EGYPTIAN AND AMERICAN COMPLIMENTS:
A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT. This study investigated Egyptian and American compliments using both qualitative and quantitative methodology. Extended interviews were conducted with 20 Egyptian and 20 American university students. Egyptians were interviewed in Arabic in Egypt and Americans were interviewed in English in the United States. On audiotape, subjects described in detail the most recent compliment given, received, and observed, providing a corpus of 60 Egyptian and 60 American compliments. Interview data were analyzed to determine 1) compliment form, 2) attributes praised, 3) relationship between the compliment giver and recipient, 4) gender of compliment giver and recipient, and 5) compliment frequency. Interview data were used to construct six forms of a questionnaire, varying the recipient of the compliment between a male/female family member, a male/female close friend, and a male/female acquaintance. Approximately 240 Egyptian students and 240 American students, about 50% male and 50% female, completed the questionnaire using a variation of Barnlund and Araki's (1985) Complimentary Mode Questionnaire for responses. Students' responses indicated preferences for direct or indirect means of complimenting. The Egyptian questionnaires were in Arabic and the American questionnaires in English. Major findings suggest that both Egyptian and American compliments tend to be adjectival; both frequently compliment personal appearance; Egyptian compliments tend to be longer than American compliments and contain more comparatives, references to marriage, and metaphors; Americans tend to compliment more frequently than Egyptians; Egyptians tend to compliment personality...

The authors wish to express their deep appreciation to Tom Schmid for his perceptive comments on numerous versions of this manuscript and to the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions.

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traits, whereas Americans tend to compliment skills and work; and both Egyptians and Americans prefer direct rather than indirect means of complimenting.

INTRODUCTION

The term “speech act” has been defined as a minimal unit of discourse, a basic unit of communication (Searle, 1969). Cross-cultural comparisons of speech acts such as compliments, apologies, introductions, requests, and refusals are of interest to sociolinguists (Hymes, 1972, 1974; Wolfson, 1981, 1983, 1989) in part because they provide insights into speech communities as well as into the linguistic and sociolinguistic rules of a language. Comparisons of speech acts are also of interest to intercultural communication practitioners and researchers (Barnlund & Araki, 1985; Barnlund & Yoshioka, 1990; Noruma & Barnlund, 1983), not only because they provide insights into speech communities and cultures, but because such comparisons can contribute to understanding cultural differences in communication style. The findings that emerge from cross-cultural studies of speech acts can help predict and prevent breakdowns in intercultural and interethnic communication (Gumperz, 1978) resulting from the ethnocentric assumption that the linguistic and sociolinguistic rules and the communication style from one's native language and culture are shared by other languages and cultures.

This study, using the two-stage methodology of Barnlund and Araki (1985), investigated Egyptian and American compliments to determine cultural similarities and differences in 1) compliment form, 2) attributes praised, 3) relationship between the giver and receiver of compliments, 4) gender of the giver and receiver of compliments, 5) compliment frequency, and 6) one dimension of communication style: directness vs. indirectness.

Communication style is an elusive notion to define as well as study, and calls for a narrowing of focus (Noruma & Barnlund, 1983). Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey (1988) define communication style as a “meta-message that contextualizes how individuals should accept and interpret a verbal message. It is expressed through shades of tonal qualities, modes of nonverbal channels, and consistent thematic developments in the discourse process” (p. 100). One dimension of communicative style that has been identified, researched, and used to describe differences in Arabic and English communication is the direct-indirect dimension (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988).

The direct-indirect dimension refers to the “extent speakers reveal their intentions through explicit communication” (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 100). A direct style of communication refers to explicitly stating one's feelings, wants, and needs; the speaker says what he or she means.
An indirect style, on the other hand, refers to "verbal messages that camouflage and conceal speakers’ true intentions in terms of their wants, needs, and goals in the discourse situation" (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 100). An indirect communication style is associated with high context cultures in which language functions as a social lubricant to maintain group harmony. In cultures with indirect communication styles, one is more likely to use imprecise and ambiguous language, to say more or to say less than what is meant.

In an analysis of Egyptian-American relations over the last 30 years, Raymond Cohen (1987) illustrates how differences in communication style contributed to "moments of missed opportunity or miscalculation" (p. 30). One example of a miscalculation occurred during negotiations over the American funding of the Aswan Dam. After the United States had decided not to fund the Aswan Dam, the American Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, met with the Egyptian Prime Minister Nasser's ambassador, Ahmed Hussein, to inform him that the United States would not fund the dam. Cohen notes that at

... a crucial meeting between Dulles and Hussein, the Egyptian ambassador was received with perfect correctness. But without any attempt to soften the blow he was briskly informed of the American decision. It was, to an Egyptian, a bitter and humiliating moment. Coming out of the meeting Hussein told an American friend "that Secretary Dulles had insulted Nasser, the ambassador, the Arabs, and in withdrawing the U.S. offer to finance the dam had implied the Egyptians were politically, morally and economically bankrupt." (p. 33)

Cohen suggests that the ambassador, an individual from a culture with an indirect communication style, would have perceived Dulles' direct utterance of the United States' refusal to fund the dam as a calculated insult, not merely as a message relating information. Cohen's analysis illustrates the importance of understanding cultural differences in communication style. The lack of such knowledge can lead to miscommunication on the international and diplomatic level and also on the interpersonal level.

COMPLIMENTS

The compliment is a particularly suitable speech act to investigate when comparing cultures because it represents "one means whereby an individual or, more importantly, society as a whole can encourage, through ... reinforcement, certain desired behaviors" (Manes, 1983, p. 97); in other words, compliments act as a window through which we can view what is valued by a particular culture. For example, in the United States, individuals compliment each other primarily on personal appearance, new acquisitions, and work (Wolfson, 1981; Manes, 1983), sug-
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gesturing that Americans value these attributes. In Japan, however, individuals are more apt to compliment skill and study (Barnlund & Araki, 1985), suggesting that Japanese value skill and study.

The most extensive research on American compliments has been conducted by Nessa Wolfson and Joan Manes who, using ethnographic methodology, have collected over 1,000 compliments in a wide range of situations. They (Manes, 1983; Wolfson, 1983; Wolfson & Manes, 1980) found that approximately 80% of American compliments fall into the three syntactic patterns given below. In reporting the syntactic patterns in this article, the following abbreviation conventions are followed: NP = noun phrase, ADJ = adjective, PRO = pronoun, VP = verb phrase, and DEM PRO = demonstrative pronoun.

**Syntactic Patterns**

- NP is/looks (intensifier) ADJ
- I like/love NP
- PRO is ADJ NP

**Examples**

- Your shoes are great.
- I love your perm.
- These are your cookies.

Two of these three patterns depend on adjectives for their positive semantic value and two thirds of the adjectival compliments use one of five adjectives: nice, good, beautiful, pretty, and great.

Wolfson (1981) has also noted cultural differences in complimenting and observed that Iranians and Arabic-speakers tend to use proverbs and other precoded ritualized expressions when complimenting. She gives the example of an Arabic speaker complimenting a friend's child. The English equivalent is "She is like the moon and she has beautiful eyes." Wolfson suggests that speech act patterns "are not only very different from culture to culture but are also largely unconscious" (p. 123). Therefore, she calls for extensive collecting and analyzing of speech acts across cultures in order to prevent cross-cultural misunderstandings.

Barnlund and Araki (1985), using interviews and questionnaires, investigated Japanese and American compliments. Interviewees were asked to describe 1) the most recent compliment they had given and received, 2) the relationship between the giver and recipient of the compliment, 3) the attribute praised, 4) the exact words used in the compliment, and 5) the day the compliment was given. Interview data indicated that the Japanese compliment much less frequently than Americans. The compliments reported by the Japanese occurred, on the average, 13 days before the interview, whereas the compliments reported by Americans occurred, on the average, 1.6 days earlier. Their findings also indicate that Japanese and Americans tend to compliment five attributes—appearance, personal traits, work and study, skill, and taste—but with varying frequencies. Japanese most frequently praise skill (31%) and work and study (19%), whereas Americans most frequently praise appearance.
Compliments

(34%) and personal traits (33%). In addition, Japanese compliment acquaintances more frequently than those in more intimate relationships, whereas Americans compliment intimates more frequently.

Based on the interview data, a questionnaire was developed and administered to 260 Japanese in Japan and 260 Americans in the United States. The questionnaire consisted of situations in which an individual might give a compliment and nine possible responses to each situation. Possible response options were ordered from the most indirect (keeping of one's feelings to oneself) to the most direct (praise frankly and enthusiastically).

Indirect strategies of complimenting were preferred by both cultures. This preference was stronger for the Japanese. The preferred strategies of complimenting among Japanese are to express admiration nonverbally, to comment on one's own limitations, and to keep one's feelings to oneself. Americans' preferred manner of complimenting, also indirect, is to express their admiration to a third party, to keep it to themselves, and to express it nonverbally.

Using a similar method of obtaining compliments, Knapp, Hooper, and Bell (1984) asked 519 individuals in the United States to relate recent compliments given and received, providing a corpus of nearly 1,000 compliments. Interviewees were also asked a series of questions concerning characteristics such as the age and relationship of the giver and recipient of the compliments. Data were analyzed for 1) attributes praised, 2) compliment forms, and 3) relationships between giver and recipient of compliments. The most common attributes praised were appearance/attire and performance. Compliment forms were analyzed according to syntactic patterns and also along four dimensions: direct/indirect, specific/general, comparison/no comparison and normal/amplified. Seventy-five percent of the compliments followed one of the three patterns identified by Wolfson and Manes (1980). Compliments tended to be direct, general, noncomparative, and normal (without intensifier). In their analysis of the relationships between the givers and recipients of compliments, Knapp et al. (1984) found that compliments are likely to be exchanged between individuals of the same sex, and between individuals in close, rather than distant, relationships.

There are two important facets of complimenting in Arabic. The first concerns the belief in the evil eye. Many Arabs believe in the evil eye—that someone can cause harm by looking at a person or a person's property (Maloney, 1976). In particular, the evil eye relates to "envy in the eye of the beholder" and is most dangerous to pregnant women, children, and anyone who is beautiful (Spooner, 1976, p. 77). For example, if an individual compliments a mother on her beautiful baby, he or she may cause the evil eye or harm to come to the baby. To counteract this effect, the giver of the compliment invokes Allah to protect the child, saying
"Allaah yihfazu" (May God protect him) or "maa shaa'a Allaah" (God's grace be upon you). In a study of 379 expectant mothers at the American University in Beirut hospital, Harfouche (1981) found that 54.9% believed in the harmful effects of the evil eye.

An example of this phenomenon—that complimenting, without using the proper invocation, may draw the attention of the evil eye—is illustrated by the story about a Jordanian who proudly showed his new car to a British friend. The Britisher said that the car was beautiful and he wished he could afford such a car. The Jordanian had a serious car accident two weeks later. "When the British friend paid him a call, the Jordanian received him coolly and their friendship never revived. The Britisher now believes that it was his inadvertent expression of apparent envy that destroyed the friendship" (Nydell, 1987, p. 106).

Another important facet of Arabic complimenting is the practice of offering the object of the compliment to the person who complimented. Almaney and Alwan (1982) relate the incident in which one of them praised the tie of an Arab friend who was visiting his house. The friend took off the tie and offered it to the person who gave the compliment. The person who complimented the tie refused it and the friend put the tie back on. Later, however, the tie was found on the sofa after the Arab friend had left.

METHOD

This study consisted of two stages, one qualitative and the other quantitative. Stage one consisted of interviews that elicited authentic Egyptian and American compliments. The compliments obtained through interviews were analyzed for compliment form, attributes praised, role relationship, gender, and frequency. They also determined the questionnaire items and responses used in the second stage of the study. Stage two, using questionnaire items developed from the interviews, investigated one dimension of communication style: directness vs. indirectness.

Stage 1

Audiotaped interviews were conducted with 20 Egyptian university students in Egypt and 20 American students in the United States. All students were between 18 to 25 years of age; half were men and half women. Interviews were conducted in the interviewees' native languages and used an expanded version of Barnlund and Araki's (1985) procedure for obtaining compliment data by asking interviewees to describe the most recent compliment they had given, received, and observed, the relationship between the complimenter and the recipient, the attribute praised, the exact words used in the compliment, and the day the compli-
Compliments was given. This procedure provided a corpus of 60 American and 60 Egyptian compliments.

At the completion of the interviews, the audiotapes were transcribed; the American compliments were transcribed in English and the Egyptian compliments were transcribed in Arabic. The Arabic transcripts were also translated into English. The primary analysis of the Arabic compliments, however, was based on the Arabic transcripts, not the English translations.

Results

Compliment Form. Compliment form is defined broadly as the language used to express the compliment. Compliments differed in length, use of metaphor and comparatives, and, to some extent, syntactic structure. However, the compliments also shared similarities; both Egyptian and American compliments were primarily adjectival in that an adjective was responsible for their positive meaning.

The American compliments tended to be short, as illustrated by the following:

1. You look great. (AF4)

The average number of words in the compliments reported by American females was 6.2 and the average for American males was 4.3. The Egyptian compliments were longer; for example:

2. eeh sh-shiyaaka di! eeh l-fustaan da! bass, iHna ma-ni’darsh. (EF21)
   (What is all this “chicness”! What is this dress! Stop, we cannot [take all that].)

The average compliment reported by Egyptian females contained 10.7 Arabic words and compliments by Egyptian males averaged 8.7 words.

Compliment length is related to two features of Arabic discourse: 1) repetition of almost the same idea with only a minor change in words and 2) the use of several adjectives in a series. Examples of repeating a similar sentence are:

3. eeh l-Halaawa di! eeh sh-shiyaaka di! (EM10)
   (What is all this beauty! What is all this “chicness”!)
4. waliid SaaHbi w-akhuuya. waliid ana ‘aarfa akhlaa’u. waliid akhlaa’u kwayyisa w-mafilish aHsan minnu. shaab akhlaa’u kwayyisa, sum’a kwayyisa, mafi-lish Hadd biyitkallim ’alee ghalaT. huwwa kamaan biy’amin n-naas mu ’amla SatHH. mafihuush Haaga tit ’aayib. l- ‘eeb l-waHiid illi fiith innu gaayiz yi’mil l- ’amal wi ma y’addersh eeh illi yiHSal. (EM17)
   (Walid is my friend and [like] my brother. Walid, I know his manners
well. Walid has good manners and there is no one who is better than he. He is a good young man and has a good reputation and no one says anything bad about him. He also treats people well. He does not have any shortcomings. The only fault he has is that he may do something and not consider the consequences.)

One Egyptian compliment uses a series of adjectives.

5. inti insaana 'add eeh Kwayyisa wi zarifa wi 'a'la wi Hakiima wi razina wi zakiyya wi labiqa wi mish na'Sik haaga. (EF8)
   (You are such a good and nice and sensible and wise and serious and intelligent and diplomatic person and don't lack a thing.)

Fifteen out of 60, or 25%, of the Egyptian compliments used this repetition of a similar concept in another sentence using different words or a string of adjectives. Only 5% of American compliments used such patterns.

Another difference between American and Egyptian compliments is the Egyptian use of comparatives, in particular similes and metaphors; 11% of the Egyptian compliments used comparatives whereas comparatives were not used at all in American compliments.

Examples of such Egyptian compliments include:

6. A: justaani Hilw awi. B: el-Ha'ii'a tasriHti aHla. (EF 30)
   (A: Your dress is very nice. B: Really, your hairstyle is nicer.)

7. amiiSak Hilw zayy bitaa 'MiHammad Fu'aad. (EF2)
   (Your shirt is as pretty as [the singer] Mohammed Fouad's.)

Marriage is a common metaphor in Egyptian compliments as illustrated by the following:

8. shaklik 'ariis in-naharda. (EM8)
   (You look like a bridegroom today.)

9. mufita li-n-nazar giddan! eeh sh-shiyaaka di! eeh l-fustaan da! bass! iHna ma-ni'darsh 'ala kida. shaklik in-naharda zayy l'-aruusa. (EF20)
   (You look very attractive! What is all this "chicness"! What is this dress! Stop! We cannot take this. You look like a bride today.)

Seven percent of the Egyptian compliments used a marriage metaphor. No American compliments referred to marriage.

An analysis of the syntactic structure indicated both similaritites and differences. Sixty-six percent of the American compliments used one of the three syntactic patterns identified by Wolfson and Manes in their research on American compliments (NP is/looks ADJ; I like/love NP; PRO is ADJ NP). Similarly, a limited number of syntactic patterns account for the majority of the Egyptian compliments:
Syntactic Patterns

NP ADJ (intensifier)

NP VP (intensifier) (ADJ)

eeh NP DEM PRO

Examples

*inti shiiK awi.* (You are very chic.)

*ineeki Hlawwit awi.* (Your eyes have become very beautiful.)

*eeh sh-shiyaaka di!* (What is all this “chicness!”)

Fifty percent of the Egyptian compliments used the syntactic pattern: NP ADJ (intensifier). This pattern is similar to the American pattern: NP is/looks (intensifier) ADJ. The Arabic version contains no verb “to be” because in Arabic, the verb “to be” is not used in a nominal sentence; thus, “*inti Hilwa*” means “you are beautiful.” Fourteen percent of the compliments used the second pattern: NP VP (intensifier) (ADJ).

The third pattern (*eeh NP DEM PRO*), used in 14% of the Egyptian compliments, does not appear in the American data. It represents one type of precoded set phrases that are used in particular situations that demand complimenting; these phrases or formulas cannot be changed. They are used as a set phrase.

Three of the Egyptian compliments made reference to Allah (e.g., *maa shaa'a Allaah 'uleek*; “God's grace be upon you”), whereas no American compliments referred to God.

The Egyptian and American compliments shared one major similarity: They were primarily adjectival. Seventy percent of the Egyptian compliments and 73% of the American compliments used adjectives. Four Arabic adjectives, *Hilw* (pretty), *Kwayyis* (good), *shiiK* (chic), and *Tayyib* (kind), accounted for 66% of the Arabic adjectives used. The most frequent was *Hilw*, which was used in 34% of the adjectival compliments. Three English adjectives, great, good, and nice, were used in 74% of the American adjectival compliments.

**Attributes Praised.** In order to develop a means of classifying the compliments according to the attributes praised, the researchers read the compliments and noted possible classifications. Based on the researchers' notes and Barnlund and Araki's (1985) study, a classification scheme with four categories (appearance, traits, skill, and work) was used to code the compliments. The coders, however, were at times unable to distinguish between the two categories skill and work. As a result, the classification scheme was modified. The categories “skill” and “work” were collapsed into one category: skill/work.

The category “appearance” referred to one's looks and included haircuts, eyes, and clothing. Skill/work was defined as the “quality of something produced through . . . skill or effort: a well-done job, a skillfully played game, a good meal” (Manes, 1983, p. 101). Traits referred to personality characteristics such as loyalty, kindness, maturity, and intel-
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Appearance Traits Skills Other Attributes Praised

FIGURE 1. Number of compliments in four categories of attributes praised as reported by Egyptian and American subjects.

ligence. Two coders independently coded each compliment as belonging to one of the three categories: appearance, personality traits, or skill/work. Reliability was high. They selected the same categories 97% of the time.

As shown in Figure 1, personal appearance was commonly praised in both cultures: 50% ($n = 30$) of the Egyptian compliments praised appearance and 43% ($n = 26$) of the American. This attribute, physical appearance, is not, however, as straightforward as it first appears. Manes (1983) found that Americans compliment those aspects of physical appearance that are the result of deliberate effort. Americans do not frequently compliment natural attractiveness. Our American data support Manes; only one compliment praised a natural attribute. A male praised a female friend, saying, "You have nice-looking legs."

However, half of our Egyptian compliments on appearance praised natural attributes. Some of the compliments are as follows:

10. sha'rik gamiil. (EF25)
(Your hair is beautiful.)

11. 'ineeki Hifwa awi. (EM12)
(Your eyes are very pretty.)

Consistent with the work of Manes (1983), Americans tended to compliment clothes and hair. Egyptians also complimented clothes and hair, but they also complimented eyes, skin, and general attractiveness.

The second-largest category of Egyptian compliments was personality traits, which accounted for 20 (33%) of the Egyptian corpus. Examples are:
12. shakhSiyyitik kwayvisa. (EM11)  
   (Your personality is good.)
13. inti 'a'la wi zakiyya wi diblumasiyya. (EF8)  
   (You are mature and intelligent and diplomatic.)

Traits accounted for only six (10%) of American compliments. The largest category of American compliments was skills/work, which accounted for 28 (47%) of the American corpus. Examples of American compliments on skill/work include:

14. You did a great job. (AF19)
15. Nice catch. (AM21)

Seven or 12% of the Egyptian compliments praised skill/work.

Relationship Between Compliment Giver and Recipient. There was little difference between the two countries in the relationship between the person complimenting and the recipient. As shown in Figure 2, a total of 26 (43%) of the Egyptian compliments were between friends and 24 (40%) were between acquaintances. Twenty-one (35%) of the American compliments were between friends and 22 (36%) between acquaintances. Ten (17%) of the Egyptian compliments and 15 (25%) of the American compliments were between family members.

Gender of Compliment Giver and Recipient. As shown in Table 1, 23 of the Egyptian compliments were given by females and 35 were given by males. Of the American compliments reported, 26 were given by females and 34 were given by males. Sixty-one percent of the compli-
TABLE 1

Number (Percent) of Compliments Given by and to Egyptian and American Males or Females
in Four Categories of Attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender Relationship</th>
<th>Appearance E, A</th>
<th>Trait E, A</th>
<th>Skill E, A</th>
<th>Other E, A</th>
<th>Total E, A</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female to Female</td>
<td>8, 14 (13%, 23%)</td>
<td>4, 0 (7%, 0%)</td>
<td>3, 4 (5%, 7%)</td>
<td>1, 0 (2%, 0%)</td>
<td>16, 18 (27%, 30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male to Female</td>
<td>12, 6 (20%, 10%)</td>
<td>8, 2 (13%, 3%)</td>
<td>0, 6 (0%, 10%)</td>
<td>0, 0 (0%, 0%)</td>
<td>20, 14 (33%, 23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male to Male</td>
<td>4, 4 (7%, 7%)</td>
<td>7, 2 (11%, 3%)</td>
<td>4, 14 (7%, 23%)</td>
<td>0, 0 (0%, 0%)</td>
<td>15, 20 (25%, 23%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female to Male</td>
<td>6, 2 (10%, 3%)</td>
<td>1, 2 (2%, 3%)</td>
<td>0, 4 (0%, 7%)</td>
<td>0, 0 (0%, 0%)</td>
<td>7, 8 (12%, 13%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Unknown</td>
<td>0, 0 (0%, 0%)</td>
<td>0, 0 (0%, 0%)</td>
<td>0, 0 (0%, 0%)</td>
<td>2, 0 (3%, 0%)</td>
<td>2, 0 (3%, 0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30, 26 (50%, 43%)</td>
<td>20, 6 (33%, 10%)</td>
<td>7, 28 (12%, 47%)</td>
<td>3, 0 (5%, 0%)</td>
<td>60, 60 (100%, 100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

E = Egyptian
A = American
Compliments 305

ments given by Egyptian females and 62% of those given by American females praised appearance. Forty-six percent of the compliments reported by Egyptian males praised appearance, whereas only 29% of those reported by American males praised appearance. Both Egyptian and American males praised females on appearance more frequently than they praised males on appearance. Egyptian males praised personality traits in 43% of the compliments and American males praised skill in 59%. American males were twice as likely to praise males on skill as they were to praise females on skill.

Compliment Frequency. Americans reported that they gave, received, or observed compliments that were given, on the average, 1.6 days before the interview. Egyptians reported that they gave, received, or observed compliments that were given, on the average, 8.6 days before the interview.

Stage 2

Subjects

A total of 265 American undergraduates at a large metropolitan university, half male and half female, completed the English version of the questionnaire. Similarly, 243 Egyptian undergraduates at an Egyptian university, half male and half female, completed the Arabic version of the questionnaire. Each questionnaire had six forms and 40 or more students completed each form.

Questionnaire

The interviews suggested cultural differences in a) attributes praised and b) the form used to express the compliment. These two variables were, therefore, included in the Compliment Questionnaire. In their study of Japanese and American compliments, Barnlund & Araki (1985) also found cultural differences in a) the gender of the giver and recipient of the compliment and b) the relationship (e.g., family member, friend) between the interlocutors; therefore, these two variables were also included.

Six questionnaire items were developed from compliments provided during the interviews. The items focused on the attributes of appearance, personality traits, and skill/work. The appearance items praised a haircut and a sweater; the personality trait items praised intelligence and maturity; and the skill/work items praised playing tennis and operating a computer. An example questionnaire item is as follows:
The interview data suggested that both Egyptians and Americans most frequently compliment individuals in their family, close friends, and acquaintances. These three relationships, each with a male and female version, were used in each situation, resulting in six versions of the questionnaire.

To measure the preferred ways of complimenting, a modified form of the scale used by Barnlund and Araki in their Complimentary Mode Questionnaire (1985) was used. Based on the interview data, two responses were added to their scale—make a comparison to something or someone else and use a formulaic expression—and three were omitted because they did not occur in our data. Barnlund and Araki's scale was ordered from the most indirect response (keep one's feelings to oneself) to the most direct (praise frankly and enthusiastically). To ensure that the two cultures ordered the items consistently, the response scale was pretested with Egyptian and American students. The scale was balanced with four indirect and four direct responses. In case some students did not find an attribute praiseworthy, a ninth response was added: I do not find this attribute praiseworthy.

To insure the equivalency of the Arabic and English version of the questionnaire, Barnlund and Araki's (1985) method of translation was followed for the Arabic version. First, the English version was translated into Arabic by one of the researchers, a native speaker of Arabic. Second, the Arabic version was assessed by two other individuals fluent in Arabic and English. Finally, the Arabic version was back-translated into English by a professional translator. The few existing discrepancies were resolved in discussions between the translator, the Egyptian researcher, and another bilingual. The English version of the Questionnaire produced a test-retest reliability of .87 and the Arabic version .83.

Results

A comparison of the total scores of Egyptians and Americans across all attributes revealed no significant difference in their manner of complimenting on the directness/indirectness scale ($F[1, 463] = 1.05, p = .304$). Both cultures preferred direct manners of complimenting to indirect manners. Seventy-three percent of the Egyptians selected direct manners of praising and 27% selected indirect manners (3% indicated that they did not find particular qualities praiseworthy). Sixty-five percent of the Americans selected direct manners and 35% selected indirect ones (1.7% indicated that they did find the attributes praiseworthy). As shown in Figure 3, the preferred manners of complimenting in both countries is the most direct response: praise frankly and enthusiastically.
Responses

1. Keep your feelings to yourself
2. Express admiration to a third party
3. Respond only nonverbally
4. Comment on your own limitations
5. Make a comparison to something or someone else
6. Use a formulaic expression *
7. Praise in a kidding, joking way
8. Praise frankly and enthusiastically

* Chosen by Egyptians significantly more frequently than Americans (p = .016)

FIGURE 3. Manner of Complimenting: Percent of responses given by Egyptians and Americans in each of eight categories listed from least to most direct (based on 3055 responses).
Egyptian's second most frequent manner of offering a compliment was "praise in a kidding, joking way" (20%) and they selected this response almost twice as often as Americans (11.4%). Americans' second most frequent response was "comment on your own limitations" (12.5%). Egyptians chose this response in only 5% of the situations. Americans' third most common response was "praise in a kidding, joking way." Neither of the above differences was statistically significant.

There was one significant difference between Egyptian and American responses. The third most common response chosen by Egyptians was "use a formulaic expression" (11.8%); Americans selected this response in 2.4% of the situations ($t = [10] 4.274, p = .016$).

In addition to analyzing the overall manner of complimenting, Egyptian and American manners of praising the specific attributes of appearance, personality traits, and skill/work were compared. Egyptians tended to praise traits more directly than Americans ($F = 23.36, df 1, 506, p < .0001$). There were no significant differences related to the Egyptian and American manner of praising appearance and skill/work.

A comparison of males and females within nationalities indicated that Egyptian females more directly praised a new haircut than Egyptian males ($t [246] = 2.486, p = .0136$), and that American females more directly praised both a new haircut ($t [260] = 3.399, p = .0008$) and a sweater ($t [258] = 4.077, p = .0001$) than American males. On the other hand, American males praised the trait of intelligence more directly than American females ($t [263] = 3.563, p = .0004$).

These differences in male and female complimenting patterns led to a comparison of females and males across nationalities. The analysis indicated no significant overall difference in male and female complimenting. When individual attributes were compared, females praised appearance more directly than males ($t [501] = 5.301, p = .0001$), and males praised traits more directly than females ($t [506] = 2.661, p = .008$). It appears that gender is, at times, more salient than culture in determining communicative style.

To determine if there were cultural differences in the directness with which Egyptians and Americans complimented family members, friends, and acquaintances, additional comparisons were conducted. As shown in Table 2, a comparison of nationalities indicated significant differences in the directness of the compliments when acquaintances were complimented. Americans more directly complimented acquaintances on appearance ($t [65] = 2.91, p = .0049$) and skill/work ($t [69] = 4.947, p = .0001$) than Egyptians. Egyptians more directly complimented acquaintances ($t [74] = 3.68, p = .0004$) and friends ($t [72] = 2.691, p = .0088$) on personality traits than Americans. There were no significant differences in how directly Egyptians and Americans complimented friends on appearance ($t [71] = 1.265, p = .21$) and skill/work ($t [73] = 1.355, p = .179$).
TABLE 2

Comparison of Countries on Directness of Compliments for Three Categories of Role Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship of Compliment Giver to Recipient</th>
<th>Attributes Praised</th>
<th>Appearance</th>
<th>Skill/Work</th>
<th>Personality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintance</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friend</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family member</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td>n.s.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The country that is significantly more direct is listed in each cell. When no significant differences were observed ($p > .05$), “n.s.” is entered in the cell.

There were also no significant differences in the directness with which Egyptians and Americans complimented family members. This lack of difference was true for appearance ($t [69] = 1.37, p = .172$), skill/work ($t [75] = 1.67, p = .098$), and personality traits ($t [65] = .075, p = .94$).

DISCUSSION

Results suggest similarities and differences in Egyptian and American compliments. Similarities include the speech act itself—complimenting is common in both cultures. In addition, both cultures share similarities in compliment form and attributes praised. Over 70% of both Arabic and English compliments are adjectival; they depend on an adjective for their positive semantic value. Further, both use a limited number of adjectives. Consistent with the findings of other researchers (Wolfson & Manes, 1980), this study suggests that Americans frequently use the adjectives *good*, *nice*, and *great*. Common Arabic adjectives include *Hilw, Kwayyis, shiiK* and *Tayyib*. Both Egyptian and American compliments use a limited number of syntactic patterns and the most frequent pattern in both countries is similar: *NP is/look (intensifier) ADJ* for American compliments and *NP ADJ (intensifier)* for Egyptian compliments. Egyptians and Americans use a variety of complimenting strategies, but prefer direct manners of complimenting, with “to praise frankly and directly” being the most frequent manner of complimenting in both cultures. These American findings are consistent with other studies suggesting that Americans praise directly (Knapp et al., 1984). Both cultures frequently praise appearance, with females praising appearance more directly than males. Previous research (Knapp et al., 1984; Wolfson
& Manes, 1980) also indicates that Americans frequently compliment appearance.

Although the two cultures share similarities in compliment form and attributes praised, they also differ in these two areas. With regard to compliment form, Egyptian compliments tend to be longer than American compliments. This length is related, in part, to repetition, a feature of Arabic discourse (Suleiman, 1973). Arabic speakers use repetition to express their feelings; the more something is valued, the more the repetition. With compliments, the more repetition, the better the compliment. Other facets of Arabic contributing to compliment length are long arrays of adjectives (Shouby, 1951) and elaboration (Almaney and Alwan, 1982).

Egyptians also tend to use more similes and metaphors. Again, similes and metaphors are not particular to compliments; they are common in Arabic (Shouby, 1951). One frequent metaphor in Egyptian compliments is marriage. As stated earlier, Manes (1983) suggests that compliments are a window through which we can view a culture. These references to brides and grooms and weddings are the window through which we see not merely the importance or prominence of weddings and marriage in Egyptian culture, but the centrality of the family.

Wolfson (1981) notes that Arabs compliment in the form of "proverbs and other precoded ritualized phrases" (p. 19). In line with Wolfson's findings, it was expected that the Egyptian data in this study would contain proverbs and ritualized expressions. This was not the case. However, both the interview and questionnaire data illustrate the use of precoded set formulas in Arabic compliments (e.g., eeh l-Halaawa di! eeh sh-shiyaaka di! "What is all this beauty! What is all this chicness!"). On the questionnaire, Egyptians selected the response option "use a formulaic expression" significantly more frequently than Americans.

In addition to compliment form, another difference between Egyptian and American compliments concerns the attributes praised. Interview data suggest that Egyptian compliments cluster in the areas of appearance and traits. Questionnaire data also support the notion of Egyptians' valuing personality traits. Egyptians complimented personality traits more directly than Americans. Americans also complimented appearance, but appearance for Americans refers to the result of deliberate effort. Americans also compliment skill/work. Consistent with other studies (Knapp et al., 1984; Manes, 1983), these findings suggest that Americans tend not to compliment personality traits. We suggest that through the window of these American compliments, we see a culture that likes to do, to complete tasks, to complete activities that have outcomes external to the individual.

Through the window of Egyptian compliments, however, we see a culture that seems to value natural appearance and personal traits;
other words, what a person is, the inner qualities of a person, not just what a person does. This distinction between wanting to complete a task and wanting to know a person is illustrated by Nydell (1987), who explains that in conducting business, Arabs expect to develop a good personal relationship, to get to know the person before discussing the business at hand.

A third difference is frequency. Americans compliment more frequently than Egyptians. This may, in part, be due to the Arab belief in the evil eye, that compliments may bring a person bad luck.

Finally, these findings are not totally consistent with other studies that suggest that Arabs communicate indirectly (Cohen, 1987; Katriel, 1986). Both the qualitative and quantitative data in this study point to the directness with which Egyptians compliment. The conflicting findings between previous studies and this study suggest the danger of overgeneralizing across speech acts and situations. It is probable that Egyptians use both direct and indirect communication depending on the context.

An indirect communicative style is associated with maintaining the collective, mutual face-saving, and upholding group harmony (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988). If a primary function of communication in Arabic-speaking countries is to maintain group harmony, to have pleasant interpersonal interactions, to not cause human beings to feel discomfort or to draw away from each other, then it is understandable that in some situations (e.g., expressing a difference in opinion or expressing negative feelings) indirect communication would be needed. Direct negative communication would cause bad feelings between individuals and would run counter to the aim of social interaction. However, in a compliment situation, the behavior of praising another can contribute to interpersonal or group solidarity and this is why it can be direct.

The findings of this study contribute to an understanding of differences in Egyptian and American compliments and suggest areas in which cross-cultural misunderstandings may occur as a result of differences in complimenting behavior. It is important to point out, however, that university students, the subjects of this study, may compliment differently than the general population of Egypt or the United States. It would, therefore, be imprudent to generalize from this university population to the population at large. One also cannot assume that these findings apply to other Arabic-speaking (e.g., Jordan, Syria) or English-speaking countries (e.g., England, Australia). Further research is needed before we know how generalizable these findings are. In addition, further research is needed on the following questions: What functions do compliments serve (e.g., conversation openers)? What are common responses to compliments? How does status interact with complimenting? These questions suggest fruitful areas for further research on complimenting in Arabic.
REFERENCES


Compliments

