Background and aims

The speech act of complimenting, which can be defined in general terms as the "spontaneous [in appearance at least] expression of admiration and/or approval" (Wolfson 1983:85) in relation to some aspect of the complimentee's appearance or, his/her possessions or skills, has been examined in different varieties of English (i.e., American English, British English, New Zealand English and South African English) and in a few other languages (e.g., Polish).

Wolfson and Manes (1980) and Manes and Wolfson's (1981), as well as Manes (1983) and Wolfson's (1983) studies on compliments in American English (AE hereafter) are seminal in this area. Wolfson and Manes were, in fact, the first scholars to focus on compliment behaviour in general. Operating within the framework of ethnography of speaking, they chose compliments for examination as part of their interest in identifying the salient speech acts of their own community (cf. Wolfson & Manes 1980) and describing the underlying rules of speaking. They also addressed aspects of complimenting behaviour from a cross-cultural perspective (cf. Wolfson 1991:82), highlighting the need for contrastive
studies to help non-native speakers acquire the information and ability they need to 'interact successfully' in a given society.

Wolfson and Manes' work instigated numerous studies in other varieties of English and a few other languages. With regards to Spanish, however, very little has been done in this area.

Below, we will provide a brief account of the key studies on complimenting behaviour, with emphasis on those focusing on the speech act of complimenting rather than compliment responses as, due to space limitations, will not be dealing with the latter.

Studies on complimenting behaviour

Wolfson and Manes examined both the form and function of compliments in AE; they also analyzed the topic of compliments and the underlying cultural values they appear to reflect. With respect to form, they found that compliments were highly formulaic, that is, that there were only a few semantic and syntactic patterns that were employed more frequently. They attributed this phenomenon partly to the need there is for their function to be easily identifiable (cf Wolfson and Manes 1980).

With regards to function, they stressed the overall social function of compliments of '... creating or reinforcing solidarity between the speaker and the addressee' (Wolfson and Manes 1980). They also considered the interactional function of compliments in relation to the degree of acquaintance between the participants as well as the type of situation they are engaged in. In interactions between strangers in a social gathering, for example, they saw the function of compliments as that of establishing a degree of rapport (Wolfson and Manes 1980:399) whereas in a classroom situation, for example, they observed that compliments were used to encourage certain behaviour. Compliments were also described by them as 'social lubricants' (Wolfson 1983) in that they could be used to soften criticism, for example.

In addition, Wolfson and Manes considered the discoursal function of compliments in relation to their place of occurrence in the exchange. They found, for instance, that compliments can serve as greetings and thanks and that they can strengthen the force of the latter if they co-occur with an expression of gratitude.

Finally, with respect to the topic of compliments, they found that an 'overwhelming' number of them dealt with personal appearance, particularly clothes and hair-dos (cf. Manes 1983:98). They also found compliments on possessions and skills to be of common occurrence.

Similar findings in broad terms were reported by Holmes (1988) with respect to New Zealand English. Some of the differences she reported concern the structure of compliments (e.g. the use of syntactic variants such as -ing forms that appear to be more common in New Zealand English), and their occurrence among unequal participants (i.e., compliments being as frequent upwards and downwards in New Zealand English, as opposed to Wolfson and Manes's observation that in unequal encounters compliments mostly occur downwards).

Holmes also considered the topic of compliments in relation to the status and type of relationship obtaining between the participants (e.g., in unequal encounters, compliments on work performance are more frequent than compliments on appearance). What was also new in Holmes's study is that she examined the function of compliments in relation to Brown and Levinson's (1978) theory of face: she considered, for example, cases where compliments can be face-threatening and where compliments are used as repressive action, to mitigate the effect of a face-threatening act. She also considered the function compliments may have with respect to the type of relationship obtaining between the participants (e.g., compliments as expression of solidarity between family members and friends).

Lewandowska-Tomaszczuk (1989), on the other hand, examined compliments and other praising behaviour in Polish with reference to British English and AE. With respect to the overall function of compliments, she suggests that it is not the establishment of solidarity between interlocutors as such, as proposed by Wolfson and Manes, but its negotiation (Lewandowska-Tomaszczuk, 1989:77). With regards to form, she found that less formulaic, more indirect forms also occur in Polish. She suggests that the use of such forms make the speaker appear more sincere. She also examined compliment responses and suggests that avoidance of self-praise is stronger in Polish than in British or AE.
Other scholars have focused on compliment responses only. Within the conversation analytic tradition, Pomerantz's (1978) study on responses in AE is key in this area. She focused on the dilemma receivers of compliments are faced with when responding to a compliment: they feel compelled to agree, but they also want to avoid self-praise. Pomerantz thus examined a number of strategies participants use to deal with this dilemma and proposed a set of categories.

Herbert (1989), built on Pomerantz's work in his examination of compliment responses in South African and AE and refined her categories of strategies. Herbert and Straight (1989) contrasted American and South African English compliment responses and attempted to explain the differences they found by considering the psycholinguistic processes involved in the acceptance and non-acceptance of compliments in each society.


With regards to Spanish, there are no studies available on the speech act of complimenting within the ethnography of speaking tradition. This is not surprising given that speech acts in Spanish have in general received little attention. The only related study available is Achugar's (1989) which focuses on *piropos*. These are a subset of compliments, which Achugar (1989:1) defines as 'compliments with an amorous or sexual tone, usually said by men to women.' Her study is, however, of a different nature as it is not based on current complimenting behaviour only and it does not correspond to any particular linguistic community. The data she employs consists of reports from speakers from several Spanish speaking communities (numbers not specified) as well as examples taken from anthologies of *piropos* (from the last century to the present day). Her aim is not to provide a description of current complimenting behaviour within a specific community, but to analyze the form *piropos* take in general or have taken in the past and the ideology that has been attached to them. Her work is, nevertheless, of interest to the present study as, in the ES data examined, there are a few instances of what appear to be prototypical *piropos* as well as compliments with traces of them.

Finally, with respect to compliment responses, there is one study on the language of Mexican-American bilinguals in the US, which focuses, however, on aspects of code-switching (see Valdes and Pino 1981).

The present study

Our aim in the present study is to examine the form and function of compliments in Ecuadorian Spanish (ES hereafter) (within a particular social network) as well as what constitutes the topic of compliments. As such, this study, is another attempt (cf Placencia 1996) to contribute to filling the void that exists in the examination of speech acts in ES and Spanish in general, as part of our interest in describing 'what one needs to know and how one needs to behave in order to function as a member of a particular culture' (Goodenough, 1957) (cited in Wolfson 1983:42)

This study is also an attempt to describe how complimenting behaviour in ES resembles or differs from complimenting behaviour in other languages and societies, particularly American English and American society. Our aim is to provide another linguistic and cultural perspective to the body of work that already exists in this area. As Holmes (1988:505) suggests, "more cross-cultural data is needed so that universal characteristics of complimenting behaviour can be distinguished from the preferred cultural patterns of particular groups" (also see Herbert 1989).

Data and issues on methodology

The corpus upon which this study is based consists of 130 compliment sequences (i.e., compliments and compliment responses) collected by linguistics students attending courses taught by the first author in Quito in 1996 and 1997. With respect to the first parts of these sequences, they, however, sometimes include more than one compliment. Therefore, in the analysis of the topic and structure of compliments, the actual number of compliments referred to will be larger than 130.

With regards to the data collection method employed, the students who acted as observers were instructed to note down the compliment sequences they heard in their environment (at work, at home, at the university and with their friends in general) during

---

1 We wish to thank Gladys, Elsa, Jorge, Diego, Juan Francisco, Mary, Maria José, Annamari, and Cristina for their enthusiastic work.
a four-month period in 1996, and a six-week period in 1997. They were also asked to provide a brief description of the situation in which the compliment sequences observed occurred and to make a note of the sex of the interactants, their approximate age, and the relationship obtaining between them (see chart employed in Appendix). Some paralinguistic and nonverbal features were also noted down although not in a systematic way. These include the use of accompanying interjections, vowel lengthening to show emphasis, whistles, tone of voice, and non-verbal behaviour such as smiling and blushing. As Herbert (1989) remarks, these appear to play an important role in compliment exchanges; the data collection method employed here, however, precluded a systematic and accurate recording of such features.

Observation was selected for data collection in the present study to guarantee data authenticity. However, as Holmes (1988:505) remarks, the use of note-taking presents problems for the recording of features such as the complete discourse surrounding the compliment exchange. She does not, nevertheless, propose an alternative method which would also yield authentic data.

The approach to data collection adopted here, which included the participation of student-observers, as described above, was also aimed at gaining access to a circle of participants wider than that which the authors alone would have had access to (as Herbert 1989 did, for example). At the same time, this approach guaranteed a certain degree of uniformity with respect to the social class of the participants, given that the observers were all university students doing fieldwork in their own environment.

The size of the corpus employed is small in comparison with Wolfson and Manes's or Herbert's (1989) study, for example. Holmes (1988), however, reports to have found similar results in her 1988 study based on over 500 exchanges and a previous (1986) small-scale study (in Holmes, 1988). She thus suggests that "...patterns of complimenting behaviour in particular contexts or social groups can be investigated using smaller samples" (Holmes 1988:505).

With respect to the sex of the participants, Chart 1 below shows the combinations obtained and the number of instances per combination. The first participant in each group is the one who (first) issues a compliment. The second participant is the one the compliment is addressed to.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of interactions (out of 130)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male-female</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-female</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>40.76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male-male</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female-male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>14.61%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It has to be noted, however, that the sex of the observers (6 females, 3 males) may have affected the results as female observers, for example, may have had access to fewer male-to-male interactions, the corpus thus yielding fewer compliments between males. The use of a larger group of both male and female observers may provide more reliable results in this respect.

With regards to the age of the participants, as can be seen in Chart 2 below, the majority of the participants correspond to the 17-30 age group; a considerable percentage corresponds to the 31-49 age group, whereas a smaller percentage to the 50+ group and even a smaller percentage to the under 15 category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>Number of participants (out of 260)</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-30</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>68.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-49</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>24.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

And finally, with respect to the relationship obtaining between the participants, most of the interactions take place between friends (i.e., people who are relatively intimate and equal). There are a few asymmetrical interactions (between tutor and student and mother and child). We will not, therefore, focus on correlations of use with respect to this feature.
Findings

Topic of compliments

Manes (1983) suggests that the study of speech acts in general can provide insight into some of the cultural norms and values of the society or social group under scrutiny. As she says, ‘any speech act ... reflects a variety of cultural norms and values and in so doing serves to express and maintain those values’ (Manes 1983: 96).

With respect to compliments, Manes (1983:96-97) thinks they are of particular interest in this respect because of ‘... their nature as judgements, overt expressions of approval or admiration of another's work, appearance or taste.’ As such, as Manes (1983:97) suggests ‘compliments represent one means whereby an individual, or ... society as a whole can encourage ... certain behaviors’

Looking at what behaviours appear to be encouraged in the corpus of ES data, four broad categories can be established: appearance, personality/qualities, achievement and possessions. Appearance accounts for 50.34% of the instances; personality traits/qualities for 13.28%; achievement/ability, for 17.48%, and possessions, for 18.88%. In this respect, there is at first glance, a great deal of similarity with Manes’ (1983) findings regarding AE where the emphasis was found to be on appearance. There are, however, some important differences within this latter category that will be considered below.

APPEARANCE

Different aspects of a person’s appearance were found to be complimented on in the data examined. Four basic sub-categories can be established: natural beauty (as a permanent characteristic); attractiveness or beauty of a temporary nature, youth, and dress. The following chart illustrates the distribution of these sub-categories:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of instances</th>
<th>Percentage of all appearance instances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Natural beauty</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness/beauty of a temporary nature</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dress</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With respect to the first sub-category, natural beauty, remarks are made by the complimenter regarding the complimentee’s body on the whole, as in example (1) below, or one part of the body as in (2) and (3):

(1) (F-F)
... eres modelo? Tienes un cuerpo bien bonito.
... are you a model? You have a very nice figure.

(2) (M-F)
¿Qué bonita sonrisa que tienes!
You’ve got such a lovely smile!

(3) (F-M)
¡No sabia que tenías tan buenas piernas!
I didn’t know you had such nice legs!

Apart from the woman’s smile in (2) above and the man’s legs in (3), other physical traits referred to in the data examined are the size of the addressee’s waist, the complimentee’s voice quality, the size and colour of his/her eyes, the shape of the complimentee’s lips, and the person’s natural hair colour. Among females, compliments such as (1), are not uncommon. In fact, those focusing on the size of the waist and hair colour occur among women only.

This, however, is one area where there seem to be differences with complimenting behaviour in AE. Whereas remarks on natural beauty appear to be of common occurrence...
in ES, Manes (1983:99) emphasizes that in American society what is complimented on is what is seen as the result of the person’s effort rather than natural beauty:

... what are complimented generally in our society are aspects of personal appearance which are the result of deliberate effort, not simply natural attractiveness ... we tend to avoid commenting on the latter.2

Compliments such as (1), (2) and (3) above may, therefore, strike Americans as intrusive since, in their culture, natural beauty does not appear to be open to scrutiny as it seems to be in ES.

Manes (1983:99) goes on to remark that compliments on general attractiveness do occur but that they take a particular form to imply that the state is not permanent, as in You’re looking good. Compliments of this type also occur in ES. The emphasis tends to be on overall appearance and grooming, as in (4) and (5) below, or physical traits whose beauty is, however, presented as being of a temporary nature, as in (6).

(4) (F-F)
¡Ay! ¡qué guapa! ¡Qué elegante que has venido ahora! Tienes alguna cita?
Wow! You look really good! You are so smartly dressed today! Have you got a date/an appointment?

(5) (M-F)
Hola, ¡qué guapa estás!
Hi, you look really good/attractive!

(6) (M-F)
Cathy, ¡qué bonita que estás!
Cathy, you look really pretty!

2 American students who come to Ecuador are annoyed by such overt remarks—in praise or criticism—to what Ecuadorians appear to perceive as simply natural bodily differences. Their reaction might point to what we think could be a more general trait in what is pragmatically acceptable behavior in American society; not to verbalize natural differences between individuals.

The temporal character of the feature is marked by the choice of tense, as in (4) above, or the choice of verb (estar rather than ser), as in (5) and (6), and often, also by the inclusion of a temporal marker, as ahora in (4) above.

Compliments of this type can also include references to changes to the person’s hair, as in these examples:

(7) (F-F)
¡Qué lindo peinado! ¡Te queda excelente!
What a nice hairdo! It really suits you!

(8) (F-F)
¿Te cortaste el pelo? ¡Te queda bien!
Did you get a hair cut? It suits you!

Manes (1983:98) remarks that hair-dos, together with clothes, constitute the main objects of complimenting behavior in AE. In the data in ES, however, there are only very few instances of compliments on hair-dos, and those on clothes, do not constitute a particularly large sub-category either. In ES, remarks on overall attractiveness and physical traits are nearly as numerous as remarks on clothes.

With respect to the sub-category of youth, there are two instances in the data examined. There is a direct reference in (9) below, whereas in (10) youth is praised indirectly:

(9) (M-H)
¡Qué guapo Mario! ¡Se le ve más joven!
You look good Mario. You look younger!

(10)(F-F)
¡Tú si que te ves igualita como te conocí!
You look just like I used to know you!
(You haven’t changed!)

For an ES speaker, it is not difficult, however, to think of numerous other instances of this type of compliment such as que bien te conservas (you keep yourself really well)
or te conservas en alcohol (it is as though you kept yourself in formol) and others. Compliments of this type did not seem to have appeared in the AE data. It has to be stressed, however, that in ES such compliments occur when participants (friends) meet after a long period of absence.

Finally, in relation to the fourth category, there are a number of remarks on how a particular item of clothing suits the complimentee, as in (11) and (12) below:

(11) (H-M)
¡Te queda super bien esa camiseta!
That t-shirt suits you really well!

(12) (F-F)
¡Te queda precioso (el vestido) ... te arma lindo el cuerpo!
That dress really suits you ... it outlines your figure very nicely!

In some cases, however, as in (11) above, although the focus on the surface is an item of clothing, the actual object of the complimnet seems to be the person's body. This appears to be the case in most of the examples where the complimneter is a male and the complimentee is a female and where the latter is wearing a revealing top or skirt.

In the data examined, there are numerous other remarks on clothes where, nevertheless, the emphasis is not on the person's appearance, but on the item of clothing (i.e., where the complimneter expresses his/her liking for a certain item but with no mention of whether it suits the complimentee or not). These are considered under the category of possessions.

To sum up, as in AE, appearance is one of the main objects of complimenting behaviour in ES. However, as exemplified above, there are differences as to what aspects of appearance are complimented on within each community.

PERSONALITY TRAITS/QUALITIES

Within this category, the traits/qualities that are praised in the ES data are tidiness, sweetness/charm, good taste, courage, dedication to studies, and intelligence. Compliments on the latter are the ones occurring most frequently, as in (13) below.

(13) (F-F)
¡... se ve que eres bien inteligente! 
... one can see that you are very clever!

In AE, on the other hand, compliments focusing on a person's talent or skill do not seem to be of common occurrence. In AE, the emphasis, according to Manes (1983:101), is on the result rather than the skill or talent.

ACHIEVEMENT

This category includes all compliments whose force can be clearly interpreted as meaning that the person is generally good at doing something or that what the person did on a particular occasion was good. In the data examined, people are praised for their ability to cook, to lecture, to play a musical instrument, to organize a party, to give a presentation, to tell jokes, and to draw. Compliments on a person's ability to prepare food, as in (14) and (15) are the ones with a larger number of occurrences.

(14) ¡Qué rico tu cheesecake!
Your cheesecake is really good!

(15) ¡Está delicioso! (un sánduche)
It's delicious! (a sandwich)

Certainly, the context in which the data is gathered will determine the occurrence of particular compliments. What these examples show, nevertheless, is that in ES it is appropriate and possibly expected to compliment people on the food they have prepared, the party they have organized and other achievements.

POSSESSIONS

Compliments on possessions in the data examined include remarks on household items, such as (16) below and, mainly, remarks on clothes and accessories, as in (17) and (18).
Structure of compliments

In their analysis of the structure of compliments in AE, Wollson and Manes (cf. Wollson and Manes 1980) examined semantic and syntactic aspects of compliments. In the same way, below we will describe both semantic and syntactic aspects of compliments in ES.

SEMANTIC ASPECTS

As in Wollson and Manes’ (1980) study, in the ES data examined, there are a number of semantic items that occur frequently. These are certain adjectives, adverbs and verbs. Regarding adjectives, from the 163 compliments available, 94 include an adjective (i.e., 61.43%).

From 30 different adjectives appearing in the data examined, the most commonly used one is lindo/a (pretty/nice) with 29 occurrences (i.e., 27.10% of all utterances including an adjective), followed by guapo/a (attractive/good-looking) with 10 (i.e., 9.34%) and bonito/a (pretty) with 10 occurrences (9.34%). In this respect, the findings from this study seem to be similar to Wollson and Manes’ (1980) as one can say that 45.78% of adjectival compliments in ES include a small set of three adjectives.

Other adjectives with 2-4 occurrences are the following: bueno/a (good), hermoso (beautiful), precioso/a (gorgeous), inteligente (intelligent/clever), rico (lovely [peruana/food]), dulce (sweet), elegante (smart), excelente (excellent/great), pleno/a (nice). The place where the compliments were gathered, however, would have also affected the results. For instance, it is likely that observation at more dinner parties or invitations would have yielded a larger number of compliments on food, and, therefore, adjectives such as ‘rico,’ or ‘bueno’ would have occurred more often.

As in Wollson and Manes’ (1980) study, some of the adjectives employed in compliments in ES are topic specific (e.g. delicious/a) while others are more general (e.g. lindo/a); some are stronger in their expression of evaluation (e.g. precioso/a) and others, weaker (e.g. bonito/a). Of course, the tone of voice, vowel lengthening and the co-occurrence of interjections such as ay/huy! can further emphasize the strength of the utterance, as in the following example:
¡Ay! ¡Qué guaaaapa!
Wow! You look so so good/attractive!

This utterance was additionally accompanied by whistles. A whistle in itself can function as a compliment or pirapo, meaning ¡qué guapa! Instances of this type, however, appear to be characteristic of ES only as there is no mention of them in Wolfson and Manes's work.

Another interesting feature regarding compliments with adjectives is the occurrence of in-group forms (cf. Shelton 1982, cited in Wolfson 1983)). These include the use of adjectives such as tenaz (cool/great) (literally meaning 'persistent'), as in (23) below, and nouns which function as an adjective, as the jargon expression una bestia (literally 'a beast').

¡Tenaz tu camiseta! Prestarásme.
Your shirt is really cool, let me borrow it some time.

In a few cases, adjectives occur with intensifiers such as bien, muy, and tan, as in (13) above and (24):

¿De dónde vienes tan elegante?
You are so smartly dressed. Where have you been?

With respect to verbs, Wolfson and Manes describe the frequent occurrence of two semantically positive verbs in AE: like and love; in ES, on the other hand, there is only one instance of the equivalents of each of these two verbs:

¡Me gusta tu camisa!
I like your shirt.

¡Ese color me fascina!
I love that color.

The verbs commonly employed in ES are neutral in content. In addition, as opposed to AE, when verbs are employed in compliments on appearance, particularly clothes, the focus in ES seems to be not on what the speaker likes, but on how the addressee looks (cf. Herbert's [1990] notion of personal focus). In fact, a verb of relatively frequent occurrence is quedar. There are 10 instances of this verb in the data examined, as (11) above. Otherwise, ser/estar (to be/to look) are the most common verbs appearing in compliments in ES. Ser, as remarked earlier, emphasizes the permanent nature of the feature complimented on, and estar, its temporary status. When these verbs are used in compliments, the focus is also on the addressee.

Impersonal forms such as (27) below are also common in ES.

Se ve que eres pilas. Felicitaciones!
One can see that you are clever. Congratulations!

Forms of this type may be said to have more weight than those more direct ones (e.g. eres pilas / you are clever) since they are presented as objective conclusions (i.e., one can see that ...). As such, these forms would be instances of what may be a general preference for the use of more indirect utterances in ES, as opposed to AE (also see below). On the other hand, the frequent focus on the addressee (cf. Herbert's [1990] second person focus) may result in compliments in ES being perceived as more direct.

Concerning adverbs, as in the case of adjectives, semantically positive forms are employed. Bien is the only form, however, with several occurrences (13 altogether). Other forms are used only once or twice. Superlative forms of adjectives such as riqui-

---

3 The tendency to focus on the addressee in ES would be in line with the acceptability in ES of focusing on aspects of natural beauty considered earlier, where the addressee becomes the object of scrutiny, of praise and comparison.
"simo are also employed in the place of adverbs, as well as jargon in-group expressions, as in the following example:

(28) (M-M)
¡Tocaste del putas viejo!
You played extremely well (a swear word in other contexts).

In addition, intensifiers such as súper occur with adverbs, as in (29):

(29) (F-F)
Tú me caíste súper bien...
I liked you a lot (when I met you)...

On the other hand, diminutives are also found in compliment utterances. In some cases, they appear to have the function of strengthening the compliment, when smallness is desirable, as in the following example:

(30) (F-F)
¡Qué linda cinturita tienes!
You have such a small waist!

In other cases, as in (31) below, where the diminutive has been added to a participle (hecho), they appear to have mostly an interactional function as they convey affection.

(31) (F-F)
... es que mamita, usted hace bien hechito. ¡Le ha salido riquísimo...!
... the thing is that Mom, you make it really (small) well. It’s delicious...

Manes and Wolfson (1981) also consider the occurrence of some deictic elements as part of the semantic formula in compliments in AE, namely, second person pronouns (e.g. you’ve got...) and demonstratives (e.g. that/this is...). They found that such elements occurred in 75% of the compliments they examined; they also state that if these forms do not occur in the compliment itself, they can usually be found in preceding utterances. They suggest that their function is to ‘...identify clearly the person or object to be complimented’ (Manes and Wolfson, 1981:119).

In ES, deictic elements also occur, but perhaps not to the same extent as in AE. The pronouns that appear frequently are tu (familiar you), as in (29) above and usted (polite you) (as in 31) above. There is also one instance of vos (camaraderie you). These pronouns may be uttered explicitly or may be implicit in the verb form, as in (30) above. Other pronouns which are also frequent are object pronouns such as te/le. Possessive adjectives such as tu (your familiar) and su (your formal) are also found, as in (14) and (18). Demonstratives (i.e. ese/a/that) are frequent when clothes and other possessions are the object of praise, as in (17) and (26) above.

A particular element that appears to be characteristic of ES only is the use of definite articles together with names of people; such occurrences are found when the compliment is meant to be overheard by other people, other pupils, for example, in (32) below. Definite articles also appear when referring to a person who is unknown to the speaker; that is, in compliments addressed to a third party as in (33) where the actual recipient of the compliment is the mother of the child.

(32) (F-F)
¡Qué capa la Jackie! Cómo ha sabido dibujar!
How talented Jackie is! I didn’t know she could draw so well!

(33) (F-F)
¡Qué linda la bebé!
(How pretty the baby)
What a pretty baby!

On the other hand, in the ES data, there are several instances with no deictic elements of the type just described. These are elliptical forms such as ¡Qué ordenada! (How tidy!) stemming from ¡Qué ordenada que eres! (How tidy you are!). Abbreviations of this type are common in ES (also see Syntactic aspects below). In this particular example, the gender of the addressee is marked in the adjective. This, in addition to contextual clues, can help clarify who the addressee is. It is possible, however, that utterances of this type only occur when the interaction is between two participants, that is, when there is no room for ambiguity.
Apart from the use of particular adjectives, verbs, adverbs, intensifiers, diminutives and deitic elements, there are a few expressions which are employed as formulas, as when a person has purchased a new pair of shoes:

(34) (F-M)
Con zapatos nuevos. Están lindos. ¡La chicha!
You are wearing new shoes. They are very nice. You should celebrate!
(literally a demand for a drink [spirits characteristic of the Andes])

In addition to these, a considerable number of compliments in ES include the use of comparisons and metaphors some of which have become rather formulaic. The following are some examples:

(35) (M-F)
¡igualita a la reina de Quito!
You look just like Quito's beauty queen!

(36) (F-M)
¡Bomboón!
Chocolate!

(37) (M-F)
¡Estás succulenta!
You are succulent today!

(38) (M-F)
... ¡si así eres de verde como serás de madura!
... if you are like this when unripe imagine what you would be like when ripe!

(39) (M-F)
¡Hola mamá! ¡Reina!
Hello mom! Queen!

A number of these compliments appear to fall within the category of pirepos (Achugar, 1998) in terms of their form, although not entirely in terms of the context of their occurrence. With regards to the former, Achugar explains that metaphor is the linguistic device most commonly used in pirepos, and through which certain concepts pertaining to a particular culture/society are foregrounded. In (36), (37) and (38) above, for instance, it is the concept of food that is highlighted. As in some of Achugar’s (1998:9-10) examples, reference is made here to the ‘taste of food’ and, as she also suggests, to the interaction between the complimentee’s qualities and those of food.

Achugar also highlights the concept of love/romantic relationships between men and women implicit behind metaphors of this type. She suggests that in some of these metaphors men are presented as doers and women as the object to be done upon (e.g., to be eaten, in the examples above). Example (36), produced by a woman, can be taken, however, as an indication that traditional male/female roles are changing.

Example (39) above, on the other hand, seems to correspond to another category of metaphors Achugar (1998:11) also considers: those where there is a ‘... dual portrayal of women as saints/mothers/wives and as objects of desire...’ In this category, as she goes on to say, women are seen as belonging to a superior class. This is explicitly conveyed in (39) through the use of the deferential address term reina.

With regards to context, Achugar (1998:1) suggests that the usual setting for pirepos is the street, ‘... where the participants don’t know each other and can remain anonymous.’ In this respect, only (35), (36) and (39) above would be prototypical pirepos since the other two took place in a different setting and between friends. In addition to their form, however, the four examples seem to share the element of performance which Achugar (1998:1) also describes as characteristic of the expression of pirepos: ‘Participants are anonymous to their interlocutors, but they usually perform for an audience of peers’ (emphasis mine). Possible differences in the function of pirepos in different contexts will be considered below.

In addition to comparisons and metaphors, other indirect forms are also employed in ES (see below). In this sense, as opposed to AE where the positive value of compliments appears to be mostly transmitted through adjectives and verbs (cf. Manes & Wolfson 1981), in ES other forms are used for this purpose too. Thus, it is not entirely possible to talk about a semantic formula in compliments in ES in the same way as Manes & Wolfson
(1981) do with respect to AE. On the one hand, it can be said that the concept of a semantic formula in compliments in ES is more encompassing as, in addition to adjectives, verbs, adverbs and intensifiers, it includes comparisons and metaphors, and yet, non-standard forms are also of common occurrence.

**SYNATOMIC ASPECTS**

Manes & Wolfson (1981) found that 85% of compliments in AE took the form of one of three basic syntactic patterns:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{NP} & \ \text{is/looks} & \ ADJ \\
\text{I} & \ (\text{really}) & \text{like/love} & \text{NP} \\
\text{PRO} & \ (\text{really}) & \ (a) & \ ADJ & \text{NP}
\end{align*}
\]

In addition, they describe six other patterns which, together with the three main ones above, account for 97.2% of their data.

In ES, there are three basic categories that account for 110 of the instances (i.e., for 67.48% of the data) (see chart below), and, additionally, there are three other patterns that account for only 8 of the instances (or 4.90%); that is, six categories account for 72.38% of all instances.

**Syntactic patterns with 2 or more occurrences in compliments in ES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Syntactic pattern</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Que (+ADJ) + NP (+que +V)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Qué pinta (What look)! ¡Qué bonita sonrisa que tienes! (What a nice smile that you've got)!</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>34.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(NP) + V (+INTENS) + ADJ/ADV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V (+INTENS) + ADJ/ADV (+NP) or V (+NP) (+INTENS) + ADJ/ADV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡La comida está súper buena! (The food is really good)! ¡Está precioso ese saco! (It's beautiful that cardigan)! ¡Estás bien! (You look good)!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Te queda súper bien ese vestido! (It suits you very well that dress)! Esa cola te sienta bien. (That pony tail suits you well).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Tu mamá cocina excelente! (Your mom cooks excellent)!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eres una persona muy valiente. (You are a very brave person.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tienes una persona muy bonita. (You have a very nice figure.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tan + ADJ</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Tan elegante usted hoy! (So smart you today)!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cómo + V</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡... cómo ha sabido dibujar! (I didn't know he could draw like that)!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP + gustar/fascinar</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gustar/fascinar + NP</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>¡Ese color me fascina! (That colour fascinates me)!</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

4 Literal translations are given here to illustrate the syntactic patterns employed in ES.
The remaining 27.60% corresponds to several instances of indirect forms which are not all amenable to clear-cut syntactic categories (see below).

In short, as with semantic aspects, syntactic choices for the utterance of compliments in ES do not appear to be as restricted as they are in AE. Even within the main categories, there is more variation in ES as compared with AE. This may be partly due to the fact that Spanish allows for more flexibility in terms of word order, for example, and in terms of what constituents are essential. In ES, as remarked earlier, a great deal of ellipsis is possible. ¡Qué guapa que estás, for instance, can become simply ¡qué guapa! ¡Tenez tu camiseta! ¡Tenez tu camiseta! and so forth (also see Placencia 1995).

With regards to indirect compliments, some of these are comparisons and metaphors, as described in the previous section. In addition, a few other syntactic categories that can be identified, are the following:

**Conditions:**
(40) (F-F)
¡Si estuviera de blanco, pensara que usted es la novia!
If you had been dressed in white, I would have thought you were the bride!

**Modal verbs:**
(41) (M-F)
Deberías usar siempre minifalda.
You should always wear a miniskirt. They really suit you.

**Questions:**
(42) (F-F)
¿Eres modelo?
Are you a model?

**Tag questions:**
(43) (M-M)
Tú eres bien estudiado, ¿no?
You are very studious, aren't you?

**Noun phrases**
(44) (M-F)
¡Esa minifalda!
That miniskirt!

**Embedded sentences:**
(45) (F-M)
¡No sabía que tenías tan buenas piernas!
I didn't know you had such nice legs!

In short, from the examples given, one can see that in ES, as compared with AE, there is more flexibility regarding the structure and semantic composition of compliments, that is, that compliments are or can be less formulaic. In this respect, our findings are similar to Lewandowska-Tomaszyk (1989) in relation to Polish where indirect forms appear to be common too. She attributes the use of less formulaic utterances to the speaker wanting to appear more sincere: 'By making a positive assessment less formulaic, less stereotypical, the speaker appears more objective, i.e., more sincere' (Lewandowska-Tomaszyk, 1989:85).

**Compliments and characteristics of the participants**

Manes (1983:99) remarks that compliments in AE typically involve women as speakers or addressees or both. In the data examined in ES, the overall results (see chart below) show that when it comes to the production of compliments, the gap between female and male speakers is not very significant (58.74% vs. 41.25%), whereas it is more so in relation to who the recipient of a compliment is (73.42% vs. 26.57%).
In other words, there would be a difference in relation to AE (of the 1970/80's) with regards to the sex of the speaker who issues compliments, more males in ES being the producers of compliments. On the other hand, within ES, there are differences in relation to the type of compliment. Whereas more male speakers produce compliments on natural beauty and achievement/ability, more female speakers produce compliments on attractiveness/temporary beauty and personality traits/qualities, and far more on possessions. With respect to the latter, all compliments which specifically refer to clothes were produced by female speakers, with the exception of those where the actual object of compliment appears to be the addressee's physical appearance.

From the compliments on natural beauty, a large number of the ones issued by male participants appear to have an ‘amorous’ or ‘sexual’ tone (to use Achugar’s [1998:1] words in the description of piropos). Apart from the form of the compliment or the context in which it is uttered, the reply given can display the perlocutionary effect of the utterance and thus give a hint concerning its intended force. Smiles, for instance, which occur in response to most of these compliments, appear to be the usual replies to piropos in ES (also see Achugar, 1998).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ISSUERS</th>
<th></th>
<th>RECEIPT</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beauty (permanent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attractiveness / Beauty (non-permanent)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>27</td>
<td></td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personality traits / qualities / taste</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possession</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement / ability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>84 (58.74%)</td>
<td>59 (41.25%)</td>
<td>105 (73.42%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compliments on natural beauty/attractiveness between friends, however, may be ambiguous. Some of the replies given in the data examined, as in (46) below, suggest the addressee feels she is being teased rather than courted.

(46) (M-F)
M: ¡Qué lindos labios!
What beautiful lips (you have)!
F: (Smiles) No molestes.
Leave me alone.

When it comes to the sex of the recipient of the compliment, the overall results, as remarked earlier, show that female participants are the ones to whom most compliments are addressed. The only exception is with regards to achievement/ability, where males overtake females, both in the production of such compliments and in terms of being on the receiving end. On the other hand, some of the compliments females get are elicited or ‘forced’ compliments (Lewandowska-Tomaszyczyk, 1989). In (47) below, for example, two friends were talking about the changes of furniture in a place and the female participant diverted the male participant’s attention to her hair:

(47) (F-M)
F: ¿Te gusta?
You do like it?
M: Ah cierto! Sorry. Ta chévere. En dónde te cortaste?
Oh, yes! Sorry. It looks great. Where did you get it cut?

The elicitation of compliments appears to be a female phenomenon. Compliments regarding appearance are elicited by female participants from other female as well as male participants. Changes to a woman’s appearance, in particular, seem to require some acknowledgement on the part of close friends or relatives. That the participants expected to do the noticing feel compelled to utter a compliment in these circumstances can be seen in examples such as (47) above, where the complimenter apologizes for not having said anything about his friend’s haircut as soon as he first saw her.

Some of the compliments uttered by male participants to female ones, which are remarks on their intelligence appear to be rather patronizing. In the compliment below,
the speaker seems to be referring to the stereotype of beautiful women not having brains. The female participant, however, seems to be pleased with this compliment as she smiles and carries on with what she was doing.

(48) (M-F)
Aparte de bonita, inteligente.
In addition to being pretty, (you are) intelligent.

With respect to the status of the participants, it was stated in the introduction that most compliments in the data examined correspond to interactions between equals. Among the interactions between unequals, the largest number correspond to relatives, such as aunt-niece and mother-daughter. In most cases they involve praising behaviour from the older participant. In addition, there are, nevertheless, a few instances of compliments being issued in asymmetrical interactions in the workplace/at college.

Compliments downwards in the workplace are reported by Wolfson (1983) as largely focusing on ability: in ES, there are a few examples of this type, as (49) where the complimenter makes the following remark on seeing his employee’s piece of work:

(49) (M-M) (boss-employee)
... pero ... qué inteligente!
... but ... you are so intelligent!

There are, however, other examples where appearance instead is the object of praise:

(50) (M-F) (boss-employee)
¡Qué guapa que ha venido hoy!
You look really good/attractive today!

(51) (M-F) (lecturer-student)
Vine hoy día porque pensé que todos los miércoles vienes con mini.
I came today because I thought that you wear miniskirts on Wednesdays.

In compliments upwards, which are far less numerous than those downwards, appearance can also be the focus of attention:

(52) (F-F) (student-lecturer)
Ay! ¡qué linda que ha venido!
Oh, you look so pretty/nice!

In American society, compliments such as (51), would probably be regarded as instances of sexual harassment, and (52), simply as inappropriate. Of course, their appropriateness in ES society would depend on how the compliment was uttered, how close the participants are and other factors. Nevertheless, it might be the case that compliments of this type are generally more acceptable in ES society. Here, however, it is not possible to make any definitive claims on this matter given that only a few of the instances available for examination come from the workplace. That is, a future study could focus specifically on complimenting behaviour in the workplace to uncover any possible differences associated with power and, possibly, gender.

Finally, concerning age, a difference between the older and the younger group lies in the choice of texts. Certain adjectives such as tenaz, or other in-group forms (e.g. una bestia) are used by younger participants only. Among these forms, there are some which are rougher (e.g. del putas) and which appear to be used by male participants only. There are not enough examples, again, to make any definite claims regarding this matter.

About the very young participants in the interactions observed for this study, there is one instance by a three-year old in which she compliments her mother on the earrings she is wearing:

(53) (F-F) (daughter-mother)
¡Qué lindos tus aretes!
What nice/pretty earrings you are wearing!

There is also another instance by another girl of a similar age where she uses a compliment instrumentally, that is, to get someone to do something for her (see [55] below). It is interesting to see that from an early age, expressions of compliment are already part of a child’s repertoire. This could be taken as an indication of the pervasive use of compliments in ES society.
Function of compliments

As in AE, compliments in ES appear to serve a variety of functions, depending on the context of their occurrence. One of them is as conversation openers, as described by Wolfson (1983:86): ‘... the giving of a compliment is an excellent and much used prelude to opening a conversation in AE.’ The situation described for (11) above, for example, is that the two participants were in a party and were not acquainted. The male participant tried to start a conversation by uttering that compliment.

Wolfson (1983) suggests that compliments can strengthen and even replace some speech acts. This also appears to be the case in ES. In (54) below, for example, the compliment seems to strengthen the force of the initial congratulatory remark:

(54) (M-F)
Felicitaiones. Muy lindo el programa de Navidad.
Congratulations. The Christmas event was very nice.

In (55), on the other hand, the compliment appears to replace a possible congratulatory remark:

(55) (M-M)
¡Les salió excelente la reunión!
Your party was great!

Compliments may also function as indirect requests, as in (56) where a child comes into a room with a set of building blocks and praises her mother’s ability to make towers. The result is that the mother starts making one:

(56) (F-F) (child-mother)
Tú armarás unas torres lindas.
You make such nice towers.

Some compliments may be regarded as social lubricants, in Wolfson’s (1983) sense, or as some kind of compensatory action when a face-threatening act occurs or is about to occur (cf. Brown & Levinson 1997). In (57) below, for example, a compliment precedes criticism of the quality of someone’s work:

(57) (F-M)
Usted cuando quiere hace bien las cosas maestro, pero eso tiene que volverlo a hacer.
You do things well when you want to, but you need to redo this.

On the other hand, a compliment can be masking a criticism, as in (43) above, where Tú eres bien estudiado, ¿no? in reply to someone getting a good mark, implies that such mark was obtained through much time devoted to study, and not because of intelligence. This becomes apparent in the addressee’s answer: Lo que pasa es que no soy tonto (the fact is that I am not dumb).

Compliments can also be used to change the topic of a conversation. In (58), for instance, two friends were talking about a common friend when this exchange took place.

(58) (F-F)
F1: Qué chévere ese cuadro!
That’s a very nice picture!
F2: Ah! Es taza! Y entonces ...
Oh! It’s cool! And then ...
F1: Déjame verle bien (she stands up)
Let me see it properly.

A compliment can thus be employed to subtly deal with face-threatening acts as in this example where the speaker perhaps did not want to hear or provide any further information on a particular topic.

Concerning piropos, in prototypical instances, their function appears to correspond to Achugar’s (1998:3,5) ‘display of grace and wit’ and ‘expression of delight in beauty or seductive remarks.’ With regards to Brown and Levinson’s theory, some of these compliments appear to have features of positive and negative politeness. Mami Reina in (39) above, for example, are address forms through which the speaker expresses some devotion and thus, deference; yet at the same time, the use of features such as the abbreviation mami for mamá (which in itself is a more familiar term than madre) is a way of marking intimacy.
On the whole, however, the ultimate function of piropos does not seem to be the expression of solidarity, but possibly a display of maleness (to peers overhearing) and an attempt at seduction by impressing the person targeted through wit and the boldness of addressing someone unfamiliar to the speaker. In other compliments, solidarity can be said to be at the core since the idea conveyed is that what the complimentee possesses (e.g., a new outfit, a new look, a particular skill) is desirable. Piropos, on the other hand, express that the person herself/himself is desirable. As such they can be regarded as invasions to a person’s more private sphere (his/her sex appeal), and, therefore, as face-threatening acts within Brown and Levinson’s framework. However, the fact that complimentees in ES appear to respond to a piropo with a smile shows that, in Ecuadorian society, piropos don’t immediately constitute face-threatening acts. It would would have been useful, nevertheless, to have interviewed recipients of these compliments to obtain a clearer picture in this respect.

Less prototypical instances of piropos (e.g., those uttered to a friend), also appear to display creativity and delight in beauty but may contain a teasing element too. They may be uttered in a jocular way thus rendering the compliment ambiguous. This might be to the advantage of the complimenter as he/she can always claim that he/she was only joking.

In particular contexts, compliments may be aimed at encouraging certain behaviour, as suggested by Manes & Wolfson (1983). This function of compliments can be found in (32) above, for example.

Compliments can also be used to ingratiate oneself with a more powerful person, as in (52) above, or to express approval of someone’s action, as in (59) where approval is actually sought by the complimentee regarding the purchase of a dress.

(59) (F1-F2)
F1: ¿Qué tal?
What do you think of it?
F2: Está lindo.
It’s very nice.
F1: ¿Sí te gusta?
You do like it?
F2: Sí, está bien bonito.
Yes, it’s very pretty.

In fact, approval seems to be one of the main functions of many compliments, specially those concerning clothes and changes in appearance. By showing approval, the speaker is expressing commonality of taste and interest in the other participant, and thus solidarity (cf. Brown and Levinson, 1987). Behind compliments of this type, however, what seems to be crucial, particularly among female participants, is the noticing of what is new regarding the other participant (e.g., new clothes, or changes in appearance). This noticing is manifested as or coupled by an expression of approval. Compliments thus often start with noticing remarks such as the following:

(60) F-F
F: Y esa blusa, ¿te compraste recién?
And that blouse, did you buy it recently?
F: Qué preciosa que está!
It’s so nice!

Solidarity is also conveyed in cases where admiration, rather than approval, appears to be the most salient function of a compliment (except in the case of piropos, as remarked earlier). (61) is an example where the speaker praises his addressee’s talent:

(61) M-M
No has estudiado alemán pero tienes una excelente pronunciación.
You haven’t studied German, but your pronunciation is excellent

In short, a large number of compliments in ES, as in AE, appear to have the overall function of expressing admiration or approval and, at the same time, depending on the context, can be used to carry out other functions (e.g., to make requests, to flirt, to thank, to encourage, to congratulate someone for something, to ingratiate oneself and to soften a criticism or another face-threatening act).

Finally, in relation to the use of more or less formulaic forms and the function of compliments, Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk (1989:85) suggests that compliments which are ‘... performed for the mere fulfillment of the addressee’s expectations ...’ tend to be formulaic, whereas those which are more evaluative can be more creative. The fact that non-conventional forms are common in ES may thus be an indication that there is a higher expectation for true evaluations in Ecuadorian society, as compared to American society.
Summary and conclusions:

In this paper, we described the patterns of use in ES (within a particular social group) with regards to the speech act of complimenting. As such, we attempted to contribute towards a description of a sociocultural grammar of ES and the Spanish language in general.

The patterns described include the topic of compliments and formal and functional aspects of complimenting behaviour. With regards to the first, four major categories were described: appearance, personality/qualities, achievement and possessions. Compliments on appearance were found to be the most common. It was suggested that in ES there is also the expectation that changes to one's appearance need to be noticed and commented on positively.

With respect to form, the use of a relatively restricted number of lexical items, such as adjectives, verbs and adverbs was identified. In addition to these, a number of less fixed forms were found to occur, including the use of comparisons and metaphors. Metaphors were described as being one of the means through which piropos, a subset category of compliments in ES, are realized.

With respect to syntax, the predominance of particular structures as well as the use of a variety of indirect forms, the use of second person focus (cf. Herbert, 1990) and ellipsis were identified.

Regarding function, the multiplicity of functions compliments can perform was highlighted (e.g. compliments as greetings or expressions of gratitude, compliments as redressive action, and so forth). It was stressed, however, that the underlying function of most compliments appears to be that of conveying admiration or approval and thus expressing solidarity. Piropos, nevertheless, were presented as exceptions since they do not seem to be aimed at claiming common ground and since they often focus on a very private sphere of a person's life. It was suggested that although within Brown and Levinson's framework, piropos would possibly count as face-threatening acts for Americans, for example, in Ecuadorian society they appear to be acceptable and perhaps even welcome. In the same way a noticing of one's new clothes, or changes in appearance is expected in ES, a noticing of one's natural beauty and sex appeal may also be expected (by women at least). Further research in this area was suggested too.

Finally, attempts were made in this study to establish correlations between aspects of complimenting behaviour and characteristics of the participants. For example, it was found common for women to compliment other women on aspects of natural beauty such as their figure. Men were found to outnumber women in the issuing and receipt of compliments on achievement, whereas in most other areas women outnumbered men. Superiors in the workplace were found to utter compliments on aspects of personal appearance (and even sex appeal in one case) to their female inferiors, which could be construed as harassment and abuse of power. Inferiors were also found to be uttering compliments in personal appearance to their superiors, which may be regarded as attempts at gaining their goodwill. It was stressed, however, that it was not possible to make definite claims in this area due to the limitations of the data discussed in the introduction. On the one hand, a larger corpus (and in a larger number of contexts and social networks) would be needed to determine the patterns that are prevalent in relation to characteristics of the participants and, on the other hand, special attention needs to be given to characteristics of the participant observers (e.g. same number of male as female observers) to guarantee more representativity in the data. Age would also be a factor to be considered more closely in order to determine possible variation in the use of semantic and syntactic forms.

The present study was also an attempt to contribute to the field of cross-cultural communication by providing another linguistic and cultural perspective to the body of work that already exists in complimenting behaviour. We drew on Wolfson and Manes's work on compliments in AE, in particular, and we attempted to determine similarities and differences between AE and ES. Significant similarities were found regarding what constitutes the topic of compliments in both languages and their form and function. With respect to the first, as in AE, compliments on appearance, for example, were found to be the most common. There were differences, however, on what aspects of appearance were complimented on in each society: a focus on natural beauty was found to be common in ES, but not in AE. It was suggested that there is a difference in terms of what spheres in a person's life are open to verbal appraisal in both societies, American society allowing for verbal appraisal of aspects that are a result of a person's effort, and Ecuadorian society also allowing for appraisal of natural traits (and even sex-appeal in the case of piropos). Along the same lines, a focus on natural talents was also found in ES, whereas in AE the emphasis appears to be on the result of a person's talent. These are areas where communication conflict between Americans and speakers of Ecuadorian Spanish is expected.
With respect to form, similarities between ES and AE include the use of semantic and syntactic formulas. In both languages, the use of certain lexical items and grammatical structures appear to be of common occurrence. A difference found, however, has to do with the range of flexibility encountered in both languages: In ES, as opposed to AE, a wider range of forms and structures is available to participants for compliment exchanges. There are fixed forms that are common, and less fixed ones that also occur with a relatively high degree of frequency. It was suggested that these differences might correlate with the use compliments are put to in each language and social, compliments in AE perhaps mostly being used for the fulfillment of the addressee's expectations, and compliments in ES being frequently used to express a judgement as well. Another important formal difference that was highlighted was the first person focus in AE as opposed to the second person focus in ES. It was suggested that this difference may be in line with the focus found in ES on what Americans would regard as more personal aspects of a person's life remarked upon earlier. Because of these features, it was also suggested that compliments in ES may be regarded by Americans as more direct, and as more intrusive although other aspects of the form of compliments in ES (e.g. the use of impersonal forms such as se ve que ...) would suggest Ecuadorians have a preference for indirect forms.

Non-verbal aspects in the utterance of compliments were also mentioned as possibly being characteristic of ES (e.g. the co-occurrence of whistles and the use of interjections and vowel lengthening). It was suggested that audio-recordings of complimenting events would be needed, however, for a systematic examination of features of this type.

Finally, concerning function, the overall function of compliments maintaining or attempting to establish solidarity through the expression of admiration or approval was found to be similar (with the exception of piropos) to what Wolfson and Manes describe for American English. In addition, as in AE, compliments in ES were also found to simultaneously serve other instrumental and interactional functions, which could nevertheless exhibit some variation between the two languages in relation to features of context.

REFERENCES


