

The pragmatic functions and expressions of compliments in Gaoling dialect

Yuanmin Zhang, Haiyan Liu, Kaini Zhi

Xi'an Technology and Business College, Xi'an, 710299, China

ABSTRACT

Culture and language are inseparable and complimentary. Language is a significant component of culture and is both shaped and impacted by it. Thus, in order to investigate the pragmatic features of the speech act of complimenting in the Gaoling dialect and its culture, this work gathers corpora using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies.

KEYWORDS

Shaanxi dialect; culture; compliment

1 Introduction

President Xi Jinping highlighted in his significant speech at the symposium on literature and art that "Culture is an important force for the survival and development of a nation." The revitalization of the country is directly tied to its culture. The strong allure and splendor of Chinese culture are essential to the country's independence and sense of national honor. The economic hub of numerous dynasties, the cradle of Chinese culture, and the site of the country's current revolution are all found in Shaanxi Province. Its culture is deeply ingrained in Chinese culture and holds a significant place in its lengthy history. Gaoling District has a lot of potential for cultural development because it is a highly concentrated place in Shaanxi Province for dialects and cultural resources. One of the most significant ways that the cultural symbols of Gaoling District are expressed is through the local dialect. Currently, the research on Shaanxi dialects and culture mainly focuses on academic culture, dialect operas, religious dissemination, wedding and funeral customs, and folk beliefs. For example, Guo Kaixuan's Research on Shaanxi Dialects and Folk Culture, Li Tie's Research on the Soft Power Culture of Shaanxi Regional Dialects under the Background of "the Belt and Road"—Taking the English Translation of Jia Pingwa's Literary Works as an Example, He Junjie's Case Study on the Interference of Shaanxi Guanzhong Dialect in English Intonation Learning, and Wang Min's Material Culture in Dialects and Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language—Taking the Material Cultural Vocabulary in White Deer Plain as an Example. Currently, the research on Shaanxi dialects and culture mainly focuses on academic culture and dialect operas. However, it is rare to conduct research on Shaanxi Jingwei regional dialects and culture from the perspective of pragmatics. Therefore, this paper investigate the pragmatic features of the speech act of complimenting in the Gaoling dialect and its culture.

2 Overview of compliments

As a regular speaking act in daily life, a compliment signifies that the speaker expresses appreciation to people or things other than himself/herself in a direct or indirect fashion, usually praising on the traits of others' belongings or the skills they possess. Compliments are the lubricants for interpersonal communication. They can successfully lower the social barriers between communicators, increase the intimacy and harmony of the relationship between the two parties, and then strengthen the emotional connection between them. Holmes defines a complement as a speaking act in which the complimenter expresses or implicitly praises the complementee's qualities or look, achievements or performance, moral character, skills, and so on. Currently, the research on compliments at home and abroad mainly focuses on gender differences, cross-linguistic aspects, second language acquisition, etc. Lorenzo-Dus, Dumitrescu, etc. conducted cross-linguistic comparison studies among different languages. Chinese scholar Feng Hongjiang made a gender pragmatic comparison study of English-Chinese compliments and their responses. Li Hui, Li Jingwei, and Jiao Xinping did an empirical study on Chinese students' speech acts of English-Chinese compliment responses. However, research integrating complement speech acts with dialects is quite uncommon. Language, as the carrier and communication medium of culture, is the external manifestation of culture. A specific ethnic culture inevitably contains an abstract language system with diverse forms. In the process of cultural development and progress, the corresponding language will also experience different developments. Gaoling dialect is a major dialect with relatively distinct regional characteristics in Northern dialects. The speech act with the highest frequency in people's daily communication is compliment. Therefore, this article conducts a research on compliments in Gaoling dialect from the perspective of pragmatics.

Research Contents and Methods:

Language is intimately linked to culture. Compliments, as a distinct language and social phenomenon in human civilization, have a relatively high social relevance in people's everyday job and studies. They can perform not just the function of interpersonal engagement, but also, to some extent, that of information transfer. Taking the native residents in the Gaoling area as the research objects, this paper adopts the method of combining qualitative and quantitative approaches.

The research questions are as follows:

(1) What are the similarities and differences in the pragmatic strategies of using compliments between males and females within the same gender and across genders in the Gaoling dialect and culture?

(2) What are the similarities and differences in the pragmatic strategies of complimenting elderly males and elderly females by young males and young females in the Gaoling dialect and culture?

Research Methods:

This research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research based on interviews, role-playing, and questionnaires.

Design of Testing Tools:

Referring to the design by Blum-Kulka and others, pertinent corpora were chosen to create a pilot questionnaire based on real-world interview and role-playing scenarios. The final questionnaire design was then adjusted and decided upon based on the findings of the pilot questionnaire survey to guarantee the validity and reliability of the study.

Research Subjects:

Twenty young men, twenty young women, twenty elderly men, and twenty elderly women were randomly selected respectively in Gaoling District to conduct questionnaire surveys.

Analysis of Data:

Gender Differences in the Use and Acceptance of Compliments:

As shown in Table 1, the percentages of male (young) and male (elderly) who often accept compliments are 55.8% and 57.9% respectively. Influenced by the regional culture, the phenomenon of accepting compliments in the regional dialect of Gaoling District is quite common among male groups. Since men like to be affirmed by others, compared with women, men are more inclined to accept compliments from others. In the Gaoling dialect, older men are usually somewhat humble when they receive compliments. They frequently reply to compliments by drawing on their past experiences, and they are more than happy to share their own stories with young people. For instance, in an interview, an elderly person said, "Stop talking about it," in response to a young person complimenting them on their flower-growing skills. I'm just acting haphazardly. They still don't look good. Growing flowers requires patience as well as timely fertilization and watering. You young one, feel free to try as well." Regarding complement usage, Table 2 indicates that 56.2% of young women and 52.5% of young males frequently use compliments. Compared to older folks, younger people utilize compliments more often. Elderly people tend to have more established social circles. The elderly are more likely to be modest and reserved in the Gaoling traditional dialect culture and are not accustomed to using compliments often. Young people are more likely to take the initiative to build new relationships with others. By using compliments, one can make a positive impression, swiftly close the distance with others, and increase their own opportunities and possibilities. Young people are more confident and will utilize a variety of compliments more frequently to express themselves in conversation as a result of current culture and socialization practices. Therefore, they have a relatively greater need to use compliments. Compared with men, women are usually more delicate, emotionally sensitive, sentimental and attach importance to the harmony and amicability of interpersonal relationships. In the dialect culture of Gaoling, it is quite common for women to use compliments. Women are more inclined to express and communicate their feelings when it comes to beautiful things or the virtues of other people. Men, on the other hand, are not accustomed to utilizing compliments regularly and may be expected to be more steady and reserved.

Table 1 Frequency of accepting compliments

	Often accept	Occasionally accept	Never accept
Women (young)	45.6%	53.7%	0.7%
Women (elderly)	40.1%	56.3%	3.6%
Men (young)	55.8%	40.5%	3.7%
Men (elderly)	57.9%	39.3%	2.8%

Table 2 Frequency of using compliments

	Often accept	Occasionally accept	Never accept
Women (young)	56.2%	43.8%	0
Women (elderly)	46.3%	53.2%	0.5%
Men (young)	52.5%	47.5%	0
Men (elderly)	23.8%	75.3%	0.9%

Compliments are widely used, and the topics involved mainly include appearance, ability, personality, children, clothing, and possessions. As shown in Table 3, in the Gaoling dialect culture, compliments about appearance account for 65%. Among them, women give more compliments on appearance than men, and young women give more than elderly women. The results of the interviews show that Gaoling has a long history and a profound traditional cultural heritage. Under the influence of some traditional concepts, people there are rather reserved and introverted. This personality trait of the people in the Gaoling area makes men may feel embarrassed to praise women's beauty straightforwardly, for they are worried about being regarded as being too frivolous. Men are more likely to concentrate on practical communication subjects, such life situation, skills, work-related issues, and so forth, in the Gaoling area's social environment and communication patterns. The Gaoling dialect has a wide variety of favorable terms for complimenting appearance. "Your looks are just amazing," "This girl is so pretty," and "This girl is really good-looking" are a few examples. Of the favorable expressions, 62.5% deal with topics related to talents. males are more likely than women to compliment someone's abilities, and young males are more likely than older men to do so. In the Gaoling dialect, there are comparatively significant discrepancies between men and women in the positive terms used to praise abilities. Men are typically complimented for their strength and exceptional work performance. People would comment, for instance, "This young man is truly something." "He's really good at his job." (Here, "wo ye" means very good). Men are likely to be praised if they demonstrate their efficiency and strength, particularly in scenes involving manual labor or agricultural activity like building homes and harvesting crops. Furthermore, a man will also receive acclaim if he demonstrates intelligence and competence in interpersonal interactions, economic dealings, and other areas. People would say, for instance, "This man is really smart." In this context, "zhuo xing" denotes intelligence, while "mei tai tai" denotes excellence. He does a fantastic job in business.

Table 3 Differences in Topics Involved in Complimentary Expressions

Topic	headcount	percentage
appearance	52	65%
clothes	28	35%
child	36	45%
competence	50	62.5%
possessions	24	30%
personality	49	61.3%

3 Conclusion

Language is the carrier of regional history and culture. The compliment expressions in the dialect of Gaoling area are widely used in daily communication. Analyzing and summarizing the usage of compliment expressions in the dialect of Gaoling area from the perspective of pragmatics will help us understand the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the area where the Jinghe River and the Weihe River converge in Shaanxi Province, and enrich and inherit the intangible cultural heritage. In the actual usage process, there are many aspects of the compliment expressions in the dialect of Gaoling area that are worthy of our in-depth exploration and excavation. For example, when people in Gaoling area use compliment expressions, whether factors such as the degree of intimacy between the two communicative parties, contextual factors and psychological factors will affect the compliment strategies remains to be further studied by us.

Funding

This research was supported by the project of Principal's Fund of Xi'an Technology and Business College (22YZ10).

References

- [1] Herbert R. K., The ethnography of English compliments and compliment responses: A contrastive sketch[A]. In W. Oleksy (ed.), *Contrastive Pragmatics* [C]. Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1989: 3-35.
- [2] Zhou Hongxia. A Comparison of English and Chinese Compliment Expressions in Intercultural Communication[J]. *Journal of Language and Literature Studies*, 2008(19): 93-94.
- [3] Jia Yuxin. *Intercultural Communication*[M]. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 1997.
- [4] Wang Lijun. A Comparative Study on the Response Strategies of Compliments between China and the United States[J]. *Journal of Inner Mongolia Agricultural University*, 2008(1): 305-306.
- [5] Zhang Yanhong, Yu Guodong. A Conversational Analysis of the "Comparative Compliment" Pattern in Chinese Compliment Responses[J]. *Modern Foreign Languages*, 2016(5): 605-615.