

Unraveling Gender-related differences in Compliment exchanges: the case of Hijazi Speakers

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Abstract

This study examined the socio-pragmatic aspects of complimenting behavior among Hijazi speakers of Al Taif City, Saudi Arabia. The study explored the effect of gender on complimenting behavior to bridge the gap in the literature addressing issues related to complimenting behavior in Arabic societies, particularly Hijazi case. Trained investigators collected the naturally accruing data through spontaneous compliments and compliment responses via ethnographic fieldwork. Unlike similar previous studies, Hijazi men and women were found to offer nearly a similar number of compliments regardless of gender. However, a probable difference in the syntactic patterns of each gender was reported where males surpassed females in their use of implicit compliments lacking positive semantic carriers. Regardless of gender, the interlocutors were more inclined to agree with the compliments than disagree, and acceptance was the most opted-for agreement response strategy. The

rapidly growing Western influence seemed to have an impact on complimenting behavior.

Keywords: compliment, compliment behaviour, compliment response, gender, hijazi speakers, pragmatics, sociolinguistics

INTRODUCTION

The use of praising terms and their response can vary greatly in a society, depending primarily upon various social variables, such as gender, age, educational background, social distance, ethnicity, and else (Sari, 2013). Some studies show that men and women often decide on their complimenting behavior depending on variations in politeness, which reflects their social relationships in several Arab and Western societies (Rees-Miller, 2011). These studies also demonstrated substantial variations in complimenting behavior between genders, including differences in sentence structures and the topics chosen for compliments (Leaper & Robnett, 2011; Tannen, 1996; Coates, 2013; Stokoe 2004)

However, a research gap lies particularly in the context of Saudi Arabian compliment behaviour. This involves studying the distribution of compliment topics, linguistic features, and response patterns that not only differs within the same gender group but also between different gender groups. Furthermore, gender differences in responding to compliments are evident, as men are more likely to deny a compliment given by a female than by another male (Herbert, 1990). Moreover, women and men employ distinct strategies when responding to compliments, and the gender of the person offering the compliment is generally regarded as a significant factor in this context. Particularly, when it comes to females, they respond more sensitively to the compliments they receive on their appearance (Al-Khateeb, 2009). This behavior reflects interpersonal sensitivity and conservativeness rather than indicating a deficiency in assertiveness.

Unlike some Arabic-speaking contexts like Kuwait, Yemen, Jordan, and Egypt, compliments in Saudi Context have not received enough research attention (e.g, Alqarni, 2020; Qanbar, 2012; Farghal & Haggan, 2006; Nelson et al., 1996). Given that the Arab

world involves various subcultures, social norms, and lifestyles that differ from one geographical place to another within the Arab world, the results of these studies may not be extended to all Arab countries. Saudi society is conservative and governed by relatively strict religious and social norms; thus, they seem to employ more conservative and religious-based utterances (Al-Khateeb,2009). Therefore, this study is deemed crucial to better understand compliments in the Saudi context. What is also worth exploring here is that there is a shortage of research studying the possible influence of gender on the realization of compliments.

In fact, most of the cited studies above seem to generally explore the overall nature of compliments rather than investigating in detail the possible effects that some social factors, such as gender, may have on compliment behavior. Furthermore, Saudi Arabia, as a vast country, exhibits a rich diversity of dialects and varying social norms across regions. Although this linguistic and cultural diversity, complimenting behavior in the Hijazi region remains untouched. Thus, the significance of the current study lies, in addition to gender, in its endeavor to fill this research gap by providing insights into the distinct complimenting patterns within the Hijazi context.

The findings of this study were likely to fill a certain gap in the documentation of complimenting behavior among Saudi men and women, a society that has shown indications of being somewhat less conservative than before. Therefore, this study seeks to achieve two objectives: (1) scrutinize the nature of compliment strategies and compliment responses used by Hijazi speakers of Arabic, and (2) the effects of the gender of speakers on the types and patterns of compliments and compliment responses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Definition of Compliment

Compliments are words or phrases that express admiration, approval, or praise for someone's qualities, actions, or accomplishments. Linguistics and social science researchers have

defined compliments in different ways based on their studies. Holmes (1988) defines compliments as “speech acts that express a positive evaluation of an object (possession, person, event) and also invite the addressee to accept the positive evaluation” (p.447).

Compliments are "speech acts that overtly express positive evaluative judgments, usually about a person, object, or performance" as defined by Holmes (1988, p.451) and Stubbe (2003). Manes and Wolfson (1981) describe compliments in a way that involves "the explicit or implicit attribution of some degree of credit or approval to the other for some quality the speaker perceives as positive."

All these definitions suggest compliments are expressions of positive evaluation and praise that play a crucial role in reinforcing interpersonal relationships in social interactions. However, the nuances of compliments may vary across different cultures and contexts, which can affect their perception and interpretation.

Compliment functions and strategies

Compliments are a type of positive social interaction that can take on different forms, patterns, and classifications depending on language structures, content, and social settings. By understanding these aspects, we can gain insight into the complexities of complimenting behavior and its underlying purposes.

Direct vs. Indirect Compliments

Direct compliments are clear and direct statements of admiration, for instance “you have beautiful eyes” whereas Indirect compliments use more indistinct language techniques, such as connotated statements. For example, “You are not wearing a bad dress today”.

Explicit vs. Implicit Compliments

Explicit compliments involve a clear and concise expression of praise that leaves no doubt in the hearer’s perception of the comment such as “You have excellent driving skills”. However, implicit compliments tend to leave ambiguity in the hearer’s mind

with unclear statements. For instance, “You really turned that complex presentation into easy delivery” *Topic-based Compliments*: Compliments are generally passed in four main contexts i.e., appearance, performance, possession, and personality.

Compliment Patterns

Compliments are usually responded to by acceptance, deflection, or reciprocation by the recipient. These responses are further classified into mere non-verbal replies to acknowledgments or more extensive replies. Furthermore, compliments also result in denials or downgrades owing to the cultural/ religious norms.

Paying compliments and responding to them is one such case. A compliment is a speech act, regarded as a polite behaviour aimed at implicitly attributing credit to the hearer or the receiver by the speaker. Compliments are intended to build and maintain social ties (Holmes, 1988). Compliments, being ‘social lubricants,’ help create intimacy amongst citizens (Wolfson, 1983). Watts (2003) also reported compliments showing respect, deference, familiarity, and solidarity embodying various sociocultural functions. A study by Boothby and Bohns (2020) revealed that people primarily compliment clothing, accessories, and physical features when given the freedom to generate compliments. He further revealed that in the case of passing a compliment to a stranger, the speaker usually overestimates the cost of a compliment as if the stranger would feel anxious or dislike it altogether. Not only this, but people also generally underestimate how a compliment can positively impact the listener as well.

When a compliment is addressed, in any way, by the hearer, it generates a compliment response (Sari, 2013). The type of compliment response is mainly based upon gender, social relationships, status, and cultural differences between the speaker and the hearer. Herbert’s (1986) Taxonomy of Compliment responses is classified into the following 12 categories: Appreciation token, compliment upgrade, comment history, comment acceptance, reassignment, return, scale down, question, disagreement, qualification, no acknowledgment, request as

interpretations (Herbert & Straight, 1989). In a study conducted by Herbert and Straight (1989), Arabic and Africans were found to respond to the compliment following an 'acceptance' strategy.

Herbert (1986) pioneered the classification of compliment responses, the way how people respond and react to the compliment explains the varying levels of responses used by a complimentee to address the compliment. Response to a compliment can be a straightaway '*acceptance*' in the form of *Appreciation Token, Comment Acceptance, or Compliment Upgrade*. Agreement to a speaker's compliment can also be exhibited in the form of *Comment History* or via *Transfers*. Transfers are generally done by *Reassignment* or *Return* of the compliment.

In contrast to acceptance, a response could be a '*non-agreement*'. This involves *Scale down, Question, Non-acceptance, or non-acknowledgment* whereas *non-acceptance* can be employed using a *disagreement* or a *qualification*. *Non-acknowledgment* is usually followed by silence from the listener. Finally, *other interpretations* include *questioning* by the hearer by interpreting it as an implied *Request* for the complimented object.

Theoretically, the three most widely employed models of compliment response strategies in the field of pragmatics are *Pomerantz's* (1978), *Holmes's* (1988), and *Brown and Levinson's* Politeness theory (1987). Pomerantz was the first one to study CR strategies. According to him, there's always a conflict in replying to the compliment as the hearer must agree while keeping the fact of self-compliment aside. Holmes (1986), however, criticized the Pomerantz model by signifying the lack of precise proportions for each type of response. She created three main categories of CRs including *Accept, Reject, and Deflect or Evade*. She further divided Brown and Levinson's Politeness theory as positively affective speech acts, and on the contrary, potentially face-threatening acts. This theory, however, claims that politeness is context-dependent i.e. complimenting behavior is significantly affected by the social status of the speaker and the listener. Whereas Holmes (1986) claimed that complimenting holds a positive value for both.

The study of compliments and CRs also reveals that it is not always what is said is what is meant. Multiple variables such as gender affect the way of expression. According to Yuan (2002), there are two categories of compliments in terms of the semantic formulas used to express them. These categories are unbound semantic formulas i.e. explicit and implicit compliments and bound semantic formulas i.e. information question, explanation, future reference, contrast, advice, and request. The other two categories are non-compliment and opt-out strategies.

The Pragmatics of Politeness

Politeness plays a crucial role in effective communication, particularly when it comes to complimenting others. Compliments not only express admiration or praise but also necessitate the use of polite language to maintain positive relationships and uphold people's self-respect. Acknowledging the significance of politeness in complimenting individuals can help us comprehend the intricacies of social interactions.

The pragmatics of politeness is best described by *Leech's (1983) Maxims of Politeness*. His maxims provide another baseline for studying and structuring compliment responses. Brown and Levinson (1987) describe two different sorts of faces based on participant desires rather than social norms: Negative Face: the want of every 'competent adult member' that his action be unimpeded by others" (p. 62) ... [the] want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" (p. 129). Positive Face: "the want of every member that he wants to be desirable to at least some others" (p. 62) [the] perennial desire that his wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them should be thought of as desirable. The main classification includes *Tact Maxim, Generosity Maxim, Approbation Maxim, Modesty Maxim, Agreement Maxim, and Sympathy Maxim*.

The Agreement and Modesty maxim come into conflict while responding to compliments the complimentee must stay low-key and reject the compliment as well as keep in view not to disagree with the complimenter. On the contrary, the complimentee may

seek to accept the compliment by avoiding self-compliment and maximizing agreement with the speaker. These maxims can create a conflict when two of them come into interaction with each other and this is when the most powerful maxim takes place, as Leech states. However, depending upon varying social settings and cultural differences, the relative strength of these maxims may differ. This is somehow in agreement with Pomerantz's Principle of Self-Compliment Avoidance. These constructs tend to operate similarly.

Global Studies on Compliment Behaviour

Sun (2013) applied Brown and Levinson's politeness theory and Pomerantz's compliment response conditions to provide in-depth literature on complimenting behaviour among male and female entities. The study primarily focuses on compliment responses in the context of English and Mandarin Chinese speakers. According to the author, miscommunication can arise between the two sexes owing to the differences in language use which can, in turn, affect complimenting behaviour. Women were found to be greatly involved in giving and receiving admiration as compared to men. However, the responding trend continues with women accepting the compliment more and men opting out more. On top of that, it was inferred by the author that this could be related to women being a subordinate group. A noteworthy conclusion was the use of the acceptance strategy as a compliment response in Mandarin Chinese people which was in contradiction to the earlier findings. Whereas English speakers yielded similar results as reported in past studies. The complimenting behaviour of men and women can be the result of the power imbalance of gender in society. Rees-Miller (2011) conducted a corpus-based comparative study of compliment responses in males and females on a small Midwestern campus in the US showed that their responses vary in a goal-oriented versus unstructured setting. Surprisingly, men were noted to give and receive compliments slightly more than their counterparts in a structured setting. Whereas the reverse was the case in an unstructured setting, and the majority of the compliments

were on appearance. On the contrary, both men and women tend to compliment each other's performance when studied in a goal-oriented setting. The research reveals how men and women hold different values when given the chance to compliment about anything they deem necessary. It was seen that looks are more important to women whereas men are more attracted to other people's talent.

Pham (2014) categorized compliment responses into three broad strategies: accepting, rejecting, and deflecting. She further arranges the specific compliment responses on the level of their strength from strongest to weakest. Her study on Vietnam reveals that there's much more to identifying and establishing compliment responses than simply grouping them in these three broad categories. They're further classified into single and dual compliment responses: reject, accept, deflect, reject/ deflect, accept/ deflect, and reject/ accept, all the dual ones in either order. This adds to the further complexity of studying compliments and CRs. A similar sociolinguistic pattern of CR strategies was observed in a study conducted on Chinese college students and it was found that the Implicit Acceptance strategy is the preferred choice, particularly among female students. Rejection and Deflection strategies were more adopted by males when the compliment was from a familiar person. The influence of Western culture on the use of pragmatics was also listed as a factor in driving CR strategies among Chinese students (Cai, 2012).

Studies on Compliment Behaviour in Arabic Societies

Alqarni (2020) studied the speech acts of compliments and compliment responses by Saudi students (younger age group) and highlighted how the first language impacts this sociolinguistic trait. Using a Discourse Completion Test as the tool to study the subjects involved, the author collected data from eighty young Saudis at a university located in Al-Baha. The participants were asked to provide their compliments and respond to the ones given to them under a particular social situation. English as a foreign language was examined as an inspiring factor and revealed that the Western

influence on the foreign language impacted how the young generation complimented or reacted in response. Also, he revealed that social relationships among participants did not affect the nature of compliments and their responses. Compliments solely require a return regardless of any sociocultural factor. Also, he found that gender did not have a great influence on compliment usage and responses. In the gender-based cohort study, men used acceptance strategies more than women in response, whereas, women tend to follow the 'compliment upgradation' strategy while replying to a compliment. Another interesting finding was that complimenting is more of a social necessity and pressure than a genuine approach.

Al Amro (2013) studied politeness strategies by Najdi Saudi Arabic speakers to find the effect of gender, age, and relationship on the generation of a compliment and its return by the hearer. A corpus of 592 compliments and compliment responses collected in natural contexts were analyzed. The author found a formulaic complimenting pattern and the majority of the compliments occurred between the same age, gender, and social relationship. Women were again found to compliment the appearance more whereas men targeted personality and performance to praise. Women passed lengthier compliments than men did. These gender-based complimenting patterns involved more invocation, appreciation tokens, compliment upgrades, and returns among women.

All these research studies extensively emphasize how gender significantly affects generating a compliment and the way it will be responded to. However, not much research has been done in the context of Saudi Arabia notably in terms of Hijazi context where gender is also greatly influenced by religious norms. Also, none of the socio-pragmatic studies examined "cross-gender" complimenting behaviour instead, all primarily concerned with gender only. Hence, the study will broadly focus on these aspects to draw insights into what strategies speakers of Hijazi adopt to pass and respond to the compliments and their approach to pragmatics.

Gender in Complimenting Behaviour

Multiple sociolinguistic studies focus on gender-based speech acts. Since ever, the speech of men is accepted as standard whereas women are seen as talking differently. Many communities in the world still recognize this difference as important. However, Jespersen (2010) claimed that women in English society apply more conservative vocabulary, polite words, and less complicated sentences. A study by Sucuoğlu and Bahçelerli (2015) revealed a considerable variation in English compliment and CR strategies between the native and non-native Turkish ELT students (male and female) in North Cyprus. The study unveiled an interesting gender-influenced compliment response, which was that the majority of non-native speakers rejected compliments from a man, whereas accepted when they came from a female. Women, generally, are also more likely to receive compliments than men. If not all, a majority of females are complimented for their appearance and tend to apply the agreement strategy. Whereas, men are more likely to reject or stay neutral with compliments.

Furkó and Dudás (2012) employed DCT to study compliments and CRs with special reference to gender-based differences in Hungarian undergraduate students. In native language contexts, they reported the patterns of the use of macro-CR strategies as parallel to those in earlier research based on native English speakers. Female respondents used more agreement macro CRs in response to female compliments than to male ones. Whereas, male participants offered Agreement macro strategies to male and female compliments with close to equal frequency. Women were also found to use more micro-CR strategies (e.g. Comment Acceptance and Comment History). Men and women differently perceive the function of compliments.

Fargahl and Al-Khatib (2001) also claim that in Arabic society, gender plays a major and decisive role in defining complimenting behaviour. For example, men reply in simpler responses to women, instead of when they reply to a man-driven compliment. The study depicts gender-segregation tradition in Jordanian society. Due to

the reserved nature of society, men interact less with women at all levels. This lets them stay non-verbal with women as much as possible. Females are also reported to be more questioning in response, whereas males follow disagreements and blessings.

This study explores compliments and compliment responses used by men and women in Saudi Arabia and understands their patterns in the use of the language from a linguistic perspective. The study aimed to answer and explore the main following question: How do gender differences affect compliments and compliment responses and define their complimenting strategies? The lack of information on the sociolinguistic behavior of Hijazi speakers brings the need to highlight the compliment behaviour of this untouched region of Saudi Arabia. The findings of this study can be extended to other cultures and replicated with the inclusion of other sociocultural factors such as age and relationship.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Fieldworkers

For the procurement and evaluation of compliments and compliment responses within the premises of Al Taif city, locals were instructed to gather the required data keeping in view the social variables under study. This led to a skilled force of investigators participating in the study and collecting spontaneous data based on the research objectives. To execute this, ten Al Taif residents, who natively speak Hijazi dialect, were recruited and trained as fieldworkers (i.e., 5 males and 5 females). They were bachelor's degree holders which makes them knowledgeable in gathering data for the study and were trained by the documentation sheet that contains information sections on age, gender, and social relationships between the complimenter and the complimentee to observe and collect naturally occurring data. By involving fieldworkers of different genders and various age groups, ranging from their twenties to forties, the study ensured a diverse and comprehensive collection of naturally occurring cases of compliments.

Research Site

The target subjects of this research were Saudi men and women living in Al Hijaz region, Al Taif City in Saudi Arabia, who natively speak Hijazi dialect. Hijaz, particularly, is the region where Arab culture and history can be experienced at their best. Al-Taif, a city in Hijaz, is the epitome of the finest civilization owing to its architecture and sculptures scattered throughout the whole city. Some very eminent local and foreign architects adorned the city with the supreme structure of its era. Suq Okaz, a historical center for tourists on the outskirts of Al-Taif, is a distinctive sight of Saudi culture and history. However, a blend of ancient history with the integration of modern technology, blunt media, and expansion of male/female community centers regard Al-Taif as a semi-conservative city. Meijer and Aarts (2012) claim that this transformation is evident in the norms and rituals of all age groups. Consequently, elderly people are considered no exception and believed to be in harmony with other age groups.

Data Collection

The researcher used ethnographic fieldwork as a primary data collection approach. Data collection for speech acts can be performed using several different protocols and the best one is still an argument. Mostly, the data is collected in the form of observation to study communicative competence. In addition, observation and elicitation are the two other commonly used strategies. Observation is primarily subjective and entails note-taking. Ethnography and impulsive speech recording are also a part of the observation method. On the contrary, elicitation involves both verbal and recorded discourse completion tests as well as interviews and role-plays. The best practice for compliment research is to observe and collect data for the routine spontaneous speech that is unplanned and occurs in a natural setting. In a study focusing on the advantages of the Ethnographic Observation method by Ejimabo (2015), it was inferred that it is one of the most appropriate research paradigms for carrying out a qualitative research project.

To avoid the incongruity between tangible and intangible behavior, this present study makes use of spontaneous data to study compliments and compliment responses.

Data Collection Procedures

The compliments and compliment responses were observed in a wide range of speech situations (e.g., family gatherings, assemblies at shops, educational settings, and meetings on the street). After receiving proper training on how to collect data and use a documentation sheet (See appendix A), fieldworkers recorded the verbal and nonverbal compliments and responses they hear in routine interactions without making any modifications in addition to gathering all possible extra-linguistics necessary details (e.g., gender, subject matter, arrangement, and contextual setting). Note-taking was done on time to avoid the loss of data as happens in collecting naturally occurring data in an unplanned situation. This loss of memory in tracing down the un-documented data is typically associated with the spontaneous data collection method, therefore, this study ensures the accurate speech is documented as and when delivered.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Frequency of Compliments & Responses and Types of Compliments

A total of 659 compliments were collected, of which 9 compliments were discarded owing to their invalidity. The compliment invalidity was determined by the disparity in the background information of both the speech parties. After excluding invalid compliments, a corpus of 650 compliments remained. Received responses were recorded as 714 in number. Table 1 shows the total number of compliments given and received.

The difference in the number of compliments and their responses reveals that more than one response can be given to a compliment along with a return, or maybe an invocation or even reassignment.

In addition, Compliments are divided into implicit and explicit categories. In the implicit type, the recipient is not directly addressed, and the hearer needs to infer the speech based on his self-judgment. While the explicit one is straightforward in nature as it conveys its literal meaning to the addressee, usually in the form of declarative sentences. The recipients often receive them as they were said.

Table 1. Corpus, Types and Frequency of Compliments and Compliment Responses

	Corpus	Types	Frequency
Compliments	650	Implicit	219 (34%)
		Explicit	431 (66%)
Compliment responses	714	-	-

The study's Chi-square result revealed that there is a strong tendency of Hijazi speakers to use significantly more explicit compliments than implicit ones ($\chi^2 = 446$, $P < .000$). i.e., explicit compliments were recorded more than implicit compliments. Table 1 also shows that the speakers of Hijazi output 431(66%) explicit compliments, while implicit compliments were 219 (34%).

This disparity suggests that there is a preference for direct complimenting as the dominant strategy among Hijazi speakers, despite its potential to cause offense. resulting in explicit compliments being more dominant, often accompanied by the protective phrase "Masha Allah" to ward off the potential negativity of the evil eye. This strategy seems to minimize potential face-threatening situations for the recipients while maintaining politeness (Al Amro, 2013). This is in line with some previous studies on Egyptian society reporting that Egyptian speakers also tend to predominantly use more explicit compliment strategies (63%) than implicit ones (27%) (Nelson et al,1993; El-Dakhs, 2021).

Below are the examples of implicit and explicit compliments by Hijazi speakers;

1. Ayish tastakhdimi li azafirik? **(Female to female)**
(Implicit)

What do you use for nails-your

What kind of products do you use for your nails?

ايش تستخدمي لأظافرك؟

The example above is categorized as an implicit compliment in its nature as the compliment is being passed as a question and not a clear indication of likeness. In the Hijazi region, when someone asks a question like this, the hearer assumes that their element is being adored in the question. This compliment is often accepted in the response and passed between strangers owing to their indirectness and ruling out the fear of the hearer's offensive response. Here, the positive semantic carriers are not used but still, the compliment towards the complimentee is understandable.

In the compliment numbered 1, there is no use of a positive semantic carrier, but this implicit compliment clearly shows how the other person is complimented for a certain characteristic. For instance, "*What kind of products do you use for your nails?*", is a sentence where the hearer will subjectively perceive the meaning and respond accordingly. Non-utterance of the words that show direct appraisal yields different responses than when explicit compliments are given. (Al-Bataineh, 2013)

Implicit compliments are often given to prevent any potential threat/insult in response to the compliment, as some individuals may get furious or defensive when their appearance and qualities are praised, particularly in a distant relationship. (CarmenMaíz-Arévalo, 2012)

2. Euyunuk hulwh **(Male to Female) (Explicit)**

Eyes-your beautiful

Your eyes. are beautiful

عيونك حلوين

This is a very direct compliment to the natural beauty of the hearer. It can be inferred in its literal meaning as it uses a clear adjective and is marked with a positive semantic carrier i.e., 'beautiful.' This

type of direct compliment is generally avoided among Arabs, particularly among the opposite genders under the influence of religious and cultural norms.

In the Saudi conservative society, direct compliments, especially between individuals of the opposite gender, are typically avoided. However, the collected data showed a different approach. For example, residents of AL Taif City are known to exchange direct compliments across genders. This could be attributed to its geographical position in the center of AL Hijaz, which attracts people from other regions and neighboring countries and societies that are, to some degree, less conservative. On the other hand, in some other Saudi cities, individuals often refrain from giving such direct compliments on natural beauty to avoid potentially face-threatening situations.

Gender and Frequency of Compliments

Among the 650 compliments examined, females initiated 299 compliments, with 42.3% (275 compliments) directed towards females and only 3.69% (24) towards males. On the contrary, males offered slightly more compliments, predominantly targeting the same gender 34.9% (227 compliments), and to a lesser extent, females (19% or 124 compliments), as seen in Table 2.

Table 2. Breakdown of Compliments Frequency by Gender

No.	Gender	Frequency of Compliment	Percentage (%)
1	Female-Female	275	42.3%
2	Male-Male	227	34.9%
3	Male-Female	124	19%
4	Female-Male	24	3.69%
	TOTAL	650	100%

These findings suggest that in Hijazi society, males tend to compliment females more than females do. This tendency is influenced by the gender-segregated policy of Saudi Arabia as only limited interactions occur between opposite genders. Even though Al Hijaz has a relatively open urban culture, women are still showing caution in complimenting men, which suggests hidden

concerns. The fact that men tend to compliment women more may be attributed to the type of data collected as most cross-gender interactions were recorded among family members.

However, a very distinct pattern of women being more involved in complimenting than men was reported by many authors. (Wolfson, 1984; Herbert, 19990; Holmes, 1995; Al Amro 2013). Hijazi men complimenting as much as women is an indication that they are also keen observers and exhibit politeness in their speech and gestures. Females received more compliments than given and vice versa was recorded for male counterparts.

Although sentence length is out of the study scope, a remarkable finding in compliment length between genders was observed. On average, females employed approximately 6 words, while males used around 5.5 words, exhibiting a relatively close balance. These observations contradict the findings of Al Amro (2013) and Nelson et al., (1993), where a difference in compliment lengths of both genders was found in Najdi Arabic (males 6.2; females 8) and American dialects (males 4.3; females 6.2).

Types of Compliments by Gender

A total of 219 implicit compliments were given, while 431 were classified as explicit. Out of the overall total explicit compliments, males produced 240 instances, whereas females, 191. Similarly, males surpassed females in their use of implicit compliments that were without any positive semantic carrier i.e. 111 for males and 108 for females as shown in Fig.1

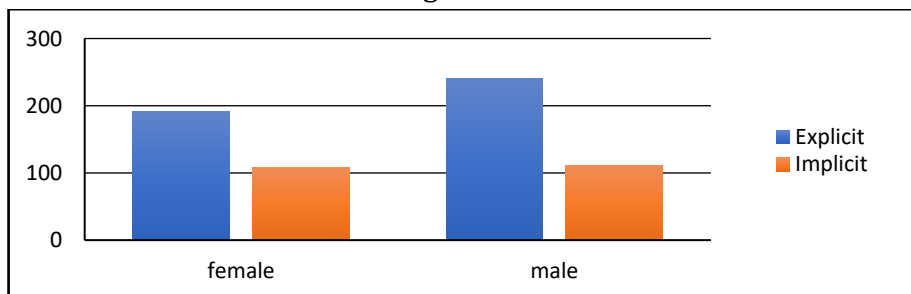


Figure 1. The relationship between the gender of the speaker and the type of compliments.

Chi² analysis revealed no statistically significant relationship between gender and complimenting behaviour, $\chi^2(1) = 1.46, p = .227$

Syntactic Patterns by Gender and Cross-gender

This study identified the formulaic nature of Hijazi compliments as females used 299 syntactic patterns and males used 351. Data shows distinct syntactic patterns between males and females. According to the data, [NP Adj] is reported as the most frequently used syntactic pattern among both genders with 17.3% of males and 16% of women using this syntactic pattern in their conversations. The second most common pattern is [NP NP Adj] with 10% of females and 7.69% of males employing them in their speech. The next most recorded pattern is [VP NP] which constitutes 7.1% of males' usage and 6.3% of females' usage in their compliment speech. Men used a greater variety of syntactic patterns than women, but there is no significant difference in the frequency of usage between genders, as $\chi^2(54) = 56.32, p = .388$. This goes against Al Amro's (2013) finding that women used more syntactic patterns than men.

The syntactic pattern [I like NP] is more common than [I love NP] in utterances, reflecting reserved language use among Hijazis. Females use these patterns more, particularly when complimenting each other, which aligns with Sun's (2013) findings on gender-based complimenting. Women also tend to use the first personal pronoun "I" more in compliments, as suggested by Holmes (1988), Herbert (1990), Sun (2002), and Duan and Guo's (2009). Interestingly, [Adj INT NP] compliment phrases are equally utilized by both genders in compliments.

Some distinct syntactic patterns are observed to exclusively occur within each gender. For instance, [What NP NP] occurred 5 times with females as in Example 3 below;

3. *Aysh aljamal alzahi alkhateer haza*

What the beauty shining great this

What a great shining beauty is that!

Similarly, the analysis revealed three instances of [VP INT Adj] structure used by males only as in Example 4:

4. *Tesedni marh mzohek*

Happy makes very comedy personality-yours

Your comedy personality makes me happy.

Tables 3 and 4 in Appendix B illustrate syntactic patterns as used in same and cross-gender complimenting. The cross-gender analysis revealed the highest use (109 times) of [NP Adj] syntactic pattern out of which 43 times (39%) passed from a female to another woman and likewise from a man to another man. This shows this maximum pattern usage between the same genders. Across gender, M-F used this 19 times (17.4%) while F-M used it only 4 times (3.6%). An instance for F-F compliment;

5. *Alaah habeet anaqtaq*

Wow loved stylish-yours

Wow i loved your stylish

M-M instance of this syntactic pattern;

6. *Ooof masha Allah syartek khteera*

Wow Masha Allah u have a nice car

The second most common syntactic pattern [NP NP Adj] was observed, being used a total of 57 times across genders. Among these instances, female-to-female (F-F) usage accounted for 47% (27 times), while the usage of this pattern in a female-to-male (F-M) context was notably lower at 7% (4 times). On the other hand, male-to-female (M-F) and male-to-male (M-M) instances were more evenly distributed, occurring 12 times (21%) and 14 times (24.5%), respectively.

In this study, certain vocabulary selection was found particular to each gender that delivered the same meaning but in a different language. Coates (1993) suggests that social roles associated with gender are significant in elucidating the language variations between men and women. Accordingly, some researchers, including Wolfson (1983), contend that gender-based variations in compliments reflect social power dynamics, where women are

typically seen as occupying subordinate positions in society, particularly in an Arabic society of male dominance .

Tannen (1990) proposed a genderlect theory of communication according to which men and women have distinct communication styles, use different linguistic codes, and have unique verbal repertoires. It can apply to the Hijazi context as revealed in the present study. However, not only gender variables can be attributed to the fact in communication differences reported here but the variables of age and social relationships can shape linguistic choices too.

Semantic Carriers Across Gender

The most common lexical terms were only reported in female compliments such as "*Jameelah*" beautiful and "*Raheeb*" wonderful while males from the other side were noticed to commonly use "*Fannan*" very creative and surprisingly found to avoid women's terms to not to sound girlish when complimenting each other. Also, women complimented everything more than men as women are more towards positive politeness and have a keen eye than men do. Similarly, men used fewer intensifiers than females did in their speech. This statement is in harmony with the conclusion of Johnson & Roen (1992) and Herbert (1990).

Compliment Topics in Across/Same-Gender

Examining how gender and compliment topics are related can reveal the sociological dynamics of compliments in Al Hijaz. The data presented in Table 5 and Fig. 2 indicate that women receive compliments primarily for their appearance (39.5%), which is also true in the case of men (42.3%). This is followed by their performance (23.4% vs. 22.1%), possession (18.4% vs. 19%), personality (10.7% vs. 10.5%), ethics (4% vs. 3.1%), children (2% vs. 1.9%) and relationship (1.6 vs. 0.85%). The preference for compliments topics in both genders is quite similar in this study. This is in contrast with Al Amro's (2013) findings where men complimented personality above all other topics while women aimed for Appearance. Surprisingly, Sun's (2002) research conducted in the Mandarin Chinese context indicates that

individuals of both genders tend to give more compliments about performance rather than appearance.

Surprisingly, men gave more compliments (149) on appearance than women did (118). The frequency of compliments for all the other topics had a very minor difference for both genders, however. Alobaisi (2021) reported a contradictory study on Al Hijaz that showed men complimented personal traits more often than appearance. This differs from another study where appearance was the most common topic. The difference in complimenting behavior might be due to variations in test subjects and speech choices.

Table 5. Frequency of Compliments Topics according to Gender

No.	Compliment Topics	Male	Female	Total
1	Appearance	149 (42.3%)	118 (39.5%)	267
2	Possession	67 (19%)	55 (18.4%)	122
3	Performance	78 (22.1%)	70 (23.4%)	148
4	Personality	37 (10.5%)	32 (10.7%)	69
5	Ethics	11 (3.1%)	12 (4%)	23
6	Children	7 (1.9%)	6 (2%)	13
7	Relations	3 (0.85%)	5 (1.6%)	8
	Total	352 (100%)	298 (100%)	650

Chi² produced no statistically significant relationship between Gender and Topic, $\chi^2(6) = 2.05, p = .915$.

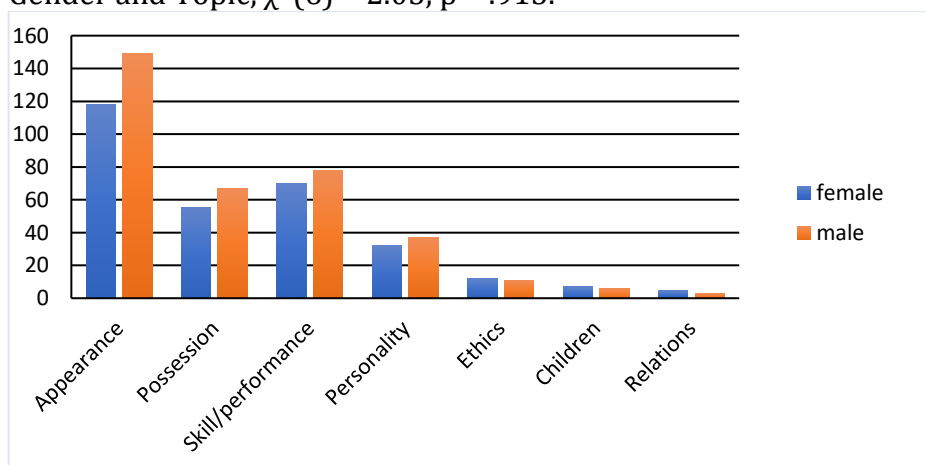


Figure 2. Compliment Topics According to Gender

In addition, Table 5 presents the distribution of compliment topics by gender, including both comparisons between genders and within the same gender. According to the data, appearance was the most complimented topic among the female interlocutors, comprising 109 compliments (39.6%) out of 275 of the F-F compliment speech which was higher than the male counterpart. On the contrary, males also passed the highest number of compliments (30.3%) on the appearance of other males. Holmes (1988) reported similar results with a noticeable inclination for women to exchange compliments related to physical appearance more frequently than men do. However, female-to-male compliment on appearance was considerably lesser i.e. only 9 times. In contrast, shockingly high (64.5%) compliments on appearance were passed from males to females which was what the researcher expected based on her experience.

The second most common cross-gender compliment topic was the performance for F-F conversation, while men passed more compliments on the possession of the same gender. Very few comments were recorded on both topics across gender, however, performance remained the second most complimented topic M-F. Sun (2013) similarly reported that compliments given by men to women tend to focus on their abilities or skills, which account for 44% of all compliments from men in his study. Possession was the third most complimented topic among females (18%) followed by personality (10.1%), ethics (3.6%), children (2.5%), and relations (1.8%).

Holmes, (1988, 1991); Herbert, (1990); Rees-Miller, (2011) all support the theory that there may be differences between males and females in the internal syntactic and lexical structures of compliments, as well as in their pragmatic strategies, frequency, and the topics they choose to compliment. Also, Wolfson (1983) believes that these language behaviours depict the social power of each gender, especially in Arabs where women are generally considered a subordinate class.

Most of the compliments were given and received between the same genders according to Table 6 while no compliments were given on children and relations from a female to a male.

Table 6. Frequency of Compliments Topics according to Cross-Gender

Compliment Topics	F-F	F-M	M-F	M-M	Total
Appearance	109 (39.6%)	9 (37.5%)	80 (64.5%)	69 (30.3%)	267
Possession	50 (18%)	5 (20.8%)	10 (8%)	57 (25.1%)	122
Performance	66 (24%)	5 (20.8%)	22 (17.7%)	55 (24.2%)	148
Personality	28 (10.1%)	3 (12.5%)	8 (6.4%)	30 (13.2%)	69
Ethics	10 (3.6%)	2 (8.3%)	2 (1.6%)	9 (3.9%)	23
Children	7 (2.5%)	0	1 (0.8%)	5 (2.2%)	13
Relations	5 (1.8%)	0	1 (0.8%)	2 (0.8%)	8
Total	275 (100%)	24 (100%)	124 (100%)	227 (100%)	650

A statistically significant relationship between Cross-gender and topic was found via Chi² analysis, $\chi^2(18) = 47.33, p < .001$

The higher propensity of Hijazis towards natural or unnatural beauty depicts Hijazis having become more confident in complimenting because in a reserved Saudi society, sometimes this is perceived as an uncommon social behavior. However, female interlocutors complimented appearance more than the male-male interaction. Females hardly complimented their male counterparts on appearance but shockingly, Saudi men complimented way more on females' appearance. However, most of the compliments were given and received between the same genders. The results here reflect many past global studies. (Holmes, 1995; Ye, 1995; Knapp et al, 1984, Al Amro, 2013).

Gender Differences in Compliment Responses

Holmes (1995) suggests that the way people respond to compliments is another way of expressing politeness, which varies across cultures. Hijazis, as previously demonstrated, tend to prioritize agreement in response to compliments. Table 7 and Fig. 3 examine the gender differences in responding to compliments and also indicate that both genders employed semi- equal compliment responses.

Table 7. *Gender-based compliment responses*

Compliment Response		Males	Females
Agreement			
<i>Acceptance</i>			
1	Appreciation	145	89
2	Comment Acceptance	72	92
3	Praise Upgrade	21	18
<i>Non-Acceptance</i>			
4	Comment History	23	30
5	Transfers	7	18
6	Disagreement	12	9
7	Qualification	2	4
8	Return	6	11
9	Reassignment	1	7
Non-Agreement			
10	Scale Down	12	21
11	Non Acceptance	20	17
12	Non Acknowledgment	14	17
13	Question	7	8
14	Evil eye protection	2	0
Other Interpretations			
15	Joking	7	3
16	Request	2	3
17	Cursing	4	0
Total		357	347

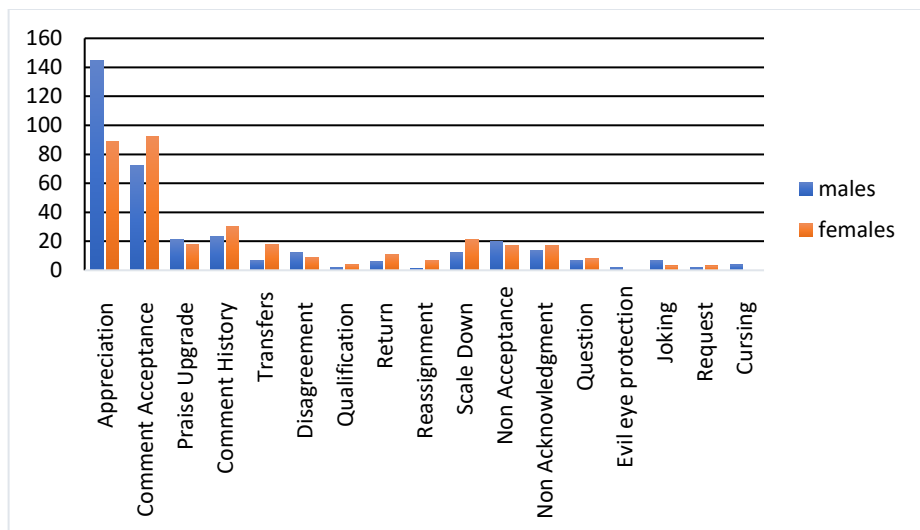


Figure 3. Gender-based compliment responses

In an *Acceptance* response to the compliment, males replied with more appreciation tokens and praise upgrades than females did ($\chi^2(2) = 12.69, p = .002$). However, comment acceptance was more adopted by females than by males. Praise upgrade is the least opted-for strategy among both the genders in Hijazi context to avoid any face-threatening situation and to avoid self-praise.

As a part of the *Non-acceptance* strategy, Hijazi females replied with more comment history, transfers, qualification, returns, and reassignments than their male counterparts. On the contrary, disagreement was a preferred response by the males. It can be inferred that in the Hijazi culture, both men and women tend to avoid self-praise and protect their own dignity by using less direct strategies such as avoiding self-praise.

While non-agreeing with the complimenter, females tend to scale down the compliment more than males do. This may be regarded as the women being more polite than their counterpart while men opted more for the non-acceptance response. However, men and women both responded by the question strategy equally while evil-eye protection was a concerned response among males. There was no statistically significant relationship between Gender and Non-agreement, $\chi^2(4) = 4.53, p = .339$

Males replied more with a joke while females replied more with requests. No female was found to reply with a curse whereas 4 such replies were reported among men. No statistically significant relationship was found between Gender and Other Interpretations, $\chi^2(1) = 1.25, p = .264$

Opting for different response strategies is significantly gender-based as shown in Fig.4 In this study, males accepted the compliments more than females did. These results are in contrast with Cai (2012) who reports a dissimilar pattern of gender distribution where women tend to accept compliments more frequently than men, while men are more likely to decline either by non-acceptance or non-response in a Chinese dialect. Similarly, Persian and English participants tended to accept compliments directed at them and the gender variable did not affect the

compliment response strategies in a study by Shabani & Zeinali (2015). In general, agreement responses are fairly higher than non-agreement responses among both genders and men overall gave more replies to the compliments than females as shown in Fig. 4

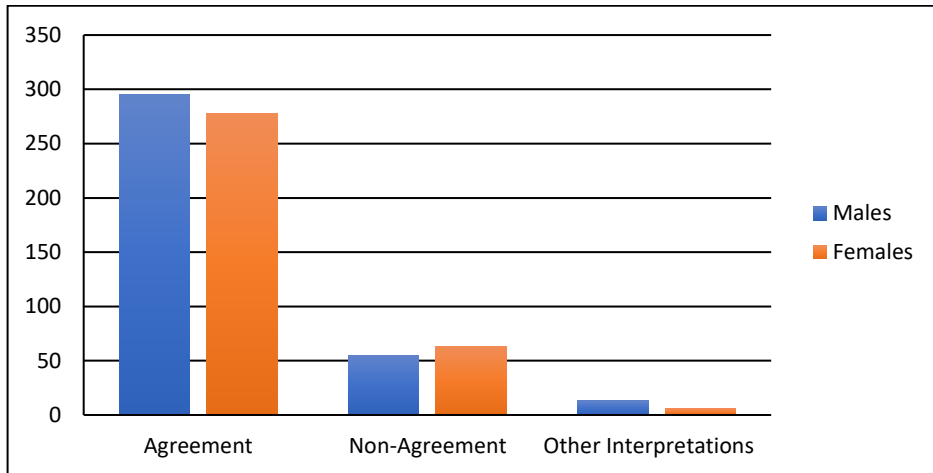


Figure 4. Frequency of Compliment Responses in Super-categories by Gender

An interesting finding of this study that contradicted many other past studies was that men and women passed nearly the same number of compliments and more compliments were given within the same gender than across genders. In Hijazi society, 34.9% of compliments given by males were to other males, while only 19% were given to females. Among females, 42.3% of compliments were exchanged between females, with only 3.69% being given across genders. Men compliment women more than vice versa in Hijazi society, which contributes to gender segregation in reserved societies like Saudi Arabia.

Compliment length was almost equal for both genders. On average, females used six words in their compliments, while males used 5.5 words. Additionally, both males and females displayed repetitive characteristics in their compliments and often used a sequence of adjectives with similar meanings. Another notable outcome was that Hijazi men used more explicit and implicit speech than women. Males also employed more syntactic patterns than

females. Across-gender syntactic patterns differed from same-gender speech. 109 times [NP Adj] syntactic pattern was employed across genders. The distinct linguistic choices among both genders are strongly backed by the results of this present study on Hijazi speakers.

Women and men in Al Hijaz were found to compliment appearance more than any other trait. And surprisingly, men complimented appearance more than women did. The complimenting pattern is quite alike for both genders in this study. The second most complimented topic after appearance was performance, followed by possession, personality, ethics, children, and relationship, regardless of gender.

It was worth noting that apart from the most opted-for agreement response strategy as a politeness mechanism among Hijazis, gender-based compliment response strategies differed greatly. Men responded to compliments with more tokens of appreciation and upgraded praise than women did. Nonetheless, Hijazi women were more likely to accept the compliment as a response, whereas men were less inclined to do so. Following the non-acceptance strategy, Hijazi women tended to use comment history, transfers, qualification, returns, and reassignments more frequently than men did. In contrast, men preferred to express disagreement in response. By this, we can assume that women are more polite while non-accepting the compliment and men are more straightforward. However, this also notes that men used more appreciation tokens than women did while women focused on other acceptance strategies. Furthermore, both men and women tend to respond with agreement more often than with non-agreement when receiving compliments. Furthermore, Hijazis tend to give more responses to compliments than women in general.

Men and women exhibit distinct patterns of complimenting, influenced by societal expectations and gender roles. Women and men both tend to offer compliments more frequently and focus on appearance-related aspects, while men typically express compliments related to achievements or skills higher than females.

These findings suggest that gender plays a role in shaping compliment behavior in this cultural context.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study highlighted the complimenting behavior in Hijazi society and revealed an overall similarity between men and women in the strategies of compliment exchange. The linguistic remarks found provide insights into the role of gender in compliment exchange in Hijazi society. In addition, gender was observed to influence compliment responses strategies with women, which tends to be more polite and indirect than men. Overall, this study explores the interplay between gender and compliment behavior, leading to a better understanding of gender role in Hijazi compliment behavior.

This research has limitations regarding the researcher's interpretation of the data and the small sample size. It focuses on gender, neglecting other variables such as, age, social status, and relationship. Future research may investigate the impact of cultural values and religious beliefs on compliment behavior. Comparative studies can also be conducted to examine how compliment behavior varies among different cultural groups.

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Appendices

Appendix B: Syntactic Patterns and Gender

Table 3. Syntactic Patterns by Gender

Syntactic Patterns	Female	Male	Total
NP what DEM Adj	2 (0.66%)	2 (0.56%)	4
Superlative form NP	9 (3.01%)	13 (3.7%)	22
How VP	9 (3.01%)	5 (1.42%)	14
VP Superlative	1 (0.33%)	0	1
I like NP	19 (6.35%)	16 (4.55%)	35
VP NP	19 (6.35%)	25 (7.1%)	44
I Need like NP	4 (1.33%)	5 (1.42%)	9
VP PP NP	6 (2.0%)	9 (2.56%)	15
NP Adj	48 (16.0%)	61 (17.3%)	109
NP VP NP	17 (5.68%)	11 (3.13%)	28
Ds NP adj	12 (4.01%)	19 (5.41%)	31
Ds NP adj INT	1 (0.33%)	0	1
Adj INT NP	11 (3.67%)	11 (3.13%)	22
NP NP Adj	30 (10%)	27 (7.69%)	57
NP PP NP	6 (2.0%)	15 (4.27%)	21
Adj	16 (5.35%)	18 (5.12%)	34
What NP PP	2 (0.66%)	6 (1.70%)	8
I like Det NP PP	1 (0.33%)	5 (1.42%)	6
I love NP	3 (1.0%)	7 (1.99%)	10
NP Adj INT	3 (1.0%)	5 (1.42%)	8
Adj NP NP	3 (1.0%)	6 (1.70%)	9
Where VP	9 (3.01%)	14 (3.98%)	23
Frequency Adv PP adj	2 (0.66%)	1 (0.28%)	3
NP INT Adj	6 (2.0%)	6 (1.70%)	12
What DEM+pro Adj	9 (3.01%)	8 (2.27%)	17
Pro Ds NP	3 (1.0%)	2 (0.56%)	5
NP what VP PP	4 (1.33%)	4 (1.13%)	8
NP VP	10 (3.34%)	18 (5.12%)	28
DS pro Adj	2 (0.66%)	5 (1.42%)	6
Adj NP	8 (2.67%)	8 (2.27%)	16
INT I like NP	1 (0.33%)	2 (0.56%)	3
Adj Adj	2	0	2
INT Adj NP	1 (0.33%)	1 (0.28%)	2
What NP NP	5 (1.67%)	0	5
Ds NP PP	0	1 (0.28%)	1
VP INT Adj	0	3 (0.85%)	3
Pro Superlative form	2 (0.66%)	0	2
Frequency Adv VP	2 (0.66%)	0	2
VP NP+F113	1 (0.33%)	0	1
Adj VP	1 (0.33%)	0	1
Adj adj NP	1 (0.33%)	0	1
What VP NP	1 (0.33%)	0	1
PP Adj	1 (0.33%)	2 (0.56%)	3

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Syntactic Patterns	Female	Male	Total
VP INT	0	2 (0.56%)	2
NP How NP	1 (0.33%)	0	1
VP like NP	0	1 (0.28%)	1
Pro NP Adj INT	0	1 (0.28%)	1
VP Pro	0	1 (0.28%)	1
NP VP PP	1 (0.33%)	0	1
NP VP INT	1 (0.33%)	1 (0.28%)	2
NP VP VP	0	2 (0.56%)	2
Pro Det VP	1 (0.33%)	0	1
Ds NP Adj	1 (0.33%)	0	1
Adj Frequency Adv VP	0	1 (0.28%)	1
NP PP	1 (0.33%)	1 (0.28%)	2
Total	299 (100%)	351 (100%)	650

Table 4. Syntactic Patterns and Cross-gender

Syntactic Patterns	F-F	F-M	M-F	M-M	Total
NP what DEM Adj	3 (60%)	0	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	5
Superlative form NP	8 (36.3%)	1 (4.54%)	7 (31.8%)	6 (27.2%)	22
How VP	7 (50%)	2 (14.2%)	1 (7.1%)	4 (28.5%)	14
VP Superlative	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1
I like NP	19 (54.2%)	0	4 (11.42%)	12 (34.2%)	35
VP NP	16 (36.3%)	3 (6.8%)	8 (18.1%)	17 (38.6%)	44
I Need like NP	4 (44.4%)	0	0	5 (55.5%)	9
VP PP NP	5 (33.3%)	1 (6.6%)	3 (20%)	6 (40%)	15
NP Adj	43 (39%)	4 (3.6%)	19 (17.4%)	43 (39%)	109
NP VP NP	15 (53.5%)	2 (7.1%)	2 (7.1%)	9 (32.1%)	28
Ds NP adj	12 (38.7%)	0	7 (22.5%)	12 (38.7%)	31
Ds NP adj INT	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1
Adj INT NP	10 (45.4%)	1 (4.5%)	7 (31.8%)	4 (18.1%)	22
NP NP Adj	27 (47%)	4 (7%)	12 (21%)	14 (24.5%)	57
NP PP NP	6 (28.5%)	0	4 (19.0%)	11 (52.3%)	21
Adj	14 (41.1%)	1 (2.9%)	7 (20.5%)	12 (35.2%)	34
What NP PP	2 (25.0%)	0	3 (37.5%)	3 (37.5%)	8
I like Det NP PP	1 (16.6%)	0	2 (33.3%)	3 (50%)	6
I love NP	3 (30%)	0	1 (10%)	6 (60%)	10
NP Adj INT	3 (37.5%)	0	0	5 (62.5%)	8
Adj NP NP	3 (33.3%)	0	2 (22.2%)	4 (44.4%)	9
Where VP	8 (34.7%)	1 (4.3%)	7 (30.4%)	7 (30.4%)	23
Frequency Adv PP adj	2 (66.6%)	0	1 (33.3%)	0	3
NP INT Adj	5 (41.6%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	5 (41.6%)	12
What DEM+pro Adj	8 (47.0%)	1 (5.8%)	1 (5.8%)	7 (41.1%)	17
Pro Ds NP	3 (60%)	0	0	2 (40%)	5
NP what VP PP	4 (50%)	0	1 (12.5%)	3 (37.5%)	8
NP VP	9 (32.1%)	1 (3.5%)	9 (32.1%)	9 (32.1%)	28
DS pro Adj	1 (16.6%)	0	2 (33.3%)	3 (50%)	6
Adj NP	9 (56.2%)	0	4 (25%)	3 (18.7%)	16
INT I like NP	1 (33.3%)	0	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	3

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Adj Adj	2 (100%)	0	0	0	2
INT Adj NP	1 (50%)	0	0	1 (50%)	2
What NP NP	5 (100%)	0	0	0	5
Ds NP PP	0	0	1 (100%)	0	1
VP INT Adj	0	0	2 (66.6%)	1 (33.3%)	3
Pro Superlative form	1 (50%)	1 (50%)	0	0	2
Frecuency Adv VP	2 (100%)	0	0	0	2
VP NP+F113	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1
Adj VP	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1
Adj adj NP	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1
What VP NP	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1
PP Adj	1 (33.3%)	0	1 (33.3%)	1 (33.3%)	3
VP INT	0	0	2 (100%)	0	2
NP How NP	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1
VP like NP	0	0	0	1 (100%)	1
Pro NP Adj INT	0	0	0	1 (100%)	1
VP Pro	0	0	1 (100%)	0	1
NP VP PP	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1
NP VP INT	1 (50%)	0	0	1 (50%)	2
NP VP VP	0	0	0	2 (100%)	2
Pro Det VP	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1
Ds NP Adj	1 (100%)	0	0	0	1
Adj Frecuency Adv VP	0	0	0	1 (100%)	1
NP PP	1 (50%)	0	0	1 (50%)	2
Total	299	24	124	227	650