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Strategies of Positive Evaluation in Computer-Mediated Communication

Silvie Válková and Jana Kořínková

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to present the results of our research into the politeness strategy of complimenting or giving positive evaluations in English on the Internet with a specific focus on comments responding to selected YouTube music videos. Compliments in face-to-face interactions have been widely studied for decades, with a new tendency emerging: the occurrence of compliments and compliment responses in digital contexts (Placencia and Lower 2016). Although there is no obvious formula for expressing compliments, research shows that there seems to be a limited number of patterns used for their construction (Válková 2012). On the corpus of complimentary evaluations in online comments on music (modern and classical), we aim to show to what extent the variety of forms conforms to the types presented in the available material and whether there are any essential differences in the characteristic lexical and syntactic repertoire with respect to the selected music genres.

Key words
Compliments; positive evaluation; computer-mediated communication

1. Introduction

In face-to-face communication, compliments belong to politeness-sensitive speech events (Leech 2014: 186). They are usually defined as polite expressions of praise, admiration, esteem, respect, approval or affection; in other words, people say something nice or positive about something or someone. The primary aim of a compliment is not informative but rather it is social, it can contribute to a smooth flow of interaction. The process of complimenting is dynamic, we can understand it as a reciprocal negotiation between the speaker and the addressee (or speaker's illocution and addressee's perlocution). As is obvious from the British National Corpus data, complimenting is not always a transparent process. The following examples of responses to potential compliments can show that there might be problems with identifying compliments:

(1)   [BNC(AEG(409))] – Was this to be regarded as a compliment or a criticism?

(2)   [BNC(AOU(1037))] – That's probably a compliment.

From both reactions we can see that the addressees are not sure whether they were complimented or not. To be certain, speakers can choose different disambiguation strategies: e.g. in the first example, the speaker opted for a direct question, while in the second the adverb *probably* is used to signal a request for clarification.

In face-to-face communication, addressees can confirm the intended goal of the speaker verbally or non-verbally (e.g. a gesture) or, less frequently, there can be no reaction (communicative silence). Authors of various studies on compliments agree that ignoring a compliment in face-to-face communication is not acceptable although the type of reaction can vary in different cultures.

Making compliments is one of the politeness strategies and as such it has been studied by researchers within politeness theory both in face-to-face and computer-mediated communication (CMC). Politeness research has undergone three ways of development and while face-to-face communication was more typically studied by earlier theories, computer-mediated communication is rather connected with more recent theories.

First-wave politeness theories "aimed to model politeness on a somewhat abstract, theoretical level" (Kádár and Haugh 2013: 13). A central concept was the notion of universality according to which linguistic politeness can be described with the same theoretical framework across languages and cultures. Universality can be found in more or less explicit form, for example in the most influential theory up to the present day, face-saving view by Brown and Levinson (1978), in the frameworks of the conversation maxim view (Lakoff 1973, Leech 1983), or the social-norm view (Blum-Kulka and Olshtain 1984, Ide 1989). The early theories typically employed quantitative research methods which used invented utterances rather than naturally occurring data, typical was also focus on the speaker (rather than hearer) and politeness (rather than impoliteness).

The second-wave theories, also called discursive theories, pay more attention to interpersonal relationships, concrete analysis on micro-level with the aim to find out how politeness and its understanding depends on communication participants and their social status. The discursive turn is connected with the publication of Eelen's (2001) *Critique of Politeness Theories* and representative of this wave are frameworks of the frame-based approach (Aijmer 1996, Terkourafi 1999), politic behaviour view (Watts 2003) or Leech's revised approach (2014).

The third wave is represented by a number of recent publications, such as Haugh (2007), Culpeper (2011), Kádár and Haugh (2013), and Kádár (2017). In their research, the authors pay attention to "the possibility of describing politeness on the macro-level, by attempting to create models that capture practices of the production and evaluation of politeness" (Kádár 2017).

Within the above-mentioned theories and frameworks, compliments have been studied since 1978, when the first pragmatic study on this topic was published by Pomerantz. Since then, compliments and compliment responses have been researched on macro as well as micro level in different languages (for more details see for example Chen 2010) with the aim to identify and often also compare their typical (formulaic) structure and formal and semantic properties. Attention has also been paid to objects of compliments, the importance of social status and

gender of participants, and differences between generations. Both compliments and compliment responses have been researched from the synchronic as well as diachronic perspective in face-to-face communication and also in relatively new forms of communication (e.g. email, Facebook).

A great amount of attention has been given to (im)politeness within computer-mediated communication in various settings, using data from different language backgrounds and practices (see for example the special issue of the *Journal of Politeness Research* from 2010 or Placencia and Lower 2016). Similarly to the research of linguistic politeness, computer-mediated communication research has undergone some moves. In the 1990s, when first linguistic CMC studies appeared, attention was paid to "the distinction between synchronous (e-chat, instant messaging) and asynchronous (mailing lists, newsgroups, discussion boards) modes of digital communication as a pivotal point for linguistic description, often based on small or even anecdotal samples" (Androutsopoulos 2006). In more recent studies, however, there is a shift of focus from the language of CMC to the socially situated discourses in which various linguistic features are embedded. Within this move, compliments and compliment responses have been studied in various languages and various social media sites, e.g. Facebook (Placencia and Lower 2013, Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez 2013), Twitter (Yusof and Hoon 2014) or Instagram (Placencia 2019).

The present paper attempts at enriching the discussion of complimenting by aiming to identify similarities and differences in the structural, formal and semantic properties of compliments between the face-to-face and asynchronous CMC practices. With respect to asynchronous CMC, we understand compliments broadly as evaluative statements involving an overt element of praise, thus we use the terms compliment and complimentary evaluation interchangeably in this paper. Based on our analysis of the corpus of classical and modern music video comments on YouTube, we propose that the complimentary statements typically preferred in the face-to-face and computer-mediated modes of communication differ primarily in the representation of various syntactic patterns. Our analysis also seems to confirm that the structural, formal, semantic and graphical configurations of complimentary evaluations differ in relation to the subject and object of evaluation (see e.g. Du Bois 2007).

2. Explicit vs. implicit compliments

In our research, we focus solely on verbally explicit compliments, although a certain proportion of compliments used in communication is implicit. In comparison with explicit compliments which "are recognized as compliments outside of context, being realized by a small set of conventional formulae" (Boyle 2000: 28), implicit compliments do not have a fixed linguistic form indicating the meaning of positive evaluation (e.g. *I wish I could manage my work like you do.*). This makes them sometimes difficult to interpret. It should be also noted that not all implicit compliments share the same degree of implicitness, some of them show recurrent linguistic patterns (i.e. conventionally implicit compliments – e.g. *Your*

husband is a very lucky man.). This leads to a scale of explicitness rather than the opposite – explicit vs. implicit compliments.

According to Boyle (2000: 35), the two main ways to pay implicit compliments in English are to involve "comparing a person to someone that the speaker thinks the other person might admire" (e.g. *There's something Karen Carpenterish about your voice on this album.*) or "to refer to something that a person has done and that he or she is proud of" (e.g. *You've worked with Elizabeth Taylor!*).

These types of compliments require "both a great deal of indexical knowledge and a reciprocity of perspectives if the intended compliment is to be a successful one" (Boyle 2000: 35). If these requirements are not met, a compliment will possess a degree of ambiguity. Maíz-Arévalo (2012: 985) reports the following example: Two female friends are talking about B's new haircut with new fringe included:

(3)   A: Wow, you've had a haircut. You look like Cleopatra!
       B: [pause] Oh, well, it'll grow back, won't it? You don't look so cool yourself.
       A: [pause] Oh, well, I meant it as something nice, a compliment, oh f ***.
       B: Huh, well, this is embarrassing. Well, next time speak more clearly and that's it!

In agreement with Kádár and Haugh's (2013: 57) view on politeness as social practice, we can see that "evaluations of politeness can vary across individuals, even when they are – at least nominally – from the same social group". It is clear from the context that the two friends do not share the same appreciation of Cleopatra's haircut as a model of beautiful hair. The implicit compliment then fails to make its point and it is only the second exchange that makes the interpretation clear. A more detailed focus on implicit compliments in CMC would be a natural follow up of our current research.

3. Explicit compliments

3.1 Speech act set

According to Manes and Wolfson (1981) or Aijmer (1996), complimenting, together with other acts, for example thanking, apologizing etc., belongs to conversational routines, more specifically to formulaic speech acts which are extremely common in spoken English. In our view, however, compliments should be approached as speech act sets rather than single speech acts. It means that they consist of several smaller units or discrete speech acts, some of which are core or constant, some are peripheral or optional (for details see Válková 2012).

The typical communicative pattern of face-to-face compliments as emergent from the previous research (Válková 2012) is the pattern in which the process of complimenting is realised within a six-step configuration of the following units leading to a kind of complimenting scenario, which, if accepted by the complimentee, confirms the intended goal.

complimenter					complimentee
attention getter	**compliment base**		request	IF amplifier	**response**
	object	**evaluation**			
1 optional	**2**	**3**	4 optional	5 optional	**6**

Table 1. Model of a compliment as a speech act set (Válková 2012: 54)

It is important to state that the number of slots as well as their order in the scenario is not fixed; the basic pattern can be modified by other optional categories or units. What proved to be always present (explicitly or implicitly) are the core parts 2, 3 and 6; in the complimenter's part it is the object and evaluation, in the complimentee's part it is one of the response types (see below).

The object of complimenting can be either explicit or context-retrievable; either referring to a simple, concrete or abstract item, or to a whole event. The evaluation of the object can be expressed by various formal and semantic properties organized in fixed syntactic configurations (see below). In their reactions, complimentees are forced to solve a conflict, i.e. they try to be modest but at the same time they feel obliged to the speaker and are willing to agree with them. Complimentees can be influenced by their culture and various sociological variables, for example their sex, age, status, and choose one of the strategies accordingly: accept/reject or deflect/evade. Another possibility is a non-verbal reaction (a smile or nod). Although the category of no reaction was also reported by some researchers (Holmes 1988; Herbert 1989), ignoring a compliment in face-to-face communication is not considered a common or preferred reaction.

Apart from the core or constant units, there are also optional units, i.e. the attention getter, request or amplifier. The attention getter can be a greeting, an address form, or a combination of both. Requests can ask for some addition of details related to the object of compliment and amplifiers emphasise or reinforce the positive evaluation by an adverb or by a repetition or rewording the positive evaluative expression.

Below is an illustrative example with numbers referring to the slots in the table above (the example is taken from Válková 2012: 55).

(4)   A: Hi, Sue (1) / this blouse, (2) / you look so cute, (3) / where did you buy it? Marks and Spencer? (4) / Really, it's nice. (5)
     B: It's from H&M, but thanks, anyway. (6)

In our current research, the focus was on the core units of the speech act set of complimenting on the part of the complimenter, i.e. the object (popular and classical music) and its evaluation (structural, formal, and semantic properties). In the course of research, the total absence of complimentee's reactions was noted, which will be discussed in the conclusion part.

3.2 Structural properties

In spoken interaction, there are many simultaneous demands on the speaker, all of which have an effect on their production (e.g. coherent contributions, sensitive to audience knowledge, social situation, appropriate register, etc.). The speaker is by no means free to concentrate on the grammatical content of his production (Pawley and Syder 1983: 204 – in Aijmer 1996: 9). Thus in the case of compliments the number of patterns or structural properties used seems to be fixed (supported also by previous research – e.g. Manes and Wolfson 1981; Holmes 1995; Herbert 1990), while what remains open to some degree of creativeness is the formal and semantic properties, i.e. the choice of lexical items (their word class and meaning) used in the patterns.

The analysis of possible syntactic configurations reveals that the syntax of compliments is more restricted than their semantic representation. As Manes and Wolfson (1981: 120) point out, "53.6% of the compliments in our data make use of a single syntactic pattern"; in Holmes' (1988) data the figure was 41.4%. Though not explicitly stated so, the syntactic structures represent a mixture of morphosyntactic considerations, as reflected e.g. in such sequences as ADJ + NP.

(5) NP   is/looks   (really)   ADJ
     That shirt is so nice.

The pattern consists of a noun phrase and a linking verb (*look* stands for any linking verb other than *be*); *really* represents any intensifier and the adjective is semantically positive. Together with the following two patterns, this makes up 85% of Manes and Wolfson's corpus.

(6) I   (really)   like/love   NP
     I really like those shoes.

(7) PRO   is   (really)   ADJ   NP
     This was really a great meal.

Like and *love* stand for any verb of liking; the noun phrase itself does not include a semantically positive adjective.

In addition to the above-mentioned patterns, there were six more in Manes and Wolfson's corpus that occurred with some regularity:

(8) You   V   (really) ADJ   NP
     You did a good job.

(9) You   V   (NP) (really)   ADV (i.e. semantically positive adverb)
     You really handled the situation well.

(10) You   have   (really) ADJ   NP
     You have such beautiful hair.

(11) What   ADJ   NP!
     What a lovely baby you have!

(12) ADJ   NP!
     Nice game!

(13) Isn't   NP   ADJ!
     Isn't it pretty!

To summarize the syntax of face-to-face compliments, it is possible to say that the most frequent patterns make use of complete syntactic structures with all obligatory sentence elements expressed (i.e. the subject, verb and either the object or complement). In the less frequent patterns, apart from the form of a complete statement, we also find exclamations (the last three examples above). These take the form of the exclamation with the introductory element *what* or without it, another possibility is the form of the exclamatory question (interrogative in structure, however, exclamatory in function). The element which carries the positive evaluation within the structure is expressed by the adjective (more often) or verb in the three most common structures, in the other patterns it is again the adjective (in five out of six patterns) or the adverb (in one of the patterns).

3.3 Formal and semantic properties

The majority of face-to-face compliments are represented by predications with an evaluative adjective (see above), mostly in its base form (Manes and Wolfson 1981: 116). Some adjectives can only be used within a specific context (*delicious*), while some are rather general in their usage (*nice*), some are quite strong (*fantastic*), and some carry a weaker semantic load (*good*). Stronger forms (*fantastic* vs. *good*, and also superlative forms) are used by women more often than by men, which was supported by various researchers (Holmes 1995: 128).

The most common adjectives used in face-to-face compliments are those which are both general (i.e. they are not context-dependent) and rather weak in their expression of positive evaluation. In Manes and Wolfson's data (American English) 22.9% of compliments made use of *nice* and 19.6% used *good*. Fox (2005: 135) mentions chronic overuse of the adjective *nice* in British English as a result of the "understatement rule", which she considers an exclusively English form of humour. She states that "any exceptionally delightful object, person or event, which in other cultures would warrant streams of superlatives, is pretty much covered by *nice*, or, if we wish to express more ardent approval, *very nice*" (Fox 2005: 67). Another reason for the preference of the above-mentioned non-specific adjectives might be the speaker's intention to avoid offence or embarrassment, especially among people who do not know each other very well.

The range of adjectives used in compliments is, of course, much wider. Those which belong to the restricted set used in the majority of compliments are *beautiful*, *pretty* and *great*. Although the number of adjectives is unlimited (an open word class), speakers tend to use other adjectives of positive evaluation rarely; in

various linguists' data they usually occur only once or twice (Holmes 1995: 128).

Verbs in compliments mostly appear in simple tense forms. They can be either explicitly evaluative, e.g. *love, like,* or neutral but within the scope of an evaluative context and often preceded by an adverbial which can be interpreted as positive (*brilliantly done*). The usage of explicitly evaluative verbs proved similarly uninventive; apart from the above-mentioned verbs, Manes and Wolfson found *admire, enjoy,* and *be impressed by* in their corpus. Similar to adjectives, semantically stronger forms of verbs are used more by women than men, e.g. *love* in Herbert's corpus of American English compliments was used exclusively by women (1990: 206). More recent studies have proved frequent usage of the verbs *like* or *love* also in computer-mediated communication (Hoffmann 2013 or Placencia and Lower 2013).

Some verbs are not inherently positive, yet when preceded by an intensifier and used in the appropriate context, they can function as compliments (e.g. *Your talk was the one that really went over.*). More frequent, however, is the combination of an intensifier with another explicitly evaluative word, such as *You've really fixed up this room nicely.*

The presence of intensifiers is not limited to the category of verbs only; they can also precede other word classes, e.g. adjectives and nouns (e.g. *That's quite a record collection.*).

The range of intensifiers used in the compliment data of various researchers is limited to *really, very* and *particularly,* which are used significantly more by women than men (Holmes 1995: 129). Although they do not form a necessary part of compliments, they can be considered a typical feature of compliments.

In some compliments, positive evaluation is carried by an adverb or a noun, although their repertoire is rather limited. The occurrence of this type of compliment is very rare (e.g. *You do this kind of writing so well. You're just a whizz at sewing.*).

Deictic elements (personal deixis) are used to help in the identification of a person or object that is being complimented. As compliments do not have a fixed place in a conversation, it might be difficult for the listener to identify who or what the compliment relates to without proper usage of deictic elements or other means (verbal or non-verbal context), as in *I love your skirt and your blouse.*

In the research of the Czech author Švárová (2010: 235), a positively loaded numeral also appeared although its frequency is not expected to be high (and its role in compliments has not been reported by other linguists yet), e.g. *It's fine. No, you were shaky on your landing, I give you a 9.2.*

In our opinion, the numeral *one* or the letter *A* can carry positive meaning and they are quite commonly used in compliments (e.g. *You are number one. I received an 'A' for my essay.*). The usage of these expressions can be accompanied by a supportive gesture, e.g. thumbs up. Such gestures can also realize the act of complimenting even in the absence of any linguistic component.

4. Data and procedure

The focus of our research was to explore whether or not the structural, formal and semantic properties of face-to-face complimenting are retained in computer-

mediated communication on the Internet, specifically in commenting on popular music videos on YouTube. After consulting several current music charts related to classical and popular music, three videos featuring popular music and three videos featuring classical music were selected and the latest hundred posts conveying complimentary evaluation by their viewers were copied and printed out for structural, formal and semantic analysis. In selecting videos of two different music genres, our aim was to compare to what extent the language used in complimentary remarks in the computer-mediated communication might differ in relation to the object of evaluation.

Our corpus included posts related to the following popular music videos:

> *Perfect* by Ed Sheeran (Official Music Video);
> *One Kiss* by Dua Lipa and Calvin Harris (Official Music Video);
> *Say Nothing* by Justin Timberlake (Official Music Video).

The choice of classical music videos was the following:

> Stephen Hough performing Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* at BBC Proms;
> Ludovico Einaudi performing his composition *Divenire* at Royal Albert Hall in London Chicago;
> Symphony Orchestra performing Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9.*

The analysis was carried out manually by means of special check lists which were designed to record the frequency of occurrence of the structural, formal and semantic features of our interest. These included explicit vs. implicit, syntactic patterns and word classes used in explicit evaluation, variety of expressions within each represented form, word class, as well as visual means used to support evaluation.

The obtained data were then summed up for the popular and classical music genre videos in order to identify similarities and differences in the complimentary language used with respect to these two music genres. Finally, the most salient features of computer-mediated complimenting were compared with those of face-to-face complimenting.

5. Results

Almost all analysed YouTube posts in our corpus included more than one complimentary comment. Most classical music viewers commented on the videos in several syntactic units, with a tendency to use a more verbose, florid way of expression. The posts related to classical music thus featured a greater number of evaluative statements than the posts related to the popular music videos. These, in turn, included more accompanying graphic features, such as pictorial signs, unusual spelling, etc.

Our final corpus of 600 YouTube posts evaluating three classical and three popular music videos included 848 complimentary comments in total. The table

below shows the total number of complimentary statements per music genre as well as the number of explicit compliments, which became the focus of our analysis.

	Classical music comments	Popular music comments
Total number of compliments /300 YouTube posts	462	386
Total number of explicit compliments/300 YouTube posts	424	328

Table 2. Total number of compliments and explicit compliments per music genre

In agreement with the above-mentioned research into face-to-face compliment-ing, our corpus also included some proportion of implicit compliments. These comprised 11.3% of the corpus (96 occurrences in total) and were found to occur slightly more frequently as part of the popular music posts (15%, 58 occurrences) than within the classical music posts (8.2%, 38 occurrences). The distribution of implicit compliments, however, was not identical in relation to the individual vid-eos. While with respect to the popular music comments it was rather even, with only minor differences between the three songs, in the classical music comments the incidence of implicit complimentary statements was less evenly distributed: in the posts related to Rachmaninoff's *Rhapsody* only three implicit compliments were found, while in the posts evaluating Beethoven's *9th Symphony* 21 instances were registered. It can be speculated that the higher proportion of implicit com-plimentary evaluations referring to popular music might be resulting from their greater subjectivity and sometimes ambiguity, while the evaluative statements on the classical music performance tend to be more descriptive with precise, or even technical vocabulary.

In agreement with Boyle's findings mentioned in section 2 above, most implicit complimentary evaluations in our corpus were based on a comparison with another person who the speaker thinks the complimentee might admire (*Dua Lipa kinda looks like Selena Gomez with that haircut, in a good way!*) and on a refer-ence to something (*Calvin has some way of creating a beat that literally makes you want to start confidently speed walking down a street without a care in the world. This is a new level.*).

More examples of implicit complimentary statements found in our corpus: *On repeat mode. I can't stop listening to this song. I regret that I can't put more than one like. 65 dislikes! What's wrong with you people?*

We also registered several interesting differences between the popular and classical music comments in terms of the semantic units used in similar syntactic structures:

(14) Seriously I could watch this video 24/7. (popular) x I can keep on listening to this performance whole day. (classical)

(15) I want this to be played at my wedding (popular) x on my funeral. (classical)

5.1 Structural properties

The following table presents the overview of the most common explicitly evaluative syntactic structures registered in our corpus of YouTube complimentary posts. For each music genre, they have been listed according to their frequency of occurrence. Examples of all structures are included for illustration. ADJ stands for any explicitly evaluative adjective; NP refers to any noun phrase; the abbreviation NPex and Vex stand for any noun and verb respectively with an inherent positively evaluative meaning; Int stands for any intensifier, *is* any linking verb and PRO any pronoun. It is interesting to note that while in face-to-face complimenting the second person pronoun *you* is rather frequent, its representation in our corpus was rather limited (it appeared almost exclusively as part of *thank you),* and the third and first-person pronouns prevailed.

	Classical music comments	%	Popular music comments	%
1	ADJ NP *The best performance ever.*	20.1	ADJ NP *The best performance ever.*	23.2
2	ADJ *Perfect.*	10.6	PRO Vex NP *I love the performance.*	7.9
3	NPex *Masterpiece.*	9	ADJ *Perfect.*	7.6
4	Int ADJ *Absolutely flawless.*	7.3	NP is ADJ *The sound is incredible.*	5.8
5	PRO is ADJ *This is fantastic.*	4.2	Int ADJ *Absolutely flawless.*	5.5
6	PRO is Int ADJ *This was so beautiful.*	3.8	Vex NP/PRO Vex PRO/Npex *Love the song/I love it/Masterpiece.*	5.2
7	PRO Vex NP *I love the performance.*	3.3	Vex NP/PRO Vex PRO/Npex *Love the song/I love it/Masterpiece.*	5.2
8	NP is ADJ *The sound is incredible.*	2.6	Vex NP/PRO Vex PRO/Npex *Love the song/I love it/Masterpiece.*	5.2

Table 3. Most common syntactic structures in the corpus

Our data clearly show that the most common syntactic structure employed to evaluate both classical and popular music videos on YouTube is a noun phrase which includes a positively evaluative adjective. This structure comprises almost 22% of our whole corpus (165 complimentary statements in total) and is almost equally represented in all six videos. The second and third most common syntactic structures in our corpus were a single positively evaluative adjective without and with intensification respectively. These comprise 9.3% and 6.5% of all syntactic structures registered in the corpus (70 and 49 occurrences in total) and were both found to appear somewhat more frequently in the comments related to the classical music videos. When compared to Holmes' or Manes and Wolfson's research data on face-to-face complimenting (see 3.2. above), it can be concluded that the computer-mediated positive evaluations generally favour the use of phrases over longer syntactic units. Whereas about half of face-to-face compliments seem to follow the structure NP is (Int) ADJ, e.g. *The sound is*

(absolutely) incredible; in our corpus this particular structure represented only 5.8% of all identified syntactic structures (44 occurrences), appearing more frequently in the posts related to popular music (9.1%, 30 occurrences). The higher representation of this typical face-to-face complimenting structure in the popular music evaluations might perhaps again be explained by the fact that the majority of YouTube comments on popular music seem to be more casually worded, more expressive and structurally more similar to face-to-face communication than the evaluations of classical music. The remaining two syntactic structures found most frequently in face-to-face compliments, i.e. PRO (Int) Vex NP a PRO is (Int) ADJ NP, together constituted only 7.5% of all compliments found in our corpus.

Although the syntactic structure ADJ NP was found to be prevalent in posts on both selected genres of music, different preferences with regard to other syntactic structures were registered. Since the language of classical music admirers appears to be more descriptively oriented, the use of a single positively expressive noun tends to be more frequent and, on the other hand, clauses with inherently expressive verbs (with or without subject) are less frequent.

Other syntactic structures found in our corpus with some regularity were the following ones:

(16) Pro is ADJ NP
     She is a great singer. (2.9%)

(17) Pro (NP) is NPex
     She (The girl) is a star. (1.6%)

(18) What NP (NPex)
     What song (masterpiece)! (1.1%)

5.2 Formal and semantic properties

The following table shows how various formal categories were represented in communicating complimentary evaluation to the two selected genres of music videos. Nominal evaluation covers all registered syntactic structures with an inherently expressive noun as the main complimenting element, adjectival evaluation all structures with positively evaluative adjective, etc.

Type of evaluation	Classical music comments		Popular music comments	
	%	Types	%	types
Nominal	16.3	37	8.8	20
Adjectival	59.2	77	61.3	43
Verbal	8.5	8	20.4	8
Adverb	0.5	2	0.3	1
Numeral	0	0	0.6	2
Exclamations	8.3	23	7.7	10
Thanks	7.7	4	1.8	2

Table 4. Formal and semantic types of evaluation

As it is already obvious from the table presenting the most common syntactic structures represented in the corpus, the most frequent word class carrying positive evaluation in all six videos is the adjective, which is in accordance with the research data on face-to-face compliments. The preference for this type of evaluation was found to be almost equal with respect to both music genres. What differed, however, was the range of adjectives used. While in the compliments related to classical music 77 different adjectives were found, only 43 different adjectives appeared in the comments on the popular music videos. 7.7% adjectives were used in their superlative form (mostly *best, most beautiful* and *most favourite*). The most common adjectives used to praise the classical music performances were *beautiful* (used 35 times), *amazing* (18), *wonderful* (16), *favourite* (13), *great* (12), *best* (10) and *awesome* (9). The popular music videos were most frequently evaluated as *perfect* (33 times – this might, however, have been influenced by the identical name of Ed Sheeran's song), *best* (24), *beautiful* (22) *amazing* (16), *good* (15), *great* (13), *awesome* (10), *favourite* (9). These findings might suggest that there is a common core of adjectives to positively evaluate music across the genres. However, most types of adjectives were registered in comments on one of the genres only. With respect to classical music, a serious genre, many fans used rather formal and 'noble' adjectives, such as *breathtaking, consummate, immaculate, magnificent, mind blowing, meticulous, sublime, unparalleled,* etc. On the other hand, a number of neutral to informal adjectives were characteristic for the popular music fans' language, some typical expressions being *cool, cute, epic, fav, groovy, pretty, sexy, sweet,* etc. One comment related Ed Sheeran's song even used the very specific adjective *supercalifragilisticexpialidocious* (known from the musical *Mary Poppins*) and asterisked *f**** appeared twice in two different posts.

Roughly 32% of all evaluative adjectives in our corpus were preceded by an intensifier, with 25 different intensifiers registered in the classical music comments and 21 in the popular music comments. The most commonly used intensifiers registered evenly across the corpus were *so, just, absolutely, really and very.* Again, a number of genre specific expressions reflecting the two different styles of evaluative language were found. The classical music viewers typically made use of intensifiers like *amazingly*, *brilliantly, enormously, utterly* and *wonderfully,* whereas the popular music fans seemed to prefer simple, more conversational intensifiers like *so much, pretty much and way too.*

Although evaluation by means of expressive *noun* is reported to be rare in face-to-face communication (see section 3.3 above), in our corpus of YouTube posts it represented almost 11% of all types of evaluation. It was more commonly found in posts commenting on classical music videos, many of which seem to be written in a more sophisticated manner featuring precise vocabulary, as was already remarked. Only four identical evaluative nouns were registered in both groups of comments with only one, *masterpiece*, represented more than once in either group. Nominal evaluation of music performance thus seems to be rather genre specific. Classical music performance is likely to be evaluated by nouns like *accolade, artistry, brilliance, genius, heaven, maestro, precision, splendour or summit*, while popular music performance seems to inspire designations by nouns like *addiction, hero, hit, queen or sunshine*.

Evaluation by means of an inherently expressive verb was more frequently registered in the popular music complimentary statements. It was not found to be much varied as the choice of expressively evaluative verbs is clearly more limited than the choice of evaluative adjectives and nouns. The common core of positively evaluative verbs was represented by *love* and *like*, both being more frequent in comments on popular music videos. Genre specific expressive verbs included for instance *admire, amaze, enjoy, inspire* (classical music) and *fall in love, obsess, win* (popular music).

Evaluation carried out by adverbs and numerals appeared rarely in our corpus, which is in agreement with the data obtained from face-to-face complimenting. Only three instances were registered of the former (twice *well done* and once *expertly made*) and two of the latter (*this song is number one* and *95%!*).

The last two rows in the table above report the usage of positively evaluative exclamations and of various ways of saying thank you, which we decided to consider a formally separate type of explicit complimenting in the context of our research. While the YouTube viewers of classical music thanked the performing musicians more frequently, in the popular music comments expressing thanks was rather rare. Except for *OMG!* and *wow!*, all exclamations registered in our corpus were found to be genre specific. Appreciation of classical music tends to be traditionally expressed by specific expressions, such as *Bravo! Bravissimo! Kudos! or Encore!*, which were all registered several times as well as variations of *OMG* (*Oh my! Oh my God! My Gosh!*). Popular music fans seem to favour shorter and more dynamic exclamations like *Yes! Yeah! Oh! Awww!* Sometimes, intensive emotions of both groups of music fans are channelled by strong, seemingly negative expressions such as *Hell, yes! (God) damn!* etc.

5.3 Graphic features

A considerable number of the YouTube video comments in our corpus included one or more accompanying graphic features, such as non-standard capitalization, multiple punctuation, emoji or emoticon and irregular spelling. These have become habitually used in the computer-mediated communication to express attitudes and emotions as well as emphasize or complement the meaning communicated by lexical units (e.g. Schneebeli 2018, Yen-Liang 2016, Dressner and Herring 2010, Shaw 2008). The graphic features can be used individually or in various combinations (e.g. *HITTT* = non-standard capitalisation combined with irregular spelling). The incidence of the different types of accompanying graphic features in the 600 posts constituting our corpus is presented in the table below:

	Classical music posts	Popular music posts
Emoticons and emojis	4.5%	34%
Non-standard capitalization	5.9%	9.8%
Multiple punctuation marks	6.1%	7%
Non-standard spelling	1.7%	2.7%

Table 5. Types of accompanying graphic features

As we can see, the difference between the frequency of pictorial symbols in the posts related to popular and classical music is quite remarkable, especially that of emojis, which are defined as "pictographs of object, faces and symbols" (Encyclopedia Britannica online). Emoticons, that is "punctuation marks, letters, and numbers used to create pictorial icons" (Encyclopedia Britannica online) which are considered to be predecessors of emojis were found to be surprisingly infrequent in the comments on all six music videos regardless the genre. In fact, only three different emoticons were found: <3, :) and :D.

Not only the number but also the variety of emojis was greater in the evaluations of popular music. Here, emojis most often appear in longer chains, either consisting of the same symbol or a succession of symbols. While some emojis clearly communicate appreciation (e.g. clapping or clasped hands, thumbs up sign, OK sign, victory sign, star), others express appreciation combined with emotion (heart, smiling face with hearts for eyes). Some emojis accompanying the popular music comments were more loosely related to their content (cat, biceps, lightning, flames, people holding hands, cocktail glass, etc.). In the posts related to the classical music the choice of emojis was rather limited, mostly just one emoji per post (thumbs up, OK sign, clapping hands, heart, angel), and rather unevenly distributed. While the listeners to Beethoven's and Rachmaninoff's music used an emoji only 4 times, 15 emojis were registered in the comments on Einaudi's *Divenire*.

Three types of non-standard capitalization were identified in our corpus. The most common one was the capitalisation of a word or phrase within a syntactic unit that was otherwise typed in standard lowercase letters. In this type of capitalisation, the capitalised words or phrases were those carrying the evaluative force of the compliment (*He is in one word AMAZING! Such a BEAUTIFUL piece of music!*). The second most common type of non-standard capitalisation, i.e. capitalising the whole evaluative comment, was found mainly in the posts related to the popular music videos (*OMG I LITERALLY LOVE IT! THAT WAS AMAZING!*). In texting and computer-mediated communication, this way of typing tends to be meant and understood as raising one's voice. The third type of capitalisation, in which only the first letter of the evaluative lexical unit is capitalised to stress its meaning (*This is so Magnificent.*), was registered only three times in the comments on classical music videos.

Multiple punctuation, i.e. using more than one exclamation or question mark at the end of an evaluative word, phrase or sentence to convey emotions, was again more frequently registered in the posts related to the popular music, whose fans seem to favour especially multiple exclamation marks (*Another PERFECT song!!! WOW!!! Love it!!!!!*). Dot dot dot (...), which can be also viewed as a kind of multiple punctuation, was used more frequently in the comments on classical music, where it seemed to convey that the viewer was so overwhelmed by the performance that he or she was lost for words (*Incredible... Perfect..., Impressive performance... My heart got touched!*).

The least frequent visual element used to intensify the evaluative meaning of some comments in our corpus was a type of non-standard spelling where the writer multiplies (most commonly triples) the final letter of a word (*Yesss!, Awww, Ohhh, That is best everrrrr! , sooooo good,* etc.).

6. Conclusions

As emergent from the data, only some norms of face-to-face communication are carried over to the computer-mediated communication. In our corpus, the complimentee's part or reaction is missing completely (as well as the request slot in the complimenter part). This suggests that complimenting behaviour in the digital environment differs essentially from face-to-face interactions. It may not be so surprising on YouTube, where in fact the complimenter does not address the complimentee directly, and similar tendencies were found in Facebook communication. As Placencia and Lower (2016) suggest, the anonymity afforded by the online environment allows users to feel comfortable breaking the usual rules of conversation and politeness. Unafraid of losing their real-life face, they are free to ignore compliments and indulge in self-praise.

The modifications in the slots also prove the validity of what a Czech linguist, Mathesius (1982), referred to as the potentiality of the phenomena of language: they are at the language user's disposal, but need not necessarily be activated as fixed configurations of patterns and fixed numbers of discrete slots.

Although it is rather a speculation, it appears that in asynchronous computer-mediated communication compliments are more about the complimenters and their self-presentations of various kinds than about a sincere positive evaluation of the addressee. This tendency seems to be emergent especially in the complimentary comments on the classical music videos, whose authors frequently try to demonstrate their own expertise.

As for the structural, formal and semantic features of computer-mediated complimentary evaluations in our corpus, these correspond with those reported in face-to-face complimenting only partially. The main difference seems to lie in the preference of more concise syntactic structures (words or phrases over larger syntactic units), which might be resulting from the mode of text (written) and the language economy principle. Formally, the same word classes (adjectives, verbs, nouns, adverbs) carry the main evaluative force of both face-to-face and computer-mediated compliments. While adjectives were registered to be the most common in this respect in both modes of complimenting, inherently evaluative nouns seem to be more frequent in the computer-mediated mode. Semantically, there seems to exist a core of common evaluative expressions across both modes of evaluation, especially with respect to basic evaluative adjectives (*beautiful, good, great*), verbs (*like, love*) and intensifiers (*really, absolutely, so*).

In our corpus however, the language used to evaluate music performance rather differed with respect to the particular music genre. It is quite logical that a certain genre of music attracts a certain type of general audience and it can even be speculated that their reasons or motifs for commenting might differ. Classical music audiences tend to be quite serious and well informed. Their responses to music performance seem to attempt at expert evaluation and are, therefore, more descriptive and linguistically sophisticated. While it is understood that the primary aim of compliment is social, we would rather conclude that in respect to classical music videos on the Internet, complimenting is largely informative – evaluating is openly based on the audience expertise and frequently involves description of

various details using evaluative adjectives and nouns with precise meanings. Popular music fans seem to constitute a somewhat more 'consumer' audience with a tendency towards more expressive and subjective evaluation, stressing their feelings towards the evaluated music performance (or one of its features) over describing a number of its different aspects. This seems to be in line with current research on identity in CMC, which suggests that linguistic forms are used to construct identity positions, that "identity emerges in discourse through the temporary roles and orientations assumed by participants" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 591) and "even in the most fleeting of interactional moves, speakers position themselves and others as particular kinds of people" (Bucholtz and Hall 2005: 595).

It can be concluded that differences in various aspects of formulating and using compliments exist not only with respect to the spoken or written mode of language but also with respect to the object of evaluation. Further research has to be done in this area to explore other forms of the computer-mediated communication in order to support and fine-tune our tentative results.

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