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A Comparative Analysis of Compliments in America and Korea*

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1. Introduction

Current trend in the fields of linguistics and foreign language teaching is to focus on communicative competence as elaborated in earlier works of Hymes(1972), Grimshaw(1973), Paulston (1975), Taylor & Wolfson(1978), among others. Recently in sociolinguistics and discourse analysis there has been considerable advance in analyzing interactive patterns and norms. However, there has been little systematic cross-linguistic comparisons on speech acts. This paper aims at comparing one particular kind of speech act, i.e. complimenting, in two different cultures, i.e. America and Korea, at various linguistic levels. The English data

used here are largely from Manes and Wolfson(1981) and the Korean data are from the graduate students at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies who conducted various kinds of survey for data collection in Fall 1998. Comparisons of compliments and responses between the two cultures reveal commonalities as well as differences in a significant way.

2. Distribution of Compliments

The distribution of compliments differs widely according to cultures. For example, American compliments are often heard to the point of sounding trite ; whereas they are rarely heard in a more conservative cultures. For example, it is said that the complimenting behavior hardly exists at all in Indonesia(Wolfson 1987:119). In this section we will compare the distribution of compliments in American culture and Korean culture.

2.1 American Compliments
Objects chosen by the speaker for compliments are of wide variety in America. For example, the data reported in Manes and Wolfson(1981) show that the objects complimented range from hairdos and fingernails to cars and furniture, from jewelry and clothing to photographs and academic papers, from chalk and bulletin boards to children and pets. The wide variety of objects may be a contributing factor of the high frequency of compliments in American society. Wolfson(1989:113) points out that the object

selected to compliment on has to do with both the role and the relative status of the participants in the interaction. Compliments on appearance and possessions appear to be more generally acceptable than those which involve a judgment of another's ability. For example, almost anyone in American culture feels free to offer a compliment on an item of jewelry or on a car. Further, an analysis of the distribution of compliments show that complimenting reflects social values. According to Manes and Wolfson(1981), Wolfson(1986 ; 1989) inter alia, Americans tend to compliment on items that are 'new' or on persons who look 'young or thin'. In addition people tend to positively evaluate 'changes', 'achievement through special abilities', 'good taste', etc.

2.2 Korean Compliments

According to the surveys of compliments in Korea objects selected are similarly varied as in America(M—S. Kim 1998). For example, according to J—Y. Chung(1998), in a survey conducted among the elementary students, the objects for compliments include not only personal possessions but also appearance, abilities, good deed, etc. According to this survey, elementary students report that they either compliment or are complimented on performing special feats among peers. This indicates that elementary students are sensitive to the abilities that enable the possessor to perform good feat either academically or non—academically. This again seems to be due to the fact that the students in this culture are subject to keen competition at school and elsewhere. H—S. Kim(1998) reports that in her survey people

tend to compliment on addressee's body parts very often, but that they rarely compliment on 'lips' and other body parts associated with sexuality. This seems to be due to the fact that Koreans show strong inhibition in commenting(even positively) on body parts which may be misconstrued as involving sexual connotation.

The frequency of compliments in Korea, however, is markedly low as is often expressed by the respondents of surveys, who say they are very rarely complimented, and also admit that they hardly give compliments to others(H-W. Park 1998).[1] This seems to be an indicator of the differences in the two cultures, and is often the source of misunderstanding and stereotypes that Americans are not serious enough and are just profuse in lip-service, and that Koreans are rude and do not know how to interact sociably.

3. Lexical Choices in Compliments

Compliments by definition are the speech act with which the speaker expresses his or her positive feelings toward the addressee. Therefore, a compliment includes at least one word that expresses such positive evaluation of the speaker. In this section we will analyze the patterns of lexical choices in compliments in America and Korea.

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1. In the survey about 23.0% of the sample responded that they are never complimented on per day ; and that about 50.5% responded that they are complimented jon once a day average. In the same survey 78.5% said that Koreans do not compliment enough.

3.1 American Compliments

As Manes and Wolfson(1981:116-117) and Wolfson(1986:116) point out, despite the enormous number and variety of positive terms in English that can be utilized for compliments, the overwhelming majority of compliments fall within a highly restricted set of adjectives and verbs. In the Manes and Wolfson(1981) corpus, it is shown that about 80 per cent of compliments used adjectives, and that verbs were rarely utilized in compliments. As many as 72 different adjectives were found in the total count of 686 naturally occurring compliments. Some of these are topic specific as delicious and curly, while others are extremely general as nice, beautiful, and fantastic ; some are quite strong in evaluation as fantastic, gorgeous and stupendous, while others are weaker in strength as nice and good. Of these wide variety of adjectives, however, only five adjectives account for two-thirds of the data, while most adjectives occur only once or twice in the data. Of these five adjectives two adjectives, nice and good, account for 22.9 per cent and 19.6 per cent of the data, respectively, the examples of which are as follows(Manes and Wolfson 1981:117).

(1) a. Your apartment's <u>nice</u>.

   b. Oh, new shoes? They are really <u>nice</u>.

   c. Bill, you look so <u>nice</u> today.

(2) a. This is <u>good</u>. It tastes like fresh orange juicy.

   b. Your moustache looks <u>good</u>.

c. You did a <u>good</u> job.

The other three most common adjectives, according to Manes and Wolfson(1981), are *beautiful, pretty,* and *great,* which appear in 9.7 per cent, 9.2 per cent, and 6.2 per cent of all adjectival compliments in the data. Some examples of these adjectives are as follows(Wolfson 1986:117).

(3) a. You did a <u>beautiful</u> job of explaining that.
b. You have such a <u>beautiful</u> baby.
c. Gosh, you have a <u>beautiful</u> living room.

(4) a. You look <u>pretty</u> today.
b. That suit is very <u>pretty</u>.
c. Are those new glasses? They're <u>pretty</u>.

(5) a. That was a <u>great</u> meal.
b. Your hair looks <u>great</u> that way.
c. You're doing a <u>great</u> job.

On the other hand, about 20 per cent of the data used verbs for positive semantic load. As the ratio indicates compliments typically utilize adjectives instead of verbs. Uses of verbs are of low frequency and the number of verbs is markedly small as compared with adjectives. In these small number of verbs, two verbs of liking, i.e. *like* and *love,* account for 86 per cent of the data. Some examples are as follows(Wolfson 1986:117 ; Manes and Wolfson

1981:118-119).

(6)   a. I <u>like</u> your haircut.

b. Mary, I <u>like</u> that coat on you.

c. I really <u>like</u> your hair that way.

(7)   a. I <u>love</u> your outfit.

b. I <u>love</u> your skirt and your blouse.

c. I <u>love</u> your skirt, Betty. It's very attractive.

Another feature that characterizes the lexical choices of the compliments in American English is the use of intensifiers such as *really, quite a, some,* etc. This is somewhat extraordinary as compared with others because the intensifiers like these are not inherently positive in meaning, but are interpreted as positive only when they are used in appropriate contexts. Some examples of this kind are as follows.

(8)   a. You've <u>really</u> fixed this place up since the last people were here.

b. Your talk was the one that <u>really</u> went over.

(Manes and Wolfson 1986:118)

The above description of the lexical features of American compliments can be recapitulated in the following tables.

(9)   Cross−Categorial Comparison of Compliments

adjectives	80%
verbs	16%
others	4%
total	100%

(10)   Adjectives in Compliments

nice, good	42.5%	67.6%	
beautiful, pretty, great	25.1%		100%
others		32.4%	

(11)   Verbs in Compliments

love, like	86.0%	100%
others	14.0%	

3.2 Korean Compliments

According to the numerous surveys conducted encompassing wide variety of social groups of various ages and occupations, Korean compliments also make use of adjectives extensively. This seems to be partly due to the fact that the Korean language has a well developed lexical system of adjectives. Many different adjectives are reported to have been used in compliments. Some of them are topic−specific as *chakhata* 'good−natured', *masissta* 'tasty', etc., but the most common adjectives such as *yeypputa* 'pretty', and *cohta* 'good' are very general in their semantics.2)

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2. Since the Korean corpora are based on types instead of tokens, neither the ratio of adjectives versus other parts of speech nor the token or

Some examples of compliments with adjectives are as follows.

(12) a. somssi-ka   cham <u>coh</u>-usi-ney-yo[3)]

talent-Nom very good-Hon-Evid-Ptl

'You are really talented!'

b. moksoli-ka acwu <u>yeyppu</u>-si-kwun-yo

voice-Nom very pretty-Hon-Evid-Ptl

'You have a beautiful voice!'

c. ne   cham <u>chakha</u>-kwuna

you   really good-natured-Evid.Exclam

'You are really good-natured!'

The use of adverbs is also frequently found. Of those adverbs used in compliments the adverbial form of the adjective *yeypputa,* i.e. *yeyppukey,* is very common. The most common adverb used in compliment is *cal* 'well', which is used in conjunction with action verbs. Therefore, in such expressions as *kongpwu-cal-hata* 'study well', *piano-cal-chita* 'play the piano well', *cal-tallita* 'drive/run well', etc., the use of the adverb *cal* is a very productive way of attributing positive meaning to verbs that are evaluatively

type frequency is available.

3. All Korean data are transliterated according to Yale Transliteration System. For glossing Korean data, following abbreviations are used : Acc : accusative, Comp : complementizer, Conn : connective, Cop : copula, Dec : declarative, Evid : evidential, Exclam : exclamation, Hon : honorific, Nom : nominative, Pres : present, Pst : past, Ptl : particle, Q : question, and Top : topic.

neutral. Some such examples are as follows.

(13) a. ne   cham kongpwu   <u>cal</u>   ha-nun-kwuna
       you   really study   well   do-Pres-Evid.Exclam
       'You study very well. [you made good grades...]'

     b. cham <u>yeyppukey</u> sayngki-ess-kwuna
       really prettily   form-Pst-Evid.Exclam
       '(You) are really pretty.'

     c. cha-ka   <u>cal</u>   talli-n-ta
       car-Nom   well   run-Pres-Dec
       'This car drives very well.'

Unlike in American English where about 16 per cent of compliments make use of verbs such as *like* and *love*, use of verbs in Korean compliments is almost never found. This seems to be related to the idiosyncrasy of Korean syntax, which will be further discussed in the subsequent section.

4. Syntax and Semantics of Compliments

The expressions used in compliments tend to be formulaic in their syntactic structures. In this section we will compare the syntactic structures of compliments used by Americans and Koreans, and discuss the peculiar semantic aspects of the

compliment structures.

4.1 American Compliments

According to Manes and Wolfson(1981:120-124) the compliment structure is very severely restricted on the syntactic level. Their corpus show that 53.6 per cent of the compliments in the data make use of a single syntactic pattern:

(14) NP {is/looks}(really) Adj.

  e.g. a. Your hair looks nice.

     b. This is really good.

Additional 16.1 per cent of the data are of the following formula.

(15) I (really) {like/love} NP

  e.g. a. I love your hair.

     b. I really like those shoes.

The third most common syntactic structure in compliments, which accounts for 14.9 per cent of the data, is of the following formula.

(16) PRO is (really) (a) Adj NP

  e.g. a. That's a nice piece of work.

     b. This was really a great meal.

Therefore, only three patterns account for 85 per cent of the compliments in the Manes and Wolfson(1981) data. Additional six

structures and these three basic structures account for 97.2 per cent of the data. This fact vividly shows that the compliments used by Americans are very severely restricted on their syntactic level.

From a semantic point of view, the syntactic structures in compliments show an interesting aspect. They tend to employ deictic expressions such as *this, that, you, your*, etc. This has to do with the special function of compliments in discourse. Compliments are observed to appear anywhere in a discourse, and very often they appear without continuous topic. Therefore, deictic expressions are required to disambiguate the object being complimented on.

4.2 Korean Compliments

As compared with American compliments that are very severely restricted in syntactic structures, Korean compliments are markedly rich in their syntax. This fact is exhibited in the surveys of H—S. Kim(1998), H—W. Park(1998), K—A. Yoon(1998), J—Y. Chung(1998), *inter alia*. Despite the wide variety of compliment syntax in Korean, the syntactic structures show certain syntactic regularities. For example, the data in H—S. Kim(1998) show that Korean compliments often employ three major patterns.

The first pattern is the use of similes, and sometimes of metaphors for an exaggerated effect. Some examples are as follows:

(17) a. model   kath−kwun−yo.
         model   like−Evid−Ptl
         'You are like a fashion model!'

     b. phipwu−ka paykkoch   kath−ney−yo.
        skin−Nom   pear−blossom like−Evid−Ptl
        'Your skin is like pear−blossom(white and fair)!'

     c. palum−i   mikwuksalam−i−ney−yo.
        pronunciation−Nom   American−Cop−Evid−Ptl
        'Your pronunciation is like that of an American(fluent
        and w/o accent).'

According to H−S. Kim(1998) the vehicles of the similes and metaphors encompass wide variety of objects, including humans, plants, animals, and other naturally occurring objects. She also suggests that humans are the most commonly used vehicle for complimentary similes and metaphors. This means that people tend to use some kind of people that can prototypically represent the quality being complimented on. For example, when someone's physical beauty is to be complimented on, the speaker chooses 'a fashion model' or 'a movie star' as a vehicle. This accounts for 47.83 per cent of the said data, which contrasts with 21.74 per cent of plants and with 13.04 per cent of animals. This fact hints at the tendency that generally comparing certain quality of humans to a quality of animals is not a preferred option.

The second pattern is the use of exclamatory structures in

compliments. This is true with some of the examples given above. People tend to use the exclamatory endings such as *-ney(yo)* and *-kwun(yo)*. Sometimes they use exclamatory intonation contour with regular sentential endings such as *-e(yo)* and *-ta*. Sometimes people use semi-questions that can mark a sentence as an exclamatory sentence. More interestingly speakers often use special endings like *-nikka* that have some forces charging the addressee. Let us examine these characteristics in turn more in detail.

The use of *-ney(yo)* and *-kwun(yo)*, which have been traditionally categorized as exclamatory markers, is very frequent in compliments. Examples in (17) belong to this category and are repeated in part in the following.

(18) a. model   kath-kwun-yo.
         model   like-Evid-Ptl
         'You are like a fashion model!'

    b. phipwu-ka paykkoch   kath-ney-yo.
         skin-Nom pear-blossom like-Evid-Ptl
         'Your skin is like pear-blossom(white and fair)!'

In the above examples, *-kwun* and *-ney* are glossed as evidential markers. They typically mark the exclamatory sentences, but semantically they contribute the evidentiality meaning to the sentence. They signify that 'the speaker has a reason to believe' that the proposition holds true. The morpheme

−kwun is an 'unassimilated' marker and *−ney* is an 'factual realization' marker(H−S. Lee 1991). In other words, *−kwun* marks that the speaker just noticed something but it has not been assimilated yet in his or her knowledge system, whereas *−ney* marks that the speaker noticed something and it is a part of his or her knowledge system. Therefore, the example (a) above amounts to saying "I just noticed that you are as fashionable as a fashion model and I utter this as soon as I notice that because I cannot hold my amazement". The example (b) above, on the other hand, amounts to saying "I noticed that your skin is as fair as the pear−blossom ; I carefully examined the fact and the truth of the proposition is a part of my knowledge system, and therefore it is absolutely true ; you have beautiful skin and how true it is!" In either way, the use of exclamatory markers is to enhance the surprise value of the complimentary statement, thus preempting the addressee's assumption that it is just a trite remark.

The endings *−e(yo)* and *−ta* are regular sentential end markers. To be precise, *−e* marks informal familiar ending ; *−eyo,* informal polite ending ; and *−ta,* formal ending. Therefore, there is nothing peculiar with these endings in sentences. However, when these markers are used in compliments, they typically accompany exclamatory intonation contours. The exclamatory intonation contour carries the same function as the formal exclamatory markers − enhancing the surprise value of the complimentary statement.

Sometimes in compliments people use a sentence structure that is originated from an interrogative structure. This option seems to

have gender preference ; females tend to use this structure more often than the males. Let us look at the following examples.

(19) a. ne-n   eccem   kulehkey   yeyppu-ni?
        you-Top   how   so   pretty-Q?
        'How can you be so pretty?!'

    b. nwun-i   eccem   kulehkey   malk-uni?
        eye-Nom   how   so   clear-Q?
        'How can your eyes be so clear?!'

The use of interrogative structure for compliments is a quite natural strategy to enhance the effect of the compliment by increasing the surprise value by marking inquisitiveness of the speaker, and by mentally charging the addressee by using a question structure as a question is an effective attention-drawer. This seems to be somewhat universal strategy in exclamatives as it is attested in many languages such as English, Spanish, French, Japanese, Chinese, and many others.

Finally, the use of -*nikka* is an interesting aspect of the syntactico-semantics of compliments. The regular function of -*nikka* is connecting clauses and marking 'reason' or 'cause' as in the following example.

(20) pi-ka   o-nikka   ttang-i   cec-nun-ta
      rain-Nom   come-Conn ground-Nom   wet-Pres-Dec
      'As it rains, the ground is becoming wet.'

However, recent development in modern Korean is such that many connectives(non-final markers) became sentential ending markers. This exemplifies interesting discourse dynamics between the speaker and the addressee. If the speaker says the first clause marked by a connective and stops his or her utterance right there, the burden of completing the sentence with logical coherence is on the part of the addressee. Therefore, the use of causal connective as a sentential ending brings forth a strong charge onto the addressee. When such causal connective is used in compliments it is affixed to a full sentence with a sentential ending or to a sentence with a complementizer for report sentences as in the following examples.

(21) a. yeksi ne-pakkey.eps-ta-nikka.
 truly you-only-Dec-NIKKA
 'Who else can help me but you!'

 b. yeksi nay atul-i   choyko-(i)-la-nikka
 truly myson-Nom best-(Cop)-Comp-NIKKA
 'Truly my son is the very best!'

The interesting semantic aspect of this syntactic structure from a discourse point of view is that the marker -*nikka* encodes that the speaker makes a claim ; presents it as having been reported - though not true ; and then charges the addressee mentally to respond to it. Very interestingly, this charge on the part of the addressee is formally given as a request to respond, but the actual

charge is not to respond to it as the speaker puts forth a strong connotation that there is no use trying to contradict it. Therefore, _-nikka_ construction is a very strong form of compliment by forcing the addressee to agree with the speaker.

One peculiar aspect of the syntactic structure of Korean compliments as compared with American compliments is the absence of the use of the English _love/like_-counterparts. The two counterpart words, _cohahata_ 'like' and _salanghata_ 'love', rarely appear in compliments. The meaning of the word _salanghata_ is more specific. It takes only human objects and carries only affection meaning. This prevents it from being used in compliment sentences where objects are typically non-person. The word _cohahata_ is very much like its English counterpart _like_ in meaning as in example (a) below. However, the use of the word is not preferred in actual speech, especially when the subject is the first person. The more preferred option is to use the speaker as the topic and use an adjective as the predicate as in example (b) below. Since people rarely use the topic when it is identical with the speaker, its resultant structure is like the compliment theme as the subject plus an adjective predicate as in example (c) below. The following exhibits the structures.

(22) a. nay-ka ney   meli style-ul <u>cohaha</u>-e.
          I-Nom   your   hair style-Acc like-Dec
          'I like your hair-style.'

b. na—nun ney meli style—i <u>coh</u>—a
   I—Top your hair style—Nom good—Dec
   'As for me, your hair—style is good.'

c. Ø ney meli style—i <u>coh</u>—a
      your hair style—Nom good—Dec
   'Your hair—style is good.'

5. Responses to Compliments

In the discourse compliments rarely occur in isolation. In other words they are usually responded to by the addressee verbally or otherwise. In this section we will examine the responses to compliments in America and Korea.

5.1 American Responses to Compliments

Goffman(1967) and Brown and Levinson(1987 [1978]) uses the notion of 'face' in sociolinguistic interaction. The interlocutors in a discourse employ certain strategies to protect face of the self and the other. Sometimes, as Brown and Levinson(1987:39) exemplified, face considerations motivate conflicting requirements. For example, Pomerantz(1978) explored the interaction of the preference for agreement with compliments, and Pomerantz(1984) explored self—denigrations. To agree with a compliment is to run counter to a constraint against self—praise. To preserve something of both the preference for agreement and the constraint, various intermediate

turn types are often used : agreements with praise-downgrade ; agreements about praiseworthiness but with praise shifted to third party ; return compliments. Self-denigrations also raise problems for the general preference for agreement, running counter to a constraint against criticism of others : again, intermediate solutions involve, for example, agreement with self-inclusion ; implicit agreement by silence or minimal acknowledgement.

Manes and Wolfson(1981) and Wolfson(1986) highlight the formulaic nature of American compliments. They are so formulaic that they do not have originality and that the interlocutors are not even aware of the existence of such patterns. In other words, the compliment-response pair is a very automatic process. Neither of these works include an analysis of responses to compliments, but our first reasonable assessment is that the most common response to a compliment in America seems to be 'thank you'. It is partly due to the fact that 'thank you' is not semantically transparent as to the respondent's agreement to the speaker's compliment that might result in self-praise. For this reason it is Wolfson's idea that appreciations(e.g. 'thank you') are virtually always appropriate as compliment responses(Wolfson 1989:115). A quantified analysis of responses in American culture should await further studies.

5.2 Korean Responses to Compliments

Face considerations in discourse should hold universal validity. Therefore, interlocutors in Korea are to adopt face preserving strategies in compliment-response pair discourse. However, since

compliment-giving is not so much a ritualized act in Korea, expressions involved are not so much formulaic as they are in American culture. Therefore, some counterpart expressions to English 'thank you', i.e. *kamsahapnita, komapsupnita*, etc. are still not fossilized as a response to a compliment at the semantic level, and use of such expressions may be regarded as a full acceptance of the compliment, thus giving rise to some sense of rudeness for self-praise. For this reason, adults seldom respond to compliments with a 'thank you'. Instead, they typically use some other expressions as follows that do not accept the compliment.

(23) a. a,   mwue-l-yo.

        oh,   what-Acc-Ptl

        'Oh, what do you mean?, what are you talking about?, that's nothing...'

   b. kwachan-i-si-pnita.

      overpraise-Cop-Hon-Dec

      'You are praising me more than it is due.'

   c. pyel-ke   ani-pnita

      special-thing   not-Dec

      'That's nothing special!'

However, children tend to respond quite differently. For example, the data from a survey with elementary school children show that about half the children who responded to compliments

on appearance said a 'thank you' to the speaker(J-Y. Chung 1998). More strikingly, one of the most common types of response is to make a comment of praise to himself or herself. The response type varies according to what was complimented on. The following is the summary of compliment and response types.

(24) Responses to Compliments(Elementary students)

	on appearance (%)	on abilities (%)	on good deeds (%)
'thank you'	46.2	19.7	21.8
'yes, I deserve it'	23.0	24.3	9.1
'oh, I don't deserve it'	15.4	12.1	25.5
'oh, it's thanks to you'		6.0	1.8
'it's a nonsense'	7.7	16.7	14.6
'I'll do even better next time'		15.2	21.8
smile or no response	7.7	6.0	5.4

In the above table it is notable that children tend to accept a compliment on their appearance(46.2 per cent) while they are very reluctant to do so with a compliment on what they did(21.8 per cent) or on what abilities they have(19.7 per cent). A similar survey of Y-K. Chung(1998) from a tenth grade highschool girls shows a result somewhat similar to the above in that 61 per cent of the responses were 'thank you'. From these facts we can reasonably argue that there exists a considerable gap in discourse patterns in compliments between the adult generation and the younger generation.

6. Cross-Cultural Variations

Even though this paper is intended to compare American and Korean compliments, some remarks on the compliments in different cultures are in order. Speech acts differ cross-linguistically not only in the way they are realized but also in their distribution, their frequency of occurrence, and in the functions they serve. Sometimes this difference is so vast that people from a different culture have no intuition at all. For example, let us look at the following translated examples from Indonesian.

(25) a. S : (Husband) : You must have been tired doing all the shopping.

      A : (Wife)   : Is it so? Now you can do the cooking.

   b. S : (Friend)   : You have bought a sewing machine. How much does it cost?

      A :   Oh, it is cheap. It's a used one. My wife needs it badly.

   c. S :   You've saved a lot of money in your account, ha?

      A :   Oh, no. Please don't tease me.

(Wolfson 1986:113)

To persons from a different culture, the above examples by no

means seem to be examples of compliments. However, these are considered genuine compliments by the Indonesians, because, according to them, they imply approval of the addressee's accomplishments. This kind of unexpected idiosyncrasy is not found in Indonesian only. Let us look at the following translated examples from Japanese.

(26) S: You earrings are pure gold, aren't they?

A : Yes, they are. They must be pure gold when you put them on.

S : Money is a necessary condition to become attractive, indeed.

A : I think so too.   (Wolfson 1986:114)

From the above example, it is equally perplexing that it should be interpreted as a compliment. When compliments employ metaphors or similes, the difference can make even sharper contrast because metaphors and similes rely on the prototypes in the culture concerned, but these prototypes differ drastically across cultures. For example, a dragon can be a positive symbol for power in the Oriental cultures, whereas it may represent evil satanic power in most western cultures. For the same reason, a typical compliment for shrewd boys, *kkakka-nohun-pamthol-kathta* 'like a pared chestnut' can hardly be interpretable as a compliment for people from different cultures. All this shows that compliments are realized very differently depending on the culture.

Response types show variations, too. We already saw that

Korean and American responses to compliments show differences. The differences are exhibited not only in the response types to regular compliments but also in the responses to the same complimentary remark. For example, let us look at the following example in American English.

(27) S : Wow! Linda! What did you do to your hair? I almost
          didn't recognize you. It looks great.

(Wolfson 1986:114)

To an American the above example is an unambiguous example of compliments, and thus the addressee is most likely to respond with an appreciating remark. However, the equivalent remark in Korean can be responded to in quite a different way such as "Is that so? Then how about yesterday? Does that mean I was not pretty before?" etc. According to Wolfson(1986) a similar response has been found in a French speaker. It has been reported that there is even a culture where someone whose possession is complimented on is morally obliged to give it to the speaker of the compliment. In this culture a compliment on an item is a request to the addressee to yield it to the speaker. In other words, some compliments can be insulting or obliging or embarrassing to people from different cultures and may bring forth very different responses. Cross-cultural variations in responses to compliments can be found in the following Jordanian example.

(28) S : She is a nice girl and beautiful.

> A : Where is the soil compared with the star?(meaning
> that S is even more beautiful)

Similarly in the following Iranian example we find a unique way of responding to compliments.

(29) S : Your shoes are very nice.
       A : It is your eyes which can see them which are nice.

From the above examples, we can see that compliments and compliment responses significantly vary according to cultures. This has an important implication for learners of foreign languages because an objective of learning a foreign language is to be functionally competent in the culture where the language is spoken, and complimenting behavior is essential aspect of such functional competence for its function of creating or reinforcing solidarity between interlocutors. This calls for, in a extended interpretation of this study, foreign language education that pays more attention to cultural understanding, e.g. acculturation process for language learners.

7. Conclusion

In this paper we compared the complimenting behavior in American and Korean cultures with special attention to the distribution of compliments, lexical choices, semantic and syntactic

characteristics, and responses to compliments. We also briefly touched on the cross-cultural variations of complimenting and responding. Findings include the facts that the objects selected for complimenting run the whole gamut in both cultures but that the frequency of complimenting exhibits differences in the two cultures. We also found that compliments tend to be formulaic on lexical, semantic and syntactic levels. We discussed on the special syntactic structures of compliments in Korean that carry special pragmatic forces in interaction, such as the uses of pseudo-interrogatives and of reporting sentential patterns with a causal connective. Responses vary not only in the types in the two cultures but also intra-culturally, i.e. according to the Korean surveys, response types vary according to the generation of the respondents in the survey. Finally, we briefly touched upon the cross-cultural variations and discussed its implication for foreign language education in that an awareness of cultural variation is essential for effective learning of foreign language in order to be functionally competent in the target language culture.

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