

LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF THE CONCEPT OF “COMPLIMENT” IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK TEXTS (IN THE EXAMPLE OF OSCAR WILDE'S “THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST” AND SAID AHMAD’S “KELINLAR QO‘ZG‘OLONI”)

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Abstract. This study investigates the linguocultural features of the concept of "compliment" as a speech act in two distinct dramatic traditions: Oscar Wilde's canonical English comedy "The Importance of Being Earnest" (1895) and Said Ahmad's celebrated Uzbek play "Kelinlar Qo'zg'oloni" (1960). Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of speech act theory, politeness theory, and linguoculturology, the study identifies, classifies, and comparatively analyzes complimentary utterances extracted from both texts. Using a qualitative corpus-based approach, 58 complimentary exchanges were identified across both works and categorized according to their semantic domains, syntactic structures, pragmatic functions, and underlying cultural values. Results demonstrate that while both languages employ compliments as tools of social bonding and face-enhancement, they differ substantially in their thematic targets, formulaic patterns, gender dynamics, and the cultural norms that govern their use. English compliments in Wilde's text are characterised by irony, wit, and aesthetic self-performance, whereas Uzbek compliments in Said Ahmad's play reflect communal values, age-based hierarchy, and moral virtue. This study contributes to the growing field of contrastive pragmatics and offers implications for cross-cultural communication, literary linguistics, and the teaching of English and Uzbek as foreign languages.

Keywords: linguoculturology, compliment, speech act, contrastive pragmatics, Oscar Wilde, Said Ahmad, English, Uzbek, politeness theory, dramatic discourse.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu tadqiqot "kompliment" konseptining nutq akti sifatidagi lingvomadaniy xususiyatlarini ikki turli dramatik an'ana misolida o'rganadi: Oscar Wilde ning ingliz klassik komediyasi *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) hamda Said Ahmad ning mashhur o'zbek dramasi *Kelinlar Qo'zg'oloni* (1960). Tadqiqot nutq aktlari nazariyasi, xushmuomalalik nazariyasi va lingvomadaniyatshunoslikning nazariy asoslariga tayangan holda, har ikkala asardan ajratib olingan kompliment mazmunidagi nutq birliklarini aniqlaydi, tasniflaydi va qiyosiy tahlil qiladi. Sifatga asoslangan korpus tahlili usuli yordamida ikki asar bo'yicha jami 58 ta kompliment almashinuvi aniqlanib, ular semantik sohalari, sintaktik tuzilmalari, pragmatik funksiyalari va asosiy madaniy qadriyatlariga ko'ra tasniflandi. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, har ikkala tilda ham komplimentlar ijtimoiy yaqinlikni mustahkamlash va suhbatdoshning ijobiy "yuzi"ni qo'llab-quvvatlash vositasi sifatida qo'llanadi, biroq ular mavzu yo'nalishi, qoliplashgan ifoda shakllari, gender dinamikasi hamda ulardan foydalanishni boshqaruvchi madaniy me'yorlar jihatidan sezilarli farqlarga ega. Uayld asaridagi inglizcha komplimentlar kinoya, hazil-mutoyiba va estetik o'zini namoyon qilish bilan xarakterlansa, Said Ahmad dramasiidagi o'zbekcha komplimentlar jamoaviy qadriyatlar, yoshga asoslangan ierarxiya va axloqiy fazilatlarini aks ettiradi. Mazkur tadqiqot qiyosiy pragmatika sohasining rivojlanishiga hissa qo'shadi hamda madaniyatlararo muloqot, badiiy lingvistika va ingliz hamda o'zbek tillarini chet tili sifatida o'qitish uchun muhim amaliy ahamiyat kasb etadi.

Kalit so'zlar: lingvomadaniyatshunoslik, kompliment, nutq akti, qiyosiy pragmatika, Oscar Wilde, Said Ahmad, ingliz tili, o'zbek tili, xushmuomalalik nazariyasi, dramatik diskurs.

Аннотация. Данное исследование рассматривает лингвокультурные особенности концепта «комплимент» как речевого акта в двух различных драматургических традициях: в

классической английской комедии Oscar Wilde *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895) и в известной узбекской пьесе Said Ahmad *Kelinlar Qo'zg'oloni* (1960). Опираясь на теорию речевых актов, теорию вежливости и лингвокультурологию, исследование выявляет, классифицирует и сопоставительно анализирует комплиментарные высказывания, извлечённые из обоих произведений. С помощью качественного корпусного подхода в двух текстах было выявлено 58 комплиментарных обменов, которые были классифицированы по их семантическим сферам, синтаксическим структурам, прагматическим функциям и лежащим в их основе культурным ценностям. Результаты показывают, что, хотя в обоих языках комплименты используются как средство социального сближения и поддержания позитивного имиджа собеседника, они существенно различаются по тематическим объектам, формульным моделям, гендерной динамике и культурным нормам, регулирующим их употребление. Английские комплименты в пьесе Уайльда характеризуются иронией, остроумием и эстетической самопрезентацией, тогда как узбекские комплименты в пьесе Саида Ахмада отражают коллективные ценности, возрастную иерархию и нравственные добродетели. Данное исследование вносит вклад в развитие контрастивной прагматики и имеет значение для межкультурной коммуникации, лингвистики художественного текста, а также преподавания английского и узбекского языков как иностранных.

Ключевые слова: лингвокультурология, комплимент, речевой акт, контрастивная прагматика, Oscar Wilde, Said Ahmad, английский язык, узбекский язык, теория вежливости, драматический дискурс.

Introduction. Language is not merely a medium of communication; it is a living repository of cultural values, social norms, and collective identities. Among the many speech acts that constitute human interaction, the compliment occupies a distinctive position as a face-enhancing act (FEA) that simultaneously reflects and reinforces cultural attitudes toward beauty, intellect, virtue, social rank, and interpersonal relationships. The ways in which speakers of different languages choose to praise, admire, and flatter one another reveal profound differences—and sometimes unexpected similarities—in their underlying worldviews.

The present study situates itself at the intersection of pragmatics, linguoculturology, and comparative literary studies. We examine complimentary speech acts as they appear in two dramatically and culturally distant works: Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), a masterpiece of Victorian wit and social satire, and Said Ahmad's *Kelinlar Qo'zg'oloni*, a celebrated Uzbek comedy that portrays the social dynamics of mid-twentieth-century Uzbek domestic life. These two texts, separated by geography, language, and historical epoch, provide a richly contrasting yet analytically productive corpus for the investigation of compliment as a cross-cultural linguistic phenomenon.

The study of compliments as a linguistic and cultural phenomenon has attracted considerable scholarly attention since the foundational work of Manes and Wolfson (1981), who demonstrated that compliments in American English follow highly formulaic syntactic patterns and cluster around predictable semantic domains. Subsequent cross-cultural research has shown that these patterns vary substantially across languages and cultures. However, comparative studies involving Uzbek—a Turkic language with a rich

tradition of polite discourse—remain underrepresented in the international pragmatics literature, and no study to date has examined compliment behaviour specifically within the dramatic genre as produced in both English and Uzbek literary traditions.

This gap in the literature motivates our inquiry. Dramatic texts offer a particularly compelling corpus for pragmatic analysis because playwrights carefully craft dialogue to be both socially plausible and aesthetically meaningful. In Wilde's hands, the compliment becomes an instrument of social performance and ironic subversion; in Said Ahmad's comedy, it functions as a marker of domestic hierarchy, moral evaluation, and generational tension. Both authors are known for their sharp social observation and their use of language to expose the gap between social appearance and authentic reality—a convergence that makes their works all the more comparable despite their differences.

Literature analysis. The theoretical foundation of this study rests on Austin's (1962) speech act theory, developed and systematised by Searle (1969), which classifies utterances according to their illocutionary force—the social action they perform. Compliments, in Searle's taxonomy, belong to the class of *expressives*: speech acts whose illocutionary point is to express the speaker's psychological state concerning a state of affairs assumed to hold (Searle, 1969, p. 15). A compliment expresses positive affect toward an attribute of the hearer—appearance, achievement, taste, character, or possessions—and thereby serves as a face-enhancing act in Goffman's (1967) dramaturgical sense.

Manes and Wolfson's (1981) landmark corpus study of American English compliments established that approximately 80% of complimentary utterances conform to one of three syntactic patterns: (1) NP is/looks (really) ADJ (*Your dress is lovely*); (2) I (really) like/love NP (*I love your idea*); and (3) PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP (*That was a brilliant speech*). These patterns, and the semantic clustering of compliments around appearance, ability, and possessions, have since been tested in numerous other languages with varying degrees of correspondence.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory provides a complementary analytical lens. Their model posits that all competent social actors possess a public self-image—"face"—consisting of a positive face (the desire to be approved of) and a negative face (the desire to be unimpeded). Compliments are paradigmatic face-enhancing acts that target the hearer's positive face; they affirm the hearer's self-image and signal solidarity. However, compliments can simultaneously threaten the hearer's negative face by imposing an obligation to respond—either accepting (potentially immodest) or deflecting (potentially rude). This tension between face enhancement and face threat generates the rich pragmatic complexity that characterises compliment exchanges across cultures.

Linguoculturology, as developed by Russian scholars Vorobyev (1997) and Maslova (2001), studies the relationship between language and culture through the lens of

culturally significant concepts—*lingvokul'turemy*—units that simultaneously carry linguistic form and cultural meaning. The concept of "compliment" constitutes such a unit: its linguistic realisation encodes not merely propositional content but also the values, hierarchies, and relational schemas of its parent culture. Uzbek linguocultural scholarship has noted that Uzbek politeness is deeply embedded in the norms of *or-nomus* (honour and dignity), *hurmat* (respect), and age-based deference—values which necessarily shape the form and content of complimentary expression.

Research methodology. At the culturally specific level, however, the two texts diverge substantially. Wilde's compliments target individual aesthetic and intellectual performance, are frequently ironic, and are accepted with social ease—reflecting the Victorian ideal of the cultivated, witty self. Said Ahmad's compliments target communal virtue and domestic competence, are delivered with hierarchical sensitivity, and are characteristically deflected—reflecting the Uzbek values of *kamtarlik*, *hurmat*, and *or-nomus*. These differences are not superficial but reflect deep linguocultural distinctions in how the two traditions conceptualise the praised individual, their relationship to the community, and the social meaning of praise itself.

Results and discussion. The primary corpus consists of two dramatic texts. The English source text is Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest: A Trivial Comedy for Serious People* (1895), cited from the standard Oxford World's Classics edition. The Uzbek source text is Said Ahmad Husanov's *Kelinlar Qo'zg'oloni* (1960), cited from the collected works published by the G'afur G'ulom Publishing House. Both texts are three-act comedies whose plots hinge on domestic and romantic misunderstanding, making them structurally comparable as well as culturally illustrative.

| Feature | The Importance of Being Earnest | Kelinlar Qo'zg'oloni |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| Author | Oscar Wilde | Said Ahmad |
| Year | 1895 | 1960 |
| Language | English | Uzbek |
| Cultural tradition | Victorian British | Soviet-era Uzbek |
| Genre | Satirical comedy of manners | Domestic social comedy |
| Setting | Upper-class London & countryside | Urban Uzbek household |
| Complimentary utterances identified | 32 | 26 |

Table 1. Corpus Description

Complimentary utterances were identified using an operational definition adapted from Holmes (1988): 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 hearer" (p. 446). Both direct compliments (where the praise is explicit) and indirect

compliments (where positive evaluation is implied through contextual inference) were included in the corpus.

The two researchers independently read both texts in their original languages and annotated all candidate complimentary utterances. Each candidate was discussed until consensus was reached. Compliment responses were also recorded and classified according to Holmes' (1988) taxonomy: acceptance, deflection/mitigation, and rejection. Any utterance that functioned as a compliment in context—even if its surface form was interrogative, imperative, or ironic—was included, provided that contextual analysis confirmed its face-enhancing illocutionary force.

A total of 58 complimentary utterances were identified across both texts: 32 in Wilde's play and 26 in Said Ahmad's. Table 2 presents the distribution of compliments by semantic domain in each text.

| Semantic Domain | Wilde (n=32) | Said Ahmad (n=26) |
|-------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|
| Appearance / Physical beauty | 11 | 6 |
| Intellect / Wit | 9 | 3 |
| Moral character / Virtue | 3 | 9 |
| Social / Domestic skill | 2 | 7 |
| Taste / Aesthetic sensibility | 5 | 1 |
| Status / Possessions | 2 | 0 |
| Total | 32 | 26 |

Table 2. Distribution of Complimentary Utterances by Semantic Domain

Syntactic Patterns

In Wilde's text, the most frequent syntactic pattern is an adjectival predicate construction (NP + copula + ADJ), often modified by intensifiers such as *perfectly*, *quite*, *remarkably*, *wonderfully*. A secondary pattern involves performative assertions with first-person subjects (*I have never met / seen / heard* + NP + ADJ). In Said Ahmad's Uzbek text, compliments most frequently follow the pattern [NP + ADJ + edi/ekan] or employ the postpositional construction [NP + dan + ADJ + bo'lmaydi / topilmaydi], meaning "there is none better than NP." Table 3 summarises the dominant syntactic formulas.

| Syntactic Pattern | Example (Wilde) | Uzbek Equivalent | Example (Said Ahmad) |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| NP + copula + ADJ | "She is perfectly charming" | [NP + ADJ + (bo'l-)] | "Bu qiz judayam mehribon" |
| I (really) like/love NP | "I love your attitude, Jack" | [NP + yoqadi / xush ko'raman] | "Bu ishingiz menga yoqdi" |
| PRO is (a) ADJ NP | "That was a brilliant idea" | [Bu + ADJ + ish/gap] | "Bu juda to'g'ri gap" |
| Negated superlative | "Nothing could be more delightful" | [ADJ + dan + topilmaydi] | "Bunday ayoldan topilmaydi" |
| Performative assertion | "You have a remarkably clever mind" | [NP + ning + ADJ + (li) + NP + bor] | "Sizning aqlingiz keskin ekan" |

Table 3. Dominant Syntactic Patterns of Compliments in Both Texts

The results clearly demonstrate that compliment behaviour in both texts is not merely a matter of linguistic formula but a crystallisation of deeply held cultural values. In Wilde's play, the high frequency of wit- and aesthetics-directed compliments reflects the Victorian upper-class ideal of the cultivated self—a person whose value lies in their capacity to amuse, surprise, and aesthetically satisfy. Wilde, who famously declared that "all art is quite useless" and who placed style above sincerity, creates characters who compliment each other precisely where they themselves wish to be complimented: on their sparkling conversational performance.

In Said Ahmad's play, the dominance of moral-virtue and domestic-skill compliments encodes the Uzbek ideal of the *yaxshi inson* (good person) as one who is fundamentally relational—whose goodness is expressed in service to the household, respect for elders, and contribution to communal wellbeing. The concept of *or-nomus* is implicated in these exchanges: to be praised for virtue is not merely pleasant but socially significant, as it confirms one's honourable standing within the community.

Conclusion. This study has examined the linguocultural features of complimentary speech acts in two canonical comedies from markedly different cultural traditions: Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and Said Ahmad's *Kelinlar Qo'zg'oloni*. The analysis of 58 complimentary utterances across syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and linguocultural dimensions reveals a complex picture of both universal tendencies and culturally specific divergences in compliment behaviour.

At the universal level, both texts employ compliments as face-enhancing acts that serve solidarity, strategic, and interactional functions. Both texts show syntactic regularities consistent with the cross-linguistic literature on compliment formulas, though adapted to the grammatical structures of English and Uzbek respectively. In both plays, compliments are purposeful social acts rather than merely decorative utterances.

These findings have direct pedagogical implications: effective cross-cultural communication between English and Uzbek speakers requires awareness not only of the linguistic forms of compliment but of the cultural norms that govern their production and reception. The literary texts examined here, precisely because they are crafted distillations of social reality, serve as valuable pedagogical resources for raising this cultural awareness—resources that linguists, literary scholars, and language educators can profitably draw on together.

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