

## ЛИТЕРАТУРОВЕДЕНИЕ И ЛИНГВОКУЛЬТУРОЛОГИЯ

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КОМПЛИМЕНТ В АНГЛИЙСКОЙ И РУССКОЙ  
КОММУНИКАТИВНЫХ КУЛЬТУРАХ:  
СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНЫЙ АНАЛИЗ

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**Аннотация.** Выявлены общие и специфические особенности языковой реализации дополнительных выражений в английской и русской лингвокультурах. Изучение комплимента представляется оправданным и необходимым, поскольку комплимент является одним из наиболее важных аспектов, который помогает участникам диалогового взаимодействия правильно настроить коммуникационного партнера.

**Ключевые слова:** Язык, комплимент, речевой акт, этикет, лингвистика, общение.

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A COMPLIMENT IN THE ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN  
COMMUNICATIVE CULTURES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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**Abstract.** The general and specific features of the language implementation of complementary expressions in English and Russian linguocultures are revealed. The study of a compliment seems to be justified and necessary, since a compliment is one of the most important aspects that help participants in dialogue interaction to properly configure a communication partner.

**Keywords:** Language, compliment, speech act, etiquette, linguistics, communication.

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## **1. Theory of speech acts in the context of modern linguistic literature**

Compliment in the English and Russian communicative cultures investigated in this work in line with the theory of speech acts. The consideration of speech acts originated in the field of analytical philosophy, after which it took shape in a separate linguistic direction in order to find the relationship of language with objects of the world [5, P. 166].

In physiological terms, a speech act is performed in the process of pronouncing sounds and writing letters designating them. However, significant differences are revealed between the simple utterance of sounds/spelling of letters and the performance of a speech act. One of the main differences is that a speech act is possible only when the combination of sounds or letters matters. A simple set of sounds that does not matter will not be considered a speech act. Therefore, each chain of morphemes produced by a person in a speech act always matters [18, P. 168].

According to D.F. Komorova, the concept of “speech act” should be approached from the point of view of pragmatics, according to which a speech act is a “speech action that is carried out by the speaker in order to express hope for a certain state of affairs in the life of the addressee in the future in order to inform him about the speaker’s assessment of the properties or actions of the addressee or the situation as a whole” [9, P. 9].

Among the main characteristics of a speech act, intentionality stands out, i.e. intent, purposefulness, conventionality, correlation with the speaker’s face and sequence [2, P. 688].

In modern linguistics, a large number of types of speech acts are distinguished. Among the most basic types of speech acts, following V.N. Yartseva, distinguished are the following ones:

- 1) informative speech acts, i.e. communications, representations (Train arrived);
- 2) speech acts of motivation, i.e. derivatives, prescriptions (leave);

3) speech acts of acceptance of obligations, i.e. commissions (I promise to be on time);

4) acts expressing the emotional state of the speaker, i.e. expressive (sorry for bothering you);

5) acts of establishment, i.e. declarations, verdicts, operatives (for example, sentencing).

The compliment speech act in this classification should be referred to as expressive. However, different researchers offer their own vision of the compliment belonging to a particular speech act. For example, V.I. Karasik [8, P.330] believes that a compliment is a status-labile speech act. R.V. Serebryakova argues that the compliment should be attributed to approving phatic speech acts.

One way or another, a compliment must be considered in line with the theory of speech acts. Therefore, it is further necessary to consider the definition of the term “compliment” as a speech act and highlight its main characteristics.

According to E.U. Abramova, compliment should be considered as “a statement containing a comment regarding any positive event, characteristics, acquisitions, achievements that are associated with the addressee and are regarded as positive by the sender of the message and its recipient” [1, P. 30]. In this definition, a compliment is described, first of all, with its evaluation characteristics, which always, in the opinion of this researcher, should be positive. In linguistic research, scientists put different aspects of the phenomenon of “compliment” in its definition.

The speech act in question has specific features [15, 16]. The structural and cognitive features of a compliment are brevity, occasionality (use only in this case) and a small degree of sincerity (especially in comparison with praise) [27, P.151]. All these features, of course, can be challenged. Most of the compliments are probably brief in structure. However, in some cases, a compliment can take a fairly long distance in communication. The same can be said about the occasional compliment. Both in Russian and in English, there are certain speech formulas that are considered established and used in finished form. As for sincerity, indeed, with

a compliment, it is important not so much to actually experience the feelings that are described in the compliment (for example, about the appearance of the interlocutor), but how much the expression of these feelings is for the purpose of a successful speech act. In other words, neither the speaker himself nor the object of the compliment cares whether the feelings expressed are sincere. However, this does not mean that any compliment is insincere, like flattery. Most likely, the speaker and his interlocutor simply do not think about whether the speaker is receiving a compliment of the emotions about which he informs his interlocutor [27, P. 151].

## **2. Compliment: definition and main characteristics**

In the study of N.T. Huong provides both a wider and narrower understanding of the compliment speech act. In a broader sense, a compliment is “any expression of a sincere positive assessment of the addressee” [21, P. 6]. In a narrower understanding, the compliment speech act presupposes a ritualized and not always sincere assessment of objects that concerns partners, and the addressee wants to convince the addressee of his respect in his speech act [21, P. 6].

N.A. Trofimova offers a definition of the term “compliment” as a speech act: a compliment is “any statement directed at the addressee with sincere admiration for its positive qualities or their ritual positive assessment expressed by the speaker in order to convince the interlocutor of his respect” [27, P. 149].

Based on a positive assessment of the compliment, this concept is very close to the concept of “praise”. In this regard, many researchers often study these phenomena together. On the other hand, the concepts of “compliment” and “praise” still reveal a number of differences. The most important difference, according to O.S. Issers, is the fact that a positive assessment in praise is the main goal, while in a compliment it is only a means of communicating your disposition or good feelings towards the object of compliment [7, P. 93].

The objectives of the compliment depend on the situation of communication and the relationship between the interlocutors. When a compliment is used in the process of communication between familiar or unfamiliar people, in this case its purpose is to show itself as a polite member of a given language community.

However, when communication takes place between relatives and friends, then the goal of the compliment is to make a pleasant communicant, to improve the emotional atmosphere in the process of communication.

The goal is to arouse sympathy, to place the interlocutor to oneself, or even to achieve personal gain in this type of communication is fading into the background [20, P. 170].

Researcher A.V. Soroko singles out the linguistic characteristics of a compliment proper, which include:

1) the expression of positive semantics, since the object of a compliment is usually one or another positive quality of the object of a compliment (for example, its appearance, professional activity, character, manner of behavior, etc.);

2) vocabulary with a positive assessment;

3) hyperbolization, i.e. exaggeration;

4) emotionality, which in oral speech is expressed by means of intonation, and in the written text by means of exclamation points [26, P. 67].

A distinctive feature of a compliment as a speech genre is its multi-genre. There are a large number of different classifications of compliment, distinguished by the following criteria:

1) the parametric orientation of the compliment (compliments in appearance, inner qualities, age, etc.);

2) by addressing (compliments to the interlocutor, to himself, to a third party);

3) by the singularity / plurality of recipients (a compliment to a single addressee and a collective addressee);

4) according to the degree of explication of intention (direct and indirect compliments);

5) according to the degree of emotionality (emotional and rational / logical compliments);

6) in temporal orientation (compliments directed to the past, present or future);

7) by structure (short, medium and detailed compliments);

8) by the presence of illocutionary coercion (initiative and compelled compliments), etc. [21, P. 7].

### **3. Place of compliment in speech etiquette and speech behavior**

In modern linguistics and philology, compliment is considered not only in the framework of the theory of speech acts, but also as a component of speech etiquette and speech behavior of people in the framework of interpersonal communication.

Etiquette in the general sense of the word means “rules of good form; the accepted order of conduct, providing contact and maintaining respectful, friendly communication of interlocutors in various situations” [12, P. 546].

The connection between compliment and speech etiquette in Russian linguistics was first revealed by N. I. Formanovskaya. From her point of view, speech etiquette should be understood as “a microsystem of nationally specific sustainable communication formulas adopted and prescribed by society to establish contact between interlocutors, maintain communication in a chosen key” [20, P. 8].

Politeness as a special category of a communicative speech act is distinguished due to the fact that it is designed to regulate the communicative effect of interlocutors, prescribe the norms of both verbal and non-verbal behavior of people in the process of communication, and also regulate the relationship of people in interpersonal group or mass communication, in which compliment is of no small importance.

The compliment in the framework of speech etiquette is standardized and official. Consequently, normalized complementary formulas characteristic of a certain time period and a specific country are used in speech behavior.

A compliment as a component of speech etiquette and speech summarization is related to the category of politeness. Politeness is understood as “the central and fundamental category of communicative consciousness, the content of which is, on the one hand, a set of standardized norms and rules of social behavior that govern the communicative interaction of communicating, on the other hand, a system of communicative strategies of positive and negative politeness aimed at harmonious, conflict-free communication” [3, P. 45].

The complex of speech acts is speech activity. As part of a speech act, information is transferred from one (or several) participants of a speech act to another/other participants. This is the communicative nature of the speech act. It should be noted that the communicative nature of a speech act always has a bilateral character; i.e. the speech act is carried out in the form of dialogue. Based on the dialogic form of communication, a speech act always has a bilateral character; i. e. involves at least two participants in communication. In this case, one of them can be imaginary or wordless. And even if the speech act appears in a monological form, then the dialogic nature of the speech act is also traced here, since the addressee makes replicas for himself, thus acting as both the addressee and the addresser [19, P. 162].

Compliment plays a large role in interpersonal communication.

Mostly, a compliment is a means of openly expressing approval or admiration for the speaking actions, appearance or behavior of the compliment object.

In addition, a compliment allows the speaker to obtain a certain line of behavior from the object of the compliment. Moreover, any compliment always reflects cultural values, which makes it relevant for a comparative study of different linguistic cultures [11, P. 133].

The structure of the compliment is characterized by brevity, occasionality, a relatively small degree of sincerity. In the linguistic aspect, a compliment reveals the following characteristic features: the expression of positive semantics due to vocabulary with a positive assessment, frequent hyperbolization, increased emotionality.

In terms of genre, the compliment is diverse. The criteria for classification of compliments are parametric orientation, addressing, singularity/multiplicity of addressees, degree of intentionality explication, degree of emotionality, temporal orientation, structure and the presence of illocutionary compulsion.

Thus, a compliment as a component of speech etiquette and people's speech behavior is of great importance for establishing contact, successful communication, and achieving the goals of dialogue. Undoubtedly, the norms of speech etiquette change over time, which is the reason for the interest in this research topic. Moreover,

a compliment as a component of speech etiquette may differ from culture to culture. In this regard, it is necessary to consider its national-cultural features.

#### **4. National and cultural specificity of the compliment speech act as a form of speech etiquette in English and Russian cultures**

A compliment as a form of speech etiquette has significant differences in English and Russian cultures. A distinctive feature of a compliment when comparing speech etiquette from different countries and cultures is the difference in the expression of compliment and its assessment in English and Russian communicative cultures. Among the main differences between the English and Russian compliments in this chapter highlighted are:

- The importance of a compliment in communication.

In different communicative situations, representatives of the English-speaking nation often and repeatedly use evaluative cues. Such hyperbolization of the British leads to the fact that representatives of other cultures (including Russian linguistic culture) consider such compliments insincere, i.e. doubt the veracity of the pleasant words of the British [11, P. 133].

In English culture, compliments are used much more often than in Russian culture, since English culture is characterized by exaggeration in expressing ratings. Russian people are much less likely to use compliments in speech. This is due to the fact that in their national character, Russians have straightforward behavior. Their assessments are always sincere, even if such an assessment may offend the interlocutor. Consequently, the Russian communicative culture is characterized, first of all, by the fact that compliment takes an insignificant place here [14, P. 193].

- Orientation to a certain style of communication.

In Russian culture, compliment is a status-oriented style, while in English culture, compliment is a personality-oriented style of communication.

The Russian communication style in this speech act is considered a status-oriented style, which is most clearly expressed in the use of the pronouns “you” and “you” in different communication situations. If we compare this feature with the English linguistic culture, in particular, here we can distinguish



a personality-oriented communication style as opposed to the Russian status-oriented style. A personality-oriented style of communication involves a more informal communication between English-speaking people, symmetrical relationships between interlocutors, with the emphasis in the process of communication being on their equality [4, P. 20].

- Thematic aspect.

Differences in the compliment speech act in Russian and English are also in the thematic aspect. While Russian people more often pay attention to external factors and a person's professionalism during a complimentary speech act, in English culture, on the contrary, a person's internal, moral qualities and mental abilities are more likely to be complimented [13, P. 58].

- The degree of emotionality of a compliment.

In English linguistic culture, compliment is a rational speech act. In Russian culture, the degree of emotionality of a compliment is much higher.

Unlike Russian linguistic culture, the British often use rational compliments as opposed to emotional ones, which are more characteristic, in this comparison, of Russian linguistic culture. The ability of a Russian person to display a wide range of emotions and feelings is defined by the Russian linguistic consciousness as a moral quality associated with the attitude to other people [6, P. 32].

- Addressee response.

Speaking of a compliment, it should be mentioned that each compliment is accompanied by a certain reaction of the interlocutor. Moreover, the response to a compliment varies from culture to culture; i. e. has a cultural and national specificity. For example, in most European cultures, the response to a compliment has a verbal expression of gratitude. However, in Japan, the interlocutor apologizes in response to a compliment. For example, the host (Japanese) will apologize for a compliment about a delicious dinner: Sorry, I did not have much time to prepare [10, P. 73].

The verbal response to a compliment is also different in English and Russian linguistic cultures.

In general, the response to a compliment, according to P. Cedar, can be of the following types:

1) acceptance of the compliment: *Thank you / Спасибо; I think so too / Я тоже такого мнения; I'm glad you like it / Я рад, что вам понравилось;*

2) positive assessment of the compliment (positively colored commentary, action history, return of the compliment): *I worked hard on the project / Я сильно трудился над проектом;*

3) neutral assessment of a compliment (search for confirmation of compliment): *Really? / Правда?;*

4) a negative assessment of the compliment (reduction of its value): *I still need a lot of improvement / Мне все еще надо работать над этим;*

5) denial or negative opinion: *No, not all / Нет, не все;*

6) laughter or smile, non-verbal expression of appreciation;

7) lack of response [23].

In English communicative culture, the response to a compliment is more often positive or neutral. In Russian linguistic culture, a negative reaction of the interlocutor is characteristic, which is not accepted in English-speaking countries. In Russian-language communication, a negative response to a compliment is more frequent, which can occur due to the fault of the speaker, or because of the modesty or shyness of the compliment object [17, P. 202].

As for the English linguistic culture, there is a negative reaction of the interlocutor to a compliment, according to R.V. Serebryakova, much less often, in comparison with Russian linguistic culture [17, P. 18].

The same point of view is held by a foreign researcher B. Langford, from the point of view of which the English rules of speech etiquette imply a simple and direct response to a compliment. For example: Thank you. I'm glad the situation turned out well. A negative reaction (for example, Oh, it was no big deal) is not characteristic of the English communicative culture [25, P. 48].

The English communicative culture is such that the British are not used to arguing with the interlocutor because of false ideas about modesty. However,

a negative reaction to a compliment in English linguistic culture does occur with the following errors in compliments:

- an error in choosing the subject of a compliment;
- inappropriate compliment in this situation;
- antipathy of the addressee to the speaker;
- the uncertainty of the object in the sincerity of the compliment [17, P. 18].
- Gender features.

In both Russian and English culture, the most frequent recipient of a compliment is a woman. However, the addressee of a compliment differs in two cultures: in English communication, a compliment is more often used in replicas of women, while in Russian communication a compliment is noticeable for the most part in men's speech. P. Eckert discusses the gender characteristics of the English compliment. According to this scientist, in the English communicative culture a compliment is more often used by women, and women are also more likely to receive compliment objects [24, P. 365].

In Russian communication culture, on the contrary, a compliment is more often pronounced by men, because, according to etiquette rules, young girls and women, by virtue of their modesty, cannot compliment in order not to fall into an awkward position. However, the recipient of the compliment, as in English culture, is often the women who act, since, as mentioned above, compliments between men are considered indecent.

Thus, a compliment as a component of speech etiquette reveals significant discrepancies in the English and Russian communicative cultures. This is due to the mentality of people of different nationalities, their national character, habits and attitudes characteristic of this community.

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