, anywhere, anytime, and by anyone. It can in school or universities (Danziger, 2018), or in the workplace (Holmes and Stubbe, 2015), or even in the social media (Eslami et al., 2019). In some circumstances, compliment shows the respect to the addressee (Alfonzetti, 2013: 280).

As it can be produced by anyone, therefore, compliment is considered as an interesting topic to conduct research. There are some researches on compliments conducted on different languages, such as Italian (Alfonzetti, 2013), Jordanian Arabic (Al-Batayneh, 2019), Indonesian (Indah and Rifana, 2018), Mexican Spanish and Irish English (Flores-Salgado and Witten, 2018), Iranian (Eslami et al., 2017, 2019), Javanese (Kumuda and Wrihatni, 2018), Israeli Hebrew (Danziger, 2018), American English (Placencia and Lower, 2018), and Chinese (Chen and Yang, 2010); or on non-native English learners (Valkova, 2013; Duan, 2011) to mention. Again, it is because compliment is a part of communication which people always do in their daily life, when they are getting along with other people.

Compliments, then, are becoming routinized. Since it is routinized, it becomes formulaic especially in English. There are hundreds of compliment formula used by people as investigated by Manes and Wolfson. Eventhough Manes and Wolfson's research is arguable since it is based on the field note, the fact that there are a lot of compliment formula used by people is still considerable as confirmed by Jucker (2009). They found that the majority of compliments

contain one of a highly restricted, set of adjectives and verbs. Adjectives *nice* and *good* are the most common. Others use adverbs and verbs like *really* and *love* (Manes and Wolfson cited by Aijmer, 2014). That is why it is common to see such compliment like:

a. It is a nice book.

b. Your car looks good.

Wolfson and Manes further stated in their research that there are some semantic patterns for the compliments produced by people (Aijmer, 2013: 13-14).

a. NP {is/looks} (really) ADJ

Ex. Your belt looks nice

This is really good.

b. I really {like/love} NP

Ex. I love your shoes.

I really like those spectacles.

c. PRO is {really} an ADJ NP

Ex. That's a nice piece of essay

That was really a great performance.

They also found some compliments which were rarely used like:

a. You are driving well.

b. Peter, you are so intelligent.

Holmes (2015), on the other hand, also proposes some formulae of the compliment based on her research in New Zealand and America. There are some syntactic formulae that they use.

a. NP BE INT ADJ

Ex. Your car is really great

b. BE LOOKING

Ex. You are stunning

c. I (INT) LIKE NP

Ex. I simply like that coat.

d. PRO BE a (INT) ADJ NP

Ex. That's a very nice blouse

e. PRO BE (INT) (a) ADJ NP

Ex. That's really great.

f. (INT) ADJ (NP)

Ex. Really cool short.

People over the world use compliment to begin a conversation. The response of the compliments is used as the means of engagement which sometimes can lead them to an appointment. It can also be used to establish a relationship when the interlocutors who meet for the first time talk about the neutral subject. When people talk about something new, like car, appearance, or even hairdo, they make a compliment. If it is produced for old thing, it can be inferred as an indication of jealousy (Holmes, 2015).

Indonesians, as other people, also make a compliment for something new. They also produce a compliment for some achievement that people gain. In addition, they also make a compliment to begin a conversation. Compliment is a good way to create a good situation to begin a conversation because compliment

is believed as the best way to start a communication in which people can mitigate the face threatening.

This research is aimed at finding the formula of English compliment produced by Indonesian learners (students) of English. It also tries to find the reasons why such pattern occurs in the compliment.

## **Method**

### ***Subjects of Research***

The subjects of the research are 37 students of University. They have been studying English since Elementary School. They are now studying English in the university. The length of their study in the university ranges from 1 year to 3 years. Since they are all studying in the English program, it is assumed that they are at least in the intermediate advanced level of English.

### ***Instrument***

The data are collected using a questionnaire based on the Discourse Completion Task (DCT). Discourse completion task (DCT) itself is a type of production questionnaire in which speech acts are elicited in the written form by some kind of situational description (Billmyer&Varghese, 2000 in Sweeney & Zhu, 2016). In this case, students are given a text complete with the context and they are asked to answer the answer based on the context provided. The questionnaire for this research is available in the appendix.

As said, students were asked to complete the DCT based questionnaire. There are 2 situations in the DCT with 3 sub-situations in every situation.

Table 1. Situation for DCT

NO.	SITUATION	SUB-SITUATION
1	Appearance	1. Hairstyle 2. Dress 3. Figure
2	Ability and Performance	1. Test result 2. Getting the scholar 3. Cooking ability

All the situations are about their friends in their institution. Therefore, the respondents can adapt their answer based on the reality that they face every day. They are not asked to pretend to be somebody else but themselves. When the DCT is related or close to the reality, it is hoped that the answers on the DCT is as natural as it can be.

### ***Data Analysis***

The data are analyzed based on the formula of the compliments proposed by Manes and Wolfson (1980 in Coates 2013) and Holmes (1986 in Holmes 2015). They, then, are analyzed to find the reasons why such compliment or compliments occur, also to find the object and the interpretation of the compliment (Chen, 2010).

## **Findings and Discussion**

The results are managed based on each situation in the questionnaire. So, there are four situations with each sub-situations which are described in this session.

***Situation 1: Compliment on the appearance***

a. Compliment on the hairdo

Most, even all, of the compliments addressed to the hearer about the hairdo. Of course, since it is about the hairdo, all the compliments must be about it. However, in some sub-situations, Indonesians are giving compliments not only about the person but also on the thing while the compliment is supposed to be addressed to the hearer about his/her performance.

Since it is about the thing, most of compliments use the word *look*. More than 50% of the respondents use that word. The next formula that is mostly used by the students is *be + adj*. The adjective mostly used by the speakers is *beautiful* which is used by 16 respondents then followed by *nice*. Not only using the above formula, students also use the *wh + adj* when expressing their compliments. Beside the general adjectives like *beautiful* and *nice*, they also use more specific adjectives like *gorgeous* and *awesome*.

Indonesians, when asked to express their compliment on the new thing, sometimes express their feeling of being surprised. Therefore, the exclamation word is sometimes used when they give their compliment about the new thing. They are not used to express the compliment on a new thing without giving the exclamation. Exclamation is considered as an expression of intimacy or attention on someone's appearance. The words *wow* and *whoa* are mostly used by the speakers who use the exclamation. Intensifiers, *so* and *really*, are also used to emphasize the compliment.

The following are the examples of the compliment expressed by the students when they are asked to express their compliment on the hairdo of their friend's. Example:

1. Whoa, you look so beautiful today.
2. Wow, how beautiful you are.
3. You are really awesome today.
4. Awesome.

Some students not only give compliment but also give comments following their compliment. Even some of them give the comment before giving the compliment as seen in the example below.

1. Your hairstyle is so cool, and *it makes you beautiful*.
2. Wow, you are so beautiful today, *you should keep this hairstyle*.
3. *New hairstyle, huh?* It looks beautiful.
4. *Why do you change your hairstyle?* But I like it.

For Indonesians, especially Javanese, the society where almost all of the respondents come from, comments are considered as an expression of intimacy. The more comment they give, the more attention they pour to the hearer. Most of the speakers give short comments as stated above. However, there is one respondent who gives long comments which in reality nearly impossible to occur. Or, if it happens in the reality, the hearer will feel awkward to respond the compliment because the respondent, who is accidentally a male, gives a long and repeated compliment. It is strange since among Indonesians, women are

considered as the ones who always give more compliment than men. Most women are more talkative than men. This is the prejudice that occurs among Indonesians.

*Wow, how beautiful you are. You look so beautiful with your new hair style. I really love your hairstyle. It's good. And it would be better if you always come to campus with this new hairstyle."*

The above compliment and the comment might happen when the speaker and hearer are having a conversation. Or, they stop for a while and chit-chat while stopping before continuing their activity. For some Indonesians, it is common to stop for a while and have a conversation especially when one of the interlocutors has something new. And, it is also common for Indonesians women, and sometimes men especially when they are close friends, to talk and give more comment on that new thing and also to suggest the hearer to

One of the respondents does not give compliment on the hairdo. When asked to give compliment, she writes as seen below.

*"Is this a special moment to celebrate?"*

Indonesians are familiar with such question while in some culture, the question can be considered as a privacy breaker. This such question is common to show the intimacy and it is accepted since among Indonesians this question shows that the speaker pays and gives attention on the new thing.

#### b. Compliment on the dress

Almost the same as the compliment on the hairdo, compliment on the dress mostly uses *look* as the verb which is mostly used by the speaker. More than 50% of the respondents use that verb. The formula *be + adj* is also used by few students, about 6 respondents. Formula *Wh + adj N* is also used by four respondents. The respondents give compliments not only on the thing (cloth/jacket) but also on the person wearing the cloth. Therefore, *nice*, which is a general adjective, and *handsome*, which is specifically used for specific term, are commonly used by the respondents.

As stated, Indonesians are used to giving an exclamation when they give compliment to somebody or something. They use the exclamation word *wow*. Ten respondents are using the word *wow*. Below are examples of the compliment. Almost all respondents give compliment on the person. One respondent gives compliment on the thing. Only one respondent gives compliment on the thing, and followed by giving compliment on the person (thing, then person). Others are giving compliment on the person then followed by giving compliment on the thing. Below are examples of the compliment.

1. Wow, look at you now, you are very different from the old one.
2. I never thought you would be such a dashing while wearing a wedding dress.
3. Wow, nice suit dude. You have changed a lot.
4. Wow, how handsome you are with your dress.
5. You look cool.

As stated, Indonesians like to give comments on the compliment. The comments are sometimes short, sometimes a little bit long. They put the comment

before or after the compliment. Even some of the respondents put their comment both before and after the compliment.

1. You're so perfect today. *Do you enjoy your style?*
2. Wow, *this is the real side of you, huh?* What a handsome man.
3. Hey, *is it you?* you look so different. *I think it's better for you to wear clothes tidily like this everyday.*

One of the respondents shows his compliment in the form of the expression of surprise as seen in the example below.

*"How come? I can't believe my eyes."*

Meanwhile, another respondent gives a unique compliment because it also shows how the speaker is feeling about the way the hearer dresses. The expression shows how close their relationship is and in some sense, it shows how much the speaker (a girl) shows her love to the hearer.

*"Why you make me feel happy to see you?"*

The above statement also expresses that the hearer rarely uses tidy cloth or rarely looks tidy.

As it is stated, one respondent gives a compliment on the thing. However, his compliment seems awkward for English native since it is a long compliment. Nevertheless, for Indonesians, that such compliment is common for women and men who are close each other. They can even give compliment again and again on the same thing.

*"Nice. I absolutely like on what you are wearing especially your jacket. That jacket and tie are suit with you. It looks really nice as well as perfect on you."*

Basically, when asked to give compliment on the dress, the respondents use either general or specific adjective. Some of the respondents use both general and specific adjectives on their compliments. However, one of the respondents gives a compliment in a strange way.

*"Nice to look you like that."*

#### c. Compliment on the figure

When giving compliment on the body, most respondents (19 persons) use the word *look*, and 11 persons use *be + adj*. There is no dominant adjective which is used by the respondents. Most of them use general adjectives like *good* (by 5 persons), *fantastic* and *perfect* (by 4 persons each). Even the adjective *beautiful* which seems inappropriate since the hearer is a boy is also used by 4 persons. Only two persons use the specific adjective *handsome*.

To start a compliment, the respondents use an exclamation word to show that they are surprised and also to show their attention to the hearer. Again, the word *wow* is used by the respondents to show their surprise. Instead of using exclamation word, the respondents also use intensifier to emphasize their

compliment. They use *so*, *really* and *very* to intensify their compliment. Examples of the compliment are exposed below.

1. Wow, you look so good now.
2. You look so different. You look fantastic.
3. You look more beautiful.\*
4. Wow, your body is good now.

As other Indonesians who like to give comment on compliment, the respondents also give comment on their compliment. Some of the comments are also the compliment when they are seen from the meaning. The comments which show their attention to the hearer are sometimes in the form of questions which do not need to answer.

1. Wow, your change is amazing. *How often do you do sport in week?*
2. *How often do you do exercise?* You look so perfect.
3. *Wow, I don't believe it's you.* You are so perfect, much better than before.
4. *Glad to see you like that.*

One of the respondents gives a compliment and a comment at the same time. Her compliment is longer than the others and it shows how close her relationship to her friend. She is proud of him. Based on her compliment and comment, it seems that she does not expect him to change so much. She might have challenged him before and she is surprised to see how different he is now.

*"I'm really proud of you. You become different in the best way. Your body is proportional now and it is good for you."*

However, if they do not have close relationship, this such compliment and comment might not be appropriate to utter.

Another respondent also produces the similar comment. His comment seems to show that he challenged his friend in the past before they meet.

*"See, you look fantastic with your body now. It's totally different since I haven't seen you 5 years. For the first time I see you again, I almost don't recognize that it is you. You look very handsome with your well-built body that you have now"*

In reality, those two comments rarely happen. Even if we have a close relationship, it is not appropriate to say how proud we are. It is not such a competition or an achievement. We do not know what happens to him. When we meet after long time, it is not good to say 'see' as if we challenged him to lose his weight. When the word *see* is not used, the expression will be appropriate.

### ***Situation 2: Compliment on the ability and performance***

#### **a. Compliment on the test result**

There is not any dominant formula produced by students in this case. Only *PRO V* in which the verbs are not stick to a particular verb. Most of the verb used is *do* which is variously used to show a congratulating action. The adjective that is mostly used is *great* and of course exclamation word is also used to show their surprise toward the achievement. They did not expect him to pass the test since he said that he did not have any hope to pass the test. Therefore, when he passes the

exam, they are surprised and they express their surprise together with their compliment. And of course, most of the respondents use *congratulations* for this case.

1. Wow, you did it well.
2. Wow, you get good score. Congratulations.
3. Congratulations for your hard work.

Since almost all respondents congratulate, the phrase *good job* and *well done* are used by the respondents. They appreciate the hard work that the hearer has done.

1. Good job.
2. Good job. You did it.
3. Well done, my friend.

They give a compliment not only on the person as stated above but also on the thing or the result. The statements are common in Bahasa Indonesia, the language that all respondents use in their daily life. However, in some cases, the statements might express an underestimating expression that the hearer can do by himself.

1. Wow, that's a great score.
2. That's amazing result.
3. That's gift from your effort.

And from the compliments produced by the respondents, it seems that they do not use the semantic formula that most people do. They use various expressions which in some cases they seem not related to the compliment.

1. How can you do it?
2. Can you teach me how to do it? Can we study together?
3. It's miracle.

One of the respondents even writes the expression which is widely used in the television. However, this expression does seem appropriate to be expressed to a friend. He writes *'That's my boy'*. In many movies, this expression is used as a compliment but it is not used as a compliment to a friend who has the same status. This expression is patronizing, which is used by a father or a person who has higher status than the hearer.

Some of the respondents even give comments which support the hearer to keep the achievement. They also say that they are proud of the achievement that the hearer gains. These expressions of support show that the speaker has a close relationship with the hearer. The expressions also show how big the attention that the speaker gives to the hearer.

1. Well, congratulations because you've got a satisfactory result. You've worked hard and kept trying. You also never give up, and here's the result you got. Very impressive.
2. Excellent. I believe that you can pass on the final exam test. Your test result is good even you also got a satisfying score. I appreciate on you hard work. Good job and you are excellent. Keep your score.
3. Congratulations. You do a good job. I am proud of you.

As seen above, there is no dominant formula. Even some respondents use the Indonesian expressions but they express them in English. They still deliver Indonesian pragmatic expressions within the English language.

b. Compliment on the scholar

Almost similar to the previous situation, most of the respondents congratulate the hearer. The congratulating expression is followed by comment as most Indonesians do. 14 respondents use the word *congratulation* and followed by some comments. Surprisingly, not many respondents use exclamation. Only 1 respondent use the exclamation *wow*. For some respondents, being chosen as a scholar is a luck. Therefore, instead of congratulating, the respondents give a compliment on his luck.

1. Congratulations. How lucky you are.
2. You're so lucky, keep spirit to reach your dream.
3. What a lucky boy.
4. So lucky are you!

However, being chosen a scholar is not only a luck. It needs a hard work. The respondents realize that getting a scholar is not easy. They have to study and work hard, even much harder than before. So, when they get the scholar, all the hard work is paid off. The scholar is like an award for given to them. It is an award for their hard work.

1. You have the right to get it.
2. That's a good achievement. I know your effort, and this is the result. Good job.
3. Congratulations for your hard work.
4. Hard work always pays off.

Getting a scholar is sometimes considered as an achievement. Those who get a scholar must be smart people. They must have worked hard. Therefore, they must be smart since they study hard to get the scholar.

1. You are so smart. The school is not wrong giving you scholarship. Congratulations.
2. How smart you are. I'm really proud of you.

Getting a scholar can make everyone happy. Not only the getter who is happy, but also their friends. They also feel happy and proud when one of their friends gets it. The expression of being proud '*proud of you*' is expressed again and again by ten respondents.

1. Glad to hear that.
2. I'm proud of you.
3. Congratulations. I'm proud of you.
4. Amazing, man. Finally, you get the scholarship. I am proud of you.

However, they know that it is not the end of their study. Getting a scholar is just the beginning of their future study. They must study hard to keep the scholarship. Otherwise, the school will withdraw the scholarship.

1. Congratulations for your scholarship. You must keep it and keep your study.
2. I am proud of you. congratulations, your effort is not useless. Good luck for your next education.

Some of the respondents (7 person) do not give a compliment. They say something which is not directly connected to the compliment. They just give comment on the achievement.

1. I never expected.
2. Well deserved.
3. As long as you work hard, nothing is impossible.

As stated before, Indonesians always give comment on something, even on the achievement like the scholarship. For them, giving comment and advice means that they get involved on somebody's life. It, further, means that they are still having a relationship, close relation. He combines all the compliment stated above.

*You are very lucky. You can get a scholarship to continue your study. It is not easy. I am proud of you. congratulations. I say to you for on what you have got. I admire you as well."*

c. Compliment on the cooking ability

Actually, this situation is about to compliment the ability of a person in cooking. However, since it is also related to food, many respondents give a compliment on the food. Therefore, the construction *be + adj* is dominant in this situation, produced by 20 respondents. Consequently, the specific adjective which is related to food, *delicious*, is also used by 19 respondents. In this situation, the respondents also use exclamation word, either using *wow* or adjectives used as exclamation, like *great*, *good*, and *terrific*. Some respondents also use *wh* construction to show their surprise. Some examples can be seen below.

1. Wow, it's delicious.
2. What a delicious food.
3. Love your cook so much. What a food.
4. Wow, your food is so delicious, yummy.

Given delicious food, some respondents thank the hearer. Besides, they also give compliment on the food that they receive.

1. That was delicious food. Thanks for the delicious food.
2. It's really delicious food. Thank you.
3. It's good food. Thank you.

Besides giving compliment merely on the food, some respondents give compliment on the ability of the person without giving compliment on the food. They do not know that their friend can cook. So, they are surprised when she gives some food to them, and they give the compliment to their friend without giving a compliment to her food. And dealing with the person, adjective *talented* is used by 10 respondents.

1. You're talented.
2. I'm surprised you can cook so good. You are so talented.
3. You're a very talented cook.
4. You're a great chef dude.

The other respondents give compliment on the food and on the person. Some of the compliments on the person seem like a comment to show surprise. However, some show that they do not give comment, but they truly comment on the person.

1. It is very delicious food that I have tasted. *I think you are the good chef in your home.*
2. *I didn't know you have a good hand to cook.* It's nice.
3. It tastes good. I think you can be a chef.

Even one of the respondents shows his exaggerated feeling. He not only gives comment but also gives compliment and expresses his happiness.

*Terrific! Evidently, you are great in cooking. I can't believe this first but it's real. You have great cooking ability. I am so happy to know it.*

### **Conclusion**

Compliments among Indonesian students of English are pragmatically based on Bahasa Indonesia, their language. It can be understood since they are all Indonesians and none has ever been in an English speaking country. However, some of the respondents imitate English natives in giving compliment with wrong target like in 'That's my boy' which seems patronizing while they are complimenting their friends not their sub status.

This phenomenon, complimenting using English with their native pragmatic context, confirms the theory that native language influences persons in complimenting and that complimenting differ from society to society even though they use the similar language (Chen, 2010). Therefore, there are some compliments that are not using the formula of compliments uttered by English natives.

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