Iraqi Online Compliments on Facebook and Instagram:

A Cyber Pragmatics Analysis

Nassier A. G. Al-Zubaidi (PhD)

Dept. of English, Faculty of Arts,

Baghdad University.

Email: nassieralzubaidi@gmail.com

naghubin@coart.uobaghdad.edu.iq

Abstract

This study examined the speech behavior of compliments giving and responding among Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users. Specifically, it investigated the realization strategies of Iraqi complimenting behavior in Facebook and Instagram online interactions. In addition, it explored the types of modification used by Iraqi Arabic speakers when complimenting in the contexts of Facebook and Instagram. To achieve the study objectives, a corpus of compliments on Facebook and Instagram platforms compiled from 20 Iraqi users were analyzed. Both qualitative and quantitative methods were performed to analyze the data and report the results. The results demonstrated that to pay and respond to compliments, Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users employ verbal and non-verbal complimentary patterns. In paying compliments, Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users preferred using explicit compliments while preferring the category of accepting compliments in responding to compliments. To modify their compliments, Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users employ internal and external modifications in favor of the former to enhance the intensity and sincerity of compliments paying and responding. Furthermore, some instances of socio-cultural influence were found in the complimenting behavior among Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users. On the basis of the findings arrived at, a number of conclusions, implications and further research are suggested.

Keywords: Compliments paying, compliment responses, modifications, social media.

1. Introduction

The wind of the internet has spread to almost every corner of the globe impacting almost every aspect of human life. The internet is becoming more and more indispensable to the social and communicative life of human beings, and internet-mediated living is becoming something normal for most social members. Orihuela (2008) defines social networks as "web-based services that allow users to interact, share information, coordinate actions and, in general, keep in touch. These applications are not only the new

way in which our social network is represented, but also the place where our online identity is constructed and the means by which our activity on the Net is created and shared" (p. 58). The internet has presented new issues and challenges for research on pragmatics. For pragmatics, what is coded in communication highly underdetermines the speaker's or writer's intended interpretation, which emphasizes the importance of context in the analysis of human interaction (Xie and Yus, 2018:1). The interface between internet and pragmatics has resulted into a new emerging interdisciplinary field known as *cyber pragmatics* (or *internet pragmatics*). Yus (2011) remarks that cyber pragmatics is a recent sub-discipline within pragmatics investigating the language of internet-mediated communication. Its main interest is the analysis of how information is produced and interpreted within the internet environment and how users access contextual information in order to fill in the informative gaps between what users type on the keyboard and what they really intend to communicate (p.13). It explores a wide variety of interactions on the internet including emails, blogs, chat rooms, social media, instant messages, web pages, etc.

For Dörtkulak (2018:17), the excessive use of social media and the increase in the use of compliments in these contexts makes it necessary to explore the cultural elements in compliment exchanges and analyze how the faces of *self* and *other* are co-constructed when giving and responding to compliments as this new mode of communication creates a setting where boundaries are vanished and borders are blurred in interpersonal communication. This cross-cultural understanding can reveal how culture comes into being in online language use. The speech act of complimenting in face-to-face interaction has received a great deal of investigation in the literature (Mohajernia and Solimani, 2013; Allami and Montazeri, 2012; Tang and Zhang, 2009; Sharifian, 2008; Ruhi, 2006; Migdadi, 2003; Golato, 2002; Lorenzo-Dus, 2001). However, studies on compliments in online communication have often been under-researched (Placencia and Lower 2013; Eslami, et al., 2015; Dörtkulak, 2018). Recently, researchers are turning to digital contexts, particularly social media, where complimenting is a widespread occurrence (Placencia and Lower, 2013). Compliments in social media interactions become an important research area in different linguistic and cultural contexts. This study delves into the speech behavior of compliments giving and responding among Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users. Specifically, it examines the realization strategies of complimenting behavior in Facebook and Instagram online interactions. In addition, it explores the types of modification used by Iraqi Arabic speakers when complimenting in the contexts of Facebook and Instagram. Accordingly, the following research questions are addressed;

1. How is the speech behavior of compliments giving realized in Iraqi Facebook and Instagram posts?
2. How is the speech behavior of compliments responding realized in Iraqi Facebook and Instagram posts?

3. What are the main types of modification accompanying the speech behavior of complimenting in Iraqi Facebook and Instagram posts?

To answer the research questions identified above, the present study is built upon previous work on complimenting behaviour and computer-mediated communication as it offers a description of types and patterns of online compliments among Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users. Furthermore, it offers a comparison between different social media platforms which are useful for exploring the pertinent societal shifts, if any, in complimenting behavior on virtual online communication.

2. Compliments in Computer Mediated Communication

The rapid growth of the internet has revolutionized communication in the today's world. Such emergent online communication settings have affected daily face-to-face communication patterns in many respects. In the last two decades, online social media, like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, offer a multimodal system of communication as they allow for different channels and modalities of communication. Users can choose to write posts on their own or on their friends' profile, and comment on different posts or photographs or click on the "Like" function as a response. They are all characterized by their "high oral quality" (Yus, 2011: 118). Such social networking media have opened up new spaces for the study of complimenting behavior online. Indeed, complimenting in response to posting pictures on different social networking sites seem to have become pervasive features of online social interaction (Dörtkulak, 2018). Placencia and Lower (2013: 618) remark that posting pictures on Facebook acts as a kind of summons inviting a response that can take the form of a 'like' and/or of a comment which can be a compliment. Recent statistics affirms that there are around two billion active users on Facebook and one billion active users on Instagram (https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics). These two communication tools become a virtual platform for their users to expand the borders of their face-to-face communications. Using these platforms, users take advantage of online communication in both synchronous and asynchronous forms. Such social media tools provide opportunities for online socializing and maintaining the relationship with friends and family members. Compliments are turning out to be an indispensable speech behavior of everyday lives especially through social media interactions. In social media, compliments are the most widely used speech acts especially when it comes to photo comments and status updates. Thus, the functions of compliments have gone under a drastic change after the spread of social media tools. In line with this changing trend, compliments have been able to attract attention as a topic of research in the last decades (Dörtkulak, 2018).

Compliments are classified under the category of expressive speech acts alongside congratulations, apologies, praising, and so forth (Vanderveken, 1990). The primary

function of a compliment is most obviously affective and social, rather than referential and informative. Compliments giving typically forms the first part of an adjacency pair whereas the response to compliments constitute its second pair-part, and both resemble a set of communicative act (Ishihara, 2003). The topics of compliment generally fall into three main categories; compliments on appearance, abilities and possessions. In face-to-face communication, compliments function as a means of establishing or reaffirming common ground creating rapport and solidarity between people. They act as social lubricant devices employed to maintain positive face wants (Wolfson 1983: 89). In the virtual context in general, and social media in particular, compliments have a range of discourse and social functions. Cirillo (forthcoming) claims that compliments can function as conversation starters, attracting other users' attention and getting into their good books. Placencia and Lower (2013) suggest that compliments in Facebook posts function as keeping the communication channel open and affirming and strengthening relationships. A working broad definition of compliments giving and responding in social media is adopted and offered here. Compliments giving is expressions of positive evaluation that attribute a credit to the addressee. Expressions of positive evaluation can be either a verbal type and/or non-verbal type including the use of 'like' and the use of visual means 'emojis' (Placencia, 2015). Compliments responding, on the other hand, are verbal and/or nonverbal responses to the compliments received from online friends and colleagues. Such responses refer to something which is positively valued by interlocutors and attributed to addressees (Eslami, et. al, 2015).

The complimenting behavior in the new virtual context gained some research interests. The research available examined compliments giving on Facebook among Americans (Placencia and Lower, 2013) and Spaniards (Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez, 2013); on Instagram, among Ecuadorians (Placencia 2015); and on Twitter among Malaysians (Yusof and Hoon, 2014). The same can be said with research on compliments responding. The research examined compliments responding on Facebook among Americans (Placencia, 2016) and Persians (Eslami, et al., 2015), and on Twitter among Malaysians (Yusof and Hoon, 2014). Although the literature on compliments in Iraqi face-to-face interaction is abundant, the literature search has revealed no research examining Iraqi compliments in social-digital environments in general and Facebook and Instagram in particular (See Al-Hilu, 2019; Al-Hilu, 2017; Sallo, 2009). Also, the study extends the scope of research available by further examining the whole conversational exchange of compliments giving and responding paid by Iraqi Arabic speakers on their Facebook and Instagram comments, following Cohen (1998) who asserts that compliment and compliment responses are a set of communicative act. The present research on Iraqi compliments in Facebook and Instagram platforms seeks to broaden the scope of pragmatics research to include non-Western languages and cultures, and to extend the scope of speech act research to cyberspace. The study of the social act of compliments can provide sociolinguists with insights into sociocultural norms of different cultures and

reveal "rules of language use in a given speech community" (Yuan, 2001: 273).

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data Collection and Sampling

The study data is based on a compiled online corpus of compliments on Facebook and Instagram photo comments. Using random sampling, the researcher has collected compliments and their corresponding responses from his Facebook and Instagram friends' profiles (of both genders). The participants are 20 native speakers of Iraqi Arabic divided equally into 10 friends' profiles from Facebook and 10 friends' profiles from Instagram. The age average of profile owners are between 25 and 40 years old. A total of 965 compliments giving and 730 compliments responding are collected from both social online sites.

In order to keep data manageable, the study is restricted to a number of limitations. First, it focuses on analyzing the use of compliment and its responses viewed only from what have been displayed in the photo comments on Facebook and Instagram. Eslami, et al., (2015) remark that photographs posted on Facebook and Instagram attract various types of responses including compliments, and social media users are innovative in formulating their compliments and compliment responses by using various online communication tools and affordances. Second, social characteristics that might influence the social act of complimenting such as socio-economic, educational and ethnic backgrounds, age and gender are not taken into consideration. Third, compliments are not extracted by asking Facebook and Instagram users to employ compliments in their postings, but actual and authentic compliments posted in these social media pages are only considered for analysis. Fourth, the photos being observed are those which are related to the compliment topics of appearance and ability. That is, the topics of all compliments are the complimentee's appearance and ability. Relatedly, Wolfson (1983) finds that appearance and ability are two complimenting topics that are commonly used in everyday conversation. Fifth, the examined data are the photo comments posted during the second half of 2020.

According to Dörtkulak (2018), the recruitment process of participants in computer mediated communication is one of the most difficult parts because of the ethical issues that need to be carefully considered. Consequently, ethical considerations are taken into account to preserve the privacy and anonymity of Facebook and Instagram users by not disclosing any personal information. For protecting the participants' privacy, any reference to the complimenters' and complimentees' identity such as names and photographs are removed from the data. In addition, oral consents are gained from the participants to use their profiles information for the study purpose only. They are informed that the photo comments on their pages are going to be used for a linguistic

study on compliments. Consequently, they show no real objections from their side.

3.2 Data Analysis Procedures

Both qualitative and quantitative methods are performed to analyze the data and report the results. The analyzed data includes both verbal and non-verbal compliments and their corresponding responses. Compliments giving is categorized based on the taxonomy offered by Alfonzetti (2013), while compliments responding is categorized based on the taxonomy suggested by Placencia, et al., (2016). Furthermore, the types of modifiers accompanying the speech behavior of complimenting are categorized according to Eslami, et al.'s (2015) coding scheme of compliment modifications. To suit the peculiarity of study data, some adaptions and modifications are made to the identified coding schemes. To ensure the reliability of data analysis, the researcher has implemented inter-rater triangulation procedures. The data is initially coded by the researcher himself. Then, 20% of the data is randomly selected for re-coding by a second rater who is an expert in the field. The inter-coder reliability is computed and revealed to be 0.90.

Following Maíz-Arévalo (2013), a discourse analysis approach is used for the analysis of Facebook and Instagram conversational exchanges where a compliment and its response occur. The two notions of "turn" and "move" are used. Typically, each conversational exchange includes two turns; a compliment turn and a compliment response turn. The first turn is executed by the interlocutor who pays a compliment; and, the second turn belongs to the receiver of the compliment who may or may not respond back. In the conversational exchanges, the first turn consists of one move that is the "initiating" move of complimenting. The second turn, if taken by the receiver of the compliment, consists of one or sometimes more than one move (Eslami, et al., 2015: 252).

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Strategies of Compliments Giving

This section answers the first research question set out above. It is concerned with the realization of basic compliment strategies by Iraqi Facebookers and Instagramers. The statistical results of the analysis of the compliment on Facebook and Instagram are presented in Table 1 below. They reveal that there are three basic strategies of compliments giving utilized by Iraqi Facebookers and Instagramers. The overall distributions of the basic strategies of complimenting behavior indicate that explicit compliments are more frequently used in comparison to other two strategies where implicit comes second and formulaic compliments comes third. Their statistical proportions are as follows; EC (660/68.39%), IC (200/20.72%), and FC (105/10.88%). This finding can be read as Iraqi Facebookers and Instagramers use explicit compliments more frequent than implicit and formulaic compliments in their online posts. The higher

occurrence of explicit compliments is reported in previous research on online compliments in social media (Placencia and Lower, 2013 and Placencia, 2015). The preference for explicit compliments can be attributed to the nature of virtual interaction in social media as requiring short formulations. It means that Facebookers and Instagramers pay compliments to satisfy a social function with minimum efforts on their parts and their interlocutors. Pragmatically speaking, the linguistic realizations of explicit compliments encode the user's direct feelings of admiration towards someone's appearance or ability by appraising positively and publicly. Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) report that social media users tend to openly and directly express their positive emotions and strong feelings towards others by means of compliments with a preference to positively evaluate appearance and possessions.

Table 1: The overall statistical distribution of compliments giving.

Main-Strategy	Sub-Strategy	No.	%
1.Explicit Compliments EC	a. Explicit performative utterances containing an illocutionary verb (e.g. I compliment you on something)	0	0%
	b. Expressions of positive evaluation (e.g., positive adjectives, nouns and verbs)	420	63.63%
	c. Like	135	20.45%
	d. Emoticon	105	15.90%
	Total	**660**	**68.39%**
2. Implicit Compliments IC	a. Questioning	30	15%
	b. Greetings	25	12.5%
	c. Expression of intimacy	48	24%
	d. Expression of longing	67	33.5%
	e. Joking	30	15%
	Total	**200**	**20.72%**
3. Formulaic Compliments FC	a. Prayers, wishes and invocations	75	71.42%
	b. Quranic Quotes	8	7.61%
	c. Cultural-specific expressions	22	20.95%
	Total	**105**	**10.88%**
Total		**965**	**100%**

More specifically, within the explicit compliments, explicit performative utterances (0/0%) show zero realization in the present data. Expressions of positive evaluation (420/63.63%) are dominantly used, followed by "Like" (135/20.45%) and then by "Emoticon" (105/15.90%). Placencia and Lower (2013) identify "Like" and "Emoticon" as a subset of direct compliments with their own characteristics. They are found to occur more frequent because they provide a simpler way to connect with others. They are more

impersonal and thus less committal, and yet, they still serve an important interactional function (p. 15). Consider the following examples of explicit compliments from the study data;

<div dir="rtl">

1- تخبل حبيبي!

</div>

1. You look stunning, my babe! (Lit: I'm goanna crazy, babe!)

<div dir="rtl">

2- فديت هالوجه

</div>

2. What a beautiful face you have! (Lit: I'm a sacrifice to your face!)

<div dir="rtl">

3- منوررر حب

</div>

3. You're blooming, babe!

It is noted that positive adjectives and nouns are dominantly employed as compliments compared to the relatively few use of positive verbs. These lexical items are loaded with positive semantic evaluation. Unlike the study finding, Al-Hilu (2017) reports that Iraqi Arabic speakers use the lexical category of adjectives more frequently than verbs and nouns when complimenting in face-to-face interaction. Such contradictory finding might be attributed to the nature of medium involved. Table 2 below shows the most common positive adjectives, nouns and verbs used by Iraqi Facebookers and Instagramers when complimenting. It is observed that the data contained few English expressions used as compliments, and these complimentary expressions are Arabized such as كيوت (cute), توب (top), واو (wow) and لوف يو (love you!). These complimentary expressions have recently gained currency in Iraqi speech due to the spread of the internet interaction, and as such are indicative of the impact of globalization. They also serve to show the speakers' cultural refinement and a tendency towards the use of glamorous, new-fangled expressions which the language offers (Al-Hilu, 2017: p.128).

Table 2: The use of explicit positive evaluation in terms of lexical items type.

Adjectives	Nouns	Verbs
blooming -منور-منورين	flower ورد-وردة-	I sacrifice for you فديتك- فديته
illuminating-مضوي	king/queen – ملك- ملكة	I love you لوف يو-
saved-محروس	love- حب	You kill – تقتل-تكتل
distinguished- متميز	babe حبيبي	
top-توب	bride/bridegroom -عريس- عروسة	
marvelous-روعة	moon- قمر	
fabulous خرافي-	sacrifice- صدقة	
charming- ساحر	heart قلب-قلبي-	
fantastic- فظيع	the revered- العزيز	
beautiful- حلو-احلى	sacrifice- فدوة	
elegant- راقي	honey- عسل	
stunning- اتخبل-تجنن	gold- الذهب	
champion -بطل	pride- مفخرة-فخر	
nice- جميل	monster-وحش	
extraordinary - موظبيعي	soul- روحي	
breathtaking- اتموت	liver- كبد	
	beauty- جمالك	
	cake- كيك	
	kiss/es- بوسة- بوسات	

As to emoticons and emojis, Iraqi Facebookers and Instagramers employ a diversified set of images and icons referring to hearts, smileys, kisses etc., either in combination with comments or alone functioning as pictorial compliments. Placencia and Lower (2013) observe that emoticons and emojis are used as supportive moves that accompany verbal compliments to reinforce them. They help clarify "that the compliment is well intended in case the recipient has a doubt about the complimenter's intentions" (p. 636). That is, they tend to intensify the compliments as well as display creativity and a touch of playfulness. Emoticons are often characterized as replacing key features of orality (Placencia, 2015). As with emoticons and emojis, the same thing can be said about the use of "Like" which is common among Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users. "Like" is considered as a direct compliment by some scholars like Placencia and Lower (2013). It is used either alone or in combination with comments. Its use can be regarded as expressions of positive approval of the complimentee's appearance or skills. In this case, "Like" can be viewed as a kind of phatic affirmation through which interpersonal bonds are created or strengthened. The use of "like" and "emoticons" as features of computer mediated

discourse is indeed representative of the gestures and facial expressions absent in online communication, and as such, it is possible to assign meaning to them within the existing taxonomy of complimenting behavior (Placencia and Powell, 2016). The following are illustrative examples from the data;

4. Like 👍!

5. 😍

For implicit compliments, the statistical results reveal that the frequency of sub-strategy of expression of longing exceeds the frequencies of all other sub-strategies. The descending distributions of the sub-strategies of implicit compliments are as follows; expression of longing (67/33.5%), expression of intimacy (48/24%), questioning and joking (30/15%) and greetings (25/12.5%). Barkindo (2009) finds that to initiate and maintain solidarity between people, compliments can be realized implicitly through the use of various implicit illocutions like explanation, advice, request, etc. Indirect realizations of compliments require going through an inferencing process to be understood as such. Masoumzadeh and Ghanadi (2016) remark that implicit compliments are utterances in which the value judgment is presupposed by Gricean maxims. Therefore the positive value of an expression can be inferred from what is said in a particular situation. The following are some examples;

<div dir="rtl">

6- هاي وينك!

</div>

6. *Where are you? (Questioning)*

<div dir="rtl">

7- يا هلا يا هلا!

</div>

7. *O, Welcome! (Greeting)*

<div dir="rtl">

8- حب الحب!

</div>

8. *Love! (Lit: Love of love!) (Expression of intimacy)*

<div dir="rtl">

9- مشتاقين!

</div>

9. *We miss you! (Expression of longing)*

<div dir="rtl">

10- انت حلو لوما خشمك!

</div>

10. *You're handsome but your nose! (Joking)*

The statistical distributions of formulaic compliments reveal that the occurrence of the sub-strategy of prayers, wishes and invocations (75/ 71.42%) exceeds the occurrences of the sub-strategies of Quranic quotes (8/7.61%) and cultural-specific expressions (22/20.95%). It can be said that the main strategy of formulaic complimenting along with

its sub-strategies are cultural-specific. Al-Hilu (2017) finds out that Iraqi Arabic speakers frequently use formulaic compliments which are largely realized through the use of religious and cultural expressions. It can be said that Islamic culture permeates almost all life activities, and complimenting is but one social activity. It indicates recipients' strong ties with their religion, and these strong ties are deeply embedded in their speech behaviors (Yusof and Hoon, 2014). Such expressions are generally used by themselves as utterances of compliment-giving and as an incantation against envy and evil eye. In Arab culture, there is a wide-circulated superstitious belief that all objects admired by "the other" reflect envy. Typically, dismissing a harmful eye requires mentioning the name of God for the sake of "protection". The following are sample examples;

11- ما شاء الله ربي يحفظكم

11. *By God's will! May God protect you! (Prayers, wishes and invocations)*

12- " قل اعوذ برب الفلق"

12. *Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of Dawn! (Quranic quotes)*

13- دگ الخشب

13. *Knock on wood! (Cultural-specific expressions)*

Table 3 below displays the statistical difference between Facebook and Instagram in terms of the main strategies of complimenting behavior. By and large, Facebook (540/ 55.95%) uses more complimenting strategies than Instagram (425/44.05%). It is evident that though there are different distributions of complimenting strategies, both social media modes employ the same compliment patterns and types. This can be interpreted as complimenting practice is realized in the same manner in these social media platforms, and this can be due to the similarity of interaction medium that gives rise to similarity in social practices in turn.

Table 3: The statistical distribution of compliments giving in Facebook and Instagram.

Compliments Giving	
Facebook **No. & %**	**Instagram** **No. & %**
Explicit Compliments 390 59.09%	Explicit Compliments 270 40.91%
Implicit Compliments 122 61%	Implicit Compliments 78 39%
Formulaic Compliments 66 62.85%	Formulaic Compliments 39 37.15%
540 **55.95%**	**425** **44.05%**
Total	**965** **100%**

4.2 Strategies of Compliments Responding

This section answers the second research question which is concerned with the main realization strategies of compliments responding used by Iraqi Facebookers and Instagramers. Table 4 below shows that there are five broad strategies of compliments responding utilized by Iraqi users in the contexts of Facebook and Instagram. It is clear that the strategy of accepting compliments significantly occupies the first rank followed by other four strategies which are sporadically distributed. The descending statistical distributions of the main strategies of compliments responding are as follows; accepting compliments (380/52.05%), deflecting compliments (130/17.80%), returning compliments (100/13.69%), rejecting compliments (75/10.27%), and formulaic compliments responding (45/6.19%). In face-to-face communication, Al-Hilu (2017) found out that Iraqi native speakers employ the same strategies identified above to respond to compliments but with different preferences. This finding leads to the interpretation that face-to-face and virtual online interactions are alike with regard to compliment responding. In other words, the practice of compliments responding in virtual interaction resembles the ones occurred in face-to-face interaction. Placencia (2015:p.18) argues that "it is not surprising to find that particular patterns of compliments described for face-to-face interaction have carried over to online contexts. They reflect deep-seated values and behaviors that simply appear to be replicated in interactions mediated by new technologies".

Table 4: The overall statistical distribution of compliments responding.

Main-Strategy	Sub-Strategy	No.	%
1. Accepting Compliments AC	a. Appreciation expression	208	54.73%
	b. Like	100	26.31%
	c. Emoticon	72	18.94%
	Total	**380**	**52.05%**
2. Returning Compliments RetC	a. Reciprocating	100	13.69%
	Total	**100**	**13.69%**
3. Rejecting Compliments RejC	a. Disagreeing	45	60%
	b. Scaling down	30	40%
	Total	**75**	**10.27%**
4. Deflecting Compliments DC	a. Expression of doubts	15	11.53%
	b. Informative comments	17	13.07%
	c. Joking	20	15.38%
	d. Greetings	10	7.69%
	e. Expression of intimacy feelings	33	25.38%
	f. Expression of longing	35	26.95%
	Total	**130**	**17.80%**
5. Formulaic Compliments Responding FCR	a. Prayers, wishes and invocations	38	84.44%
	b. Quranic Quotes	7	15.56%
	Total	**45**	**6.19%**
Total		**730**	**100%**

The high frequency of the strategy of accepting compliments among Iraqi Facebookers and Instagramers is also reported in Eslami, et al.'s (2015) study and Placencia and Powell's (2016) study. They found that the category of accepting compliments is the most frequently used strategy among Iranian complimentees in Facebook. By adopting this strategy, speakers tend to create a balance between modesty and agreement maxims proposed by Leech (1983). In accepting the compliment, the recipient downgrades the force of the compliment. The use of the straightforward accepting strategy can be perceived as that users are both culturally polite and appreciative.

Within the broad strategy of accepting compliments, the sub-strategy of appreciation expressions takes the first position accounting for (208/54.73%) of the data followed by "Like" (100/26.31%) and then by emoticon (72/18.94%). In their study, Eslami, et al. (2015) observed the same strategy preference of compliment responses among Iranian Facebookers. They maintain that by using appreciation strategy, the recipient appreciated the compliments paid by the complimenter, and may use non-verbal strategies such as smileys and "Like" to increase the intensity of their appreciation. It is the safest way to respond to a compliment to avoid self-praise .The use of emoticons is used to upgrade the

appreciation token. It is however generally accepted that emoticons offer users a way of indicating or altering the tone of discourse (Herring 2007). Placencia and Powell (2016) propose that the use of stand-alone emoticons, such as smileys, can be regarded as compliment acceptance tokens. The use of "like", on the other hand, indicates an approval or appreciation of the recipient, equivalent to a round of applause or a thumbs-up gesture (Placencia and Lower 2013). Liking something is a positive evaluation, therefore responding to a compliment with 'Like' appears to suggest acceptance of that compliment, but it could reasonably be interpreted as either a token of appreciation or of agreement (Placencia and Powell, 2016). The following examples illustrate accepting compliments;

<div dir="rtl">

14- اشكرك ݣلبي! ♥ ♥

</div>

14. *Thanks my heart!* ♥ ♥

<div dir="rtl">

15- تسلم حياتي! 🥰

</div>

15. *May you be safe my life!* 🥰

<div dir="rtl">

16- مرسي!

</div>

16. *Mercy!*

For the category of returning compliments, it is observed that it functions as extended compliments in exchange to the compliments received. Reciprocal compliments comply with the politeness maxims of generosity and tactfulness (Leech, 1983). For Eslami, et al. (2015), by using reciprocal compliments, the recipient of the compliment performs two functions of accepting and returning the compliment for the same or a different commendable attribute at the same time. The following are sample examples;

<div dir="rtl">

17- انت النور!

</div>

17. *You are the light!*

<div dir="rtl">

18- فدوة لقلبك!

</div>

18. *I'm a sacrifice to your heart!*

The category of rejecting compliments is also common among Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users who either disagree with or downgrade the compliments paid. Rejecting a compliment can be a face-threatening act in virtual communication where users post their pictures, they believe they look good in them; thus rejecting the compliments they receive can be contradictory to the premise underlying their posting a picture on their social media profiles (Eslami, et al. , 2015). For Maíz-Arévalo (2013), choosing this strategy contributes to creating a banter effect among interlocutors and can reinforce the

sense of solidarity among the participants. In face-to-face interaction, Iraqi speakers sometimes tend to reject compliments, and such rejections can be ascribed to two social tendencies; either dismissing a harmful eye or the expression of modesty (Al-Hilu, 2017). Within this broad category, the frequency of the strategy of disagreeing (45/60%) is higher than the frequency of scaling-down strategy (30/40%). The examples illustrate the use of this category;

<div dir="rtl">

19- لا ، مو لهالدرجة!

</div>

19. No, not to that extent! (Disagreement)

<div dir="rtl">

20- اصلا كلش عادي!

</div>

20. Actually, it's very normal! (Scaling-down)

The fourth category of deflecting compliments is realized by a diversified set of pragmalinguistic strategies. These strategies are distributed sporadically as follows; expression of doubts (15/11.53%), informative comments (17/13.07%), joking (20/15.38%), greetings (10/7.69%), expression of intimacy feelings (33/25.38%), and expression of longing (35/26.95%). In their verbal responses to compliments, Iraqi Facebookers and Instagramers have the deflecting strategy at their disposal to evade compliments paid. A possible explanation for the use of evading or deflecting compliments can be ascribed to the pragmatic considerations of modesty and dismissing a possible harmful eye (Al-Hilu, 2017). The following are sample examples from the present data;

<div dir="rtl">

21- صدك ! ما اعتقد!

</div>

21. Really, I don't think so! (Expression of doubts)

<div dir="rtl">

22- نزلت وزني رجيم!

</div>

22. I lost weight, diet! (Informative comments)

<div dir="rtl">

23- الله يستر من عينك !

</div>

23. May God protect me from your eyes! (Joking)

<div dir="rtl">

24- تحياتي الك !

</div>

24. My regards to you! (Greetings)

<div dir="rtl">

25- لوجهك الحلوة بوسة !

</div>

25. A kiss to your beautiful face! (Expression of intimacy feelings)

<div dir="rtl">

26- الداعي اشوق!

</div>

26. I miss you more! (Expression of longing)

The category of formulaic compliments responding is realized through the sub-strategies of prayers, wishes and invocations (38/84.44%) and Quranic quotes (7/15.56%). This category best reflects the sociocultural norms of Iraqi society as they reveal the rules of language use in a speech community (Yuan, 2001).The use of religious utterances serve as a reminder that all accomplishments are considered by Muslims to be achieved by the will of Allah. Such utterances are used in the belief that it may help protect them from jealousy and the evil eye. The examples cited below show the use of this category of compliment responses;

27- الله يحفظك!

27. *May Allah protect you! (Prayers, wishes and invocations)*

28- امين يا رب العالمين !

28. *Amen, my God! (Prayers, wishes and invocations)*

29- "قل اعوذ برب الفلق"

29. *Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of Dawn! (Quranic quotes)*

Al-Hilu (2017) remarks that the Quranic verse cited in example (29) above is used to dismiss bad enchantments and harmful eyes. Though likely to embarrass the complimentor, it is usually acceptable since it cites the Glorious Quran, which is the sacred text most revered by the majority of Muslims (p.135). Table 5 below illustrates the statistical difference between Facebook and Instagram with regard to compliment responses. It is clear that the broad categories of compliments responding are statistically different in both social media platforms in favor of Facebook. As with compliments giving, both social media platforms employ the same patterns and types of compliment responses, and this can be attributed to the peculiarity of communication medium involved.

Table 5: The statistical distribution of compliments responding in Facebook and Instagram.

Compliments Responding	
Facebook **No. & %**	**Instagram** **No. & %**
Accepting Compliments 225 52.44%	Accepting Compliments 155 51.49%
Returning Compliments 64 14.91%	Returning Compliments 36 11.96%
Rejecting Compliments 44 10.25%	Rejecting Compliments 31 10.29%
Deflecting Compliments 72 16.78%	Deflecting Compliments 58 19.26%
Formulaic Compliments Responding 24 5.59%	Formulaic Compliments Responding 21 6.97%
429 **58.76%**	**301** **41.24%**
Total	**730** **100%**

4.3 Strategies of Compliment Modification

Table 6 below displays the raw frequency and types of modifiers used in Iraqi verbal complimenting behavior on Facebook and Instagram. Generally speaking, there are internal and external modifiers that accompany the head act of compliments functioning as supportive moves. The overall distribution of internal modifiers (298/63.94%) significantly outnumbers the distribution of external modifiers (168/36.06%). The use of both types of modifiers can increase the intensity and sincerity of compliments. With respect to internal modification, the frequency of intensifying adverbials (160/53.69%) is relatively higher than that of emotional expressions (138/46.31%). The two types of internal modification are used with both illocutions of giving and responding to compliments. Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users employ a number of intensifiers which either precede or follow compliments like the following;

30- حلو كلش!

30. *Very Beautiful!*

31- حيل اتخبل!

31. *Extremely charming!*

32- هواي احبك!

32. *I love you too much!*

The following are sample examples of emotional expressions from the present data;

33- واوووو!اتموت!

34. Woooow! Breathtaking!

34- اييااااااااه!

34. Oh my goddess!

The use of intensifiers and emotional expressions is an instance of exaggeration. They increase the expressivity beyond the strict limits of truth which is a marked feature typical of compliments. They accentuate the speaker's sincerity of the compliments through exaggeration. Sometimes, Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users employ the strategy of double intensifier to enhance their compliments.

As displayed in Table 6, the distribution of main categories of external modification reveals that the frequency of alerters (93/55.35%) is relatively higher than that of extra head acts (75/44.65%). The category of alerters includes titles, nicknames, first names, endearment terms and attention getters. It can be said that endearment terms are cultural-specific in the sense that most of these terms indicating body organs (e.g., liver, heart, eye, head) which are frequently used in Iraqi everyday interactions. As for the category of extra head acts, it is observed that Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users employ more than one head act or strategy when paying and responding to compliments to enhance the effect of their intended illocution. The use of extra head acts functioning as supportive moves is another instance of exaggeration since more than one complimentary expression or utterance is used. The examples below illustrate the use of external modification;

35- كبد مشتاقين!

35. Liver, we miss you! (Endearments)

36- الله يحفظكم ويسلمكم وترجعون بالسلامة!

36. May Allah keep you safe and sound! You may return home safely! (Extra head acts)

Table 6: The overall statistical distribution of compliment modification.

Main-Strategy of Modification	Sub-Strategy of Modification	No.	%
1. Internal Modifiers	a. Intensifying adverbials	160	53.69%
	b. Emotional expressions/exclamations	138	46.31%
	Total	298	63.94%
2. External Modifiers	a. Alerters	93	55.35%
	b. Extra head act/supportive move	75	44.65%
	Total	168	36.06%
Total		466	100%

Table 7 below shows that there is a statistical difference in compliment modification between the two social media platforms. As to internal modification, the total distribution of international modification reflects that there is a relative statistical difference between Facebook (146/48.99%) and Instagram (152/51.01%) in favor of the latter. For external modification, it is evident that there is a statistical difference between Facebook (92/54.76%) and Instagram (76/45.24%) in favor of the former.

Table 7: The statistical distribution of compliment modification in Facebook and Instagram.

Internal Modifiers		External Modifiers	
Facebook No. & %	**Instagram** No. & %	**Facebook** No. & %	**Instagram** No. & %
Intensifying adverbials 93 63.69%	Intensifying adverbials 67 44.07%	Alerters 50 54.34%	Alerters 43 56.57%
Emotional expressions/exclamations 53 36.31%	Emotional expressions/exclamations 85 55.93%	Extra head act/supportive move 42 45.66%	Extra head act/supportive move 33 43.43%
146 **48.99%**	**152** **51.01%**	**92** **54.76%**	**76** **45.24%**
298 **63.94%**		**168** **36.06%**	

5. Conclusions and Implications

The current study intended to explore the realization strategies of Iraqi compliments giving and responding behaviors in the virtual contexts of Facebook and Instagram. Furthermore, the modification accompanying the speech illocutions of compliments giving and responding was explored. The results demonstrated that to pay compliments, Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users employ three broad categories of compliments; *explicit compliments, implicit compliments* and *formulaic compliments*. The broad category of explicit compliments occupies the first position in comparison to other categories. Explicit compliments encode the user's direct feelings of admiration towards someone's appearance or ability by appraising positively and publicly. In responding to compliments, they use five broad categories of compliment responses; *accepting compliments, returning compliments, rejecting compliments, deflecting compliments* and *formulaic compliments responding*. Of these five categories, the category of accepting compliments is the most frequently used strategy among Iraqi Facebookers and Instagramers. It is used to create a balance between modesty and agreement maxims (Leech, 1983). Online compliments paying and responding are realized verbally and non-verbally. Non-verbal compliments are realized through the use of "Like" and emoticons

which are absent or socially inappropriate in face-to-face interactions. Non-verbal compliments help clarify interlocutors' positive intent and prevent misunderstandings in cases where a compliment and its response can be misinterpreted. Compliments are utilized to establish solidarity and rapport among online users in the virtual world.

As for modification, Iraqi Facebook and Instagram users employ internal and external modifications in favor of the former. Both types of modifiers are used to enhance the intensity and sincerity of compliments paying and responding. Such enhancement can be regarded as an instance of exaggeration. Facebook and Instagram platforms share similar norms and conventions of language use with reference to the speech behavior of online compliments. Though there are differences due to the nature of interaction medium, virtual online interaction resembles, to a certain extent, the face-to-face interaction with respect to speech behavior of compliments. Furthermore, the socio-cultural values of Iraqi society are embedded within the illocutions of compliments giving and responding through the use of religious and cultural complimentary expressions.

This study brings some practical implications that need to be acknowledged. It offers insights about how Iraqi speakers perform the illocutions of compliments giving and responding in Facebook and Instagram contexts. Thus, it can be useful for promoting intercultural communication, cultural awareness and understandings as it offers authentic information about the complimenting norms of Iraqi speech community. Also, L2 instructors can make use of the information on Iraqi online compliments behavior and patterns to raise students' awareness of cultural similarities and differences between L1 and L2.

The current study has a number of limitations. It cannot provide information about the demographics of online users since such personal information is not accessible due to Facebook and Instagram policies that preserve personal privacy. Therefore, a similar research using a different research methodology like in-depth interviews can be used to provide more insights about the social variables of online users (e.g., gender, age, social distance, status, attitudes towards technology, etc.) that play key roles in their choice of complimenting behavior on social media platforms. Another research can be conducted to explore the differences, if any, in complimenting behavior between face-to-face interaction and online virtual interaction.

References

-Alfonzetti , G. (2013). Compliments and compliment responses in Italian. In Georgeta Rata (ed.), *Linguistic studies of human language*, pp. 275-289. Greece: ATINER.

-Al-Hilu, M. (2019). Metaphorical compliments in the performance of Iraqi Arabic speakers. Unpublished manuscript.

-Al-Hilu, M. (2017). Complimenting behaviour in the performance of native speakers of Irish English and Iraqi Arabic: A cross-cultural pragmatics study. PhD dissertation, University of Limerick.

-Barkindo, B. (2009). Pragmatic analysis of compliments in Hausa social contexts. Master's thesis, Ahmad Bello University.

-Carmen, M., and García-Gómez, A. (2013). *"*You look terrific!" Social evaluation and relationships in online compliments. *SAGE, Discourse Studies,* 15(6), 735-760.

-Chen, R.   (2010).Compliment and compliment response research: A cross-cultural survey. In Rong Chen (ed.), *Pragmatics across Languages and Cultures*, pp.79-102 Berlin/Boston: de Gruyter.

-Cirillo, V. (forthcoming) "I never forget a pretty pixel": Compliments in a virtual environment. Personal communication.

-Cirillo, V. (2012). The pragmatics of virtual environments. Compliment responses in Second Life. *Lingue e Linguaggi* , 7: 37-58.

-Cohen, A. (1998). Strategies in learning and using a second language. *ELT Journal*, 66 (12): 251-253.

-Dörtkulak, F. (2018). Communicating culture through online compliments. *CUJHSS*, 12(1):17-31.

-Eslami, Z., Jabbari, J. and Kuo, L. (2015). Compliment response behaviour on Facebook: A study with Iranian Facebook Users. *International Review of Pragmatics,* 7: 244-277.

-Golato, A. (2002). German compliment responses. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 34: 547- 571.

-Ishihara, N. (2003). Formal instruction on the speech act of giving and responding to compliments. In Kathleen Bardovi Harlig and Mahan Taylor (eds.) *Teaching pragmatics*, pp. 62-78. Washington DC.

-Leech, G. (1983). *Principles of pragmatics*. London: Longman.

-Lorenzo-Dus, N. (2001). Compliment responses among British and Spanish university students: a contrastive study. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33: 107-127.

-Maíz-Arévalo, C. and García-Gómez, A. (2013). "You look terrific!" Social evaluation and relationships in online compliments. *Discourse Studies,* 15: 735-760.

-Maíz-Arévalo, C. (2013). "Just click 'Like'": Computer-mediated responses to Spanish compliments. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 51: 47-67.

-Maíz-Arévalo, C. (2012). "Was that a compliment?" Implicit compliments in English and Spanish. *Journal of Pragmatics,* 44: 980-996.

-Masoumzadeh, A. and Ghanadi, S. (2016). Contrastive analysis of compliments given by Facebook commentators in the pages of Iranian and England foreign ministers. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 5 (3): 83-90.

-Migdadi, F. (2003). Complimenting in Jordanian Arabic: a socio-pragmatic analysis. PhD dissertation, Ball State University.

-Mohajernia, R. and Solimani, H. (2013). Different strategies of compliment responses used by Iranian EFL students and Australian English speakers. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 4: 340-347.

-Orihuela, J. (2008). Internet: la hora de las redes sociales. *Nueva Revista,* 119: 57-62.

-Placencia, M., Lower, A. and Powell, H. (2016). Complimenting behaviour on Facebook: The case of compliment responses in American English. *Pragmatics and Society,* 7: 339-365.

-Placencia, M. (2015). Peer evaluation among Ecuadorian teenage girls on Instagram. Paper presented at the 14th International Pragmatics Conference, Antwerp, 26-31 July.

-Placencia, M. and Rodríguez , C. (2013). Cumplidos de mujeres universitarias en Quito y Sevilla: un estudio de variación pragmática regional. *Pragmática Sociocultural. Revista Internacional sobre Lingüística del Español,* 1: 100-134.

-Placencia, M. and Lower, A. (2013) "Your kids are stinking cute": Complimenting behavior on Facebook among family and friends. *Intercultural Pragmatics,* 10: 617-646.

-Sallo, I. (2009). A sociolinguistic study of compliments in Iraqi Arabic. *Kirkuk University Journal*, 4: 1-24.

-Vanderveken, D. (1990). Semantic analysis of English performative verbs. In Daniel Vanderveken (ed.), *Meaning and Speech Acts,* pp.166-219. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

-Wolfson, N. (1983). An empirically based analysis of complimenting in American English. In Nessa Wolfson and Elliot Judd (eds.), *Sociolinguistics and language acquisition*, pp. 82-95. Rowley, Mass.: Newbury House.

- Xie, C. and Yus, N. (2018). Introducing internet pragmatics. *Internet Pragmatics*, 1(1): 1-12.

-Yuan, Y. (2001). An inquiry into empirical pragmatics data-gathering methods: written dcts, oral dcts, field notes, and natural conversations. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 33: 271-292.

-Yus, F. (2011). *Cyberpragmatics: Internet-mediated communication in context.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

- Yusof, S. and Hoon, T. (2014). Compliments and compliment responses of Twitter among male and female celebrities. *Pertanika Journal of Social Science and Humanities,* 22: 75-96.

https://zephoria.com/top-15-valuable-facebook-statistics