

SPEECH ACTS AND REGIONAL VARIATIONS IN FRENCH: THE CASE OF COMPLIMENTS ON SKILLS IN CAMEROON AND CANADIAN FRENCH

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Abstract

The present study examines differences and similarities in the realization of compliments on skills in Cameroon and Canadian French. The data were collected by the means of a Discourse Completion Test (DCT) administered to 55 participants in Yaoundé (Cameroon) and 39 respondents in Montréal (Canada). The 278 compliments collected were analyzed according to the three super-strategies identified in the corpus, namely direct compliments, indirect compliments and compliments with external modification, i.e. supporting acts. The results show a strong preference for direct compliments in both sub-cultures. While the Cameroonian participants most frequently used double head acts, i.e. the combination of two direct compliments, the Canadian informants mostly favoured single head acts, i.e. single direct compliment. Differences in terms of situational distribution of the direct compliments were also identified. Moreover, the Cameroonian informants used six indirect compliments, while there was no occurrence of indirect compliments in the Canadian data. With regard to the use of supportive moves to modify the compliments, the results reveal that 'gratitude', 'wish', 'apology' and 'comment' were largely used in both data sets, while some external modifiers such as 'greeting' and 'self-introductions' only appeared in the Cameroonian responses.

Keywords: *politeness, compliment strategies, Cameroon French, Canadian French, regional pragmatic variation.*

Rezumat

În articol, autorul analizează diferențele și asemănările în receptarea complimentelor în limba franceză, în Camerun și Canada. Faptele de limbă analizate în articol au fost obținute în urma unei testări a 55 de persoane din Yaoundé (Camerun) și a 39 de persoane din Montreal (Canada). Testul se baza pe completarea unui discurs cu unități eliptice, cu caracter de compliment. În urma testării, au fost înregistrate 278 de unități de acest fel. Acestea au fost analizate, ținându-se cont de cele trei strategii majore care au permis identificarea unităților cu sens de compliment direct, indirect și celor cu modificare externă, adică cu caracter de unități de justificare. Analiza efectuată atestă faptul că vorbitorii de limbă franceză din Camerun și Canada preferă să întrebuințeze unități cu sens de compliment direct. Persoanele supuse testării din Camerun au utilizat mai frecvent două unități cu sens de compliment direct, în timp ce canadienii au preferat să întrebuințeze, în bună parte, o singură unitate cu sens de compliment direct. Studiul în cauză a identificat și diferențele în ceea ce privește distribuția unităților cu sens de compliment direct. Mai mult decât atât, participanții la testare din Camerun au folosit șase unități cu sens de compliment indirect, în timp ce canadienii nu au întrebuințat nici una. În ceea ce privește folosirea unităților cu scopul de a modifica sensul unor complimente, rezultatele testării arată că „recunoștința”, „dorința”, „scuza” și „comentariul” au fost, în mare măsură, întrebuințate în discursurile propuse de ambele părți, în timp ce unitățile cu sens de „salut” și „auto-prezentare” au apărut numai în răspunsurile camerunenilor.

Cuvinte-cheie: *politețe, strategii de complimentare, limba franceză din Camerun, limba franceză canadiană, variații pragmatice regionale.*

1. Introduction

The present paper examines compliment strategies in two 'non hexagonal' varieties of French, i.e. two varieties of French spoken outside France: Cameroon French and Canadian French. Several (comparative) studies have dealt with phonological, syntactic, lexical and semantic features of one or many varieties of French around the world, with some researchers focussing on the history, profile and features of 'Frenches' spoken outside France.²⁸⁵ French in Canada (Québec, Ontario, Acadia, etc.) has been intensively studied.²⁸⁶ So too is French spoken in Cameroon.²⁸⁷ One of these studies has explicitly dealt with regional pragmatic variations. As far as French spoken in Cameroon and Canada is concerned there is, to the best of our knowledge, no work comparing both varieties on any of the aspects listed above. Moreover, very little has been discussed about the similarities and differences in the realization of speech acts and/or politeness strategies in different regional varieties of French. With respect to other pluricentric languages such as English, Spanish and German, many aspects of pragmatic variation have been addressed.²⁸⁸ Some few studies have been published on pragmatic variation in varieties of French (see section 2.2). Although the speech act of complimenting has received extensive attention, the research carried out on this speech act has so far focused on inter-lingual and/or cross-cultural variation, i.e. the comparison of at least two different languages and/or cultures.

The present study has two main goals. It attempts to extend the scope of research on pragmatic variation in pluricentric languages to speech acts other than requests, offers or apologies on the one hand. It intends to contribute to studies on regional pragmatic variations in French on the other hand. After this introduction, section 2 presents the background of the study followed by the discussion of the method used (section 3). The findings are then presented and discussed in section 4, followed by a conclusion and some reflections for future research in section 5.

2. Background

2.1. Compliments and politeness / face-work

²⁸⁵Dumont, 1983; Manessy, 1994; Pöll, 2001 & 2005; Thibault, 2008.

²⁸⁶See, for instance, Mougeon & Beniak, 1989; Martineau et. al., 2009; Wiesmath, 2006.

²⁸⁷See, for instance, Biloa, 2003; Mendo Ze, 1999; Zang Zang, 1998.

²⁸⁸See the edited volume of Schneider & Barron (2008) with ten different studies on the realization of speech acts and other pragmatic phenomena in different regional varieties of English, Spanish, German, French, and Dutch.

Holmes defines a compliment as “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”²⁸⁹. In most studies, compliments are considered as expressive speech acts with multiple functions. According to Kerbrat-Orecchioni²⁹⁰, compliments are “verbal gifts”, aimed at enhancing the face of the recipient. Other researchers argue that compliments are employed to negotiate or affirm solidarity between speaker and addressee²⁹¹ and to encourage desired behaviour in specific situations. Furthermore, compliments could serve as intensifier of other speech acts or as indirect ways of apologizing, thanking, advising, asking for information, etc. in addition to that, compliments may be used as mitigating devices of face-threatening acts like criticism, reprimanding, etc. on the level of discourse organization, and some speakers may use compliments as conversation openers.²⁹² In general, the speech act of complimenting is perceived as a positive politeness strategy, as it is realized to show that the compliment giver notices or attends to the recipient’s face desires. In written discourse, book reviews for instance “compliments contribute to establishing rapport and solidarity with the reviewee while redressing the face-threatening acts in the genre”.²⁹³ It is worth noting that certain functions of compliments may be culture or situation specific. In a study on compliment behaviour in Cameroon²⁹⁴ we found that compliments in asymmetric situations in general and professional settings in particular, serve strategic functions, i.e. they are generally used by speakers of lower status as “face flattering acts” to obtain favour from addressees in higher positions.

Although compliments are face boosting acts, they may also threaten the face of the people involved in the compliment exchange. Generally, the positive interpretation of compliments depends on how successful the speaker weight specific situational, linguistic and socio-cultural factors such as gender, social distance, power distance, setting, linguistic forms, topic, etc. Otherwise, the ‘verbal gift’ could also be interpreted as a face-threatening act: for instance, if the addressee believes that compliments offered to him/her accompany hidden intentions, are not sincere, exaggerated, represent an intrusion in his/her private sphere, compel him/her to share the complimented object with the speaker, etc. the compliments may provoke negative reactions.

²⁸⁹Holmes, 1986, S. 485.

²⁹⁰Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2005.

²⁹¹See, for instance, Herbert, 1989, Holmes, 1988.

²⁹²Traverso, 1996, S. 107.

²⁹³Gea Valor, 2000, S. 24.

²⁹⁴See Mulo Farenkia, 2006.

Complimenting is a very complex speech act, governed by specific cultural, linguistic, or situational norms. Giving compliments without respect of such norms may lead to misunderstanding in interpersonal or intercultural encounters. For example, compliments to an unknown addressee or to a person of the opposite sex in a public context and on a 'sensitive' topic (e.g. physical appearance) could be considered as face-threatening, depending on the cultural practices and background of the speaker and the addressee. It is important to be aware of the cultural norms of underlying language use in general and compliment act in particular.

Research on compliments have largely benefited from several comparative studies in which the culture specific features of compliment behaviour have been highlighted. However, it has been ignored that differences in complimenting behaviour may also occur when speakers and addressees use two different varieties of the same language. In order words, "pragmatic differences may occur across varieties of the same language."²⁹⁵ A new research paradigm, 'variational pragmatics' was officially introduced in 2005 and further developed by Barron and Schneider²⁹⁶ to address regional pragmatic variations.

2.2. Variational pragmatics

The scope of most cross-cultural pragmatic studies has been to pinpoint variation in speech acts strategies and realizations in at least two different languages/cultures.²⁹⁷ While languages in intercultural pragmatics studies "are seen as homogenous wholes from a pragmatic point of view"²⁹⁸, the researchers seem to ignore that "Speakers who share the same native language do not necessarily share the same culture. For instance, native speakers of English in Ireland and the United States use language in different ways [...]. Neither do Americans in the US all use English in the same way [...] On the other hand, cultures may be shared by speakers with different native languages. Thus, as language use in interaction is shaped by cultural values, pragmatic similarities may occur across languages, while pragmatic differences may occur across varieties of the same language."²⁹⁹

Differences and similarities in different varieties of the same language have been either neglected or treated as peripheral phenomena. In most cross-cultural orientated studies, the impact of region has not been accurately addressed. For instance, the seminal work of Blum-Kulka et. al. (1989) in their Cross-cultural Speech Act Realization Project dealt with many

²⁹⁵Barron *et alii*, 2009, S. 425.

²⁹⁶See Schneider, 2010.

²⁹⁷Wierzbicka, 2003.

²⁹⁸Barron, 2005, S. 520.

²⁹⁹Barron *et alii*, 2009, S. 425.

languages and language varieties, there was however no explicit attempt to compare the data across varieties of the same languages. On the other hand, dialectology, a study of language variation, has long been concerned with how macro-social factors correlate with linguistic choices. The focus has been, however, on “the central levels of the language system, i.e. on pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar, whereas language use in terms of communicative functions, linguistic action and interactive behavior has been almost ignored.”³⁰⁰ So, while cross-cultural pragmatics has ignored pragmatic variations across varieties of the same language³⁰¹, dialectology has ignored pragmatic aspects in the study of language variation³⁰².

In order to fill these two gaps in research, ‘variational pragmatics’ was conceptualized as a discipline at the interface of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, aiming at “introducing the examination of regional and social variation in pragmatics research [...] [and] adding the pragmatic level to the other language levels overwhelmingly analyzed in dialectology.”³⁰³ As the “‘dialectologisation’ of pragmatics” and the “‘pragmaticisation’ of dialectology”³⁰⁴, variational pragmatics studies intra-lingual pragmatic variation, i.e. pragmatic variation across varieties of the same language.

Although variational pragmatics does not dictate any particular theory and methodology, it is based on the following three principles: (1) the *principle of empiricity* which stipulates that research should be data driven and not based on researcher’s intuition; (2) the *contrastivity principle* which states that “linguistic features can be considered variety-specific only if the variety under study is contrasted with at least one other variety of the same kind and of the same language”³⁰⁵; (3) the *principle of comparability* according to which the data sets employed for comparative analysis must be produced by participants of the same sex, group, social class, etc.

Moreover, Variational pragmatics distinguishes the following five levels of pragmatic analysis: (1) the *formal level*, which takes a linguistic form as a starting point and aims examines the various communicative functions of this form in discourse; (2) the *actional level*, which takes linguistic actions, i.e. speech acts, and analyses the linguistic realizations of these illocutions; (3) the *interactive level*, which deals with patterns of local or global sequential organization of spoken discourse, i.e. dialogic units like adjacency pairs,

³⁰⁰Schneider *et alii*, 2008, S. 3.

³⁰¹What Barron calls “Pragmatics without macro-social variation” (Barron, 2005, S. 521).

³⁰²“Macro-social variation without pragmatics”, according to Barron (Barron, 2005, S. 522).

³⁰³Schneider, 2010, S. 238.

³⁰⁴*ibidem*.

³⁰⁵Barron *et alii*, 2009, S. 429.

speech act sequences, conversational opening and closings, etc.; (4) the *topic level* which addresses issues of topic selection and topic management, i.e. the way in which topics are introduced, maintained, developed, changed and terminated; and (5) the *organizational level* which deals with the mechanisms of turn-taking (and related issues like interruption, silence in discourse)³⁰⁶. So far, studies in variational pragmatics have essentially focused on the actional level in general and on the comparison of the realization of speech acts across two regional/national varieties of a pluricentric language.³⁰⁷ However, a great deal of work still remains to be done on regional pragmatic variation in French, since the existing studies are not many. In our literature review we could identify the following few publications: Bernicot *et alii* (1994) on interactions between mothers and their daughters in French French and Canadian (Québec) French, Schölmberger's article (2008) on apologies in French French and Canadian French and Rohrbacher's book (2010) on requests in French French and Canadian (Québec) French.

The present study is, as earlier mentioned, an attempt to fill two research gaps by examining complimenting strategies in two varieties of the same language, a speech act that has received very little attention so far, thus extending the scope of variational pragmatics in general. Secondly, by comparing compliment strategies in two regional varieties of French, one spoken in Cameroon and the other Canada, varieties that have to our knowledge not yet be contrasted. By so doing, we hope to contribute to research on regional pragmatic variations in French.

3. Method

3.1. The participants

Two groups of students took part in the present study: one group of 39 speakers of Canadian French (10 females and 29 males), aged from 14 to 17 and one group of 55 speakers of Cameroon French (39 females and 16 males), the majority of these participants (50/55) were aged from 15 to 19. Three of the respondents were aged 20 and two were aged 22. Twenty-six of the 39 Canadian informants stated that they were native speakers of French, while the 13 others mentioned that they spoke in addition to French other languages (e.g. Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, etc.). The Cameroonian respondents were speakers of French as an official second language in a multilingual context where two official languages (French and English) are

³⁰⁶For details see Schneider *et alii*, 2008, S. 19-21; Schneider, 2010, S. 244-246.

³⁰⁷See Schneider *et alii* (2008) for studies on Dutch, English, French, German, Spanish, and on speech acts such as requests, gratitude, apologies, invitations, etc. and other pragmatic phenomena such as the use of address forms, response tokens, and small talk. Readers are also directed to Félix-Brasdefer (2009), for an overview on intra-lingual pragmatic variation across varieties of Spanish.

permanently in contact with more than 250 native languages³⁰⁸. The Canadian respondents were students at the *Académie Dunton*, a secondary school in Montréal (Québec) and the Cameroonians participants were students in three different high schools in Yaoundé, namely *Lycée de Biyem Assi* (n=21), *Lycée de Mbankomo* (n=18) and *Lycée de Mimboman* (n=16).

3.2. Instrument and procedure

The data were collected by means of a questionnaire consisting of sixteen situations (eight situations in which compliments were elicited and eight where the participants were asked to produce compliment responses). All ninety-four participants had to complete a questionnaire in each situation was briefly described, setting “the general circumstances [...] and the relevant situational parameters concerning social dominance, social distance and degree of imposition”³⁰⁹ and the participants were asked to write what they would say in the given situations. The eight situations included a variety of day-to-day life situations, such as compliments on appearance (haircut, clothes, shoes), skills/talents/performance (sports, cooking, presentation in class), possessions (mobile phone, car), and the compliments were given to friends, a teacher, friend’s parents, a classmate, a stranger, etc. The DCTs were administered during regular classes in October 2010 to the Canadian respondents and in January 2011 to the Cameroonian participants by teachers of those schools and classes. The current study focuses on three of the eight situations, namely on compliments on skills/performance in cooking, sports and class presentation. These situations are described as follows:

SITUATIONS	Description of situation
<i>S 2 (repas)</i>	<p>Tu es invité(e) chez l’un de tes ami(s)(es). Ses parents t’offrent à manger. Après le repas que tu as particulièrement apprécié, que dis-tu aux parents de ton ami(e)? Toi: ... Les parents de ton ami(e): <i>Merci. C’est gentil!</i></p> <p>You are invited to your friend’s place. His parents ask you to stay for supper. After the meal that you particularly appreciated, what do you say to your friend’s parents? You: ... Your friend’s parents: <i>Thank you. That’s so nice!</i></p>
<i>S 4 (sports)</i>	<p>Tu assistes à un match de soccer/hockey/basketball et tu es particulièrement impressionné(e) par la prestation d’un(e) joueur/joueuse. A la fin du match, tu vas voir le joueur/la joueuse en question pour lui dire ton admiration. Toi: ...</p>

³⁰⁸All of the respondents indicated that they spoke a native language.

³⁰⁹Barron, 2008, S. 43.

	<p>Le joueur/la joueuse: <i>C'est vrai? Merci d'avoir assisté au match!</i></p> <p>You attend a soccer/hockey/basketball game and you are particularly impressed by the performance of one of the players. At the end of the game, you go to see the player in question to let him know of your admiration.</p> <p>You: ...</p> <p>The player: <i>Really? Thanks for coming to the game!</i></p>
S 14 (présentation)	<p>Un/une camarade (du sexe opposé à «tu») a fait une excellente présentation en classe. Tu ne le/la connais pas très bien, mais tu voudrais lui dire qu'il/elle a fait un excellent travail.</p> <p>Toi: ...</p> <p>Le/la camarade: <i>Merci. Ça fait vraiment plaisir d'entendre cela!</i></p> <p>A classmate of the opposite sex made an excellent presentation in class. You don't know him or her very well but you would like to tell him/her that he/she did an excellent job.</p> <p>You: ...</p> <p>Your classmate: <i>Thank you. It makes me really happy to hear that!</i></p>

Table 1: *Situational description*

Situation 2 deals with compliments on the culinary skills of the addressee's (friend's) parents. Situation 4 is about compliments on the sports skills or performance of an unknown player. Situation 14 was intended to elicit compliments on the intellectual skills of a classmate of the opposite sex. The participants of both groups produced 278 compliments (162 from the Cameroonian and 116 from the Canadian informants). These data were coded according to the scheme presented in section 3.3 and analyzed in terms of the main strategies employed by the respond to realize the compliments (section 4).

3.3. Compliment strategies

Since the purpose in this study is to identify and compare compliment strategies in two varieties of French, it is important to outline the coding scheme used to account for the various phenomena found in both data sets. In her study of compliments in French (spoken in France) Kerbrat-Orecchioni³¹⁰ distinguishes between *direct compliments*, i.e. compliments directed to the addressee (e.g. *Vous êtes charmant*. 'You are charming'), and *indirect compliments*, i.e. compliments to a person different from the addressee, but who happens to have a connection with the addressee (e.g. *Il est adorable, votre gamin*. 'Your little boy is adorable'). She further makes the difference between *explicit compliments*, i.e. compliments realized by means

³¹⁰Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1998, p. 204.

of performative formulas or expressions in which the positive assessment is overtly verbalized; and *implicit compliments*, i.e. compliments realized in the form of different speech acts. Contrary to this researcher, we will not consider the difference between compliments offered directly to the addressee (what she calls *direct compliments*) and compliments to other people, not necessarily present at the time of the conversation, but related in some way to the addressee (what Kebrat-Orrechioni calls *indirect compliments*). We will use the term *direct compliments* to refer to compliments realized in a more or less unambiguous manner, and the term *indirect compliments* will be employed to refer to compliments appearing in the forms of other speech acts. But, as the following examples show, there may be more aspects involved in the realization and analysis of compliments:

- 1) *Oh my god! T'étais vraiment bonne, c'tait fou.* (CF³¹¹)
'Oh my god! You were really good. That's was crazy'.
- 2) *Bonjour compagnon. Pardon de te perturber mais j'aimerais te dire que tu as été parfait tout au long de ton exposé et je conte m'intégrer dans ton groupe la prochaine fois qu'il y aura encore exposé.* (CMF³¹²) (= 'Good morning, buddy. Excuse me for bothering you but I would like to tell you that you were perfect during your presentation and I look forward to joining your group the next time there is another presentation').

In the first example, the compliment giver uses the interjection (an attention getter) *oh my god* to open the compliment. Then, a core compliment is realized, a *head act T'étais vraiment bonne* 'You were really good'. This direct compliment is followed and intensified by a second head act *c'tait fou* 'That was crazy'. The direct compliment has been realized by a *multiple head act* which is preceded by an attention getter.

In the second example, the speaker uses several strategies to open/introduce the core compliment. A greeting formula and an address form *Bonjour compagnon* 'Good morning, buddy', an apology *Pardon de te perturber mais* 'Excuse me for bothering you but'. The combination greeting + address form and the apology serve as external modification of the head act *j'aimerais te dire que tu as été parfait tout au long de ton exposé*. 'I would like to tell you that you were perfect during your presentation', whereas the next speech act, a wish *et je conte m'intégrer dans ton groupe la prochaine fois qu'il y aura encore exposé* 'and I look forward to joining your group the next time there is another presentation' is also an external modification. To sum up: the compliment in the second example is preceded and followed by different types of external modifications with specific politeness/relational connotations.

³¹¹'CF' here stands for examples in Canadian French.

³¹²'CMF' indicates examples in Cameroon French.

Overall, the participants of both groups employed three main compliment strategies: (1) direct compliments; (2) indirect compliments and (3) compliments with external modifications.

Direct compliments are compliments realized in an unambiguous manner, by means of occurrences containing devices with positive connotation (e.g. adjectives, adverbs, verbs, verbal constructions, etc.) or performative formulas (e.g. *Je te félicite pour le travail bien fait*. 'I congratulate you for job well done.' It should be mentioned that the direct compliments may be simple or complex/compound. A simple compliment appears in a single utterance. This type of compliment will be called a **single head act**. A single head act can be realized in many different ways: e.g. by using either a complete syntactic structure containing a lexeme with positive connotation as in (3) – (5) or an elliptical expression as in (6):

- 3) *Ma chérie, ton travail était vraiment excellent*. (CMF) (= 'My dear, your work was really excellent').
- 4) *J'aime beaucoup votre nouvelle coiffure*. (CF) (= 'I really love your new haircut.')
- 5) *C'est beau!* (CF) (= 'It is beautiful!')
- 6) *Bon travail!* (= 'Good job!'); *Très bien!* (= 'Well done!'); *Génial!* (= 'Genius!')

Direct compliments can also appear in compound forms, i.e. in a combination of two or more direct compliments. This type is a multiple direct compliment or a **multiple head act**. Based on the number of direct compliments combined, multiple direct compliments may be sub-divided in **double, triple, quadruple direct compliments or head acts**. It is noteworthy that the constitutive direct compliments of a multiple head act may use different syntactic formats as in (7) and (8):

- 7) *Bravo! Mon pote, tu as été excellent tout à l'heure, J'ai beaucoup apprécié*. (CMF) (= 'Bravo! My friend, you were excellent a while ago. I really loved it.')
- 8) *Hey bravo, tu as vraiment faite un superbe présentation!* (CF) (= 'Hey, bravo, you really gave a superb presentation.')

Multiple direct compliments can be realized in many different ways, i.e. using many different linguistic forms. For example, by repeating the first direct compliment (e.g. *C'est beau! C'est (vraiment) beau!* (= 'It is beautiful. It is really beautiful!'), or by reformulating the first compliment or focusing on a new aspect of the compliment object.

Indirect compliments are expressions of admiration occurring in forms used to realize other speech acts (e.g. advice, wish, promise, request, etc.) and which "need more inferences on the part of the addressee to reconstruct the intended meaning conveyed in the message by the speaker."³¹³ Like the direct compliments, indirect compliments can be realized in simple or complex forms. The simple form uses a single utterance or speech act (e.g.

³¹³Yu, 2005, S. 98.

Donne-moi s'il te plaît la recette! (=‘Please give me the recipe!’) Complex or multiple indirect compliments are the products of combinations of at least two indirect compliments (e.g. *Chanceux! Je désire ce téléphone depuis un ans! Je n'arrête jamais d'en parler à mes parents.* [CF] (=‘Lucky you, I have been looking forward to having that phone since a year. I can stop talking about it to my parents.’)³¹⁴

External modification refers to the different kinds of additional speech acts or *supportive moves*³¹⁵ that appear either before or after the direct compliments (single or multiple head acts) and which serve various politeness or relational functions such as mitigating or intensifying the head acts. As the analysis will show, external modifications are used to initiate contact with the addressee as in (9) and/or serve other functions to be revealed by the analysis:

- 9) *Salut moi c'est malaica et j'ai vraiment apprécié ta présentation.* (CMF) (=‘Hi, I am Malaica and I really loved your presentation.’)

4. Findings and discussion

4.1. Main compliment strategies

Of the 278 compliments produced by the participants of both groups (162 by Cameroonians and 116 by Canadians), 109 were direct compliments (39.20%), six were indirect compliments (2.15%) and 163 were compliments with external modifications (58.63%). The Cameroonian respondents realized 57 direct compliments, i.e. 35.18% of the responses, six indirect compliments, i.e. 3.70% of the data and 99 compliments with supportive moves, or 61.11%, while the Canadian informants chose 52 direct compliments, i.e. 44.82% and 64 compliments with external modifications, or 55.18% of the CF data. There was no instance of indirect compliment in the Canadian responses.

4.1.1. Direct compliments

With regard to the means or strategies employed to realize compliments in a direct manner, a speaker may choose, as earlier mentioned, a *single head act*, i.e. one direct compliment or a *multiple head act*, i.e. a combination of two or more direct compliments. The multiple head acts can be double, triple or quadruple. Of the 109 direct compliments collected, 42 were single head acts, 53 were double head acts, 12 were triple head acts and two were quadruple head acts.

Of the 57 direct compliments in the Cameroonian data, we found 17 single head acts as in (10), 34 double head acts as in (11), four triple head acts as in (12) and two quadruple head acts as in (13):

³¹⁴This example was found in situation 6 [new mobile phone] of the Canadian corpus.

³¹⁵Blum-Kulka *et alii*, 1989.

- 10) *Impressionnant ce que vous venez de faire là.* (CMF) (=‘Impressive what you have just done.’)
- 11) *Ton exposé, super, excellent. Je l’ai vraiment trouvé intéressant.* (CMF) (=‘Your presentation [was] super, excellent. I really found it interesting.’)
- 12) *Bravo, tu as joué de façon extraordinaire, j’en suis restée scotchée!* (CMF) (=‘Bravo, you played in extraordinary way, I was really amazed!’)
- 13) *Vous avez très bien joué. Vous étiez le(la) meilleur(e) joueur(euse)! Bravo. Le match était excellent.* (CMF) (=‘You played very well. You were the best player. Bravo! The match was excellent.’)

The Canadian respondents most frequently used single head acts (25 occurrences or 48.05% of the direct compliments) as in (14). The second most favoured pattern was the use of double head acts, found in 19 instances (36.53%) as in (15). Eight Canadian participants employed triple head acts (15.38%) as in (16). There was no instance of quadruple head act in the CF responses:

- 14) *Bonne présentation!* (CF) (=‘Good presentation!’)
- 15) *J’ai vraiment aimé ce que vous avez cuisiné. C’était délicieux.* (CF) (=‘I really liked what you cooked. It was delicious.’)
- 16) *Bravo, t’as vraiment bien joué, t’étais le meilleur sur le jeu.* (CF) (=‘Bravo, you played well. You were the best on the pitch.’)

Although there was a general tendency to use direct compliments, differences regarding the patterns put in place to realize the direct compliments emerged from the data. While the Cameroonians showed more preference for double head acts, the Canadian participants employed more single head acts. Moreover, as can be seen in Table 2, the realization patterns of the direct compliments displayed some significant differences as far as their situational distribution in both language varieties was concerned:

	Situation 2 (meal)		Situation 4 (sports)		Situation 14 (presentation)	
	CMF	CF	CMF	CF	CMF	CF
Single head act	N=5	N=2	N=7	N=7	N=5	N=16
Double head act	N=2	N=4	N=18	N=7	N=14	N=8
Triple head act	N=0	N=1	N=2	N=6	N=2	N=1
Quadruple head act	N=0	N=0	N=2	N=0	N=0	N=0
Total	N=7	N=7	N=29	N=20	N=21	N=25

Table 2: Frequency of direct compliments across the three situations in CMF and CF data sets

Table 2 indicates that the CF respondents mostly used single head acts to express admiration of the addressee’s oral presentation (S14), while this strategy was used with the lowest frequency in the meal situation (S2). Overall, single heads were clearly favoured in the presentation situation by the Canadian informants. By contrast, the Cameroonian respondents mostly used double heads in the sports situation and clearly favoured direct

compliments in this situation. The two quadruple head acts used by the Cameroonians appeared in the sports situation (S4), in which the Canadians used more triple heads than their Cameroonian counterparts. The distribution of the other patterns also showed some statistically not significant differences.

4.1.2. Indirect compliments

With regard to the use of indirect compliments, the following differences are noteworthy. The Cameroonian informants used six indirect compliments (3.70% of all the responses), while there was no occurrence of indirect compliments in the CF data. Of the six indirect compliments in Cameroonian data, five appeared in the meal situation (S2) and one in the presentation situation (S14). Two of the indirect compliments in the meal situation were realized through the expression of gratitude. As the example below shows, the gratitude expression contains a positive adjective *délicieux* ('delicious') which also gives the speech act a complimentary connotation:

17) *Merci cher parent pour ce repas très délicieux.* (CMF) (= 'Dear parent, thank you for this very delicious meal.')

One respondent chose the speech of promising to indirectly realize the compliment as in (18). The promise to come back for a culinary lesson can obviously be interpreted as a positive assessment of the addressee's talents from which the speaker would like to benefit:

18) *Chers parents, je reviendrai prendre le cours de cuisines chez vous un de ces quatre.* (CMF) (= 'Dear parents, I'll come back one of these days for a cooking lesson.')

There were also two instances of indirect compliments in which the respondents combined two speech acts. In the first case, the expression of gratitude in which a complimentary device *délicieux* appeared was extended and intensified by a positive comment as in (19):

19) *Mes chers parents, merci pour un repas ci-délicieux, jamais j'étais accueilli d'une telle manière.* (= 'My dear parents, thanks for the very delicious meal, I have never been treated like this.')

The second example was a case where the compliment giver expressed gratitude and promised to come back as in (20):

20) *Merci on se verra prochainement.* (= 'Thanks we will see next time.')

The other indirect compliment in the presentation situation (S14) was realized through the expression of wish or encouragement as in (21):

21) *Du courage dans ton travail.* (= 'Keep up the good work.')

4.1.3. External modification of compliments

As earlier mentioned, the data contain 163 compliments with external modifications, 99 of them were generated by the Cameroonian informants and 64 by the Canadian respondents. Above this statistical difference, there are striking features concerning the types, frequencies and situational

distribution of the external modifiers. Table 3 shows the frequency of supportive moves across the three situations in both data sets:

	S 2 (Meal)	S 4 (Sports)	S14 (Presentation)	Total
Cameroon French	42 (42.42%)	25 (25.25%)	32 (32.32%)	99 (100%)
Canadian French	32 (50%)	18 (28.12%)	14 (21.87%)	64 (100%)

Table 3: Situational distribution of compliments with supportive moves in CMF and CF

As can be seen in Table 3, the Cameroonian and Canadian respondents used external devices to modify their compliments, although not with the same percentage, much more in the meal situation (S2) than in the other two situations (sports (S4) and presentation (S14)). As a matter of fact, the Cameroonians used external modifiers in 42 instances in the meal situation (S2), which made up to 42.85% of all the external modifications in the Cameroonian data, while the Canadian informants employed 32 examples of external modification in the meal situation, which accounted for 50% of responses of the Canadian data set. A striking difference was noted in the other two situations: while the Canadians employed the second highest percentage of all the external modifications in the sports situation (S4), the second most favoured situation for the use of external modification by Cameroonian respondents was the presentation situation (S14).

Another step of the analysis was to examine the types and frequency of the external modifiers found in both data sets. The results are summarized in Table 4:

External modifications	CMF (n= 126)		CF (n=66)	
	n	%	n	%
Gratitude	40	31.74	29	43.93
Greeting	25	19.84	1	1.51
Wish	18	14.28	10	15.15
Comment	11	8.73	6	9.09
Apology	10	7.93	6	9.09
Question	6	4.76	4	6.06
Advice	5	3.96	3	4.54
Self introduction	5	3.96	0	
Request	4	3.17	3	4.54
Promise	1	0.79	3	4.54
Joy	1	0.79	0	
Joke	0		1	1.51
Total	126	100	66	100

Table 4: *Frequency external modifications in Cameroon and Canadian French*

Table 4 shows that the Cameroonians used almost twice the number of external modifications displayed by the Canadian respondents. Overall, a total of 192 external modifiers were employed in the entire corpus.

The most preferred means of external modification was the *expression* of *gratitude*, which represented 32% of the Cameroonian data and 43.93% of the Canadian external modifiers. This supportive move was mostly used in the meal situation (S2), i.e. in a context where the speaker was offered food by the friend's parents. In this context the expression of gratitude was employed as an intensification device of the preceding or following compliment. It is safe to say that the combination of compliment and appreciation token indicated that the product of the culinary talents of the addressee was also beneficial to the compliment giver. In both data sets, gratitude expressions generally appeared before a single head act or a double head acts, as in (22):

- 22) *Merci³¹⁶, c'était un délice.* (CMF) (= 'Thanks, it was a delicacy.')
 23) *Merci beaucoup, madame, c'était délicieux, ce plat en particulier: vous êtes un chef.* (CMF) (= 'Thank you very much, mam, it was delicious, this dish in particular. You are a chef.')
 24) *Merci. Honnêtement, c'était délicieux!* (CF) (= 'Thanks, honestly, it was delicious!')

Greeting was the second most preferred external modification in the Cameroonian data set. There was, by contrast, only one instance of greeting in the Canadian responses. The Cameroonians used this strategy to introduce compliments in the sports and presentation situations, two situations where social distance prevailed.

Wish was the second most frequently used external modification in the Canadian data set. It was found in 10 examples, i.e. 15.15%, whereas *wish* was the third mostly used external modifier in the Cameroonian sub-corpus, where it occurred in 18 instances or 14.4% of the supportive moves. In general, the compliment giver made use of this supportive move to express addressee-orientated or speaker-orientated wishes. The first type, the addressee-oriented strategy was employed by the speaker to wish something good to the addressee, e.g. further success in/with the complimented area/object. With the second type, the speaker-oriented strategy, the speaker expressed the desire to have the same accomplishment as the addressee or to possess a similar object. In both cases, the expression of wish could serve as an intensification device of the core compliment, since it portrayed solidarity with the addressee on the one hand and stressed the quality of the admired object on the other. As earlier mentioned *wish* was the

³¹⁶The external modifications in the examples are underlined.

third most frequently employed supportive move in the Cameroonian data. The Cameroonian mostly used this external modification device in the sports situation (n= 9), where it appeared after a single head or a double head act as in (25). In the Canadian responses, this external modification occurred mostly (n = 4) in the presentation situation (S14) as in (26):

25) *Votre talent réveille l'attention, vous jouez un ballon d'un niveau international, que Dieu vous aide.* (CMF) (=‘Your talent draws my attentions, you play a game of international standard, *may God help you.*’)

26) *Hey! Vraiment bon ton travail. J'aimerais bien travailler avec toi bientôt.* (CF) (=‘Hey! Really good, your presentation. *I would like to work with you soon.*’)

The external modifiers *self introduction* and *expression of joy* were used by the Cameroonians, whereas these elements did not appear in the Canadian data. Meanwhile, a Canadian participant used an occurrence of *joke*, which did not appear in the Cameroonian data. The other external modifications showed a relatively similar frequency in both data sets.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to highlight some strategies employed by speakers of two varieties of French, namely French spoken in Cameroon and French spoken in Canada (Québec), to compliment the skills or performances of their vis-à-vis in cooking, sports and academic / school presentation situations. Based on written data collected from two groups of speakers representing speakers of both varieties of French, we found that the informants used three super-strategies: direct compliments, indirect compliments and compliments with external modifications.

With regard to *direct compliments*, it was found that these were the most preferred strategies, whereby the informants used single as well as multiple head acts in both data sets. However some interesting differences were revealed concerning the sub-strategies employed, i.e. the number of core compliments combined to make up the multiple head acts. While the Cameroonians displayed more preference for double head acts, the Canadian participants employed more single head acts.

Concerning *indirect compliments*, our findings show that the Cameroonian informants used six indirect compliments, whereas there was no occurrence of indirect compliments in the Canadian data.

The analysis of *external modifications* revealed that the most frequently used external modification was the *expression of gratitude*, which appeared in most cases before the core compliments. The second most favoured external modifier was the expression of wishes before or after the main compliments. We also noted that greetings were mostly used by the Cameroonians, who generally combined the greetings with compliments to strangers (situation 4 and situation 14). The general preference for the use of greetings (and

apologies to some extent) by the Cameroonian informants could be explained by the fact that these participants considered compliments to unknown people, despite the positive intentions, as face threatening acts that needed to be introduced or softened. Giving a blunt compliment in such situations entailed the risk of being refused if the compliment receiver considered the compliment as an intrusion. In other words, the greetings and apologies used before the core compliments served either to create familiarity prior to the compliments and/or to mitigate potential face threats. The use of other external modifiers also showed that the participants of both groups considered complimenting as a complex activity that comprised other moves or speech acts. In general, compliments appeared in both data sets to be subtle pretexts for other communicative or social goals. The complex strategies generated by the participants of both groups could indicate how the respondents in both sub-cultures perceived their vis-à-vis, the type of social rapport they intended to construct and the social image they were eager to portray in complimenting.

The present study was an attempt to highlight variation in complimenting in two “outer-circle” varieties of French: Cameroon and Canadian French. We focussed on convention of means, i.e. the functional categories put in place to compliment skills. Some differences and similarities were found. However, these findings need to be supplemented by further studies on the level of convention of forms, i.e. the realization forms of the various compliment strategies found in the data, on other compliment topics (e.g. appearance and possessions) and by using other methods of data collection (authentic conversations, interviews, role plays, etc.) and larger populations of participants, in order to have a more realistic picture of how speakers of both varieties of French express admiration.

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