Compliment patterns in English and Arabic on Facebook

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Abstract

Users of social media have been able to establish and maintain relationships not only within their local and intimate networks of friends and family, but also with networks of professionals and celebrities. By analyzing data from Facebook, the aim of this paper is to examine the syntactic and lexical patterns of Facebook compliments in English and Arabic, and to examine the influence of addressing a public figure on these patterns. While research on face-to-face compliments has been quite abundant (e.g. Wolfson 1981, Migdadi, 2003; Riesberg 2000, Allami & Montazeri 2011), few studies have tackled compliments on social media platforms (e.g. Maíz-Arévalo 2013, Eslami & Jabbari & Kuo 2015), and research on social media compliments in relation to social dynamics is still scarce (e.g. Placencia & Lower 2013), with no study of Arabic compliments on such platforms. Two sets of data were collected in both languages: The first set includes compliments among

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family and friends while the second includes compliments addressed to a public figure. Results show there is no significant influence on the compliment patterns when addressing a public figure. The only difference is in the distribution of compliment patterns even within one language.

It cannot go unnoticed that online activities have become an important part of life and that a lot of people have a direct contact with online landscape for different purposes such as research, gaming, and shopping. Communication on the internet has become a significant part of internet's everyday use: We all use different online landscapes to communicate with each other on daily basis. Interactions between people in face-to-face settings, or on the phone, can now also occur in virtual settings. Facebook is an online landscape that has become a widespread medium of communication. Compliments are an example of speech acts that take place in face-to-face interactions and which are also used in online communication on platforms such as social network sites like Facebook. The creation of such social network sites has allowed people to communicate and socialize with not only people in close distance like family and friends, but also with people who don't share the same closeness of geographic location. With Facebook facilitating communication, people have been able to interact and socialize with other individuals who are known as public figures. The main concern of this paper is to observe the ways in which compliments are addressed to close distance individuals such as family and friends, and the ways in which they are addressed to public figures whom people might not have seen in person, but whom they have connections with through Facebook. By observing this speech act in a cross cultural perspective, this paper seeks to answer the following research questions:-

1- What are the lexical and syntactic patterns of compliments used by native English and Arabic speakers to address family and friends on Facebook?

2- Does addressing a public figure on Facebook influence these patterns?

This paper uses both quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze the complimenting behavior on Facebook. The first question focuses on finding general patterns of compliments by focusing on syntactic patterns and lexical choices used by American English and Palestinian Arabic speakers. The second question seeks to examine if these patterns are affected by addressing public figures. Before reviewing relevant research on compliments in the literature, it may be helpful to introduce a definition of what a compliment is, along with some of the functions that a compliment might serve.

Holmes (1986) introduces a broad definition of a compliment. "A compliment is a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some "good" (possession, characteristic, skill, etc…) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer" (Holmes, 1986: 485). The positive value mentioned here is expressed pragmatically by Brown and Levinson's politeness theory in which compliments serve as politeness speech acts that maintain the positive face of the addressee. In other cultural contexts though, compliments may be regarded as face threatening acts that could threaten the negative face of the addressee (Brown and Levinson, 1987). Wolfson (1983) proposes a social function of compliments: "They [compliments] represent a social strategy in that the speaker attempts to create or maintain rapport with the addressee by expressing admiration or approval" (Wolfson, 1983: 86).

Relevant research on compliments in face-to-face and Facebook contexts and in cross cultural settings will be reviewed in the next section.

Compliments in English

Nessa Wolfson (1981), one of the pioneers in research on compliments, examined data from a variety of languages to draw attention to the different cultural representations of compliments. One of the most notable characteristics of American English compliments is that the majority of them fall within a restricted set of high frequent adjectives and verbs. The most used adjectives are good, nice, beautiful, pretty, and great. Wolfson (1983) suggests compliments in American English are formulaic because they are highly patterned. She collected one thousand examples of naturally occurring compliments and found that three syntactic patterns occurred in 80 percent of her data:-

1- NP is/looks (really) ADJ = 50%.

2- I (really) like/love NP = 16%.

3- Pro is (really) (a) ADJ NP = 14%.

An advantage of the compliments being formulaic is that they minimize the risk of misunderstanding and help maintain rapport and solidarity:

Thus the fact that compliments are formulaic in nature is a great advantage to speakers in that it prevents misunderstanding and minimizes the differences which might play havoc with the reason for the compliment having been given in the first place-the creation or maintenance of rapport between interlocutors (Wolfson, 1983: 86)

As compliments serve to keep the social wheels going, Wolfson noted that sometimes compliments function as an expression of gratitude and they serve to

replace or reinforce other speech acts like greetings and apologies. Compliments could be viewed as a kind of flattery, given in an attempt for the speaker to gain an advantage. Another interesting function of compliments is to mitigate criticism:

"This is good. I like the way you're handling this. You might put more on the students though, and let them carry the conversation" (Wolfson, 1983: 89).

With respect to compliments and social relationship and status of interlocutors, Wolfson introduces the notion of The Bulge in which compliments are more likely to occur between people of the same age and status. However, compliments that occur in interactions where status is unequal were found to be given by the person in higher position.

Manes (1983) emphasizes the cultural values of compliments which are a form of positive reinforcement. Compliments are positively valued by society and individuals which encourage certain desired behavior. The most frequent types of compliments in American English are those on personal appearance and skills or efforts. Compliments on personal appearance such as You look nice, you're looking good, according to Manes are directed towards the deliberate effort of the addressee, not the natural attractiveness. In other words, the value of newness is a very important cultural value that is reflected in such compliments on appearance. Compliments on skills and efforts like a well-done job are directed towards the results not the talent or the skill, although they are referred to.

Holmes (1986) found a great similarity in New Zealand English. She analyzed the syntactic and lexical patterns of a corpus of about 500 compliments. Similar to Wolfson, Holmes found that four syntactic patterns accounted for 78% of her data which suggests another empirical evidence on the formulaic nature of compliments in English. The most frequent adjectives in Holmes's corpus were

nice, good, lovely, beautiful, and great. The distribution of compliments by topic was also significantly similar: 50.7% of compliments were on appearance, 30.6% were on skills and performance, 11.2% were on possessions, and 4.8% were on personality. The vast majority of compliments (79.1%) were between interlocutors of equal status. 11.2% of compliments were addressed to a higher status and 9.7% were addressed to a lower status.

1.0 Compliments in Arabic

Wolfson (1981) suggests the way compliments are realized differ across cultures. They also differ based on their distribution, their frequency, and the function they serve. Translating and analyzing some compliments in Arabic, Wolfson indicates one different feature of their structure is repetition and the use of proverbs and pre-coded ritualized phrases:-

(1) She is like the moon and she has beautiful eyes (Wolfson, 1981: 119).

Nelson et al. (1993) comment on two important aspects of complimenting behavior in Arabic. The first is the attempts to offer the complimented object to the person offering the compliment, which could be taken literally in some contexts, but might be ostensible in others. The second facet mentioned in Nelson et al. is the belief of harm caused by the evil eye. To counteract this effect, people invoke God to protect the object or the person complimented. In analyzing Egyptian Arabic compliments, Nelson et al. found the length of Arabic compliments to be significant. This was due to repetition of words and use of multiple adjectives in a single compliment. Three syntactic patterns accounted for 78% of the collected compliments and four adjectives made 66% of the data (pretty, good, chic, and kind).

1- NP ADJ (int)

2- NP VP (int) (ADJ)

3- NP DEM PRO

Migdadi (2003) found ten syntactic patterns in his corpus of Jordanian Arabic compliments. Four of the patterns found accounted for 86% of the data which gives another evidence for the formulaic nature of compliments in Arabic as well as English. The same three syntactic patterns that occurred in the Egyptian Arabic compliments were widely used in the Jordanian data as well. The fourth pattern didn't occur in the Egyptian data, but did occur in the Jordanian:

The fourth pattern in Jordanian Arabic compliments: NP VP

Hada it-tagim bihalii-ki ktiir

This the-suit make beautiful-you very

This suit makes you very beautiful (Migdadi, 2003: 67)

The adjective hilu 'beautiful' was the most frequent adjective in the Jordanian and Egyptian data. Other adjectives that occurred in Jordanian Arabic but not in Egyptian were mumtaz 'excellent' and zaaki 'delicious'. As far as relationship between participants is concerned, 86% of compliments were among acquaintances and friends. 8% were between close relatives and 5% were addressed to strangers. Migdadi points out that the function of compliments in Jordanian society is not primarily solidarity which could be a major function of exchanging gifts, but instead the main function is praising and admiring of the object or person complimented.

The most frequent syntactic patterns in Najdi Saudi Arabic compliments were similar to the most frequent compliments in the other data. Al Amro (2013) analyzed the syntactic structures of compliments in Najdi Saudi Arabic and found

that speakers of this variety used fewer syntactic structures than Jordanian and Egyptian varieties. Three adjectives were common in this data: pretty, amazing, and good. Similar to the notion of "Bulge" proposed by Wolfson, 89% of the data were compliments among family and friends.

2.0 Compliments on Facebook

While research on face-to-face compliments and compliment responses in English and across cultures has been quite abundant (e.g. Wolfson, 1981, 1983; Manes, 1983; Holmes, 1988; Herbert, 1989; Riesberg, 2000, in English; Lewandwska-Tomaszczyk, 1989, in Polish; Chansongklod, 1994, in Thai; Salameh, 2001; Migdadi 2003; Al Amro, 2013, Nelson et. al, 1993, in Arabic; Yu, 2005, Yu et. al, 2007, in Chinese; Allami & Montazeri, 2011, in Farsi), few studies have tackled compliments and compliment responses on social media platforms (e.g. Placencia & Lower, 2013, in English; Eslami & Jabbari & Kuo, 2015, in Farsi; Maiz-Arevalo, 2013, in Spanish).

Placencia & Lower (2013) look at the topics of compliments, their form, and the function they serve in English. They analyzed a corpus of Facebook compliments in American English among family and friends. They found an additional syntactic pattern that occurred on Facebook but not in face-to-face: How ADJ! e.g. How cute!, How adorable!

Topics of compliments were also dominated by appearance (75%), possession (8%), and skill (7%). Placencia & Lower suggest that Facebook compliments may serve a different function: They serve as a kind of affirmation and valuation of the relationship. This affirmation is manifested in the fact that the actual content of the compliment seems to be less important than the act of the

compliment itself. They also found a lot of abbreviated compliments which they referred to the nature of Facebook being a casual and an informal environment.

3.0 Method

The aim of this paper is to explore the syntactic and lexical patterns of compliments on Facebook when addressing family and friends, and when addressing public figures. A total number of 240 compliments were collected from my personal Facebook contacts. Compliments were given on photos that were posted by my friends in my contact list. I browsed different photos from different contacts and collected a number of compliments from each different post. The English compliments were collected from American English speakers whom I have been friends with for a couple of years on Facebook. The Arabic speakers, who are from Jerusalem and the West Bank, are also on my friends list or friends of friends. The 240 compliments collected are divided into two main groups and two subgroups: 120 compliments were collected in English and 120 were collected in Arabic. The 120 compliments in every language is divided into two subgroups: 60 were addressed to family and friends and the other 60 were addressed to public figures who are well known to people on Facebook. The American English speaking public figure is a TV reality show star whose public page on Facebook has been followed by more than 29 million followers. The Palestinian Arabic speaking public figure is a TV talk show host whose public page on Facebook has been followed by more than 95 thousand followers. The breakdown of the compliments is illustrated in table 1 below. All the compliment addressees in this study are women. Examining compliments that are given to women is in line with findings from other studies that have shown women to receive more compliments than men (e.g. Manes, 1983; Al Amro, 2013).

	Compliments to family and friends	Compliments to a public figure	Total
American English	N=60	N=60	N=120
Palestinian Arabic	N=60	N=60	N=120
			N=240

Table 1: The Breakdown of the collected compliments

One final remark is on why Facebook was chosen as a medium for this study. Compliments are likely to be present in social networking sites where maintenance of social relationship is crucial to the existence of these sites whose users communicate to keep the social rapport. Moreover, complimenting behavior on Facebook is likely to reproduce the social conditions of this behavior in face-to-face contexts. These social conditions are represented in the fact that family and friends as well as acquaintances and strangers integrate Facebook communities who might eventually become friends (Maiz-Arevalo, 2013).

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1 Syntactic patterns of compliments in English

The main aim of the present study is to examine the syntactic and lexical patterns of compliments on Facebook and the effect of addressing a public figure on these patterns. The two research questions are:-

1- What are the syntactic and lexical patterns of compliments used by native English and Arabic speakers to address family and friends on Facebook?

2- Does addressing a public figure on Facebook influence these patterns?

Six syntactic patterns were found in the English data. All the patterns were of compliments addressed to family and friends. Table 2 shows the syntactic patterns of the present study from the most frequent to the least frequent in the data:-

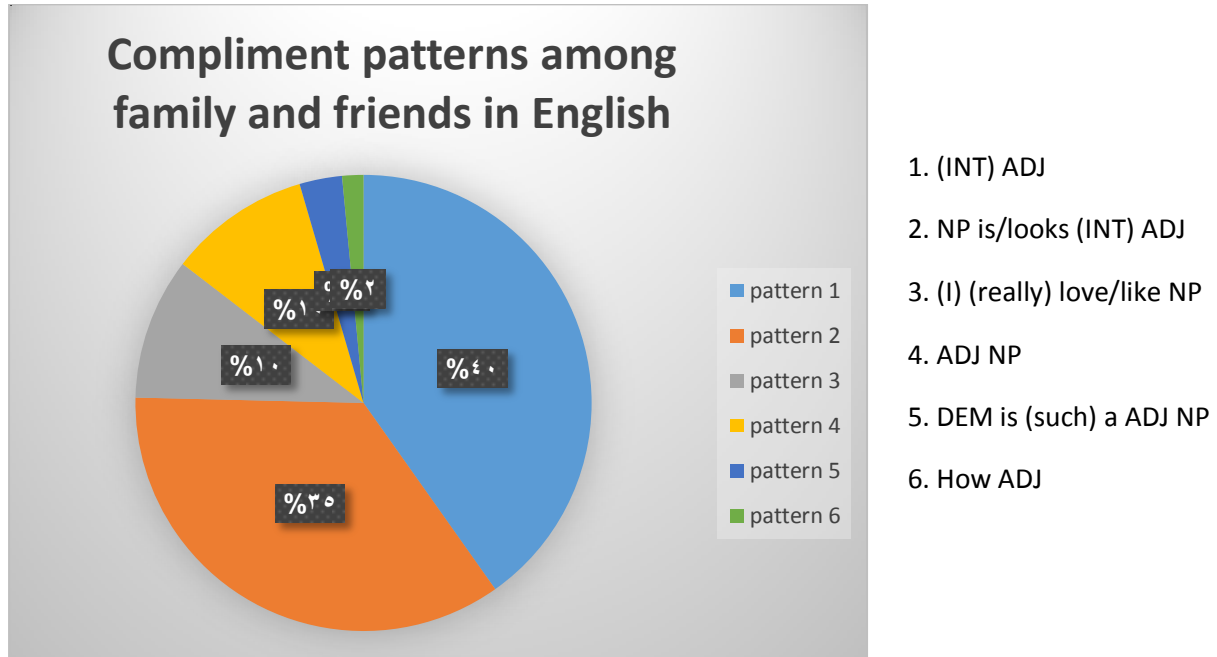|	Syntactic patterns	Percentage in the data
1	(INT) ADJ So cute	40%
2	NP is/looks (INT) ADJ You look so good	35%
3	(I) (really) love/like NP Love your jacket	10%
4	(such) (a) ADJ NP Such a nice picture	10%
5	DEM is (such) (really) a ADJ NP This is a really nice picture	3%
6	How ADJ! How cute!	1.5%

Table 2: Syntactic patterns of compliments among family and friends in English.

The three most frequent syntactic patterns in Wolfson's (1983) occurred in this data as well, but in different distribution and frequency. Pattern 2, which accounted for half of the patterns in Wolfson's data, totaled 35% in mine. The second most common pattern in Wolfson's data was pattern 3, which accounted for 16% of her compliments and 10% of mine. The third was pattern 5, which totaled 14% in her data and 3% in mine. The first four patterns above account for 95% of the data collected. All the patterns found here were also found in Placencia & Lower (2013), except for one single pattern that was found there but not here: What (a) ADJ NP. This may be due to the fact that the sample size of this study is fairly small compared to the other sample sizes.

Taking into consideration the casual and informal characteristics of internet communication, it seems plausible that pattern 1 accounted for 40% of this data, but didn't exist in face-to-face contexts. Compliments such as so cute and beautiful were very frequent in the data I collected, which shows additional evidence of the abbreviated forms of Facebook communication and the online environment of Facebook which contributes to its construction as a friendly and an informal medium. (Placencia & Lower, 2013). Pattern 6, which accounted only for 1.5% of

the compliments among family and friends, includes examples of: How ADJ!, e.g. How cute!. This pattern didn't occur frequently in Placencia & Lower's data either (only 2% of their data), and didn't occur at all in Wolfson's (1983).

With all the accessibility that Facebook has offered to its users, people have connected themselves with public figures who are not relatives or family members, but who are Facebook friends and whom people might not have seen in person. In fact, as I collected the data for this study, I was amazed by the enormous number of compliments: thousands of comments were posted, most of which contained compliments. This paper seeks to explore the effect of addressing these people on Facebook on using one of the most common speech acts, namely compliments. The following chart illustrates the compliment patterns addressed to family and friends and those addressed to a public figure. All the compliment patterns that were found among family and friends were also found in the compliments addressed to the public figure except for pattern 6 (1.5% among family and friends). Finding this pattern on Facebook but not in Wolfson's data could be due to the fact that the language has changed in the last three decades and that Facebook as well as other digital communication platforms have created an environment for the emergence of new abbreviated and casual patterns. This does not mean that compliment patterns are not formulaic anymore. In fact they still are, but they occur in a more casual and informal way to conform to the casual and informal nature of Facebook. However, the low percentage of this pattern compared to the other patterns can be due to the fact that the sample size might be relatively small, and that if a larger sample of data was collected, there would have been more instances of this pattern. Placencia & Lower's sample consisted of 1057 compliments, 2% of which were How ADJ! (around 58 compliments). More research is needed to examine this pattern in Facebook as well as in other digital platforms.

Compliment patterns among family and friends in English

1. (INT) ADJ
2. NP is/looks (INT) ADJ
3. (I) (really) love/like NP
4. ADJ NP
5. DEM is (such) a ADJ NP
6. How ADJ

- pattern 1
- pattern 2
- pattern 3
- pattern 4
- pattern 5
- pattern 6

Chart 1: Distribution of syntactic patterns of compliments among family and friends in English.

Chart 2 below shows these patterns when addressing a public figure. There is no significant change in the compliment patterns. In other words, no new patterns have significantly emerged in significant percentage when complimenting a public figure. There is only a slight percentage variation in the compliment distribution. Wolfson (1981) suggests the distribution of speech acts in general and compliments in particular vary from one language to another, and it seems here that through technology and new related digital platforms, the distribution of linguistic patterns can vary within a single language as well.
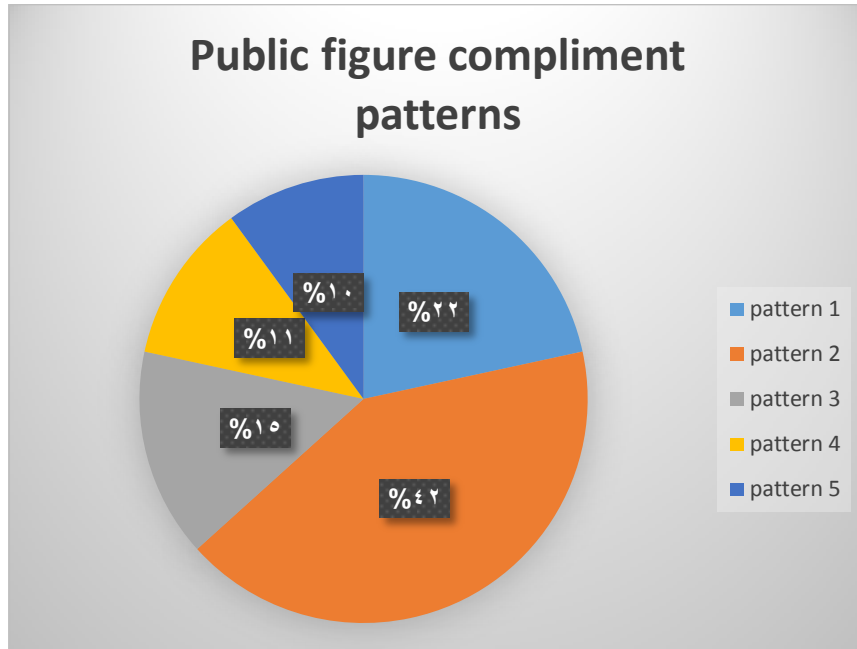
Chart 2: Distribution of public figure compliment patterns in English.

4.2 Syntactic patterns of compliments in Arabic

Seven syntactic patterns were found in the Arabic compliments among family and friends. These patterns are ordered from the most to the least frequent:

Syntactic patterns[2]	Percentage in the data
1. (Mashallah) (NP) NP Mashallah Inti Amar Grace be upon you you moon Grace be upon you. You are like a moon.	30%
2. (Mashallah) (NP) VP Mashallah soora bitjanen Grace be upon you picture amuse (somebody) Grace be upon you. The picture is amazing.	25%
3. (Mashallah) what DEM NP? Mashallah sho ha-l Jamal? Grace be upon you what this-the beauty? Grace be upon you. What is this beauty?	16.5%
4. (Mashallah) (NP) like NP Mashallah dohkei zay il Amar Grace be upon you smile like the moon	10%

The pie chart "Public figure compliment patterns" shows the following segments:
- pattern 1: ٢٢%
- pattern 2: ٤٢%
- pattern 3: ١٥%
- pattern 4: ١١%
- pattern 5: ١٠%

Legend on the right:
1. (INT) ADJ
2. NP is/looks (INT) ADJ
3. (I) (really) love/like NP
4. ADJ NP
5. DEM is (such) a ADJ NP

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[2] NP= noun phrase, VP= verb phrase, DEM= demonstrative pronoun, ADJ= adjective, INT= intensifier.

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Grace be upon you. Your smile is like a moon.

5. ADJ DEM NP   8%
   Hiloo ha-l thob
   Pretty this-the dress
   This is a pretty dress.

6. (Mashallah) (NP) (INT) ADJ   6.5%
   Mashallah inti kteer hilwei
   Grace be upon you very pretty
   Grace be upon you. You are very pretty.

7. ADJ (comparative) NP
           3%
   Ahla min il Asal

   Prettier than the honey

   You are prettier than honey.

The word Mashallah 'Grace be upon you' represents the invocation of God to protect the complimentee from the harm caused by the evil eye, which is a wide belief in the Arab society. The first four syntactic patterns in the Arabic data accounts for 81.5% of the compliments among family and friends. Patterns 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 occurred in Jordanian Arabic (Migdadi, 2003). Patterns 2 and 6 occurred in Egyptian Arabic (Nelson et. al, 1993). Patterns 1, 6 and 7 occurred in Najdi Saudi Arabic (Al Amro, 2013). Pattern 6 occurred in all Arabic varieties, but pattern 5 didn't occur in any of them. As suggested by Wolfson (1981), ritualized phrases e.g. Mashallah 'Grace be upon you' and proverbs are very common in Arabic compliments. Although Mashallah occurs in most of the patterns above, I didn't find any instances of proverbs among the compliments to family and friends. However, I did find a couple within the public figure compliments. The same patterns above were found within the compliments addressed to the public figure except for pattern 7: ADJ (comparative) NP. In contrast, 1 new pattern was found within the public figure compliments:-

(Mashalla) How ADJ (DEM) (NP)

Mashallah Ma ahla ha-l thob

Grace be upon you how pretty this-the dress

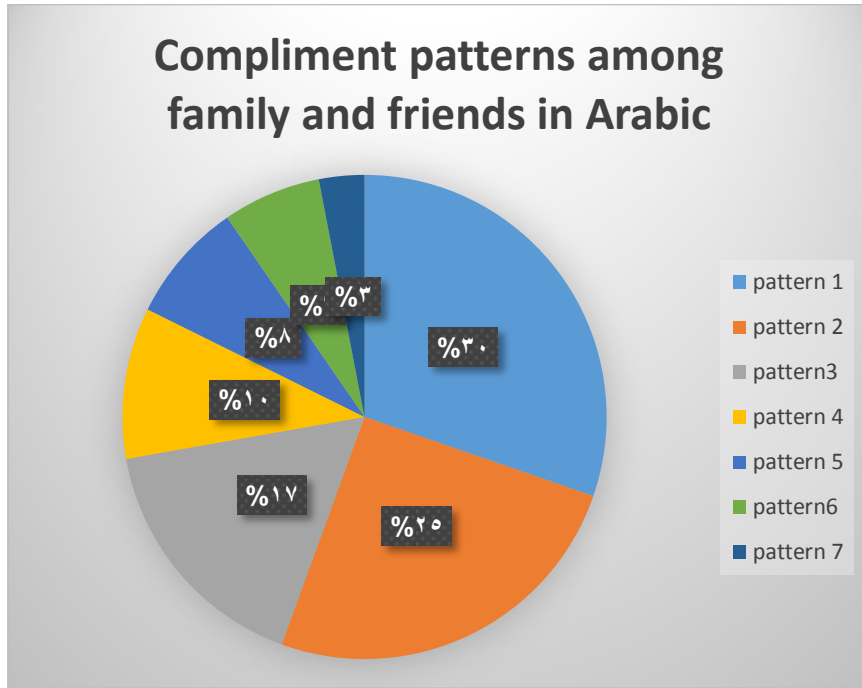Grace be upon you. How pretty this dress is!

Mashallah Ma Ahla-ki

Grace be upon you. How pretty-you
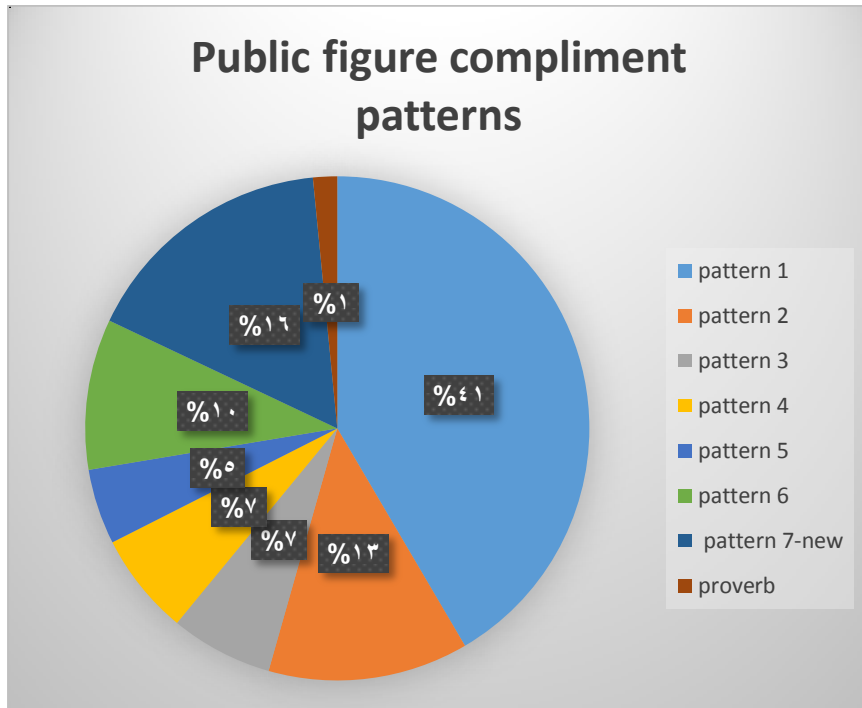
Grace be upon you. How pretty you are!

Interestingly, this new pattern was found in the English compliments among family and friends (2%), but didn't occur in the public figure compliments. In the Arabic data, this pattern didn't occur within the compliments among family and friends, but did occur frequently (16.5%) in the public figure compliments. The frequency of this pattern in Arabic could be justified by the assumption that it represents a significant and expressive semantic load to the Arabic speakers, while it is not the most expressive pattern for the English speakers. (I) (really) like/love NP might be a more attractive pattern than How ADJ for English speakers, who might prefer it based on the highly positive semantic load. For Arabic speakers, this could be one of the expressive syntactic patterns that can carry a highly valued semantic load when addressing a public figure.

Compliment patterns among family and friends in Arabic

pattern 1
pattern 2
pattern3
pattern 4
pattern 5
pattern6
pattern 7

%٣٠
%٣
%٨
%١٠
%١٧
%٢٥

1. (Mashallh) (NP) NP

2. (Mashallah) (NP) VP

3. (Mashallah) what DEM NP

4. (Mashallah) (NP) like NP

5. ADJ DEM NP

6. (Mashallah) (NP) (INT) ADJ

7. ADJ (comparative) NP

Chart 3: Distribution of syntactic patterns of compliments among family and friends in Arabic.

Public figure compliment patterns

pattern 1
pattern 2
pattern 3
pattern 4
pattern 5
pattern 6
pattern 7-new
proverb

%٤١
%١
%١٦
%١٠
%٥
%٧
%٧
%١٣

1. (Mashallah) (NP) NP

2. (Mashallah) (NP) VP

3. (Mashallah) what DEM NP

4. (Mashallah) (NP) like NP

5. ADJ DEM NP

6. (Mashallah) (NP) (INT) ADJ

7. (Mashallah) How ADJ (DEM) (NP)

Chart 4: Distribution of public figure compliment patterns in Arabic.

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Similar to the English compliments, there is a change in the distribution of compliments with no significant public figure influence on the compliment patterns except for the case of compliment 7 discussed above. More research is needed to examine the significance (if there is any) of this pattern across the two languages, in addition to examining its occurrence in other digital platforms. Otherwise, a larger set of data can examine the frequency of this pattern in English and its consistency in Arabic, especially to determine whether it only occurs when complimenting a public figure like the data above.

One instance of proverbs was found in this set of data. This proverb is often used as a compliment in the Palestinian dialect. It implies the person complimented is like a moon that doesn't fade, and that the person is viewed in a permanent state of prettiness. It occurred once in the public figure compliments and it looks like a kind of flattery to indicate the speaker's attempts to gain some advantage (Wolfson, 1981).
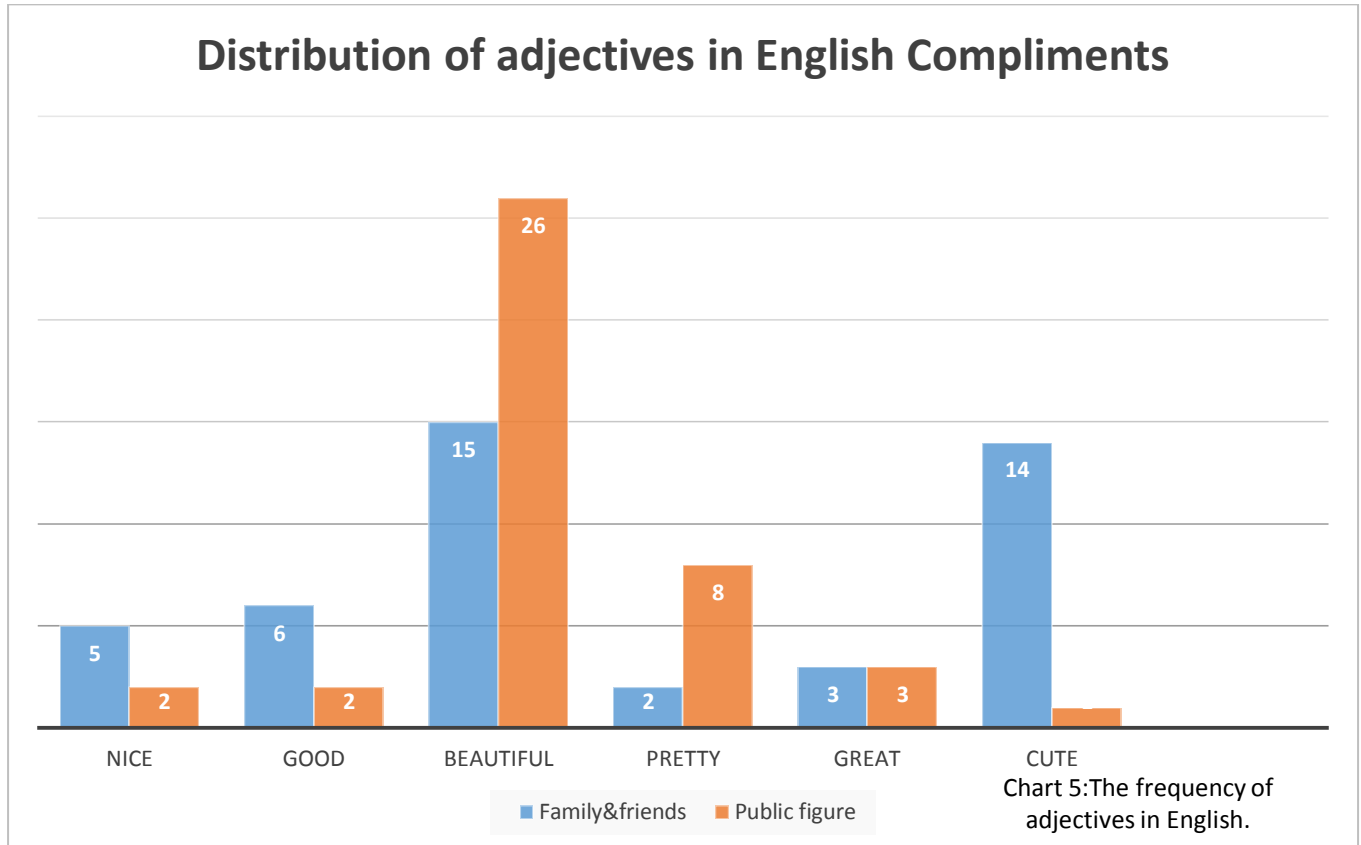
Wa hal yakhfa il Kamar?

And does disappear the moon?

And does the moon fade away?

4.3 Lexical patterns

Wolfson (1981) found that the most frequent adjectives used in compliments are nice, good, beautiful, pretty and great. All of these adjectives are found in the present study in addition to some other. The chart below illustrates the frequency of adjectives:-

Distribution of adjectives in English Compliments

	NICE	GOOD	BEAUTIFUL	PRETTY	GREAT	CUTE
Family&friends	5	6	15	2	3	14
Public figure	2	2	26	8	3	

Chart 5:The frequency of adjectives in English.

The most used word category in the English compliments are adjectives. Beautiful is the most used adjective which occurred 15 times among family and friends, and 26 times when addressing the public figure. Cute was used 14 times among family and friends, but was used only once with the public figure. Pretty, on the other hand, was used more with the public figure (8 times). Based on the data, it doesn't seem that addressing a public figure on Facebook has a substantial influence on the lexical patterns of complimenters. Overall, it appears that English speakers rely highly on adjectives to express the positive values of the complimentee. Beautiful might be the most preferred and most expressive adjective to address public figures, though it's also very common among family and friends. This gives additional evidence that instead of public figures having an exclusive influence on compliment patterns, it is the distribution of these compliments that

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vary. Other adjectives that occurred in the data less frequently include: gorgeous, perfect, and amazing.

Arabic speakers seem to draw on three categories to carry the meaning: adjectives, nouns, and verbs. This finding is similar to the Najdi, Egyptian, and Jordanian Arabic in which the three categories were frequent. The following chart illustrates the distribution and portions of nouns, verbs and adjectives among family and friends and the public figure.
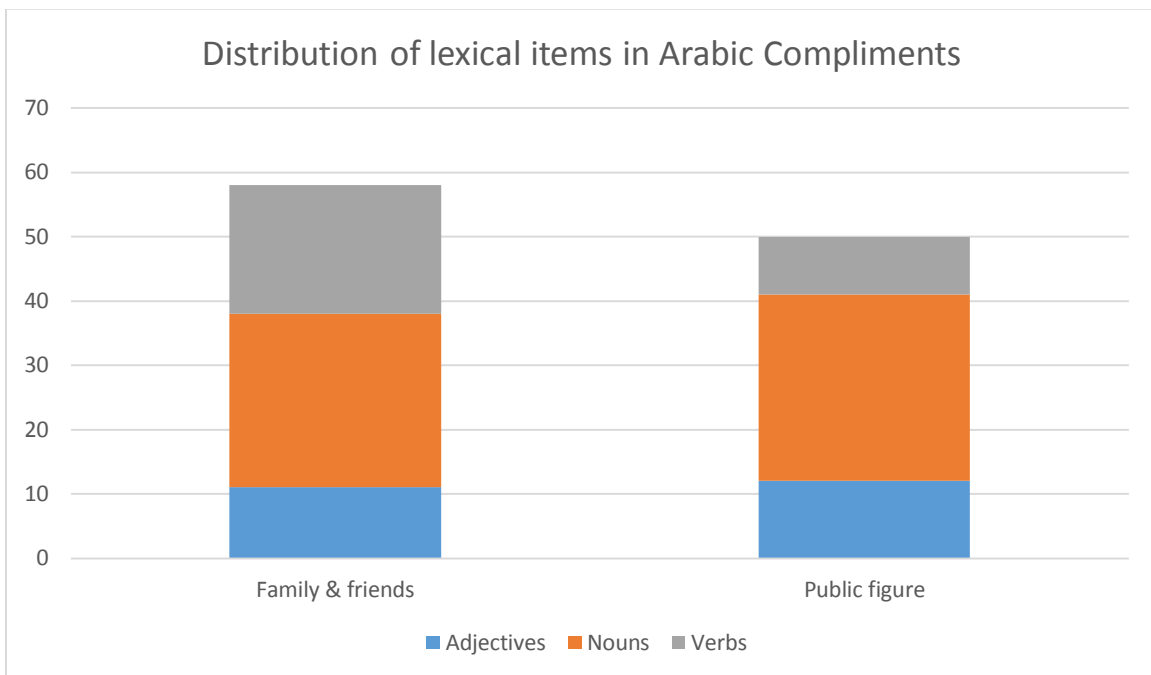
Chart 6: The frequency of adjectives, nouns and verbs in the Arabic compliments.

Contrary to other research on Arabic compliments that found a lexical semantic effect carried by adjectives, nouns and verbs respectively, the data here show that nouns are more frequent than the other two categories. The types of nouns used here are those extracted from nature like: Wardei 'flower', Zahra 'rose', Amar 'moon', Asal 'honey', or nouns that indicate beauty and attractiveness like: Jamal 'beauty', Halawei 'prettiness', Malikeh 'queen'. The most used adjective was Jameel 'beautiful' and Hilo 'pretty'. Two main verbs were used in both sets of

compliments: Mnawrei 'lighting up' (illuminating something) and Bitjanin-i 'amaze-you' (you amaze somebody-you are amazing). There is a little variation between the public figure compliments and those among family and friends in terms of the use of verbs only. However, the use of adjectives and nouns is consistent among the two groups. Face-to-face compliments were the focus of previous research (Nelson et. al, 1993; Al Amro, 2013, Migdadi, 2003) that found the dominance of adjectives. It may need further research to examine the dominance of nouns in Facebook compliments as opposed to adjectives in face-to-face contexts, but it appears that when it comes to complimenting others on digital media, nouns seem to have the most positive semantic effect.

4.4 The Flattery and the Great expectations

Among the functions that compliments can serve, Wolfson (1983) suggested two significant functions that were very frequent within the public figure compliments only: criticism and flattery.

"…Compliments are also used to soften criticism…thus, compliments followed by but or though, and a criticism, are very common" (Wolfson, 1983:89). She adds "Popular wisdom has it that compliments are frequently a kind of flattery, given in an attempt to gain some advantage for the speaker" (Wolfson, 1983:91).

In fact, flattery was very frequent in the public figure compliments in the English data as well as the Arabic. Interestingly, whether it was flattery or criticism in the data, a compliment always would inaugurate the discourse, followed by but or though as Wolfson suggested for criticism, and followed by a string of adjectives in English or poetry-like lines in Arabic for flattery. This advantage suggested by Wolfson, gives speakers the chance to present themselves before the public figure who is prestigious and who –most of the time- reads the compliments but does not

respond to them. Such flattery attempts on Facebook are expressive attempts from the speakers to set their compliments apart from those of others in order to gain the attention of the public figure. Flattery compliments in Arabic were long and repetitive such as the example below:

Sho ha-l talei il hilwei

What this-the look the pretty

What is this pretty look!

Awadt-i-ni Asha bakir

accustomed-you-me wake early

You accustomed me to wake up early

O An'asht-i Sabah-i

And refreshed you morning-my

And you refreshed my morning times

Allah Yin'esh Sabah-ek O Kol Ayam-ek

God refresh morning-your And all days-your

May God refresh your morning and all your days.

(What is this pretty look! You have accustomed me to wake up early and you have refreshed my morning times, May God refresh your mornings and all your days)

These long and repetitive lines contain a series of positive content words to express a positive value that the speaker thinks the public figure has done nicely and graciously. Although the speaker might know the public figure may not

respond to this flattery comment, they seek to distinguish their comment from others by adding this extra flattery content. The use of the compliment in the first line to inaugurate such speech might serve as a smooth and easy transition to the flattery in which the speaker builds on the compliment by adding more positive words in order to address the public figure as eloquently and expressive as possible. Such patterns were not found among family and friends, but it seems speakers have a sense of the social distance between themselves and the public figure, so they use compliments and build on them to gain leverage when addressing the public figure who already has this leverage.

The English compliments to the American public figure exhibited criticism, which was not evident in the Arabic data. Considering the fact that the American public figure has a huge number of followers compared to those of the Arab public figure, it seems she has attracted an enormous number of people from different educational and religious backgrounds and from different ages. Criticism of the public figure was based on a variety of purposes: social practices, religion, motherhood, and behavior. All sorts of criticism comments were preceded by a compliment:-

You are beautiful But cover it up. You are a Mom. Just a thought but mothers are discreet. Now is the time to lay low. Pay attention to babies not the silly public. I like you but the clothing you wear is for your husbands eyes only.

You look beautiful in your outfit…remember your body is the temple of the Lord, always keep it sacred

u are so beautiful but u need more of Jesus in your life...get it straight girl

The use of compliments to mitigate criticism as suggested by Wolfson (1983) is obvious here when the speakers are using the compliments to have a smooth and a mitigated transition to their criticism. Not only do speakers criticize the public figure, but they also offer their advice. It seems speakers have their own expectations of the public figure they address; when they see a video or a photo that violates their expectations, they offer their criticism, but they need it to be softened by the compliment. It might be hard to measure the truthfulness of the compliment in such contexts. That is, it is hard to know whether speakers give this compliment for the sake of it and for what they truly believe to be a positive value like the compliments among family and friends, or it is just an ostensible compliment that paves the ground for speakers to say whatever it is that they want to say.

5.0 Conclusion

The data collected for this study showed that Facebook compliments exhibit a variety of lexical and syntactic patterns, which answers research question 1. It does not seem that addressing a public figure on Facebook has a significant influence on these patterns. For the two languages studied here, it seems the only difference in compliment patterns when addressing a public figure is in the distribution of such patterns, which suggests that distribution can be within the language itself as well as in cross cultures. The main limitation of this study is the sample size. Further research is needed to examine the pattern How ADJ in both languages. This pattern occurred once in the English compliments among family and friends, but didn't occur at all in the public figure compliments. On the other hand, it didn't occur at all in the Arabic compliments among family and friends, but occurred frequently among the public figure compliments. I suggest this pattern is highly expressive and semantically significant for Arabic speakers, but less expressive than other compliment patterns for English speakers.

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