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Compliments as gendered discourse among Lubukusu speakers

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ABSTRACT

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A compliment is a speech act that explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker for some good which is positively valued. Compliments are among the most common speech acts that facilitate interaction by fostering solidarity, reducing social distance, and promoting harmony. Context plays a pivotal role in the interpretation of the role of a compliment this means that one compliment can be used as a token of appreciation in one context but in another it is interpreted as Face Threatening Act. This study investigated the role of pragmatic contexts specifically gender in the use of compliments among Lubukusu speakers in Bungoma County. The study adopted an ethnographic approach using purposive and simple random sampling to select respondents. Data was collected through field notes and audio recordings, yielding 200 naturally occurring compliments. The analysis was guided by Brown and Levinson's Politeness and Austin's Speech Act theories. Findings revealed that Lubukusu compliments relied on a restricted set of lexical items with adjectives being the most dominant followed by adverbs, nouns and verbs. The study also noted that women tended to use longer and more elaborate compliment structures compared to men. The study therefore concludes that Lubukusu compliments are formulaic, context-sensitive and serve an important role in face management. The findings contribute to scholarship in pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and politeness theory while offering practical insights for educators, policymakers, and learners of Lubukusu.

Background information

Throughout history, compliments have served as a means of social bonding and as a form of self-expression. In

ancient societies, such as ancient Egypt and Greece, compliments were seen as a way of establishing hierarchies and social status (Davies, 2017; Mark, 2017). They were frequently given by the upper classes to

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reinforce their power and superiority over others however, during the Renaissance period, compliments began to take on a more romantic and poetic nature. They became an art form, with poets using elaborate language and imagery to praise their subjects. This evolution in the expression of compliments reflects the changing societal values and the growing importance of individuality and emotional connections. Understanding the historical perspectives of compliments helps us appreciate the complexity and cultural significance attached to these seemingly simple gestures of appreciation (Sylvia & Zainil, 2025).

Mokoginta (2023) posits that complimenting is an important communicative event. As part of phatic communication, compliments are very helpful in maintaining social connection between participants in an interaction. Kharboot and Ma (2021) posit that a compliment is used as a way of expressing an opinion about a certain thing or behaviour, or as icebreakers to start conversations. Additionally, compliments are comments a speaker makes to express his/her admiration of a particular characteristic or possession of another person. Alqarni (2020) notes that a compliment may be motivated by a desire to maintain a harmonious relationship, maintain face or observe established social protocols, or it may be part of an interactional strategy. He contends that compliments play varied functions geared towards increasing solidarity between the speaker and the recipient.

Human beings interact in order to build and sustain relationships and compliments play a pivotal role in the facilitating such interactions. This view is supported by Mwambapa and Msuya (2022) who carried out a study to examine teachers' use of compliments in classroom interactions. In their study, they indicate that compliments enhance learners' self-perception of success, thereby encouraging more active participation in

classroom interactions. Peng *et al.* (2014) also had carried out a study which revealed that teachers prefer complimenting their students to establish rapport and to minimize the social distance between them. This finding further enhances the notion that compliments are used to establish rapport, reduce social distance, and promote harmony. Holmes (1986) appreciates that compliments appear to be functionally complex speech acts because apart from creating solidarity, they may be used to connect up with a friend, smoothen ruffled feathers, express positive evaluation, appreciation or praise, and bridge gaps created by possible offenses.

According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory, compliments are examples of positive politeness strategies which take care of the addressee's positive face; they address his/her desires and interests. Positive politeness strategies indicate that some attribute of the addressee is acceptable to the speaker as such the speaker takes care of the hearer's positive face thereby enhancing cohesion with him/her. As an act, complimenting differs from one community to another and culture which is at its center, plays a pivotal role in the way it is paid and received by those interacting (Culpeper, 2011; Fathi, 2024). In a study that investigated compliment and compliment responses among Indonesian learners of English and Arabic languages in a university in Indonesia, Kamsinah *et al.* (2022) revealed that learners of English language employed varied types of compliment strategies and compliment responses compared to those of Arabic language. The notion that compliments are culture specific is further corroborated by Stepykin (2021) who conducted a study on communicative strategies and tactics of paying compliments between Spanish and Russian speakers. The study revealed the peculiarities in the usage of different strategies and tactics of complimenting by the respondents. It noted that the strategy of preserving the negative face of the addressee prevailed among the Spanish speakers whereas that of

preserving the speaker's face was found only among Russian compliments.

Compliments can be classified as explicit/direct or implicit/indirect. Explicit/direct compliments are based on conventional or literal meanings found in the utterance itself, for example, your haircut is nice. While implicit/indirect compliments are based on non-conventional meanings that depend highly on the context of the utterance, which requires more interpretation and inference to understand the positive meaning (Wolfson & Judd, 1983).

The Problem

The structure and interpretation of compliments within particular contexts determines how effective they are. Available research has shown that compliments have patterns which are formulaic and syntactic in nature. Nevertheless, they are comprehended and realized in varied ways across languages and by extension cultures. Limited research has been conducted on the use of compliments in African languages generally and Lubukusu specifically despite the plethora of research carried out on compliments in English and other languages of the world. Previous studies in Kenya have examined politeness in Kiswahili, youth language, and Bukusu songs, but little attention has been given to paying and receiving compliments in everyday Lubukusu interactions generally and the distinctions in compliment behaviour between Lubukusu speaking men and women in Kibingei ward Bungoma County, Kenya, specifically. Understanding how compliments are realized in Lubukusu is therefore important both theoretically and practically. It is thus against this backdrop that this study sought to fill the gaps of knowledge regarding the linguistic comprehension of gender-based compliments in Lubukusu.

Objective of the Study

This study was guided by the following specific objective:

To examine how gender influences the use of Lubukusu compliments in Kibingei ward, Bungoma County.

Literature Review

There are differences in the way men and women use compliments globally and several studies bring to perspective these differences. Widyanita and Pasaribu (2019) carried a descriptive study that focused on how male and female characters in the movie "Me Before You" expressed compliments. Analysis involved coding the data and presenting it in the form of tables. Data was then categorized chronologically following the modes of classification adopted by Manes and Wolfson. A total of 55 compliments were collected from the movie with the male characters using 32 and the female 23 compliments. The high use of compliments by men as opposed to women in this movie is attributed to the plot and the attributes of the characters. The study also revealed that compliments were used in expressing admiration, establishing solidarity, as a conversation strategy and reinforcing desired behaviour. This study is pivotal to the current with regard to methodology. Moreover, it gives adequate literature on how men and women use compliments and the roles that compliments play in society.

A study on Gender Differences in Compliment Strategies in Social Media Interaction was carried out by Mirandah and Hamzah (2018). This study adopted a descriptive research design. Data was collected from both male and female respondents. The study revealed differences in the compliment strategies used by both male and female participants. While men used three compliment strategies (explicit, implicit and non-compliments) women used two (explicit and implicit). The study further

noted that male-to-male interactions entailed the use of explicit compliments only while female-to-female interactions involved both explicit and implicit compliments. This study is instrumental to the current because it provides literature on compliment strategies employed in interactions. However, it is different from the current in the sense that while its source of data was Facebook, a social media platform, the current study sourced data from naturally occurring conversations among Lubukusu speaking respondents.

Al-Oudat and Mahfouz (2023) carried out a descriptive study on Gender-Based Differences in Compliment Responses among Jordanian University Students. This study was based on a corpus consisting of 233 compliment responses (118 from females and 115 from males). The data were divided into three groups. The first contained 100 responses by females to females; the second was 100 responses from males to males and the last was 33 responses by both male and female students. The compliment responses were analyzed according to Herbert's (1986) taxonomy of compliment response strategies. The study revealed that the most frequent response to compliments that was used by both males and females was the agreement strategy, which constituted 92.7% of the total responses. The second was non agreement at 7.3%, though it was rarely used. The frequent use of agreement strategies among both male and female students was attributed to the norms and expectations in the Jordanian society where rejecting a compliment is deemed shameful. The study further revealed that the most frequent agreement strategy used by female students was the appreciation token strategy, accounting for 52.5% of female responses; on the contrary, the most frequent agreement strategy used by male students was the return strategy, which belongs to the sub category of non-acceptance. Additionally, female students tend to accept compliments offered to them on Facebook more than male students do. This study is

significant to the current study since it provides literature on the gendered response to compliments as well as strategies used to pay compliments. It however differs in the sense that while it used university students as respondents, the present study used ordinary individuals of mixed gender and of varied ages who belonged to different professions whose common denominator was Lubukusu.

An experimental study on women's preferences to men who use metaphorical language when paying compliments in a romantic context was conducted by Gao *et al.* (2017). This study was done at the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China in which heterosexual female students recruited from different majors were used as respondents. Crucial demographic information including age, years of education, romantic relationship status and menstrual cycle was obtained from the 116 respondents. The heterosexual female participants were stratified into either relationship (in-relationship duration of ≥ 3 months) or single groups (individuals with no previous relationship experience or who had had a relationship that had broken up at least 3 months previously). It was noted that men who employed novel metaphorical compliments in their speeches were deemed more attractive than those who used prosaic literal compliments. Additionally, men who complimented women on their appearances were perceived more romantic hence attractive than those who complimented them on what they owned. This study informs the current with regard to crucial information on the gendered use of compliments which the present study is interested in. The points of divergence between this and the present study however, is that while the previous was conducted in an academic setting in China, the present was carried out in varied settings in Kibingei ward, Bungoma County, Kenya. Additionally, while the previous study revolved around the topic of romance, the present study handled wide ranging topics. With regard

to methodology, the two studies differed with the former adopting an experimental while the latter a descriptive research design.

Almallah (2017) conducted a study on Gender Differences in Using Compliment Response Strategies. One hundred (50 female, 50 male) undergraduate Arabic students of Eastern Mediterranean University participated in the study. Data was collected using the Discourse Completion Test (DCT). The situations of the DCT covered two main compliment topics namely: appearance and performance. The study noted a significant female superiority in the use of compliment response agreement strategies, and that females show more acceptance to compliments on both appearance and performance than males do. On the other hand, male students use more disagreement in responding to compliments on appearance paid by males. This study is crucial to the present in the sense that it provides literature on compliment strategies employed by both men and women in various contexts. The point of divergence between this and the current is that while this used university students as respondents, the current employed respondents whose levels of education varied. The instruments used to collect data also varied with this making use of DCT while the current used participant observation using field notes and the tape recorder.

Bibi and Sartini (2023) carried out a cross-cultural study that examined the dynamics of compliment response strategies among university students in Indonesia and Pakistan focusing on the influence of gender and power dynamics. The study utilized a mixed-methods approach to offer a holistic understanding of the subject matter. The study comprised 100 undergraduate students aged between 18-24 years all selected from the department of English, Literature and Linguistics. The respondents were evenly split between Indonesia and Pakistan, with equal gender representation (25 males, 25 females) in each

country. A Google Form questionnaire was used to collect data. Following the data collection process, the responses received were categorized into six distinct compliment response strategies based on the comprehensive taxonomy proposed by Yu (2004). The study revealed that acceptance (63.37%) was the most commonly used response strategy by both male and female students in the Indonesian and Pakistan universities followed by Combination (14.25%), Amendment (11.12%), No Acceptance (6.5%), No acknowledgment (3.37%), and Face relationship (1.37%). The results of the study further indicate that the use of compliment strategies was gendered with Indonesian males preferring acceptance, face relationship and no acknowledgment strategies while females preferred amendment and combination strategies. Among the Pakistani students, the compliment strategies employed was also gendered with the males preferring to use more no acceptance and no acknowledgment strategies than the females.

Chen (2021) carried out a study on sex-based differences in the use of compliments. It revealed that females tended to use more adjectives and adverbs while complimenting than men. The study also revealed that when complimenting females put a lot of emphasis on emotions and feelings while the males put more focus on information delivery. Additionally, it noted that people mainly focused on physical appearance when giving a compliment to a female and on achievements, abilities, and personalities when complimenting males. Another finding was that females were prone to using the first and second persons while complimenting the males on the other hand, males preferred using the third person when paying compliments. Lastly, the study noted that females often accept the compliment then evaluate it but males often accept it but will not add unnecessary comments on it. The study contributes to the existing literature on compliments used by both men and women. However, it

differs from the present research in that it draws on conversational data from native speakers of English in America, whereas the current study focuses on native speakers of Lubukusu in Kenya.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded on two theories that is Austin's Speech Act (Harris *et al.*, 2018; Ball 2014) and Brown and Levinson's Politeness theories (Culpeper, 2011; Fathi, 2024).

Speech Act theory

Speech act theory was initially proposed in the 1950s and widely discussed in the 1960s and 1970s by philosophers, such as Austin (1975), Searle (1969) and Wittgenstein (1958). According to Austin's (1975) speech act, language plays a dual role; it used to say things and perform actions the reason why utterances are classified as speech acts. Austin comes up with three acts namely: locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary. Locutionary refers to the very act of saying something. Illocutionary act on the other hand, refers to the force in the statement that is uttered. It is the act that is performed when a particular statement is spoken (Searle, 1969). Perlocutionary act is the intended or unintended social consequences of the illocutionary act. Kaburise (2011) looks at perlocutionary act as the effects brought about by means of uttering the statement, such effect being special for the circumstance of utterance.

Searle (1969) developed Austin's speech act theory further and focused on the illocutionary acts performed by the speaker. He offers a new categorization of illocutionary force based on relatively clear principles of distinction as follows:

a) Assertives – they commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed proposition (paradigm cases: asserting, concluding, etc.)

b) Directives – they are attempts by the speaker to get the addressee to do something (paradigm cases: requesting, questioning)

c) Commissives – they commit the speaker to some future course of action (paradigm cases: promising, threatening, offering)

d) Expressives – they express a psychological state (paradigm cases: thanking, apologizing, welcoming, congratulating)

e) Declarations – they affect immediate changes in the institutional state of affairs and tend to rely on elaborate extra-linguistic institutions (paradigm cases: excommunicating, declaring war, christening, firing from employment). The current study was interested in assertives in which the speech act of complimenting belongs.

Politeness theory by Brown and Levinson

Brown and Levinson (Culpeper, 2011; Fathi, 2024) note that politeness is a strategy that is employed for the purposes of avoiding conflict, minimizing it or controlling its potentiality. The concept of politeness has been elaborated using Goffman's (2017) notion of face. He contends that face is an entity that can be lost, preserved or even reinforced. Every person in the society possesses two types of face namely: positive and negative. These two are taken care of in different ways; the former is taken care of when an individual's actions are appreciated and his/her deeds approved of while the latter is taken care of when an individual is allowed to freely carry out an action. Since speech acts like requests, offers and compliments can threaten both the speaker's and the addressee's face wants, politeness approaches come in handy in ensuring that the face wants of those involved in an interaction are taken care of (Culpeper, 2011; Fathi, 2024).

Research methodology

In the description of Lubukusu verbal compliments, the study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. The research was carried out in Kibingei ward, Bungoma County. The respondents who took part in the study were of mixed gender between the ages of 20-73 years. The data collection instrument used was participant observation which entailed the use of field notes and audio recordings of naturally occurring conversations. A total of 200 compliments collected from different conversational contexts were examined. The frequency of an lexical item was calculated by determining the number of times an item occurred. The percentage on the other hand was determined by the number of times an item occurred divided by the number of compliments in a given context multiplied by a hundred.

Discussion

Examining how gender influences the use of Lubukusu compliments in Kibingei ward, Bungoma County

The research sought to establish how the gender of the participants influenced their use of compliments in Lubukusu. Seven conversational contexts in which males and females used compliments in Lubuku are presented as follows:

Context One

The conversation from which compliments are derived takes place in a home in the neighbourhood. Participants had gathered at that home to learn about best farming practices. The data was collected during meal time before the main meeting began. The participants were both men and women of varied ages. Table 1 summarizes the distribution of lexical items and gender in context one.

Table 1: Distribution of lexical items and gender in context one.

Lexical items	F-F	M-M	M-F	F-M
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Adjective	4	6	4	1
Adverb	5	2	2	3
Noun	0	2	0	0
Verb	1	0	0	0

F-F=Female-Female; M-M=Male-Male; M-F=Male-Female; F-M=Female-Male

A total of thirty compliments were used in this context. Adjectives were favoured more in male-to-male interactions at 20% compared to female-to-female interactions at 13.3%. This finding mirrors that of Holmes (1988) who opined that men's compliments included more adjectives especially of the type *cool* and not *bad*.

Context Two

This conversation takes place at the roadside where a sizeable number of people of mixed age and gender are gathered. They do not have a specific agenda; it looks like they are just passing time. Table 2 summarizes the distribution of lexical items and gender in this context.

Table 2: Distribution of lexical items and gender in context two.

Lexical items	F-F	M-M	M-F	F-M
Adjective	10	6	1	4
Adverb	5	1	2	1
Noun	0	4	0	0
Verb	0	3	0	0

F-F=Female-Female; M-M=Male-Male; M-F=Male-Female; F-M=Female-Male

The total number of compliments offered in this context were thirty-seven. The study noted that the most frequently used were adjectival and adverbial compliments. Adjectival compliments were preferred more by female-to-female participants at a frequency of 27.03%. The study further revealed that adverbs had the highest frequency in female-to-female interactions at a frequency of 13.51% compared to males at 2.70%. This result is supported by the findings of Chen (2021) who found that compliments in the form of adjectives and adverbs were the most frequently used by females. This

study also revealed that women make use of compliments more than men a finding which is resonated by Chairani and Subiyantoro (2022). Chen (2021) revealed that compliments were employed more by women in comparison to men. Moreover, women not only paid more compliments but also received more than the men. With regard to the type of lexical items used in the act of complimenting, the frequencies of adjectives and adverbs were higher than those of noun and verb compliments. This finding could be attributed to the fact that men pay more compliments on abilities and possessions while women on appearances. This result is corroborated by Ralarala and Dlali (2007) who opine that men complimented more on abilities and possessions as opposed to appearances.

Context Three

The conversations take place at a wedding ceremony. The participants in this conversation were both men and men tasked with food preparation and serving; the topics of conversation mainly focused on appearance, possession and ability. Table 3 summarizes the distribution of the types of compliments used on the basis of gender in context three.

Table 3: Distribution of lexical items and gender in context three.

Lexical items	F-F	M-M	M-F	F-M
Adjective	12	7	1	4
Adverb	7	2	1	1
Noun	2	5	0	2
Verb	1	5	0	0

F-F=Female-Female; M-M=Male-Male; M-F=Male-Female; F-M=Female-Male

A total of fifty compliments were used in different conversations; the study found out that female participants used more compliments than the men. This finding is supported by Wu (2008) who conducted a study on Gender- Based Differences in Compliments in the

American Comedy *Ugly Betty* which revealed that females used more compliments than men. Moreover, the conversations revealed that females used more compliments on appearance at a frequency of 25.00% in female-to-female interactions than males at a frequency of 5.00% in male-to-female interactions. With regard to the compliments on possessions, men used them more at a frequency of 10.00% as compared to women who used them at a frequency of 4.00%. The study further revealed that men (10.00%) used compliments on ability more than females (2.00%). Additionally, the study found out that the compliments on possessions and abilities were not as common as those on possessions. This finding is corroborated by a study that was conducted by Sciriha (2003) which revealed that the compliments given by female and male Maltese speakers focused on three areas namely: appearance, possessions and ability. Out of these, appearance compliment was the most frequently used and interestingly these compliments were usually directed towards female addressees. This finding is corroborated by Qodirova and Dilafruz, (2023) who revealed that women tend to receive compliments more frequently about their appearance or physical attributes, while men are more likely to receive compliments about their achievements or skills. This is because women are often valued for their physical appearance, leading to more compliments centered around their looks. On the other hand, men are often expected to excel in their professional or academic pursuits, resulting in compliments focused on their achievements. Chen (2021) also mirrors this finding by noting that people mainly focus on physical appearance when giving a compliment to a female and on achievements, abilities, and personalities when complimenting a male.

Context Four

The conversation takes place outside the one-acre fund shop. The meeting didn't start on time so the small-scale farmers took advantage of the situation to catch up and

they discussed topics that were varied. Table 4 summarizes the distribution of the types of compliments used on the basis of gender in context four.

Table 4: Distribution of lexical items and gender in context four.

Lexical items	F-F	M-M	M-F	F-M
Adjective	4	2	2	1
Adverb	0	0	0	2
Noun	3	0	5	2
Verb	0	4	1	0

F-F=Female-Female; M-M=Male-Male; M-F=Male-Female; F-M=Female-Male

This context had twenty-six compliments. Women used adjectives more with the highest frequency being between female-female participants at 15.38% compared to men whose frequency of use was 7.69%. This finding is supported by Chen (2021) whose study also revealed that women used adjectives more than the men. The higher use of adjectives by women could be due to the fact that different adjectives help women express their feelings and admirations of other people's appearances or possessions (Wu, 2008).

Context Five

The data was collected during a dowry payment session where friends and family had gathered. The taking of the data was done when negotiations had been completed and people were just having a chat. Table 5 summarizes the distribution of the types of lexical items used in compliments as well as their nature in relation to gender in context five.

Table 5: Distribution of lexical items and their nature on the basis of gender in context five

Lexical item	F-F	M-M	M-F	F-M	Nature of compliment
Adjectives	6	3	6	4	All Explicit
Adverbs	4	1	0	0	All Explicit
Nouns	0	2	0	0	All Implicit
Verbs	2	5	1	1	All Explicit

F-F=Female- Female; M-M=Male-Male; M-F=Male-Female; F-M=Female-Male

Thirty-five compliments were sampled in the context. Both men and women used more explicit compliments as compared to the implicit ones. Women used explicit comments at a frequency of 17.14% in female-to-female interactions while men at a frequency of 8.57% in male-to-male conversations. Out of the thirty-five compliments that were given, only two were implicit in nature. The finding that both men and women prefer explicit comments is corroborated by Otemuyiwa and Okonkwo (2025) who noted that majority of the compliments (63%) in their study were explicit in nature. Alqarni (2017) additionally supports the preference to explicit compliments in a study which found out that Saudi English Foreign Language speakers were more likely to explicitly voice their positive feelings in their compliments than deliver implicit ones.

Context six

The conversation takes place at a church compound after the main service. This was just before the couples' meeting. Participants were in small groups discussing various topics. Table 6 summarizes the distribution of the types of lexical items used in compliments as well as their nature in relation to gender in context six.

Table 6: Distribution of lexical items and their nature on the basis of gender in context six

Lexical item	F-F	M-M	M-F	F-M	Nature of compliment
Adjectives	5	3	2	3	All Explicit
Adverbs	0	1	1	0	All Implicit
Nouns	3	1	2	2	All Explicit
Verbs	3	0	1	3	All Explicit

F-F=Female- Female; M-M=Male-Male; M-F=Male-Female; F-M=Female-Male

In context six, thirty compliments were sampled with women using more adjectives than the men. Adjectives were used at a frequency of 16.67% in female-to-female

and 10.00% in male- to- male interactions. This finding is corroborated by Chairani and Subiyantoro (2022) who revealed that adjectival compliments occurred more in female-to-female interactions. Moreover, the context once again confirms that the adjective is the most frequently used lexical item in complimenting. The adjectives and nouns were all used more by the male and female participants unlike the adverbs. The verbs were equally used in female-to-female interactions and female-to-male interactions at a frequency of 10.00%. In this context, most of the compliments used were explicit in nature implying that Lubukusu speakers prefer using direct compliments. This finding is resonated in a study done by Kharboot and Ma (2021) who also noted the preference of explicit compliments among respondents in their study.

Context seven

The conversation was held at a school after a parents' meeting. The parents were called to deliberate on the ways of raising funds to purchase a school bus. Table 7 summarizes the distribution of the types of lexical items used in compliments as well as their nature in relation to gender in context seven.

Table 7: Distribution of lexical items and their nature on the basis of gender in context seven

Lexical item	F-F	M-M	M-F	F-M	Nature of compliment
Adjectives	4	1	2	4	All Explicit
Adverbs	1	1	1	1	All Implicit
Nouns	1	2	0	1	All Explicit
Verbs	0	0	1	0	All Explicit

F-F=Female- Female; M-M=Male-Male; M-F=Male-Female; F-M=Female-Male

Twenty compliments were employed in this context. The study found out that women used more adjectival compliments than men. On the contrary, men used more noun compliments in male-to-male interactions than

women did in female-to-female interactions. This was attributed to the fact that men prefer noun compliments since they do not spontaneously signify endorsement (Alosaimi & Alenizi, 2024). Once again, the adjective was the most commonly used lexical item while the least being the verb. The verb was used at a frequency of 5% in male-to-female interactions. Additionally, the adverb was equally used in female-to-female interactions as well as male-to-male interactions at a frequency of 5%. The use of explicit compliments was rampant however, in a few instances, adverbial compliments were indirectly uttered. To be able to comprehend their meanings, indirect compliments require more interpretation and inference (Kharboot & Ma, 2021).

The study noted that generally, noun compliments used in Lubukusu are limited as compared to the number of other lexical items such as adjectives. This may be attributed to the fact that nouns play the role of pointing that is, they name and classify things. However, the main function of compliments is to evaluate and this is mainly done through the use of adjectives. In the seven contexts that were studied, men used more noun compliments at a frequency of 61.54% in male-to-male interactions as compared to women who used it at a frequency of 38.46 % in female-to-female interactions.

From the findings of this study, it was evident that women in the Bukusu culture are more expressive than the men hence their preference for adjectival compliments. The study revealed that women used 41 adjective compliments in female- to-females interactions in all the seven contexts in comparison to the men's 27 adjective compliments in male-to-male interactions. In essence, women used more compliments with their fellow women. This finding resonates with those of varied studies such as the one by Alosaimi and Alenizi (2024) who noted that women were found to be greatly involved in giving and receiving admiration as compared

to men. Moreover, women have to use diverse terms to be able to adequately express themselves because of the nature of compliments that they frequently use in this culture. Men on the other hand, prefer noun compliments which do not spontaneously signify endorsement. Additionally, women use more compliments on appearance while men focus on skill.

Conclusion

The act of complimenting in the Bukusu society just like in other communities globally is gendered. Gender is at the core of paying and receiving compliments; it not only

determines the type of compliment used, the context in which it is applied but also its length and the role that the compliment plays. Compliments are used to promote social balance and manage face in addition to ensuring that communication is done in a harmonious way. Further, compliments adequately take care of both the positive and negative face of an individual. While men prefer complimenting using shorter forms, women prefer the longer and more detailed compliments.

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