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“Oh thanksss my loveee”: A Qualitative Analysis of Verbal Responses to Compliments in Text Messaging

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Citation

Akarcesme, D. (2024). *“Oh thanksss my loveee”: A Qualitative Analysis of Verbal Responses to Compliments in Text Messaging*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

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Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



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“Oh thanksss my loveee”: A Qualitative
Analysis of Verbal Responses to
Compliments in Text Messaging

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Master's Thesis

Linguistics

July 2024

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Abstract

When individuals receive compliments, they often want to accept them while maintaining modesty, creating a dilemma in how to respond. Studies on compliment responses have demonstrated various strategies that people employ in these situations. Given that text messages have become a large part of communication nowadays, it is interesting to determine which compliment response strategies are utilised in text messaging, as it has different response possibilities and limitations than face-to-face interaction, and has not been studied yet. Therefore, this study examines the responses to compliments (among acquaintances) via text messages. These responses are categorised to provide an overview of the strategies used in written communication. The results indicate that ‘accepting’ strategies were the most frequently employed, with ‘thanking’ being the most common response, generally accompanied by an emoji or affectionate words (e.g., “aww,” “my love,” “homie”). Even ‘deflecting’ strategies were predominantly only used in combination with an accepting strategy.

Keywords: compliment, compliment responses, response strategies, text message, stylistic enhancements

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1. Introduction

Whether it is a casual “Nice shoes” or a heartfelt “You did so well”, receiving compliments can sometimes perplex us about how to respond. Do I say “Thank you”? But what if that comes across as arrogant? What if I just return the compliment to seem modest? But what if that comes across as insincere? These questions bring to light the challenges in managing compliment responses and the variety of factors we consider while deciding our reactions. According to Pomerantz (1978, p.83), ‘appreciation’, which would include a simple “Thank you”, is often all that is needed or expected from the person giving the compliment. Yet, recipients may find themselves offering alternative responses like: “Your shoes are nicer” or “I could have done better.”

Why not stick with the straightforward “Thank you”? Pomerantz (1978, pp. 80-81) was the first to propose that recipients face a dilemma when receiving compliments. When responding to a compliment, individuals are faced with two opposing preferences. While individuals tend to (a) avoid self-praise, they also tend to (b) accept or agree with the compliment. The interplay between these conflicting constraints and the wide range of response options is what makes compliment responses especially intriguing.

Moreover, the politeness theory, developed by Brown and Levinson (1987), explains why compliment recipients experience difficulties in responding to compliments. When responding to compliments, ‘positive politeness’ may be expressed through gracefully accepting, agreeing or expressing gladness to the compliment, which will acknowledge the speaker's good intentions and strengthen the social connection (Chen, 1993, p. 58). Positive politeness is a strategy where through communication the desire of the hearer is satisfied, such as communicating shared wants and knowledge, approval, claim reciprocity, or use intimate language to imply common ground with the hearer (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 101-102).

However, accepting or agreeing to compliments may be perceived as engaging in self-praise, potentially coming across as arrogant, and hence harm the positive face¹ of the compliment recipient. Therefore, to maintain modesty and protect their own face, one might choose to reject the compliment. This nonetheless poses a problem because rejecting the compliment involves other-disagreement (Herbert & Straight, 1989, p. 36), which can threaten the positive face of the compliment giver by making them feel devalued. Therefore, neither self-praise nor disagreeing with others encourage unity within society (Wolfson and Manes,

¹ Here, ‘face’ refers to an individual's public self-image that everyone wants to claim, with the positive face being the part of one's personality that desires appreciation and approval (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61).

1980, as cited in Herbert & Straight, 1989, p. 41), leading to a dilemma in how to respond to compliments without threatening the compliment giver's face while also appearing modest.

Because of the difficulties that recipients face when receiving a compliment, they can employ a variety of verbal reaction strategies (see Holmes, 1986; Chen, 1993; Herbert, 1990). For instance, Holmes (1986) distinguished the compliment responses: 'accept', 'reject', and 'evade'. Danzinger (2018) and Razi (2013), in turn, adapted this threefold division for the semantic coding of the compliment responses they collected through a Discourse Completion Task (DCT)². In essence, they utilised Holmes' taxonomy as a guideline and categorised the collected responses into the most appropriate category among the three options. Chen (1993) has added an extra main category of 'return', which can be found in Holmes division under 'accept'.

Interestingly, some of the categorisations proposed in the literature were based on people's responses to a compliment in an imaginary situation. The influence of imagined scenarios on responses to compliments poses an intriguing question: do individuals' hypothetical reactions truly align with their real-life responses? When complimented on real-life interaction, people could feel under pressure to answer in a socially acceptable way. Their responses and expressions of appreciation may be influenced by this pressure. Contrastingly, in hypothetical situations, individuals have more time to reflect, may feel less compelled to respond honestly, and might even adhere to idealised behaviours.

Additionally, while in real-life situations conversations commonly proceed beyond a compliment response, the DCT task typically confines responses to that single interaction. Therefore, participants may feel compelled to provide a more thorough or detailed answer within that limited scope. As a result, their responses may be less spontaneous but more carefully considered, as they aim to convey their message effectively without the opportunity for a follow-up conversation.

To address the gap in researching compliment responses in real interactional situations, studying compliment responses in actual practice would provide valuable insight. Since mobile phones and texting have become embedded in every aspect of our daily lives, studying

² The Discourse Completion Task (DCT) is a questionnaire with a series of briefly explained situations designed to elicit certain speech acts. Participants read the given situations and respond in writing to the prompt as if they were in those situations (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000).

compliments exchanged through text messages offers a good research opportunity. Complimenting friends via texting on platforms like WhatsApp or Instagram has become a common practice. Yet, existing literature lacks exploration into how individuals respond to compliments in the context of text messages, and whether these responses differ from those analysed in a DCT setting (Chen, 1993; Razi, 2013). Text-based exchanges offer recipients the opportunity to think about their answer and provide them with more time to compose a response to the compliment in the absence of facial expressions and vocal cues –though emojis may partially compensate for this absence (Boutet et al., 2021, p. 2). Thus, investigating responses to compliments in the setting of text messaging not only provides insight into how people react to compliments in actual practice but also sheds light on how they finetune these responses in written communication.

Hence, the main research question of this thesis will be: in what ways do acquaintances respond verbally to compliments conveyed through text messages? The approach involves offering sincere and direct compliments to acquaintances via text such as “You look very good in your profile picture” or “The dress you wore on your graduation is very beautiful”. The strategies the compliment receivers employ in their responses will be analysed and categorised similarly to Holmes’ (1986) taxonomy with additional categories from Chen’s (1993) taxonomy. The taxonomy of Holmes will be utilised due to its clarity and efficiency, featuring fewer main categories, while still encompassing all possible response strategies to compliments within those categories. Chen’s (1993) additional categories were included to ensure a comprehensive analysis.

Section 2 discusses the concept of compliments, their responses, and the challenges associated with responding to them. Subsequently, compliment response strategies identified in previous research are outlined, alongside with additional insights into politeness within the context of compliment responses. Given the context of text messaging, section 3 provides insights into the activity of text messaging and its pros and cons, as well as the stylistic enhancements that can be used in a text message. After the methodology is explained in section 4, the findings and analyses are presented in section 5. Finally, section 6 concludes the research and provides discussion of the findings and their implication.

2. Reacting to Compliments

2.1 Compliment

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, compliments are expressions of approval, admiration, or respect. However, there are more nuanced definitions of compliments. For instance, a compliment can be seen as the speaker's way of expressing gratitude to the chosen recipient. In human sociality, compliments are significant because they are a fundamental practice that allows one person to express their explicit approval of another, encouraging or maintaining social solidarity (Pillet-Shore, 2015). Holmes (1986, p. 485) defines a compliment as a speech act wherein credit is explicitly or implicitly attributed to someone other than the speaker, typically the addressee, for some “good” (possession, characteristic, skill, etc.) valued positively by both the speaker and the listener.

Compliments are speech acts that maintain, improve, or support the addressee’s face. They are used as a positive politeness strategy that notices the addressee’s needs, changes, remarkable possessions, and interests (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 103). Although compliments are generally seen as a positive politeness strategy and therefore appear beneficial to the recipient, complimenting potentially threatens the complimentee’s face. First, because compliments include positive evaluation it could make the compliment receiver feel like they owe them something in return. Second, a compliment expresses envy or admiration, implying that the complimenter likes or would want something from the compliment receiver (Chen, 1993, p. 58). Consequently, the compliment receiver feels obliged to either protect the object of the compliment or to offer it, which is face-threatening according to Brown & Levinson (1987, p. 66).

Interestingly, a compliment can be regarded as an ‘expressive’ and ‘assertive’ speech act, according to Ruhi (2006). Compliments are expressives, since they communicate the speaker’s attitude to a certain state of affairs. At the same time, compliments are also assertives, since they express the speaker’s belief in a proposition. For instance, “What a beautiful sweater!” expresses both a positive reaction (“beautiful”) and an assessment of the object (“the sweater is beautiful”). Thus, one can agree or disagree with the proposition in the compliment. This shows that recipients of compliments have options and are flexible in formulating their responses. They may respond to either the assertive (“Yes”) or the expressive (“Thank you”) illocutionary force of the utterance (Ruhi, 2006, p.47).

A compliment response then would amount to a reaction to a compliment intended for the compliment giver by the compliment’s intended recipient. Compliments and their responses

thus consist of a minimum of two sequential actions. As Pomerantz (1978, p.82) describes it, Action1 and Action2 are linked in such a way that the performing of A1 provides the possibility of A2 as an appropriate next action, demonstrating a chain of action. One such possible action chain for compliments may consist of:

A1: A compliments B

A2: B accepts/rejects the compliment

The compliment giver's preferred response frequently involves acceptance (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 78). Acceptance, most of the time, is accomplished with an appreciation token ("Thank you", "Thanks") because it recognises the prior utterance as a compliment (Pomerantz, 1978, p. 83). However, when a person receives a compliment, there is no standard manner in which the recipient of a compliment must respond when they receive one. One can respond by downgrading the compliment, returning the compliment, rejecting it or even providing a brief explanation of the subject matter of the compliment. Pomerantz (1978, p. 82) argues that for recipients of compliments, there is a preference to agree and/or accept compliments and, at the same time, there is a preference to avoid self-praise. These preferences stand in potential conflict. Additionally, the recipient faces a dilemma in responding to both the content aspect of the assertion (whether it is true or false) and the 'gift aspect' (whether to accept or reject) simultaneously. The gift aspect refers to the compliment itself, which involves positively valuing an object, appearance, etc., that is offered to the recipient (Herbert, 1990, p. 208).

Similarly, Leech (2014, p. 189) addresses these dilemmas through his politeness theory, which outlines a set of maxims to explain the functions of politeness in conversational interactions. He argues that recipients of compliments find themselves compelled to choose between the two maxims of Agreement and Modesty. That is because, the recipients need to make an effort to accept the compliment, while still wanting to come across as modest. It is a situation where the addressee might be perplexed and torn about how to answer in order to still remain a modest person ("Should I accept the compliment? But what if I come across as overconfident?").

Therefore, it makes sense to say that compliment receivers are influenced by the self-politeness model, as proposed by Chen (2001), that operates within Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness framework. The term "self-politeness" describes situations in communication when the desire to protect and enhance one's own face affects both what is said and how it is stated (Chen, 2001 p.88). Another potential influence on a response to a compliment might be

the social distance that determines the degree of comfort between interlocutors, thus influencing politeness choices in interaction as well (Danzinger, 2018).

2.2 Compliment Response Strategies

So, which responses could be given to compliments? Herbert & Straight (1989) state that although there is a widespread consensus on the appropriate way to respond to compliments such as ‘thanking’, a lot of individuals, especially Americans, admit to feeling awkward and embarrassed when they accept them. Thanking someone is considered to be accepting the compliment because the recipient acknowledges the positive feeling expressed by the complimenter and shows appreciation for it. However, it is essential to note that accepting a compliment does not automatically signify agreement with it.

Yet, even though ‘thanking’ might be a preferred reaction for compliment recipients, research reveals that people utilise different approaches to respond to compliments rather than straightforwardly accepting them. Dazinger, Ruhi, and Razi, for instance, adapted the threefold division of Holmes (depicted in *Table 1*). They each put their findings (compliment responses) under the most suitable category of Holmes’ taxonomy without creating new ones.

On the contrary, Chen (1993) put some strategies that he found among American students under a different main category or named the same strategy differently. Most of them still overlap with Holmes, however, for instance, Holmes recognised “Returning compliment” as “Accepting”, whereas Chen gave that strategy its own main category. In total, Chen found 10 strategies, as depicted in *Table 1* as well. Herbert (1990), suggests yet another taxonomy for compliment response strategies (depicted in *Table 1*), notably distinguishing between “Nonacceptance” and “Nonagreement”. Unlike the above-mentioned categorisations, Herbert's classification treats “Returning compliment” as nonacceptance, whereas it is considered a form of acceptance according to Holmes. In the taxonomy of Chen, it has its own main category. Similarly, downgrading a compliment is seen as acceptance in Holmes's taxonomy, whereas Herbert views it as “Nonagreement”.

HOLMES' TAXONOMY	
A) Accept	1. Appreciation token, 2. Agreeing utterance, 3. Downgrading Utternace, 4. Return compliment
B) Reject	1. Disagreeing utterance, 2. Question accuracy, 3. Challenge sincerity
C)Deflect/ Evade	1. Shift credit, 2. Informative comment, 3. Ignore, 4. Legitimate evasion 5. Request reassurance/repetition
CHEN'S TAXONOMY	
<i>Super Strategy 1: Accepting</i>	
1. Thanking 2. Agreeing 3. Expressing gladness 4. Joking	
<i>Super Strategy 2: Returning</i>	
5. Returning compliment 6. Offering object of compliment 7. Encouraging	
<i>Strategy 3: Deflecting</i>	
8. Explaining 9. Doubting	
<i>Strategy 4: Rejecting</i>	
10. Rejecting and Denigrating	
HERBERT'S TAXONOMY	
ACCEPTANCE: 1. Comment Acceptance 2. Appreciation token 3. Praise upgrade	
NONACCEPTANCE: 4. Comment history 5. Reassignment 6. Return	
NONAGREEMENT: 7. Scale down 8. Question 9. Disagreement 10. Qualification	
11. No acknowledgment	
12. REQUEST INTERPRETATION	

Table 1 *Taxonomies of Compliment Responses of Previous Studies*

Although in each of the aforementioned research's findings, "Acceptance" is the most commonly used strategy in the participants' reaction to a compliment, Chen (1993) found, when categorising the response of Chinese students, that the majority responded to a compliment by rejecting it, and that fewer strategies were used.

Chen's (1993) findings highlight potential cultural differences in response strategies to compliments with "Rejecting" being the most common strategy. Whereas Chen (1993), as one of the few partially non-Western studies, conducted a study on politeness strategies used in the responses to compliments of American English and Chinese speakers, Pomerantz (1978), Herbert & Straight (1990), and Holmes (1986) all focused on compliments and compliment responses from a Western perspective. It should be noted, however, that there are a number of studies that allow for more cultural variety: Razi (2013) analysed compliment responses among Australian English and Iranian Persian speakers, Danzinger (2018) studied compliment responses in Israeli Hebrew, and Ruhi (2006) analysed a corpus of compliment responses in Turkish.

Reviewing the literature this far, it is evident that the compliment responses listed in it represent a wide range of reactions that someone might provide after being complimented. The focus now shifts towards investigating how compliment responses appear in digital communication, particularly within text messages.

3. Text Messaging Dynamics

3.1 Texting as an Activity Type

Text messaging, commonly known as "texting" or "messaging", involves the transmission of messages through cell phone services (Smith, 2020). Texting is one alternative in a larger universe of messaging modalities, including email, instant messaging, and messaging within social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter (Mathias, 2023).

The usage of text messages has become widespread in modern communication and plays a vital role in numerous areas of our society. Texts provide for immediacy, allowing messages to be sent instantly and creating a more interactive engagement (Pelton, 2024). Moreover, text messages provide advantages for communicating in personal as well as business contexts (Die Bedeutung von SMS, n.d.). Texting serves as a mode of communication that encompasses both verbal and nonverbal elements. Verbal communication within texting includes written and spoken words, such as those found in SMS messages. Nonverbal communication in texting extends to various forms of conveying information without using words, including emojis, gifs,

pictures, and videos. Due to its widespread use, texting frequently takes on an informal feel, with users writing messages as if they were speaking. In casual exchanges between friends, adherence to perfect grammar conventions is typically loosened (Merrell, 2023).

Texting also presents certain constraints. Text messaging can make genuine statements seem insincere since it cannot always accurately convey tone and emotion, due to a lack of facial expressions, gestures, body language, eye contact, spoken speech, or in-person discussions (Miscommunication, n.d.). Moreover, the 160-character maximum length of SMS-text messages is one of its drawbacks. As a result, communications may seem shortened or lack crucial information. Longer messages can be sent, but there is a chance they will be divided into many SMS messages, which will make them more challenging to read (Die Bedeutung von SMS, n.d.). It should nonetheless be noted that WhatsApp, the number one messaging app globally (Potor, 2024), has a maximum character limit of 65,536 characters, which hence allows for much longer messages than SMS.

Individuals also have several options when they receive a text message: they may respond right away, decide to respond later when it is more convenient or refrain from responding altogether. Consequently, both parties do not need to be concurrently active in the conversation. They can send a message and continue with their other unrelated responsibilities, which makes text messaging asynchronous (Asynchronous Messaging, n.d.). Thus, texting gives the freedom to users to reply at their own pace (Merrell, 2023). When texting on platforms like WhatsApp or Instagram, one even can correct the text message after it is sent or take it back completely. Furthermore, this asynchronous mode of communication contrasts significantly with phone calls, where individuals might have to stop what they are doing to engage in synchronous, real-time conversation (Merrell, 2023). Therefore, since text messaging does not need full attention like a phone call, it is practical for a lot of individuals (Die Bedeutung von SMS, n.d.).

Another opportunity that text messaging gives to the message's recipient is the feature where you can save messages to review them at a later time. This makes it possible to quickly retrieve essential information such as addresses, appointments, or details of an agreement. Text messages are also easier to read and comprehend than emails, which might require the recipient to make many clicks on their device (Die Bedeutung von SMS, n.d.).

3.2 Stylistic Enhancements in Text Messages

As previously mentioned, when communicating via text, we lose the ability to convey tone and emotion, facial expressions, gestures, body language, and eye contact, which are typically present in face-to-face interactions. However, there are ways in text messaging to compensate for this absence. According to Boutet et al. (2021), emojis (e.g. 😊😏😘😘) serve as substitutes for nonverbal cues, especially for facial expressions. Emoticons, which are keyboard character combinations (e.g. “:)” “:(”) (Emoticons, n.d.), serve a similar function (Lo, 2008, p. 595). Furthermore, emojis communicate emotions and provide contextual information that helps recipients interpret the sender's emotional state. Therefore, emojis play a crucial role in enhancing digital interactions not only by communicating the sender's emotions and personality traits but also by improving the comprehension of the messages' content (Boutet et al., 2021, p.9).

There even is the possibility to give a message reaction with an emoji of your choice to one particular text as demonstrated in *Figure 1*, on apps such as WhatsApp and Instagram.

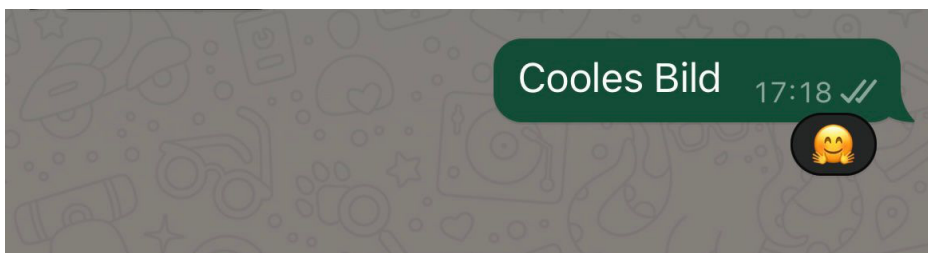


Figure 1 Example of a Message Reaction Conducted in his Study

On Snapchat, you can also react to messages, but instead of using standard emojis, you use Bitmojis (see *Figure 2*). Bitmojis are personalised emojis created by Snapchat users usually to resemble themselves (What is a Bitmoji?, n.d.). In the default Text Message app, reacting to messages is also possible, but the available emojis are limited to six different symbols, such as thumbs up, thumbs down, and a heart. Overall, message reactions enable users to respond to a particular message by expressing a specific emotion, thereby quickly acknowledging or conveying their feelings in a concise manner without even having to respond with words (Moxon, 2017).

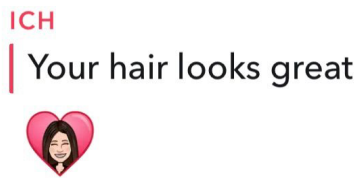


Figure 2 *Example of a Message Reaction on Snapchat to a Simulated Compliment*

Furthermore, in the absence of tone and intonation in written communication, also capitalising letters can be utilised to emphasize certain words (“The concert was AMAZING!”). In addition, the repetition of letters is common in text messages, as seen in examples like “The concert was amaziinnngg”, likely used to draw attention to the emphasised word (McSweeney, 2018, p. 29). Punctuation marks can fulfill the role of conveying feelings in written communication (Exclamation Marks, 2021) similar to how tone is conveyed through voice in spoken communication to express feelings. An exclamation mark, for example, expresses different feelings, such as anger, surprise and joy, which helps the reader to understand the meaning of the sentence better (Exclamation Marks, 2021). Indeed, according to research conducted by Gunraj et al. (2016), texted responses concluding with a period were perceived as less sincere compared to those without a period. This suggests that punctuation serves as one of the cues utilised by senders and interpreted by receivers to convey pragmatic and social information.

4. Methodology

Now that the theoretical framework of this research has been discussed, the methodology for analysing compliment responses will be explained.

4.1 Method of Analysis

To gather insights into how people respond to compliments via text messages, a total of 7 friends and I recruited for this purpose complimented individuals in our contact lists. Friends were chosen because I am in regular contact with them, making it more convenient to assist them in adjusting their compliments or, if clarification is needed, to easily contact them again about the person they complimented. Moreover, the setup involving multiple complimenters was used for efficiency as well as to have a diverse group of complimenters and more reactions for analysis. There were some rules on the type of compliment that could be given as part of this study and how it had to be formulated. First of all, even though, there is also the possibility to compliment a third person who is not around or indirectly compliment the addressee (Holmes,

1986), these third-party compliments were not given in this study. The focus was solely on compliments addressed directly to the recipient, as illustrated in *Example 1*.

(1) C: You look very good in your profile picture

R: Aww thanks 😊

Example 1 – Illustration of the type of direct compliment given to the research participants

In this example, C compliments the appearance of R. Besides appearance, there are other topics on which a person could get complimented. For the compliment topics, the classification by Holmes (1986, p.455) was used; compliments could concern the recipients' appearance, ability, performance, possessions, and some aspects of personality or friendliness.

These compliment topics can also be categorised based on whether the addressee has control over them. For instance, compliments directed at a person's actions or achievements, such as “Well done on your grade”, pertain to something they are (to a certain extent) accountable for. Conversely, compliments on inherent traits, like “You have beautiful blue eyes” relate to attributes (fully or predominantly) beyond the individual's control. Thus, complimenting solely on someone's inherent traits can be seen as acknowledging something they did not actively choose, for which other compliment responses can be expected than for compliments for which the recipients are accountable. In the current study, all the compliments given to participants were based on something they, in principle, were responsible for.

Moreover, the compliment to the participants was direct (e.g. “Your glasses are nice” instead of “I think your glasses are nice”). For practical reasons, the compliments to participants were carried out without the performative verb (“Good job on winning the match”, not “I compliment you on winning the match”). This was because the process of gathering data took place in the informal setting of texting an acquaintance, making it less appropriate to utilise performative verbs, which would have undermined the process' authenticity.³ Furthermore, the compliments were sent as a single message; no further messages were given until the participants responded. Emojis and emoticons were omitted from the compliments to prevent recipients from feeling compelled to use emojis in their responses. There was one instance, in

³ In formal or academic occasions, such as award or graduation ceremonies or performance evaluations, the performative verb is more appropriate to use (“I hereby compliment you with your diploma”).

which the complimenter sent an additional message with an emoticon. However, this compliment was not excluded from the research because it was the only deviation, and the rest of the compliments adhered to the criterion of not using emojis or emoticons and extra messages, thus not significantly impacting the results.

Additionally, to make the compliments as authentic as possible, my friends and I tried to come up with compliments that suited the participant's current life situation. For instance, I told someone who is busy working and studying at the same time: "You are doing a good job balancing all that". Another option to make the data collection less difficult was to compliment the recipient about their profile picture, such as "Your dress on your profile picture is really beautiful". For more data, I asked friends to do the same.

To ensure that the compliments from other people besides me followed the established structure and guidelines, I reviewed their compliments before they were sent, making adjustments as necessary or formulating the compliments on their behalf if needed. For the compliments to appear authentic, the complimenters were permitted to use punctuation or nicknames, like "bro!", but only under the condition that excluding them would fail to reflect their typical texting style and might compromise sincerity.

Since the aim is to collect data on responses to sincere compliments, it is essential for the participants to recognise the utterance as a genuine compliment. Hence, any participants whose responses suggested they did not perceive the compliment as genuine were excluded from the study (2 participants).

With the exception of four instances, all compliments were exchanged via the texting app WhatsApp. Of the remaining four, two were given via iMessage, one via Instagram Direct Messenger, and one via Snapchat messages. The sole distinction between these apps lies in the fact that iMessage imposes a character limit of 160 characters and Snapchat has a limit of 1196 characters. Both also offer a limited selection of emojis for message reactions. Conversely, WhatsApp allows up to 65,536 characters, and Instagram Direct Messenger permits 2,200 characters. Additionally, the latter two of these platforms offer a wider selection of emojis for message reactions. To what extent the use of these different apps might have affected the research outcomes will be discussed in the discussion section.

After receiving the participants' responses to the compliments, they were asked whether their responses could be used for research purposes (while emphasising that the given compliments were sincere!). They were assured that their identity would remain anonymous throughout the study. Following this clarification, they were asked for their consent.

Since the language used to text a compliment was the usual language the complimenter communicates with the recipient, the compliments and responses were given in English, Swiss German, German, Turkish, and Spanish. I translated the non-English compliments and their responses to present them in the results section. The Spanish compliment and response were translated by the complimenter who originally delivered the compliment in Spanish. When I was uncertain about my interpretation of the responses, I sought clarification from participants by asking them directly about the intentions behind their responses.

Subsequently, the responses were evaluated and categorised qualitatively based on the main and sub-categories devised by Holmes, with three additional strategies borrowed from Chen (1993) namely ‘Joking’, ‘Offering object of compliment’, and ‘Encouraging’. These additional strategies were included because there are no equivalent strategies in Holmes' taxonomy that could serve as substitutes if such responses occur. The choice for Holmes' taxonomy is driven by its perceived depth and clarity. With fewer main categories, it strikes a balance between comprehensiveness and simplicity.

Chen categorized “Joking” as acceptance, so it was included under acceptance in Holmes' taxonomy as well. The two other borrowed strategies, “Offering object of compliment” and “Encouraging,” are derived from the main category of “Returning” in Chen's taxonomy. However, in Holmes' taxonomy, “Returning” is not a distinct category but is instead classified under “Accept”. Therefore, in the taxonomy used for this study (see *Table 2*), both of these strategies are also placed under the category of “Accept”. After all, offering the object of a compliment or encouraging someone to pursue it implies an acceptance of the positive sentiment conveyed in the compliment.

A) Accept	1. Thanking, 2. Appreciation, 3. Agreeing utterance, 4. Downgrading Utterance 4. Return compliment 5. Joking 6. Encouraging
B) Reject	1. Disagreeing utterance, 2. Question accuracy, 3. Challenge sincerity
C) Deflect/ Evade	1. Shift credit, 2. Informative comment, 3. Ignore, 4. Request reassurance/repetition

Table 2 *Taxonomy of Compliment Responses Used for this Study*

It should be noted that Holmes' first strategy "Appreciation/agreement token"⁴ which includes thanking, saying "yes" or smiling, was also revised and divided into "Thanking" and "Appreciation" as distinct strategies. This separation was made because these responses represent different approaches, and in my view, they should be treated separately for a better understanding of the responses. Expressing appreciation for a compliment does not necessarily involve saying "thank you", as it can be conveyed through phrases like "I appreciate that" suggesting the need for a distinct thanking strategy. Additionally, merging an agreement token with appreciation might seem redundant, particularly when considering that the taxonomy already includes the "Agreement utterance" strategy, which can incorporate responses like "yes". In addition, the strategy "Legitimate evasion" from Holmes, will be excluded since this strategy can only be used by a recipient if there is an additional utterance added after the compliment. However, as mentioned before, the messages to the participants will only include direct compliments without any additional utterances.

Furthermore, if a response arose that did not align with the taxonomy chosen for this study, a new category will be established and integrated as a supplementary strategy within the findings and analysis.

4.2 Participants

In total, 24 acquaintances received a compliment over a text message. I complimented 13 people, while there were seven other compliment givers to collect data. Four of them complimented two participants and the other three each complimented one person. Out of those seven complimenters, three were participants themselves and were asked after they were complimented and informed about the research to compliment an acquaintance over text message in the same manner. The compliment receivers were between the age range of 18 and 41 with an age average of 25,79.

Among the 24 participants, 9 received compliments in Swiss German, 8 in English, and 5 in Turkish, while 1 participant received a compliment in German and 1 participant in Spanish.

In the discussions section, I will discuss to what extent these diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds might have influenced the results.

⁴ See Table 1 in section 2.2

5. Analyses and Results

Now that it has been clarified how this study was conducted, the results will be discussed. Section 5.1 analyses the types of compliment responses used in the text messages. First, an overview of the categorised compliment response strategies is provided as well as the combinations of strategies observed in these responses. In section 5.2, each strategy is explored in detail, accompanied by examples. Section 5.3, focuses on the stylistic enhancement, and expressions of endearment and affection used in the responses since they might increase the politeness of the compliment responses. In the final section of this chapter, section 5.4, interesting cases that are distinct from the standard responses collected, are presented and discussed.

5.1 Categories of Compliment Responses

The overall number and percentage of strategies observed in 24 responses to a compliment over text messages are presented in *Table 3*. It is important to note that combinations of strategies in responses also occurred; each strategy in combinations was considered separately, resulting in a total of 37 instances rather than 24 (i.e., allowing for a total percentage greater than 100%).

Response Type	Number	%
ACCEPT		
1. Thanking	18	75%
2. Appreciation	5	20.83 %
3. Agreeing utterance	2	8.3%
4. Return compliment	2	8.3%
5. Offer object of compliment	1	4.16%
6. Joking	1	4.16%
	Subtotal	29
		120.75%
DEFLECT/EVADE		
1. Shift credit	1	4.16%
2. Informative comment	5	20.83%
3. Ignore	1	4.16%
4. Request reassurance/repitition	1	4.16%
	Subtotal	8
		33.31%
Total	37	154.06%

Table 3 Number and Percentage of Each Strategy Employed in the Compliment Responses

Table 3 shows that “Accept” was the most common response category with the occurrence of 120.75%. This is in line with the findings such as by Holmes (1988), Ruhi (2006) and Herbert & Straight (1989). In the context of compliments, accepting would mean acknowledging and understanding the positive words conveyed by the compliment. This would include accepting the compliment in the way it is and recognising the compliment graciously. The strategies conducted in this study that belong to this main category are: ‘Thanking’, ‘Appreciation’, ‘Agreeing utterance’, ‘Return compliment’, ‘Offer object of compliment’ and ‘Joking’.

Table 3 also shows that the most commonly used approach overall and within the accepting category is “Thanking”, at 75%. Following that, the occurrence of “Appreciation” was 20.83% whereas “Agreement utterance” and “Return compliment” each occurred at 4.16%.

The “Deflect/Evade” category occurred less frequently (33.31%). This category includes strategies in which the person receiving the compliment does not take direct credit for it. They can accomplish this by avoiding acknowledging the complimenter's positive emotion, or by deflecting or shifting the credit elsewhere. This avoidance can be accomplished in two ways: either by responding in a semantically appropriate and informative way while ignoring the compliment's positive affect or by responding in a way that simply ignores the compliment and switches the topic of conversation (Holmes, 1986, p. 493). The strategies conducted in the current study that are a part of this category are the following: ‘Shifting credit’, ‘Informative comment’, ‘Ignore’, and ‘Request reassurance/repetition’. The most common deflecting strategy observed was “Informative comment” at 20.83%. The remaining strategies in this category were each employed only 4.16% of the time.

Some responses, as noted before, included multiple strategies, which are demonstrated in *Table 4*. The most frequently combined strategy was “Thanking”. Out of all responses, 75% employed “Thanking,” and of these, 38.88% included a second strategy. Additionally, all instances of agreeing responses were accompanied by an informative comment. Another interesting combination as discussed in example (5) is “Joking” and “Shifting credit” at the same time in one response. This is different from the other combinations, as both strategies did not come in separate utterances but only as one.

What is interesting about the obtained results is that there was no rejecting strategy used in any of the compliment responses. What is more, the “Encouraging” strategy identified by Chen (1993) was neither observed. Also, there was no need to create a new strategy for compliment responses. Nevertheless, the results suggest that the name of one of the strategies should be altered, which will be addressed later in the next section when discussing the “Offer object of compliment” strategy.

Combination of Strategies	Number	Percentage
Thanking + Informative comment	3	12.5%
Thanking + Returning¹ compliment	1	4.16%
Thanking + Returning compliment + Appreciaton	1	4.16%
Thanking + Appreciation	2	4.16%
Thanking + Requesting¹ reassurance/repetition + Appreciation	1	4.16%
Agreeing + Informative comment	2	8.33%
Joking + Shifting¹ credit	1	4.16%

Table 4 *Combination of Strategies Observed and Their Frequency of Occurrence*

5.2 Compliment Responses over Text Messaging

Now that an overview of strategies has been provided, I will explore in more detail the strategies observed in this research, beginning with the Thanking strategy, which was the most frequently employed by the participants. While in theory thanking is typically associated with negative politeness, in the context of responding to compliments, it can be interpreted as positive politeness, since according to Pomerantz (1978) it is the response the complimenter would typically want to receive. This is because saying “Thank you” allows one to show positive civility by accepting a compliment with grace and kindly acknowledging the speaker's good intentions.

Interestingly, a pattern occurred in the responses that included “Thanking”. In all but one response, the complimenter was thanked while also adding an emoji at the end of the utterance or trying to express affection with words like “aww”, “my love”, or “homie” was typical (e.g. “Thanks homie”). These extra expressions of endearment can be regarded as added politeness strategies, indicating that it does not seem enough to only thank the compliment giver.

Another strategy in which the recipients accept the compliment is “Appreciation”. Expressing appreciation can be achieved through phrases like “I appreciate that” or, as observed in this study, with the utterance: “That is what I needed to hear 🥹💖💖”⁵. Interestingly, one participant in this research indicated appreciation of a message containing the compliment without sending any additional response: when complimented on their profile picture with “Cool picture”, the participant reacted to the text with the “😊” emoji. According to Holmes (1988, p. 492), smiling is also recognised as a form of appreciation, which the emoji effectively represents alongside its open hands that demonstrates a hug (Smiling Face, n.d.). When questioned about their response, the participant admitted hesitating to respond with a text message due to shyness.

Furthermore, “Appreciation” through a message reaction with the emoji “❤️” also occurred in two other instances, however, they still added a response such as “Aw thank you, I appreciate you too ❤️” or “Thank youu ❤️❤️❤️”. This indicates that the message reaction with only a heart emoji was insufficient as a response for these two compliment receivers.

In addition to thanking and appreciation, Pomerantz (1978, p. 105) argues that returns (“and you too”) are also constructed as agreements. This makes sense due to the word “too” in a response such as “You look good too”. When receiving a compliment, you can either return the same compliment given to you (e.g. “You look good too”) or compliment the person who complimented you on something different. This occurred in the responses collected through text messages, one of them is demonstrated in (2).

(2) **C:** You applied the makeup very beautifully on your lips in your profile picture.

R: Thank you very much, I find the color of your eyeglass lenses very exotic and cool.

Upon analysing this example and observing the return of a different compliment, it becomes apparent that the formulation alone does not necessarily indicate agreement from the recipient. No expression in the response suggests agreement, therefore it is still unclear if the recipient genuinely agrees with the compliment. A response along the lines of “Thank you very much, I think your makeup is also beautiful” would have implied agreement due to the marker “also”. Therefore, Pomerantz's theory applies effectively only to returns that compliment the same object and explicitly include expressions like “too” “also” or “as well”.

⁵ Note that this is the response to the direct compliment which included the emoticon and additional message “There is not much left :)”.

Despite uncertainty regarding the agreement, returning a compliment can still be interpreted as acceptance. When considering example (2) without the thanking expression, the emphasis may shift from the original compliment to the new topic potentially appearing as deflecting. The reason why the response appears to be deflection without the thanking expression “Thank you very much”, is that by complimenting the compliment-giver on another topic instead of directly reciprocating their positive sentiment first, the attention moves away from oneself onto something else. Nevertheless, when evaluating the entire response, it appears that the return is primarily used to avoid self-praise and therefore the response as a whole can be recognised as an acceptance.

Example (2) is particularly intriguing because, unlike face-to-face interactions where returning a compliment on appearance is more straightforward and easier due to the immediate presence of the complimenter, responding in a similar manner via text requires a different approach and more effort. When returning a compliment face-to-face, you have the person in front of you at the moment, allowing you to quickly find something to compliment them on in return. However, the absence of immediacy in texting compared to face-to-face interaction, reciprocating a compliment demands additional effort. Without the complimenter present, one must take the time to find something praiseworthy. This process tends to be more deliberate and thoughtful rather than spontaneous. Example (2) illustrates this: the compliment recipient put great effort into formulating a thoughtful response despite having already expressed gratitude initially. They clearly clicked on the complimenter's profile picture, potentially even zoomed in to discern the color of the sunglass lenses. Their act of returning a compliment can be understood as a direct reaction to the indebtedness created by receiving the initial compliment. This reciprocation serves to balance the exchange, enabling the responder to relieve the sense of owing gratitude to the complimenter by returning the verbal gift (Chen, 1993, p. 58).

Similar to returning the compliment is the strategy “Offering the object of compliment”, where the recipient of the compliment also seeks to reciprocate by offering the object that was complimented. In example (3), the complimenter gave a compliment on the recipient's appearance. However, it is important to note that, by praising the makeup, the complimenter is indirectly complimenting the recipient's skill in applying the makeup.

- (3) **C:** Your makeup on your profile picture is so nice
 R: Let me do it my love on you too

In my opinion, it would be more appropriate to term the strategy “Offer skill of compliment”, as it is not the object itself that is offered, but rather the action or skill involved in applying the makeup. The offer of the participant indicates that the recipient perceives the compliment as an expression of admiration or desire (Chen, 1993, p. 58). Consequently, they offered to apply the same makeup to the complimenter. Hence, the offer reflects the compliment receiver's good intention to fulfill the complimenter's positive face wants (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 125). The offer, moreover, suggests an acceptance of the compliment, as it would not make sense for the recipient to offer similar makeup if they did not acknowledge the preceding statement as a compliment or a positive sentiment.

There is one strategy within the “Accept” category that is distinct from all the other strategies within the same category: Agreeing Utterance. Unlike the other strategies in this category, where acceptance of the compliment may not inherently imply agreement, an agreeing utterance explicitly states the recipient's agreement with the compliment, thus acknowledging the conveyed positive sentiment. Out of all the participants, only two responses with an agreement utterance occurred. What is noteworthy is that neither of them stopped there; they also added additional informative comments. In both cases, these informative comments were sent as separate, consecutive messages, as illustrated in (4).

(4) **C:** You’re doing a really good job balancing all of that [working and studying at the same time]

R: I know right?

Lol

Now it is slightly better in recent days

It appears that simply agreeing might be perceived as immodest. This inference is supported by the inclusion of additional informative comments following both instances of agreement, presumably to continue the conversation. The “Lol” included after the agreement is an abbreviation for “laughing out loud,” as defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.). It is commonly used on social media and in text messages to express that something is funny. Adding “Lol” can also convey a friendly tone (Rausch, 2023), as is evident in this context where its addition gives the response a sense of humility, making the agreement seem more casual and

lighthearted. The informative comment “Now it is slightly better in recent days” provides additional details about the recipient's circumstances, implying that they are better at managing it. The participant is therefore admitting that they did not always do well, which makes the response as a whole seem more modest. Furthermore, considering Ruhi's (2006) statement that “expressives” are mainly reactions to a situation where it should not be possible to utter an agreement or disagreement, this is an example of the participant interpreting the compliment as an assertive speech act, since an agreeing utterance would not be possible when answering to the expressive part of the compliment.

The last strategy that is recognised as acceptance is “Joking”. In a particular instance, demonstrated in (5), the response can be regarded as humorously playful while simultaneously attributing credit to someone else. This instance is interesting because it seems that the strategy of “Joking” is intertwined with that of “Shifting credit”.

(5) C: Bro your curls on your profile picture look very good

R: I also did not do it hahhaha

In a conversation conducted in Swiss German, the response “han au nöd I gmacht hahhaha” was used. While this translates literally to the example provided in (5), it carries additional implications due to the inclusion of the word “au” in the original language. Essentially, it conveys, “It only looks beautiful because I did not do it”, indicating it is indeed beautiful but only because it was not done by them which also indirectly implies agreement. The addition of laughter adds a playful tone to the sentence.

To ensure that this was indeed the intended meaning of the compliment response giver, the participant's response was later clarified through direct inquiry, confirming the interpretation of joking in the response. We could also say the recipient is making fun of themselves with their response. They even humorously noted, “I never receive compliments from her, and the one time I did, it was not even for something I had done, which is funny”. The fact that the participant joked in her response implies that the recipient may have tried to reduce the threat to the complimenter's positive face, since jokes are usually employed for that reason (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 124).


Moreover, when people get complimented on their appearance, they usually are implicitly getting credit for achieving a good appearance (Holmes, 1986, p. 492). For that reason, they might shift credit to someone else if they were not responsible for the appearance being

complimented. This is indeed what the participant did humorously; even with no intention of shifting credit, the response still explicitly redirected credit to the third person. However, notice that shifting the credit solely would be a deflecting strategy. In combination with joking, the whole response is still accepting.

Having discussed the accepting strategies, let us now explore what deflecting strategies the participants employed. According to Chen (1993, p. 63), “Deflecting” can be regarded as a strategy to establish a middle ground between the Agreement Maxim and the Modesty Maxim. Besides the “Shifting credit” strategy mentioned above, three more deflecting strategies were observed: ‘Informative comment’, ‘Requesting reassurance/repetition’, and ‘Ignoring’.

The deflecting strategy of providing an informative comment only co-occurred with accepting strategies. As mentioned earlier, instances of agreeing with the compliment consistently included an informative comment. However, there were also three instances where an informative comment was combined with “Thanking”. Two of these responses were to compliments about possessions, where the informative comment in both instances detailed where the recipients acquired the object being complimented (e.g. “Awwh, thx girl, from [the retailer] bershka!”). If the participant's response had solely consisted of an informative comment, it would have been recognised as deflecting. The reason for that is that in this scenario, there is no direct positive acknowledgment of the compliment; instead, the focus is redirected away from the compliment to the source of the dress.

However, since the detailed information was expressed after thanking, the informative comment acts more as a form of showing appreciation for the compliment by sharing information about the item. The addition of the second strategy may also serve to avoid self-praise or to appear modest. Because thanking the complimenter, without any other response, might be perceived as arrogant, incorporating another strategy, especially a deflecting one, helps to balance the response (Chen, 1993). In this case, the informative comment even helps to avoid self-praise by shifting the focus from themselves to the origin of the item.

Another interesting strategy used was “Requesting reassurance/repetition”, which was also used along with the strategies “Thanking” and “Appreciation”. Unlike the other strategies that were combined with “Thanking”, in this instance, the deflecting strategy was written first (“ohh really  I got really happy right now thank you my little lamb”⁶). The negative-polarity question “Ohh really” in this example appears like the compliment receiver is expressing surprise rather than genuinely requesting a repetition of the compliment. Moreover, the subsequent joy

⁶ “Kuzucum” (my little lamb) is a common term of endearment in Turkish to express affection.

expresses appreciation for the compliment, acknowledging the positive sentiment. Therefore, the compliment receiver is not necessarily seeking a repetition of the compliment, as they have already accepted it. Negative-polarity questions usually receive interpretations of modesty (Ruhi, 2006, p. 91). They can also be seen as that the compliment receiver's attempt to check whether the complimenter is sincere or not (Ruhi, 2006, p. 69). In that case, however, it becomes evident that it gives the response a modest effect. The "Oh really" phrase adds a layer of modesty because it suggests that the compliment receiver was not expecting praise and does not consider the positive sentiment to be obvious.

The final strategy within the "Deflect/Evade" category is "Ignoring". This occurs when the recipient opts for not acknowledging or responding to the compliment in any way (Herbert, 1990, p. 39). Thus far, all the strategies discussed have involved some form of response to the compliment, even if not directed at the positive sentiments conveyed by the compliment. Ignoring, however, is the only strategy that completely disregards the compliment. An example from this study is presented as (6).

(6) C: You teach very good

R: Coming

Where are you?

The recipient's decision to ignore the compliment in (6) could have been influenced by the ongoing conversation, especially since both parties were eager to meet. While it is possible that the recipient overlooked the compliment due to the presence of other topics, further inquiry revealed that the addressee had indeed read the compliment but considered other topics more relevant at the time. It is interesting that "Ignoring" as a strategy emerged in the context of text messages, given that text messaging platforms offer the option to react to messages without significantly interrupting the conversation flow (also at a much later stage in the interaction). Despite this, the recipient still decided to completely ignore the compliment.

According to Holmes (1986, p. 494), even if a deflecting strategy was included in the compliment response, the recipient undeniably accepted the compliment if an "Accept" strategy was added. The deflecting strategy is likely incorporated to reduce the amount of credit that the recipient takes or it could simply serve as an efficient additional contribution. In this study, when considering the predominant approach in each compliment response and categorising them under a single main strategy based on their overall meaning, it becomes evident that the main strategy employed in the compliment responses over text messages was 95.833%

“Accept” and 4.167% “Deflect/Evade”. This indicates that nearly all recipients of compliments, specifically 23 out of 24, accepted the compliment in some manner. The only exception was a participant who opted to disregard the compliment completely. This suggests that even in text messages, recipients are more inclined to accept compliments.

5.3 Stylistic Enhancements and Expressions of Affection

Given that the compliment recipients responded via text messages, the recipients could also use stylistic strategies in addition to the different types of compliment responses. For example, within the Thanking strategy, of the 12 “Only thanking” responses, 11 incorporated an emoji or term of endearment. What could be the reason behind this? While these stylistic strategies might not change the overall strategy expressed by the words, they can add some emotions to the response. Especially positive emojis can contribute to a more sincere reaction, even emphasising modesty because it emphasises that the compliment was not really expected (otherwise, emotions would not have been aroused) and that this was a pleasant surprise (hence, the positive emotions). They also add to the overall tone of communication by adding warmth and happiness to it (Boutet et al., p. 10). When comparing a simple and dry “Thanks” to “Thaaanks! 😊”, the second one appears more modest than the first one; the emojis emphasise the compliment giver’s positive face, while the elongation through letter repetition stresses the recipient’s gratitude. That is most likely why many responses (75%) came with stylistic enhancements like emojis, multiplying letters, expression of laughter, exclamation mark and question marks.

Punctuation plays a significant role in conveying intonation and stress in a written context, with each mark serving its distinct purpose (Exclamation Marks, 2021). According to Brown & Levinson (1987, p. 104), intonation and stress in speech are a form of positive politeness. Therefore, since exclamation marks, question marks or multiplying letters in written context can be utilised to exaggerate intonation, incorporating these stylistic enhancements in responses to compliments can be considered as a positive politeness strategy.

Additionally, the compliment recipients in the present study used terms of endearment. Terms of endearment are not unique to written context, as they are commonly used in face-to-face interactions too. Nonetheless, they add warmth to text messages as well and were presumably included to enrich expressions of gratitude (e.g. “Thanks homie”). Again, it is a form of positive politeness by using terms of address like these that communicate in-group

membership. These endearing words can serve to highlight the emotional connection between both of the communicators (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

Table 5 provides an overview of how often stylistic enhancements and terms of endearment/affection were employed in combination with different strategies. The stylistic enhancements or words of endearment were counted according to the specific compliment response strategy they accompanied. For example, in the response “Awwh, thx girl, from bershka!”, the multiplying letter “Awwh” was counted as part of the thanking strategy, as it likely belongs to the thanking expression. The “Awwh” here was also counted as an expression of affection within the Thanking strategy. The exclamation mark was counted as being used in the “Informative comment” strategy because of its placement following the informative utterance.

Apart from that, it should be noted that the emojis used as a message reaction are not listed in *Table 5* because it is not considered an additional stylistic strategy to the main strategy it represents. Also, there were cases where the letters of the terms of endearment or affection were multiplied (e.g. “my loveee,” “aww”). However, these are not specifically included in the table, as the expressions continue to serve as politeness strategies with or without the inclusion of additional letters.

Type of enhancement or expression	Strategy occurred in	Number of occurrence	Percentage of occurrence	Examples
Emoji	Thanking Appreciation Request Reassurance	9 1 1	45.83%	😊, 😭, ❤️, 🙏, :)
Expression of endearment	Offer skill of object Thanking	1 6	29.16%	My love, homie, girl, beybii
Multiplying letters	Thanking	4	16.66%	Thaaank you, awhh
Expression of laughter	Thanking Agreeing Joking/Shift credit Informative comment	1 1 1 1	16.66%	Lol, hahaha
Expression of affection	Thanking Appreciation Request reassurance	6 1 1	33.33%	Aww, oh
Exclamation mark	Thanking Informative comment	1 1	8.3%	!

Table 5 Stylisic Enhancement and Terms of Endearment/Affection Employed in the Responses

5.4 Less Clearcut Cases

So far, I have discussed relatively straightforward examples from my dataset. Yet, not all compliment responses were as clearcut. For example, in one instance, the compliment receiver initially responded with an information-seeking question that expressed some kind of confusion, as depicted in *Figure 3*. The recipient was complimented on their performance in acting out a character in a game played by both the complimenter and the compliment receiver. The response, “How do you mean?”, raises the question of whether this is truly a request for clarification or rather used as a deflecting strategy. This is what makes this instance ambiguous compared to the other compliment responses observed in this study.

The complimenter interpreted the compliment receiver's answer as confusion and consequently explained the meaning of the initial utterance. After clarification, the recipient

responded by using the strategy of thanking, indicating that the utterance was eventually interpreted as a sincere compliment. When asked about this, the participant confirmed that they did not completely understand the initial compliment. Therefore, even though “How do you mean?” could be used as a deflecting strategy, in this instance, it was, in the end, considered as an attempt to gain a better understanding of the text message.

It is important to take into consideration that in this text exchange, only the second response (“Thank you. ❤️”) was viewed as a compliment response. This is because, only the second message from the complimenter, which was a clarification, was interpreted as a sincere compliment from the recipient.



Figure 3 Example of Compliment Exchange in Text Messaging for Data Collection

Another example I would like to mention is based on the emoji the recipient used. After being complimented on their profile picture with “You drew your profile picture very well” the response of the recipient was ”Thanks 🖕”. This emoji stands out from the others used in the compliment responses because it usually carries a negative connotation, often considered an insulting gesture, especially in Western cultures (Middle Finger, n.d.). However, it is crucial to note that, the complimenter and the recipient in this interaction are siblings. Thus, the middle

finger emoji is likely used to convey playful banter. Although it has an insulting meaning, banter can be used to emphasise solidarity between individuals with a close bond, as the risk of offense is reduced in such scenarios (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 229). Jobert & Sorlin (2018, p. 75) explain this by stating that it is just as if speakers behave in a way that their bonds are so strong with the addressee that they are entitled to be offensive and express their aggressive tendencies without harming in-group members. This demonstrates Leech's (1983) principle that excessive impoliteness can be seen as a form of politeness and intimacy. Therefore, such banter is a form of positive politeness that increases the intimacy between the speaker and addressee. That is because if two or more persons think it is acceptable to insult each other without taking it seriously, perhaps even find it humorous, they share a strong manner of expressing their solidarity (Leech, 2014, p. 239).

6. Conclusion and Discussion

This thesis studied compliment responses from acquaintances in text messages. The aim was to analyse what kind of strategies individuals use when responding to compliments conveyed via texts. Given the specific characteristics of digital communication, the analysis also included the stylistic enhancements used in the responses and determined how those relate to politeness strategies. To collect compliment responses, direct compliments were texted to acquaintances to receive a compliment response via the same medium.

In what ways do acquaintances respond verbally to compliments conveyed through text messages? They do so predominantly by means of expressing acceptance with Thanking (75%). Also the additional acceptance strategies of Appreciation (20.83%), Agreeing utterance (8.3%), Returning compliment (8.3%), Offer skill of compliment (4.16%) and Joking (4.16%) were used. Deflecting occurred mostly with Informative comment (20.83%). Shifting credit (4.16%), Ignore (4.16%) and Request reassurance/repetition (4.16%) occurred in the dataset as well, albeit less frequently than the acceptance strategies.

Interestingly, a trend emerged in the responses: apart from one response, every thanking response featured an emoji or words of affection. This suggests that a simple "Thank you" is often regarded as insufficient when communicated through a text message. In some instances, compliment receivers even tried to show more affection by combining several accepting strategies such as "Thanking" and "Appreciation".

Even though emotions (such as gratitude) can be conveyed in text messages through the use of emojis and words of affection, misunderstandings may still arise due to the lack of non-

verbal cues such as body posture and facial expressions. This could explain why, apart from the “Ignoring” strategy, participants in text-based communication tended to avoid only using a deflecting strategy. An accepting response such as “Thank you” is less likely to be misunderstood in a written context, as it is straightforward and clearly indicates gratitude. In contrast, a deflecting response only such as “It is not mine” could be interpreted as somewhat rude in a written context. Therefore, it seems like, in text messages, participants prefer avoiding potential misunderstandings and therefore opt to accept the compliment to guarantee clarity. In contrast, Ruhi’s (2006) study, which employed an observational approach to collect data from face-to-face interactions, found clear instances where only the deflecting strategy was used (e.g. C: “Your pullover is very nice.” R: “I bought it just recently.”). Through text messages, besides one instance, a deflecting strategy was only used to minimise the credit the compliment receivers were taking or try to shift the focus away from the compliment once they accepted it. Regarding this, for a more reliable conclusion and to have a better generalisation, whether deflecting strategies alone are less common as a response in text messaging, research with a larger sample size focusing on this aspect would be more appropriate.

Given the fact that this study was conducted via text messaging, it was interesting to see that returning compliments on appearance was also observed as a compliment response strategy in this study. In face-to-face interactions, returning compliments on appearance would be easier than in texting, since, in the former, you have the opportunity to observe the person and spontaneously acknowledge something about them, while that is not the case in the latter. Nonetheless, in this study, one participant, after being complimented on applying their lipstick very beautifully, responded with “Thank you very much, I find the color of your glasses’ lenses very exotic and cool.” Compared to face-to-face interactions, complimenting something like the color of lenses from someone's profile picture runs a higher risk of coming across as somewhat forced: it feels like the person is only returning a compliment to be ‘nice’ and alleviate the indebtedness a compliment creates for the recipient. Yet, in this study, I have not analysed how the compliment responses are perceived by the initial compliment givers, so I cannot conclude anything with certainty about the reception of this compliment response. Compliment reception would nonetheless be an interesting focus for future (quantitative) research, especially in the context of text messaging.

Another point for discussion is the use of various texting platforms, such as Instagram, iMessage, and Snapchat, in addition to WhatsApp in the present study. Initially, this use might appear to be a methodological drawback. However, since recipients were only required to respond to a compliment, the character limit does not significantly impact their response, as

compliment responses typically are not lengthy. Even if a more lengthy answer was preferred, recipients could simply reply with multiple consecutive messages. Furthermore, although iMessage and Snapchat lack a wide array of emojis to react to text, recipients can still express appreciation by reacting with a heart emoji. Therefore, individuals who prefer to react to a specific text via iMessage without sending additional words or emojis in the chat still have the option to do so. In sum, I do not believe that the different texting platforms significantly impacted the results of this study. Yet, to be absolutely sure, a comparative corpus analysis of compliment responses on different texting platforms would be necessary.

There are still several other factors that could have influenced the compliment responses provided in the present study, one of them being the diversity of the cultural backgrounds of the participants in this research. That is because compliments are interpreted differently in various cultures. While some cultures accept compliments more, others might find it impolite to accept them (Razi, 2013). Germans, for example, tend to agree with a compliment more by uttering a confirmation marker such as “Yes” (Golato, 2002), whereas Chinese people prefer to reject the compliment (Chen, 1993). Therefore, the participants' reactions may have been influenced by their cultural background. Nevertheless, it was intriguing to observe that, despite the participants' diverse cultural backgrounds, no striking differences in responding to compliments were observed. Rather, commonalities such as thanking with added stylistic enhancements, which function as positive politeness strategies, emerged.

Another factor in this study that could have influenced the compliment responses is the relationship between the compliment recipient and the complimenter. Accepting a compliment might be easier if the complimenter is a close friend or acquaintance, as there may be less concern about appearing arrogant. Moreover, for someone to use positive politeness, they must believe that they are members of the same group (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 73). In this study, since compliments were given to people with higher intimacy, a significant amount of positive politeness was observed in the responses. We do not know if the stylistic enhancements or strategies might change when individuals are complimented by someone with greater social distance. However, it is important to note that although compliments were given to acquaintances, the social distance between the complimenter and the recipient still varied in each interaction, depending on the degree of intimacy. This is because the compliments were directed to different acquaintances with varying degrees of intimacy (e.g. best friend, classmate, sibling, partner). Regarding this, future research could explore not only the responses to compliments given over text messages to strangers or individuals with less intimacy but also determine the social distance more clearly between individuals, whether they are acquaintances

or strangers, exchanging compliments. This could be accomplished using a questionnaire or similar method to gain a deeper understanding of the social distance between the complimenter and the recipient. Gaining clearer insights into the degree of social distance would help clarify how it affects the use of politeness strategies in this context.

In addition, the response to a compliment can also vary based on the type of compliment given. It is more likely that a person will give an informative comment (e.g. “I got it from Spain”) when complimented on their possession (e.g. “Your dress is beautiful”) compared to when they are complimented on their ability (e.g. “You are such a good communicator”). In this study, most compliments were made on appearance, but only one out of five informative comments appeared in the responses to an appearance compliment. Therefore, future research with a greater number of participants could profit by giving more compliments on each topic to compare the responses and examine how they differ based on the type of compliment.

A wider range of compliment responses over text messages would also enable a more accurate generalisation of the results. Even though the 7 compliment givers and 24 compliment recipients in the present study already allowed me to draw conclusions on compliment responses in texting, a bigger quantitative study with more compliment givers and recipients might help to refine the distinguished responses in the present research and even add other strategies to the existing ones. Moreover, there could then be a focus on specific variables such as gender or age to determine whether they have any impact on the reactions.

Regardless, this thesis provided valuable insights into how individuals, particularly acquaintances, responded to compliments in text messages. By analysing the compliment responses, this research contributes to the literature by highlighting how compliment recipients can respond via text messaging. Additionally, this research also reveals politeness strategies utilised in text-based responses. This thesis offers a basis for further research on compliment responses in the setting of text messaging, whether the focus is going to be on social distance, cultural differences, a larger sample size or other relevant aspects.

7. References

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Appendix

This table provides an overview of compliments and their responses, including information on the participant and the type of compliment given. For compliment exchanges that were not made in English, the original language is given in brackets.

Participant (Compliment receiver) / Age	Compliment Type	Compliment	Response	Strategy
1. Female 23	Appearance	Your makeup on your profile picture is so nice man (Profil fotindeki göz makyajın çok güzel ya)	Let me do it my love on you too (Yapim askim sana da)	Offer object (skill) of compliment
2. Female 26	Appearance	Your hair looks so pretty here (Dini haar gsehnd voll schö us do)	❤️ (message reaction) + Thank you ❤️❤️❤️ (Dankee ❤️❤️❤️)	Appreciation +Thanking
3. Male 24	Appearance	The beige jacket on your profile picture look very good on you (Bej ceketin çok yakışmış profil resmindeki)	Oh thankkk you my loveee (Ay sağolll askimmm)	Thanking
4. Female 24	Appearance	Looks very beautiful (Gseht mega hübsch us)	thank you 🙏 (dankeschön 🙏)	Thanking
5. Male 23	Appearance	Your hair looked really good today	Thank you for the compliment	Thanking
6. Male 21	Appearance	Your outfit on your profile picture is really cool	Tnx 🙏 Tht was my revenge outfit tht was not to be revenge outfits	Thanking + Informative comment
7. Female 32	Appearance	You look very beautiful on the last picture you posted (Son paylaştığın fotoğrafta çok güzel görünüyorsun)	Thank you honey :) (Teşekkür ederim balım :))	Thanking
8. Female 24	Appearance	Bro your curls on your profile picture look very good (Brudi dini locke ufem pb gsend mega guet us)	I also did not do it hahaha (han au nöd i gmacht hahahaha)	Joking / Shifting credit
9. Female 23	Appearance	You look very good in your profile picture (Ggesch mega guet us ufem profilbild)	Aww thanks 😊 (Aww danke😊)	Thanking
10. Male 23	Appearance	Cool picture (Cooles Bild)	😊 (message reaction)	Appreciation
11. Male 41	Ability/Action	You teach very good	Coming Where are you?	Ignore
12. Female 30	Ability/Action	You applied your lipstick very beautifully on your profile picture.(Du hesch dini Lippe mega schön)	Thank you very much, I find the color of your eyeglass lenses very exotic and cool. (Merci vielmol, i	Thanking + Returning Compliment

		gshminkt uf dim Azeigebild.)	find d farb vo dine brillegläser mega eotisch und cool.)	
13. Male 24	Ability/Action	Youre doing a really good job balancing all of that	-İ know right? -Lol -Now it is slightly better in recent days	Agreeing utternace + Informative comment
14. Male 25	Ability/Action	That was pretty good, you played that off well	Thank you.	Thanking
15. Non-binary 26	Ability/Action	Youre an amazing partner and such a good communicater	(message reaction) + Aw thank you, I appreciate you too	Appreciation+ Thanking + Returning compliment
16. Female 23	Ability/Action	-You are doing very well [name of comp receiver]! - There is not much left :) (Ho estas fent molt be [name of participant]! Ja queda poc:))	Oooh thankk you thats what I needed to hear (Aaai mercii es el que necessitava sentir	Thanking + Appreciaiton
17. Male 28	Ability/Action	You drew your profile picture very good (Du hesh dis profilbild mega gurt zeichnet)	Thank you (Danke	Thanking
18. Female 23	Ability/Action	You did such a great job coaching!	Hey (name of complimenter)! Thank you!	Thanking
19. Female 18	Ability/Action	Very beautiful font you chose	-Right (Gel) -Its the original font of the block jacket (Da isch original schrift vo de block jacke)	Agreeing utternace+ Informative comment
20. Male 27	Ability/Action	You painted those really good bro	Thanks homie	Thanking
21. Female 20	Possesion	Veru beatiful top on your picture (Voll schös oberteil ufdim bild)	Thankkss (Dankeschönn	Thanking
22. Female 24	Possession	The dress on your profile picture is very beautiful (profil resmindeki elbise çok güzel)	-Thanks beybii(Sağol beybii) -I bought it from spain hahaha (İspanyadan almıştım dkskd)	Thanking + Informative comment
23. Female 32	Possession	Really cool tshirt on your profile picture (Mega cooles t-shirt uf dim profilbild)	Awh, thx girl, from bershka! (Jö, thx girl, vom bershka!)	Thanking + Informative comment
24. Female 35	Possesion	The dress you wore on your graduation is very beautiful (Mezuniyette giydiğın elbise çok güzel)	Ohh really I got really happy right now thank you my little lamb (Ayy gercekten mi cok mutlu oldum su an tessekkur ederim kuzucum)	Request reassurance/repi tition + Appreciaiton + Thanking