Compliment Sequences in Preferred Environments. Some Evidence from Talk-in-Interaction in Romanian

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Abstract: *The present study is a corpus-based analysis of compliment sequences in preferred environments in Romanian. Using excerpts from naturally occurring conversation, this study explores the speech event of complimenting in terms of adjacency. In other words, it examines the compliment sequence in both first and second pair parts. Starting from the contradictory claim in the literature that compliments can both strengthen (Wolfson, 1983:88) and soften (Holmes 1986: 488; Holmes and Brown, 1987: 532) another speech act, this paper aims to provide a principled account as to how compliments can be interpreted as having both strengthening and mitigating functions. To achieve this end, I propose a conversation analytic approach with the view to demonstrating the interconnectedness of (a) the linguistic form the utterance takes, (b) the sequential context in which it occurs, and (c) the action it is performing. This study demonstrates, with empirical data from Romanian conversational discourse, that the placement of the compliment within the larger sequence and the preference organization are consequential for the action the compliment is performing, since not every utterance having the semantic and syntactic features of a compliment actually performs the action of complimenting. Rather it is the placement of a potential compliment turn in its local sequential context that determines its function.*

With regard to the preference organization, this study examines compliments as first pair parts and second pair parts in preferred environments, demonstrating that in addition to performing the action of complimenting, compliments also perform an additional action that constitutes a preferred action (i.e., a noticing, an expression of gratitude, an alignment with a story, an acceptance, etc.), and it is this preferred action that has a social solidarity building function.

Keywords*: compliment sequence; adjacency; sequential organization; preferred environment; positive politeness*;