

Compliments: Teacher's Resource and Sample Handouts

Teacher's Resource

Compliment Formulas

Top 3 compliment formulas ([Manes and Wolfson, 1981](#), pp. 120-121)

1. NP is/look (really) ADJ (*Your blouse is really beautiful; Your hair looks great!*)
2. I really like/love NP (*I really like your dress; I love your new apartment*)
3. PRO is (really) ADJ NP (*That's a really nice rug.; That's a great looking car*)

Six additional formulas

1. You have such beautiful hair.
2. What a lovely baby you have!
3. Isn't your ring beautiful!
4. You (really) did a good job!
5. You (really) handled that situation well!
6. Nice game!

Compliment Response Formulas

([Billmyer, 1990](#), p. 36)

Responses to compliments	Response types
A: That's a nice shirt you are wearing! B: Well, I just got it in Target, though. It was pretty cheap	<i>downgrading</i>
A: You did an excellent job yesterday, Jim! I really enjoyed your presentation. B: Do you really think so? A: Oh, yeah, it was fabulous.	<i>questioning</i>
A: I love your clock. It looks great in your living room! B: Thanks. A friend of mine brought it to me from Oregon.	<i>shifting credit</i>
A: Y're lookin good! B: Thanks. S're you!	<i>returning</i>

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Sample Handout 1: Data Collection and Language Analysis: Compliments and Responses

For the next coming week, pay attention to any compliments that you give, receive, or overhear **in English or other languages**. Jot them down **in the original language** in your notepad as accurately as possible after the conversation has ended. Observe carefully the **context** in which these compliments were given and received in terms of **age, gender, role, distance/ closeness, and compliment topics**. Fill out the following form and then decide how appropriate the interaction seemed to be.

	Relative Status (age, gender, status, role)	Distance	Topic, adjectives	Patterns of compliments, function(s)	Patterns of responses, overall success
<p>Example from the film <i>Father of the Bride</i></p> <p>Dad:</p> <p>Annie:</p> <p>Mom: May be we should go to Rome for a few months, honey.</p> <p>Annie: Oh, you two would love it. It's the most romantic place on earth.</p> <p>Dad:</p> <p>Annie:</p>					
<p>Interaction 1</p> <p>A:</p> <p>B:</p>					
<p>Interaction 2 (give as many rows as necessary below)</p>					

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Sample Handout 2: Culture-Focused Discussion

Positive Values of Mainstream Americans

([N. Wolfson & E. Judd, 1983](#). *Sociolinguistics and Language Acquisition*)

1. Being slim has strong positive value among mainstream speakers of American English, and the adjective thin (e.g., "You look thin") is interpreted as complimentary in itself in this society. That this is very definitely not the case for speakers from other societies around the world is often a cause of some confusion, and even insult, when nonnative speakers are the recipients of such remarks. Favorable comments on the attractiveness of one's children, pets, and even husbands, boyfriends, wives, or girlfriends seem to fall within this category, as do compliments on cars and houses. (p. 113)

Question 1. Does this positive value of being slender apply to both men and women in the U.S.?

Question 2. Would it be all right to say, "You lost some weight, didn't you?" as a compliment? What's the possible danger?

2. It is useful for nonnative speakers to know, for example, that the quality of newness is so highly valued in this society that a compliment is appropriate whenever and acquaintance is seen with something new, whether it is a car, a new article of clothing, or a haircut. The fact that the new appearance may be due to an alteration (such as a new hairstyle or the loss of weight) as well as to a purchase leads us to conclude that the true importance of the comment lies in the speaker's having noticed a change, thereby proving that he or she considers the addressee worthy of attention. (p. 114)

Question 1. Do you agree that newness is highly valued in the U.S.? What about in your country?

Question 2. What would be an example of the "new appearances"?

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References

Billmyer, K. (1990). "I really like your lifestyle": ESL learners learning how to compliment. *Penn Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 6(2), 31-48.

Manes, J. & Wolfson, N. (1981). The compliment formula. In F. Coulmas (Ed.), *Conversational Routine: Explorations in Standardized Communication Situations and Prepatterned Speech* (pp. 116-132). The Hague, the Netherlands: Mouton Publishers.

Wolfson, N. & Judd, E. (1983). *Sociolinguistics and language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.