

COMPLIMENT STRATEGIES AND REGIONAL VARIATION IN FRENCH: EVIDENCE FROM CAMEROON AND CANADIAN FRENCH¹

Bernard Mulo Farenkia

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 means of discourse completion tasks (DCT) administered to 55 participants in Yaoundé (Cameroon) and 39 respondents in Montréal (Canada). The 277 compliments obtained were analyzed according to the following three aspects: a) head act strategies (direct and indirect compliments), b) lexico-semantic and syntactic features of complimentary utterances, and c) external modification. With regard to head act strategies, the results show a preference for double head acts by the Cameroonian participants, while the Canadians more frequently employed single head acts. It was also found that indirect realizations of head acts occurred only in the Cameroonian data. Positive evaluation markers (e.g. adjectives, adverbs, verbs) and syntactic devices appearing in the compliments varied in type and frequency in the two varieties of French under investigation. The analysis of external modifications reveals that participants of both groups used many speech acts to externally modify their compliments. Overall, interjections, address forms, greetings, self-introductions and apologies were used as pre-compliments, with some speech acts, namely greetings and self-introductions, occurring only in the Cameroonian data.

Keywords: Compliments; Head act strategies; Positive evaluation markers; External modification; Regional variation; Cameroon French; Canadian French.

1. Introduction

The present paper examines compliment strategies in two varieties of French spoken outside France: Cameroon French and Canadian French. Several comparative studies of varieties of French around the world have focused on phonological, syntactic, lexical and semantic features of two or more varieties of French². To our knowledge, no study has ever

¹ I would like to extend my sincere appreciation to the Office of Research and Graduate Studies at Cape Breton University for funding this research. Many thanks to the students in Yaoundé and Montréal who participated in this study, my friends and colleagues in Cameroon and Canada who helped me with data collection and my research assistants for their help in organizing the data. I also thank the anonymous reviewer for their numerous and valuable comments on a previous draft of this paper.

² See, for instance, for *French spoken outside France in general*: Dumont (1983); Pöhl (2001, 2005); Thibault (2008), for *French in Canada* (Québec, Ontario, Acadia, etc.): Mougeon & Beniak (1989);

contrasted Cameroon French and Canadian French on any of the aspects listed above. Moreover, very little has been done with regard to the realization of speech acts and/or politeness strategies in regional varieties of French in general. Meanwhile regional pragmatic variation in other pluricentric languages such as English, Spanish and German has witnessed greater attention in the recent years.³ As will be shown in section 2.2 of this paper, there are some few recent studies on regional pragmatic variation in French spoken in France and Canada. The speech act of complimenting has been extensively analyzed. However, the vast majority of the studies mainly examine this speech act from an inter-lingual and/or cross-cultural perspective.

Following this introduction, section 2 presents the background of the study and section 3 discusses the method used. Section 4 then presents the results of data analysis, followed by a conclusion and suggestions for future research in section 5.

2. Background

This section deals with definitions and functions of compliments (section 2.1) and briefly presents variational pragmatics, the framework used in analyzing and comparing compliment strategies in both varieties of French (section 2.2).

2.1. Compliments and politeness / face-work

Holmes (1986: 485) 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”. Most studies consider compliments as expressive speech acts with multiple functions. According to Kerbrat-Orecchioni (2005) compliments are “verbal gifts”, employed to negotiate or affirm solidarity between speaker and addressee (Herbert 1989; Holmes 1988, etc.), to encourage desired behaviour in specific situations. They can serve as intensifiers of other speech acts or as indirect ways of apologizing, thanking, advising, asking for information, etc. and may also be used as mitigating devices for face-threatening acts such as criticism, reprimanding, etc. Some speakers may also use compliments as conversation openers (Traverso 1996: 107). In general, compliments are presented as positive politeness strategies, because they indicate that the compliment giver notices or attends to the recipient’s face desires. The functions of compliments are also observed in written discourse. In book reviews, for instance, “compliments contribute to establishing rapport and solidarity with the reviewee while redressing the face-threatening acts in the genre” (Gea Valor 2000: 24). Certain functions of compliments may be culture or situation specific. In a study on compliment behaviour in Cameroon (Mulo Farenkia 2006), we found that compliments in asymmetric situations, in professional settings, are generally

Martineau et. al. (2009); Wiesmath (2006), for *French in Africa*: Manessy (1994), and *French in Cameroon*: Biloa (2003); Mendo Ze (1999); Zang Zang (1998).

³ See, for instance, the edited volume by Schneider & Barron (2008).

used by speakers of lower status as “face flattering acts” to obtain favours from addressees in higher positions. In short, compliments are face boosting acts.

However, the positive interpretation of compliments depends on how successful the speaker weighs specific situational, linguistic and socio-cultural factors like gender, social distance, power distance, setting, linguistic forms, topic, etc. Otherwise, compliments may also threaten the face of people involved in the compliment exchange. For example, if the addressee believes that the compliments accompany hidden intentions, are not sincere, exaggerated, represent an intrusion into his or her private sphere, or compel him or her to share complimented objects with the speaker, the compliments may then provoke negative reactions. Compliments are therefore very complex speech acts. In intercultural encounters, compliments could lead to misunderstandings, since the speech acts produced are based on different cultural norms. For instance, compliments to an unknown addressee or to an addressee of the opposite sex in a public context and on sensitive topics like appearance etc. could be considered as face-threatening, depending on the cultural practices / background of the speaker and the addressee. It is important to be aware of the cultural norms underlying language use in general and the compliment act in particular.

Research on compliments has largely benefited from several comparative studies in which the culture specific features of compliment behaviour have been highlighted. The scope of most of the cross-cultural pragmatic studies of speech acts in general and of compliments in particular has been to pinpoint inter-lingual and/or intercultural variation, i.e. variation between different languages and/or cultures, thus ignoring the fact that “pragmatic differences may occur across varieties of the same language.” (Barron & Schneider 2009: 425). Although the focus on regional pragmatic variation within the same language had been demonstrated in a number of previous studies, the research paradigm was officially introduced in 2005 by Barron and Schneider and further developed (Schneider 2010) into a framework known as ‘variational pragmatics’.

2.2. Variational pragmatics

As mentioned earlier, the scope of most cross-cultural pragmatic studies has been to pinpoint variation in speech act strategies and their realizations in at least two different languages / cultures (Wierzbicka 2003). In intercultural pragmatic studies “languages are seen as homogenous wholes from a pragmatic point of view” (Barron 2005: 520). It is very often ignored 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. (Barron & Schneider 2009: 425)

Differences and similarities in varieties of the same language have been either neglected or treated as peripheral phenomena. In most cross-culturally oriented studies, the impact of region has not been addressed. For instance, the seminal work of Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) in their Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Project dealt with many languages and language varieties. However, there was 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, but has focused 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 completely ignored” (Schneider & Barron 2008: 3). Therefore, while cross-cultural pragmatics has ignored the pragmatic variation across varieties of the same language⁴, dialectology has ignored pragmatic aspects in the study of language variation⁵.

In order to fill these two gaps in research, “variational pragmatics” was conceptualized as a discipline at the interface of pragmatics and sociolinguistics, aimed 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” (Schneider 2010: 238). As the “‘dialectologisation’ of pragmatics” and the “‘pragmaticisation’ of dialectology” (Schneider 2010: 238), variational pragmatics studies intra-lingual pragmatic variation, i.e. pragmatic variation across varieties of the same language. Although variational pragmatics does not consist of any particular theory and methodology, it is based on the following three principles. The *principle of empiricity* stipulates that research should be data driven and not based on researcher’s intuition. The *contrastivity principle* 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” (Barron & Schneider 2009: 429). According to the *principle of comparability*, the data sets used for comparison must be produced by speakers of the same sex, group, social class, etc. (Barron & Schneider 2009: 429).

Moreover, variational pragmatics distinguishes the following five levels of pragmatic analysis: (a) the *formal level*, which takes a linguistic form as a starting point and aims to examine the various communicative functions of this form in discourse; (b) the *actional level*, which takes linguistic actions, i.e. speech acts, and analyzes the linguistic realizations of these illocutions; (c) the *interactive level*, which deals with patterns of local and global sequential organization of spoken discourse, i.e. dialogic units such as adjacency pairs, speech act sequences, conversational opening and closings, etc.; (d) 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 e) the *organizational level*, which deals with the mechanisms of turn-taking (and related issues like interruption and silence in discourse)⁶.

So far, studies in variational pragmatics have essentially focused on the actional level, namely on comparisons of the use of one or more speech acts across two regional or

⁴ Barron (2005: 521) calls this “pragmatics without macro-social variation”.

⁵ In Barron’s (2005: 522) terms, “macro-social variation without pragmatics”.

⁶ For details see Schneider & Barron (2008: 19-21) and Schneider (2010: 244-246).

national varieties of a pluricentric language. This area of study has witnessed a rapid growth in the publication of articles and books etc.⁷ However, with regard to French, the few available studies have focused on varieties of French in France and in Canada. These publications include an investigation of interactions between mothers and their daughters in French spoken in France and Canada (Québec) (Bernicot et al. 1994), a Master thesis on exclamation or exclamatory utterances in hexagonal and Québec French (Dubois 2000), an article on apologies in French from France and Canadian French (Schölmberger 2008) and a monograph on requests in hexagonal French and Canadian (Québec) French (Rohrbacher 2010). There is, to the best of our knowledge, no comparative study on compliments in two varieties of French. Moreover, apart from an article on compliment responses in American English and Irish English (Schneider 1999), there is no work on compliments from the variational pragmatics perspective.

Hence, the present study is an attempt to fill two research gaps. On the one hand, it intends to extend the scope of variational pragmatics in general, by examining the strategies for complimenting in two varieties of the same language, a speech act that has received a lot of attention in cross-cultural pragmatics but very little attention in variational pragmatics. On the other hand, by comparing compliment strategies in two varieties of French that have not yet been contrasted, this study contributes to research on regional pragmatic variation in French.

3. Methodology

This section presents the participants of the study (section 3.1), the instrument and procedure (section 3.2), and the coding scheme (section 3.3).

3.1. 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 the Cameroonian participants (50 out of 55) were aged from 15 to 19. Three of the respondents were aged 20 and two were aged 22. The Cameroonian respondents were speakers of French in a multilingual context where two official languages (French and English) are permanently in contact with more than 250 native languages⁸. The Canadian respondents were students at the *Académie Dunton*, a secondary school within the Montréal School Board (Québec), and

⁷ See Schneider & Barron (2008), a volume comprising studies on pluricentric languages such as Dutch, English, French, German, Spanish, and on speech acts such as requests, thanking, apologies, invitations, etc. and other pragmatic phenomena like the use of address forms, response tokens, and small talk. See Félix-Brasdefer (2009) for an overview on intra-lingual pragmatic variation across varieties of Spanish.

⁸ All of the respondents indicated that they spoke a native Cameroonian language (e.g. *ewondo*, *douala*, *medumba*, *yemba*, etc.).

the Cameroonian 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 DCT (Discourse Completion Task) questionnaire consisting of sixteen situations (eight situations where compliments were elicited and eight where the participants were asked to produce compliment responses). All 94 participants had to complete a questionnaire in which each situation was briefly described, setting “the general circumstances [...] and the relevant situational parameters concerning social dominance, social distance and degree of imposition” (Barron 2008: 43), and the participants were asked to write what they would say in the given situations. The 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), and possessions (mobile phone, car). The compliments were given to friends, a teacher, a friend’s parents, a classmate, a stranger, etc. The current study focuses on three of the eight situations, namely on those in which (culinary, sports and intellectual) skills were complimented. The situations were described as follows:

| SITUATIONS | Descriptions |
|--|---|
| <p>Situation 2 (Meal)</p> | <p>Tu es invité chez l’un de tes amis. 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) : « Merci. C’est gentil!”</p> <p>‘You are invited to your friend’s place. His/Her parents ask you to stay for supper. After the meal, which you particularly appreciated, what do you say to your friend’s parents? You: Your friend’s parents: “Thank you. That’s so nice!”</p> |
| <p>Situation 4 (Sports skills/ Performance)</p> | <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/la joueur/joueuse en question pour lui dire ton admiration. Toi: Le/la joueur/joueuse : « C’est vrai ? Merci d’avoir assisté au match ! »</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/her know your admiration. You: The player: “Really? Thanks for coming to the game!”</p> |

| | |
|--|---|
| Situation 14 (Class présentation) | Un(e) camarade 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. Toi: Le/la camarade: « Merci. Ça fait vraiment plaisir d'entendre cela! » 'A classmate of the opposite sex made an excellent presentation in class. You don't know him / her very well but you would like to tell them that they did an excellent job. You: Your classmate: "Thank you. It makes me really happy to hear that!" |
|--|---|

Figure 1: Situational description

3.3. Data analysis

The examples provided by the informants represented compliments which appeared alone (*head acts*) (cf. Section 4.2), or accompanied by supportive moves (*head acts + external modification*) (cf. Section 4.4). The participants employed direct or indirect realizations to produce the head act strategies. Direct realizations or *direct head acts* occur in structures containing positive evaluation markers (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 a job well done.' Some direct head acts in the data occurred alone (*single direct head acts*), i.e. in single complete syntactic structures as in (1) – (3) or elliptical expressions as in (4).

(1) *Ma chérie, ton travail était vraiment excellent.* [Cameroon French, henceforth CMF]⁹
 'My dear, your work was really excellent.'

(2) *J'aime beaucoup votre nouvelle coiffure.* [Canadian French, henceforth CF]
 'I really love your new haircut.'

(3) *C'est beau!* [CF] 'It is beautiful!'

(4) *Bon travail!* [CF] 'Good job!'; *Très bien !* [CF] 'Very good!'; *Génial!* [CF] 'Genius!'

Direct head acts also appeared as combinations of two or more single direct compliments (*multiple direct head acts*). The multiple head acts were realized in many different ways: e.g. by repeating the first direct compliment (e.g. *C'est bon! C'est (vraiment) bon!* 'It is

⁹ I would like to draw attention to the fact that the examples included in the text have been copied / typed by my research assistants and that the grammatical and/or typographic errors these examples contain also feature in the original responses.

good / nice. It is (really) good / nice!', or by reformulating the first compliment or focusing on a new aspect of the compliment object as in (5) and (6).

(5) *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.'

(6) *Hey bravo, tu as vraiment fait une superbe présentation !* [CF]

'Hey, bravo, you really gave a superb presentation.'

Indirect realizations of heads occurred in the form of other types of speech acts, thus needing "more inferences on the part of the addressee to reconstruct the intended meaning conveyed in the message by the speaker" (Yu 2005: 98). An example of an indirect compliment was the realization of encouragement as in (7).

(7) *Du courage dans ton travail.* [CMF]

'Hang in there (with respect to work).'

The other main strategy employed in the data was the combination 'head act + external modification'. External modification refers to the different kinds of additional speech acts or *supportive moves* (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989) that appear either before or after single or multiple head acts. The supportive moves serve various politeness or relational functions such as mitigating or intensifying the head acts (cf. examples (8) – (10)). The data were also analyzed with regard to the lexical and stylistic devices used in the head acts. The following examples from the data help us to illustrate the various aspects under investigation.

(8) *Oh my god! T'étais vraiment bonne, c'tait fou*¹⁰. [CF]

'Oh my god! You were really good. That was crazy.'

(9) *Ce gars, ta présentation était excellente.* [CMF]

'Man, your presentation was excellent.'

(10) *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.* [CMF]

'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 (8) the compliment giver uses an interjection (attention getter) *oh my god* to introduce the head act *T'étais vraiment bonne*. 'You were really good.'. This direct compliment is intensified by the adverb *vraiment* 'really'. A second core compliment is used to intensify the first head act *c'tait fou* 'That was crazy'. In (9), the head act is

¹⁰ Examples are written as found in the data, i.e. grammatical and spelling errors remained uncorrected.

preceded by the address form *Ce gars* ‘Man’, which serves as an attention getter as well as a solidarity marker, employed to reinforce the core compliment. As the discussion below will show, the address form belongs to a heterogeneous category of external modification devices comprising pre-compliments such as interjections, greetings, apologies, etc., used by the compliment giver to get the attention of the addressee or to establish a positive atmosphere prior to the core compliment. In (10), the speaker uses different types of pre-compliments, namely a combination of greeting and address forms *Bonjour compagnon* ‘Good morning, buddy’, and an apology *Pardon de te perturber mais* ‘Excuse me for bothering you but’ prior to 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’. Also, this head act contains the syntactic device *j’aimerais te dire que* ‘I would like to tell you that’, which serves as an internal introduction to the direct compliment. The core compliment is followed by another type of external modification: The expression of 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’.

The next section presents the results of the comparative analysis with regard to the following aspects: (1) head act strategies, (2) lexico-semantic and stylistic features of head acts and (3) External modification.

4. Findings

4.1. Overall frequency of main compliment strategies

Overall, the 94 participants provided 277 answers to the three questionnaire tasks. The Cameroonian respondents produced 161 responses: 54 in the sports, 54 in the presentation and 53 examples in the meal situation. In each of these situations, one informant did not offer a compliment. Moreover, one answer in the meal situation did not contain a compliment, but consisted of two supportive moves, namely an expression of gratitude and parting (e.g. *Merci on se verra prochainement*. ‘Thanks we will see each other next time.’). The Canadian participants provided 116 examples. One respondent did not provide an answer in the sports situation. Of the 277 examples in which compliments were offered, 114 occurred as head acts only (41.16%) and 163 appeared as combinations of head acts and supportive moves (58.84%). Table 1 shows the distribution of these strategies in the two varieties of French under investigation.

Table 1: Overall frequency of the main compliment strategies

| | CMF | CF |
|-------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Head act only | 62 (38.50%) | 52 (44.83%) |
| Head act + supportive move(s) | 99 (61.49%) | 64 (55.17%) |
| Total | 161 (100%) | 116 (100%) |

As can be seen in Table 1, while the Canadians employed ‘head acts only’ strategies much more frequently than their Cameroonian counterparts, the ‘head act(s) + supportive move(s)’ strategies occurred more frequently in the Cameroonian than in the Canadian data.

4.2. Head act strategies

Of the 62 examples of ‘head act only’ found in the Cameroonian data, 57 (91.94%) were direct head acts and five (8.04%) were indirect head acts. The direct head acts consisted of 17 (29.82%) single head acts as in (11) and 40 (70.18%) multiple head acts. The multiple head acts comprised 34 (85%) double head acts as in (12), four (10%) triple head acts as in (13) and two (5%) quadruple head acts as in (14).

- (11) *Impressionnant ce que vous venez de faire là.* [CMF]
‘Impressive what you have just done.’
- (12) *Ton exposé, super, excellent. Je l’ai vraiment trouvé intéressant.* [CMF]
‘Your presentation [was] super, excellent. I really found it interesting.’
- (13) *Bravo, tu as joué de façon extraordinaire, j’en suis restée scotchée !* [CMF]
‘Bravo, you played in an extraordinary way, I was really amazed!’
- (14) *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.’

All the 52 head acts in the Canadian data set were direct head acts, consisting of 25 (48.08%) single head acts as in (15), and 27 (51.92%) multiple head acts. The combinations of head acts consisted of 19 (70.37%) double head acts as in (16) and 8 (29.63%) triple head acts as in (17). There was no occurrence of quadruple head acts in the CF responses.

- (15) *Bonne présentation!* [CF]
‘Good presentation!’
- (16) *J’ai vraiment aimé ce que vous avez cuisiné. C’était délicieux.* [CF]
‘I really liked what you cooked. It was delicious.’
- (17) *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.’

While the Cameroonians showed a higher preference for double head acts, the Canadian participants much more employed single head acts. As can be seen in Table 2, some significant differences appeared with regard to situational distributions of the single head acts and multiple head acts in the two varieties of French.

Table 2: Frequency of head act strategies across the three situations in the CMF and the CF data sets

| | S2 (meal) | | S4 (sports) | | S14 (presentation) | |
|--------------------|-----------|----|-------------|----|--------------------|----|
| | CMF | CF | CMF | CF | CMF | CF |
| Single head act | 5 | 2 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 16 |
| Double head act | 2 | 4 | 18 | 7 | 14 | 8 |
| Triple head act | 0 | 1 | 2 | 6 | 2 | 1 |
| Quadruple head act | 0 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 7 | 7 | 29 | 20 | 21 | 25 |

Table 2 indicates that the Canadian respondents mostly used single head acts to express admiration in the oral presentation situation (S14), while this strategy was used with the lowest frequency in the meal situation (S2). By contrast, the Cameroonian participants mostly used combinations of two head acts in the sports 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.

With regard to indirect head acts, it was found that while there was no occurrence of indirect compliments in the Canadian data, the Cameroonian informants employed five indirect compliments, of which four occurred in the meal (S2) and one in the presentation situation (S14). Indirect compliments on meals were mostly (three out of four) realized as expressions of gratitude in which the speaker used adjectives with positive connotation such as *bon* ('good / nice'), *délicieux* ('delicious'), as in (18).

- (18) *Merci cher parent pour ce repas très délicieux.* [CMF]
'Dear parent, thank you for this very delicious meal.'

The fourth example of an indirect compliment on a meal was the speech act of promising as in (19). 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.

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

In the presentation situation (S14), the indirect head act appeared as an expression of encouragement as in (20).

- (20) *Du courage dans ton travail.* [CMF]
'Hang in there (with respect to work).'

4.3. Lexico-semantic and syntactic devices in head acts

4.3.1. Lexical devices

Overall, the participants of both groups used 557 lexical devices, namely 259 adjectives, 193 adverbs, 74 verbs and 31 positively loaded nouns.

1. *Adjectives.* As positive evaluation markers, adjectives are an integral part of direct compliments. Some of these elements are intrinsically stronger than others in terms of their positive connotation. For instance, by using a hyperbolic adjective, e.g. *excellent*, instead of a weaker adjective such as *bon* ‘good’, the speaker shows more positive politeness to the addressee. Thus, adjectives in compliments could be examined with regard to their types and/or their frequency. In general, the compliments in both data sets showed a very high frequency of adjectives: 150 adjectives appeared in the 161 compliments of the Cameroonian data (93.16%) and 109 were used in the 116 compliments of the Canadian sub-corpus (93.96%). Overall, the CMF participants used 64 different adjectives, while the CF respondents employed 28 different adjectives. The three most frequent adjectives in the CMF compliments were *délicieux* ‘delicious’ (n = 33; [22%]), *excellent* (n = 24; [16%]) and *bon* ‘good/nice’ (n = 20; [13.33%]), while the three most favoured adjectives with the CF participants were *bon* (n = 58; [53.21%]), *délicieux* (n = 8; [7.34%]) and *fort* ‘strong’ (n = 6; [5.50%]). In some of the examples *bon* appeared in the comparative or superlative form (e.g. *(le/la) meilleur(e)* ‘better/the best’). Although the most frequent adjectives in both data sets made up to half (or more) of the total number of adjectives used, the adjective *bon* alone represented 50% of the adjectives used in the CF compliments. The most striking difference between both varieties of French was the larger repertoire of adjectives in the CMF responses compared to that of the CF informants. Consequently, there were many adjectives in the CMF compliments that did not appear in the Canadian compliments. Another difference was the fact that some adjectives in the Canadian data were examples of a semantic shift by which negatively coloured adjectives such as *malade* ‘sick’, *sale* ‘dirty’ were used with a positive connotation to reinforce compliments. Also noteworthy was the use of English adjectives such as *nice*, *beautiful*, and *good* in the Canadian compliments, a phenomenon that was not observed in the CMF data.¹¹

2. *Adverbs.* The Canadian participants showed a higher incidence in compliments modified by adverbs (95 adverbs in 116 compliments, or 81.89%) as compared to Cameroonian informants (98 adverbs in 162 compliments, or 60.49%). The Cameroonian respondents used 14 different adverbs, while their Canadian counterparts employed 13 different types. The participants of both groups showed a preference for the same adverbs. As a matter of fact, the most favoured adverbs in both varieties were *vraiment* ‘really, very’ (CMF [n = 31] vs. CF [n = 36]), *très* ‘very’ (CMF [n = 24] vs. CF [n = 21]) and *bien* ‘good’ (CMF [n =

¹¹ An analysis of the situational distribution of the adjectives may also show interesting differences and similarities.

17] vs. CF [n = 18]). Surprisingly, there was a statistically significant difference in the use of *beaucoup* ‘a lot/very much’, which was found only twice in the CF data, while the CMF used this adverb fourteen times. Also, some CF participants borrowed adjectives/adverbs from the English language, namely *fucking* and *full*, to intensify their compliments, a phenomenon that we did not notice in the CMF responses. Another interesting aspect was the use of *maudit* ‘damned’, an adjective used as an intensifying adverb and which appeared before a positively loaded adjective (see Bilodeau 2001: 128). Generally, the adverbs in both data sets appeared before adjectives or verbs, while some of the intensifying adverbials occurred in combinations such as *vraiment très bien* ‘really very well’, *trop bien* ‘too well’, etc.

3. *Verbs*. The third category of lexical devices included verbs with complimentary connotation such as verbs of liking, admiration, surprise, know-how, etc. Of the 74 verbs found in the data, 57 (77.07%) were employed by the CMF participants and 17 (22.97%) by the CF respondents. The most favoured verb in the CMF data was *apprécier* ‘to love/like’ (n = 23), which showed a percentage twice as high as that of the second most preferred verb *aimer* ‘to love’ (n = 11). The most favoured verb with the CF respondents was *aimer* (n = 8), with a percentage twice as high as that of *impressionner* ‘to impress’, the second most preferred verb in the Canadian responses. A striking difference between both data sets was the fact that the verb *apprécier*, which was frequently used by the CMF informants, appeared only once in the CF responses. Moreover, the CMF participants displayed a larger repertoire of verbs to express admiration, although most of the verbs showed a very low percentage as compared to the most frequent ones.

4. *Nouns*. Finally, the analysis showed that 31 positively loaded nouns appeared in compliments. They were employed by participants of both groups to reinforce some of the lexical devices mentioned above. Some of them thus occurred in metaphorical structures. Although the nouns appeared with a very low percentage, their combination with other positive evaluation markers contributed to the face flattering aspect of the compliment. The nouns identified in the CMF data included *festin* ‘feast’ (n = 2), *délice* ‘delicacy’ (n = 1) (e.g. *Merci c’était un délice*. ‘Thanks. It was a delicacy.’), *merveilles* ‘marvel’ (n = 1), *chef* ‘master chef’ (n = 1), *cordons bleu* ‘cordons bleu chef’¹² (n = 2) (e.g. *Vous êtes un cordon bleu! Le repas était bon et très délicieux*. ‘You are a cordon bleu chef. The food was really delicious.’), *gentillesse* ‘kindness’ (n = 1), *plaisir* ‘pleasure’ (n = 1), *talent* (n = 6), *homme du match* ‘man of the match’ (n = 1), *spectacle* (n=1), *champion* (n=1), *star* (n=1), *courage* (n=3), *inspiration* (n=1), *intelligence* (n=1), *sagesse* ‘wisdom’ (n = 1), *modèle* ‘example/role model’ (n = 1). The repertoire of positive nouns used by the CF respondents included: *talent* (n = 1), *MVP* ‘Most Valuable Player’ (n = 1), *idole* ‘idol’ (n = 2) and *prof*

¹² ‘Cordon bleu’ is used to describe cooking of very high quality. A ‘cordons bleu chef’ is a skilled cook or the main cook in a restaurant.

‘teacher’ (n = 1). The CMF participants obviously used more positively loaded nouns to reinforce their compliments than the CF respondents did.

4.3.2. Syntactic devices

The syntactic devices found in both data sets had either mitigating or intensifying functions. Table 3 presents a breakdown of the types and frequency of syntactic modifiers in both data sets.

Table 3: Frequency of syntactic devices in the CMF and the CF data sets

| Syntactic devices | Frequency | |
|---|-----------|----|
| | CMF | CF |
| Comparative devices | 3 | 4 |
| Hyperbolic expressions | 10 | 2 |
| Mitigating devices | 6 | 4 |
| Consultative devices | 1 | 0 |
| Devices indicating eagerness to compliment | 3 | 4 |
| Compliment minimizing devices | 8 | 0 |
| Devices expressing embarrassment in complimenting | 1 | 0 |
| Devices announcing the reason for the interaction | 1 | 0 |
| Devices announcing the intention to say something | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 34 | 14 |

As shown in Table 3, while the participants of the two groups used various syntactic structures to internally modify their compliments, the Cameroonian responses showed a much higher incidence and a more varied repertoire of this type of modifiers. Overall, the Cameroonian participants employed 34 devices, while the Canadian respondents made use of 14 syntactic elements. Nine sub-types of syntactic devices were identified in the Cameroonian responses, whereas the Canadian respondents employed only four sub-types. A more detailed analysis of the realization forms of these devices in the two varieties of French showed some striking differences. A look at the comparative devices revealed that, while the Cameroonian participants exclusively employed comparative structures, the Canadian respondents employed comparative as well as metaphorical structures.

1. *Comparative devices.* The respondents made use of these devices to indicate that the complimented topic was the best ever. Here are some examples from the data.

- (21) *Je n'ai jamais goutté d'aussi bon plat.* [CMF]
‘I have never had such an appetizing meal.’
- (22) *Tu as joué comme une reine.* [CF]
‘You played like a queen.’
- (23) *J'ai jamais vu quelqu'un patiner d'même.* [CF]
‘I have never seen someone skate like that.’

2. *Hyperbolic expressions.* The structures were employed to reinforce the illocutionary force of the compliment. These expressions identified were employed to indicate

- total success or engagement in achieving the complimented object:

- (24) *Vous avez assuré à fond.* [CMF]
'You gave it your best shot.'
- (25) *J'ai tout vu ce que j'attendais de toi.* [CMF]
'I saw everything I expected from you.'
- (26) *Tu as capté mon attention du début à la fin.* [CF]
'You captured my attention from the beginning to the end.'

- (total) satisfaction of the speaker with the situation:

- (27) *J'ai pris du plaisir à vous observer.* [CMF]
'I had pleasure in watching you.'
- (28) *J'ai savouré chacune des secondes de ta présentation.* [CMF]
'I enjoyed each second of your presentation.'
- (29) *Il avait le goût qu'il faut.* [CF]
'It had the taste it had to have.'

3. The sub-category of *mitigating devices* was very heterogeneous and consisted of expressions such as *on dirait que / on peut dire que* 'one could/can say that', *je crois que* 'I think that', *je trouve (que)* 'I think/find that'. These devices aimed at softening the content of the compliment, by making it appear as the point of view of the speaker or a general point of view. Here are some examples from the data.

- (30) *On dirait que c'est un prof qui parle.* [CF]
'One could say you sound like a professor.'
- (31) *On peut dire que vous êtes l'homme du match.* [CMF]
'One can say you are the man of the match.'

4. Another variant of this sub-category was the use of *aimer* 'to like' in the conditional (e.g. *j'aimerais te dire que*. 'I would like to tell you that.'). This device was only used by the Cameroonian participants.

- (32) *j'aimerais te dire que tu as été parfait tout au long de ton exposé.* [CMF]
'I would like to tell you that you were perfect during your presentation.'

5. The consultative device *tu sais* ‘you know’ was used by a CMF informant to get the attention of the addressee (e.g. *Oh la la ! Tu sais j’ai bien aimé ta façon de jouer et tu as un grand talent.* [CMF] ‘Oh lala ! You know I really liked your play style and you have a great talent.’).

6. Another sub-category comprised devices indicating eagerness or sincerity in complimenting the addressee. These expressions were characterized by the use of verbs like *devoir* ‘must’; *tenir à* + verb (infinitive) (‘to (really) want to’), *vouloir* ‘to want to’ employed in the present/past tense or conditional and reinforced in some cases by *vraiment*. Some of these structures contained other verbs or verbal constructions employed to stress the sincerity of the compliment or to prepare the ground for an upcoming compliment. Some examples from the data.

(33) *Je tenais vraiment à vous féliciter.* [CMF]
‘I really wanted to congratulate you.’

(34) *Salut, j’ai regardé le match et je dois t’avouer que ton jeu m’a impressionné.* [CMF]
‘Hi, I watched the match and I must admit that your play style impressed me.’

(35) *Salut toi, on se connaît pas, mais je veux te dire que ta présentation était vraiment bonne.* [CF]
‘Hi there, we don’t know each other, but I want to tell you that your presentation was really good.’

(36) *Je ne te connais pas beaucoup, mais je vais prendre ce temps-ci pour te dire que tu as fait un travail remarquable.* [CF]
‘I don’t know you very well, but I’ll take this time to tell you that you did a remarkable job.’

7. A further group comprised compliment minimizing devices with *juste* ‘just’ used to minimize any threat to the addressee’s face (time, privacy, etc.) (e.g. *C’est juste pour vous dire que.* ‘It’s just to tell you that.’).

(37) *Salut! je voudrais juste vous dire que votre travail était bien et m’a beaucoup plu.* [CMF]
‘Hi, I just wanted to tell you that your work was good and really pleased me.’

(38) *Yo, j’voulais juste te dire que j’ai VRAIMENT aimé ton exposé.* [CF]
‘Yo, I just wanted to tell you that I REALLY loved your presentation.’

8. A Cameroonian respondent employed a device to express embarrassment in complimenting. By using this strategy, the speaker recognized the face threat posed by the compliment to a stranger and hoped that, by explicitly acknowledging the embarrassment, the recipient would downplay it (e.g. *Vous avez fait une excellente présentation, mais je ne savais pas comment vous dire.* [CMF] ‘You gave an excellent presentation, but I didn’t know how to tell you that.’).

We also found a structure employed by a CMF informant to indicate the reason for the interaction, thus preparing the ground for an upcoming compliment.

- (39) *S'il te plait! excuse-moi, mais c'est pour la présentation de tout à l'heure tu as été excellent.* [CMF]
 'Sorry, excuse me, but it is about the presentation you just gave you were excellent.'

The next section presents differences and similarities in the use of external modifications to compliments in Cameroon French and Canadian French.

4.4. External modification

Overall, the Cameroonian respondents used 162 and the Canadian participants 95 external modifications, which appeared either before or after the head acts. Ten different types/groups of external modification devices were identified in the data: Pre-compliments, thanking, expressing wish, commenting, questioning, advising, requesting, promising, expressing joy, and joking. These strategies were used either to mitigate or to intensify the head acts, depending on situational variables such as topic, social distance, and power distance. Table 4 shows the types and frequencies of external modifications used by informants of the two groups.

Table 4: Frequency and type of the external modifications in Cameroon French and Canadian French

| External modification | Cameroon French (n = 162) | Canadian French (n = 95) |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Pre-compliments | 75 | 36 |
| Thanking | 40 | 29 |
| Wishing | 19 | 10 |
| Commenting | 11 | 6 |
| Questioning | 6 | 4 |
| Advising | 5 | 3 |
| Requesting | 4 | 3 |
| Promising | 1 | 3 |
| Expressing joy | 1 | 0 |
| Joking | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 162 | 95 |

4.4.1. Pre-compliments

By pre-compliments, we understand the various pragmatic strategies employed to introduce the head acts. Although many speech acts may serve as pre-compliments, we will apply this terminology exclusively to those supportive moves in the data that essentially appeared before compliments, namely *address forms*, *interjections*, *greetings*, *self introductions* and *apologies*. The address forms were employed to initiate contact with / catch the attention of

the compliment receiver prior to the complimenting act proper. The respondents also used address forms to intensify the compliments, by displaying respect, conviviality, etc. Interjections were employed to catch the attention of the addressee and to express positive emotions concerning the compliment topic (e.g. surprise, pleasure, etc.). Greetings and self-introductions were used to initiate contact and soften the core compliments while the apologies mainly served as face-saving devices prior to compliments to strangers.

1. *Address forms.* Overall, the participants of both groups employed 41 address forms: 31 by the Cameroonians and 10 by the Canadians. The address forms in both varieties occurred mostly in the meal situation (S2) (n = 14). The Cameroonian respondents showed a more significant variety in terms of choice of address forms as compared to the Canadian informants. The Cameroonians used terms of respects (n = 6) such as *madame / monsieur* 'madam / sir', kinship terms (n = 7) such as (*chers / mes chers / les*) *parents* '(dear/my dear/the) parents'; *papa / maman* 'dad/mom' and terms of friendship, affection, closeness (n = 18) such as (*cher*) *camarade* '(dear) friend', *ma chérie* 'my darling', *mon pote* 'buddy', *ce gars* 'this boy/man', *garçon* 'boy'. The Canadian respondents chose terms of respect (n = 5) such as *monsieur / madame*, a first name *Josée* and terms of friendship and solidarity (n = 4) such as *hey man, yo, hey toi* 'hey you', *hey bravo*. It should be noted that the use of kinship terms with the parents of a friend by the Cameroonian informants was a means of flattering the positive face of (superior) addressees, since their seniority and biological status (status of parents) was explicitly recognized. In this case, such kinship terms reinforced the compliment offered. This feature did not occur in the Canadian data. This difference may be an indication of a major difference in the perception of social rapports and asymmetrical relationships in both cultures. While the Cameroonian participants showed explicit deference to their friend's parents (the compliment recipients), the Canadian informants did not express, at least at the level of address forms, any deference.

2. *Interjections.* Overall, twenty-one interjections appeared in the corpus. The Canadian respondents used more interjections (n = 18) to express surprise or pleasure prior to the core compliments than their Cameroonian counterparts, who only produced three interjections. The interjections found in the Canadian compliments were *wow* (n = 9), *Hum* (n = 1), *Mhm* (n = 1), *Ah* (n = 1), *hey* (n = 3), *Ooohh* (n = 1), *Oh my god* (n = 1), *Shit* (n = 1). The Cameroonian informants used the following interjections: *Ummm* (n = 1); *Oh* (n = 1) and *Oh la la* (n = 1).

Major differences appeared in the situational distribution of these attention getters. While the CF participants employed several interjections in the presentation situation (n = 9), the CMF respondents used none. The presentation situation (S14) also revealed noteworthy differences between CMF and CF responses. Here the CMF informants showed more creativity and variety in the use of greetings and apologies as compared to the other two situations.

3. *Greetings.* The respondents made use of greetings to initiate contact with the addressee and to soften an upcoming compliment. Considerable differences were noticed between the CMF and the CF participants: While the Cameroonian participants used

greetings 27 times, only one Canadian informant employed a greeting formula. The CMF respondents used this strategy to introduce compliments in the sports (n =9) and presentation situations (n =18), two situations where social distance prevailed. The Cameroonian participants used the following greeting forms: *Salut* ‘Hi’ (n = 9); *Bonjour* ‘Good morning’ (n = 2); *Bonjour monsieur / madame* ‘Good morning sir / madam’ (n = 3); *comment tu vas?* ‘how are you doing?’ (n = 1); *Salut jeune fille/ mademoiselle/chère(e) ami(e)/camarade* ‘Hi young lady/miss / dear friend/buddy’ (n = 6) ; *Bonjour Salut* ‘Good morning, hi’ (n = 2) ; *Bonsoir toi / champion / compagnon / cher camarade* ‘Good evening you / champion / buddy/ dear friend’ (n = 4) ; *Stenlai*¹³, *bonjour* ‘Stenlai, good morning’ (n = 1). As the examples show, one or two greeting formulas appeared alone before a single, double or triple head as in (40 - 41) or accompanied by either address forms as in (42 - 43) or other supportive moves (e.g. *self introduction* or *apology*) as in (44 - 45).

- (40) *Salut j’aimerais te dire que tu as fait un bon travail.* [CMF]
 ‘Hi, I would like to tell you that you did a great job.’
- (41) *Salut, comment tu vas? Tu as été magnifique tout à l’heure – sérieux, tu m’as presque subjugué.* [CMF]
 ‘Hi, how are you? You were magnificent, seriously, you almost charmed me.’
- (42) *Salut chère(e) ami(e). Ton exposé a été extraordinaire. J’ai savouré chacune des secondes de ta présentation. Bravo!* [CMF]
 ‘Hi, dear friend. Your presentation was extraordinary. I enjoyed every second of your presentation. Bravo!’
- (43) *Bonjour cher camarade, j’aimerais beaucoup te connaître et profiter de l’occasion pour te dire que tu as été superbe.* [CMF]
 ‘Good morning, buddy, I would really like to know you and use the opportunity to tell you that you were amazing.’
- (44) *Salut moi c’est malaïca et j’ai vraiment apprécié ta présentation.* [CMF]
 ‘Hi, my name’s Malaïca and I really enjoyed your presentation.’
- (45) *Salut ! C’est vrai qu’on n’a pas eu l’occasion de causer mais j’ai trouvé votre présentation excellente.* [CMF]
 ‘Hi! It’s true that we didn’t have an opportunity to talk, but I found your presentation excellent.’

4. *Introducing self*. By indicating who he or she was, the speaker’s intention was to build a social rapport with the addressee. This strategy aimed at contributing to the success of the compliment exchange. *Self introductions* were exclusively used by the CMF participants, and most of the examples (3 out of 4) were produced in the presentation situation (S14), where the speaker combines this strategy with greeting formulas as in (46).

¹³ The first name was used by the respondent to address the compliment recipient.

(46) *Bonjour toi ! je m'appelle Muriel au fait je voulais juste te dire que j'ai beaucoup aimé ta prestation en classe.* [CMF]

'Good morning you! My name is Muriel, in fact I just wanted to tell you that I liked your performance very much.'

5. *Apologizing*. This strategy was used to minimize the potential face threat of a compliment. The respondents made use of this strategy in situations that involved strangers. The Cameroonian and Canadian respondents employed apologies to the same extent. The apologies in the CMF data appeared in the sports (n= 4) and presentation situations (n = 6), two situations where compliments were offered to strangers (i.e. to an unknown player, and to a classmate the compliment giver is not familiar with). This is an indication that some of the CMF and CF participants considered compliments in these two situations to be face threatening acts that they mitigated, by means of appropriate external modifiers like apologies or greetings. The most frequently used forms to express apology in both varieties were *Excuse-moi* 'Excuse me' and *S'il te plait* 'Please'. However, some respondents in both data sets used realization forms in which they directly acknowledged the fact that they didn't know the addressee that much and thus indirectly alluded to the potential threat of the compliment (e.g. *Je sais que je ne te connais pas beaucoup* 'I know that I don't know you that much' (CF); *C'est vrai qu'on n'a pas eu l'occasion de causer* 'It's true that we haven't had the opportunity to talk' (CMF)). Of the seventeen apologies found, ten were employed before compliments by the Cameroonian respondents, and seven by their Canadian counterparts. The Cameroonian apologies were realized as follows: *Excusez-moi* (n = 4); *S'il te/vous plait!* (n = 4); *Pardon de te perturber* 'Excuse me for disturbing you' (n = 1); *C'est vrai qu'on n'a pas eu l'occasion de causer* 'It's true that we have not had the opportunity to talk' (n = 1). The Canadian apology forms were: *Excuse moi* (n = 2); *Je sais que je ne te connais pas (beaucoup)* (n = 2); *On se connaît pas* 'We don't know each other' (n = 1); *Scuse-moi si je t'ai pas beaucoup parlé* 'Excuse-me if I haven't talked to you much' (n = 1). Generally, the apology appeared before a single head or a double head act, and could be intensified by a greeting or other supportive moves as in the following examples.

(47) *Excuse-moi, je tiens à te dire que ta présentation a été excellente, j'ai aimé.* [CMF]
'Excuse me, I want to tell you that your presentation was excellent. I loved it.'

(48) *S'il vous plait, juste pour vous dire que votre exposé était sans reproche.* [CMF]
'Excuse me, just to tell you that your presentation was without fault.'

(49) *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.* [CMF]
'Good morning, buddy. I am sorry for bothering you, but I would like to tell you that you were perfect during your presentation and I intend to join your group the next time we have another presentation.'

Only one apology occurred after the head act¹⁴.

- (50) *C'était vraiment bon ! Scuse-moi si je t'ai pas beaucoup parlé en passant.* [CF]
 'That was really good. Excuse me if I have not spoken much with you.'

4.4.2. Thanking

Table 4 above shows that this strategy was the second most preferred means of external modification by the Cameroonian (n = 40) and the Canadian participants (n = 29). It was mostly used in the meal situation (S2), where the speaker was offered food by the friend's parents. In general, thanking functioned as an intensifying device with the explicit compliment: The appreciation token implicitly highlighted the complimented object as a revelation of the addressee's culinary talents and as beneficial to the compliment giver. As such, this external modification enhanced the face-flattering connotation of the compliment. In both data sets, thanking appeared as pre-sequence, post-sequence, or in central position, i.e. between two compliments.

Similarities were also found with regard to the positions and situational distributions of this supportive act. The Cameroonian and Canadian informants mostly made use of thanking in the meal situation (S2), where the combination of a single head and the supportive move was the most frequent pattern. Generally, thanking occurred before a compliment (CMF [n = 21] vs. CF [n = 23]). In the CMF data, there were also instances in which thanking appeared after a single head (n = 3) or was combined with two head acts, appearing either before (n = 6) or after (n = 2) the double head. In very few cases was thanking combined with a compliment and another external modifier. In the Canadian data, thanking also occurred after a single head act (n = 4) or was associated with a single head and another supportive move (n = 1). There was no instance where gratitude was combined with a double head. The following examples from both data sets are illustrative of the major positions of thanking with respect to the single or double head.

- (51) *C'était délicieux, merci bien.* [CMF]
 'It was delicious. Thanks very much.'
- (52) *C'était vraiment bon, merci !* [CF]
 'It was really delicious. Thanks.'
- (53) *Merci beaucoup madame c'était délicieux, ce plat en particulier : vous êtes un chef.*
 [CMF]
 'Thank you very much ma'am, it was delicious, this dish in particular. You are a chef.'
- (54) *Merci. Honnêtement, c'était délicieux!* [CF]
 'Thanks, honestly, it was delicious!'

¹⁴ Obviously, this is an example of a post-compliment. However, it was included here to facilitate making generalizations in the use of apologies in the Canadian data.

As can be seen in (53) and (54), thanks were also offered in the meal situation as pre-compliments.

4.4.3. *Wishing*

The respondents used this supportive move to express addressee-oriented or speaker-oriented wishes. The first type was a strategy by which the speaker wished that something good would happen to the addressee (e.g. further / future success in the complimented area). With the second type, the speaker expressed the desire to have the same skill as the addressee or to possess a similar object. In this case, it was an intensification device, since it showed solidarity with the addressee on the one hand and acknowledged the quality of the complimented object on the other. In the Cameroonian data, the wish was the third most frequently employed supportive move, appearing 19 times. It was mostly used in the sports situation (n = 9), where it occurred after a single or a double head act as in (55). In the Canadian data, this external modification was the second most preferred supportive move, used ten times and mostly (n = 4) in the presentation situation (S14) as in (56).

- (55) *Votre talent réveille l'attention, vous jouez un ballon d'un niveau international, que Dieu vous aide.* [CMF]
 'Your talent draws my attention, you play a game of international standard, may God help you.'
- (56) *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.'

4.4.4. *Commenting*

By employing this supportive move, the speaker added some information concerning the addressee, the complimented object or the speaker. In using this strategy, the speaker addressed the communication needs of the recipient. Depending on the type of comments and the situation, this strategy was used to soften or strengthen the illocutionary force of the compliment. Comments were the fourth most frequently used external modifications in the Cameroonian data (n = 11) and the Canadian (n = 6). While comments were mostly employed in the presentation situation by the Cameroonian participants (n = 6), this strategy was evenly used in the three situations by the Canadian informants.

- (57) *Mes félicitations, j'ai eu à voir votre match, vous avez un très grand talent.* [CMF]
 'Congratulations, I watched your game, you have a great talent.'
- (58) *Tu étais très bon ce matin. Je tenais à te le dire.* [CF]
 'You were very good this morning. I wanted to let you know that.'

In some cases, the comments prepared the addressee for the forthcoming compliment as in (59).

- (59) *Je t'ai suivi en classe aujourd'hui tu as fait du bon travail.* [CMF]
 'I listened to you in class today, you did a good job.'

4.4.5. Questioning

This supportive move appeared either before (as pre-compliment) or after a single or a multiple head act. It was employed to ask for information related to the compliment topic. Depending on the situation, the questions asked by the compliment giver focused on aspects such as the origin of the complimented object, what/how the addressee thinks/feels about it, the state or brand (type or design) of the object, etc. Questions occurring prior or after compliments therefore indicated multiple goals of the compliment giver. The questions showed, for instance, that the speaker was not only interested in expressing admiration, but would also like to know more about the complimented object and/or the compliment receiver, as Jaworski (1995: 67) clearly puts it: "questions [...] are plurivalent acts [...] indicative of the speaker's multiple goals in discourse [...]. On the one hand, the speaker expresses an appreciation [...] and at the same time elicits information which may be useful in obtaining a similar item."

This supportive move was used differently by the participants of both groups. The CMF informants employed questions six times, while the CF participants employed questions in four instances. Differences in terms of situational distribution were also observed. The questions in the Cameroonian data were mostly (n = 4) used in the presentation situation (S14), as in (60), while no respondent in the Canadian corpus used questions as supportive moves in this situation.

- (60) *Ton travail était parfait. Pendant combien de temps l'as-tu constitué?* [CMF]
 'Your work was perfect. How long did it take you to prepare for it?'

It was found that, although most of the questions in the Cameroonian data appeared after the head acts, there were occurrences of questions as pre-compliments by Cameroonians and mostly by the Canadians, as in the following examples.

- (61) *Monsieur, quel est le nom de votre mets, car votre repas est savoureux.* [CF]
 Sir, what is the name of your meal, the meal is delicious.'
- (62) *Comment tu as fait ? J'ai vraiment apprécié ta façon de faire et surtout ton courage.*
 [CMF]
 'How did you do it? I really loved the way you did it and your courage above all.'

4.4.6. *Advising*

By using this supportive move, the speaker told the addressee to keep up the good work. In other words, this supportive move served as an intensifier, since it indicated that the respondents were also overtly encouraging the addressee. The respondents of both groups employed this strategy to modify their compliments exclusively in the sports situation (S4), with similar percentages. The advice generally occurred after a compliment. The following examples are taken from the data.

- (63) *T'as vraiment bien joué ce soir, continue comme ça.* [CF]
 'You really played well this evening, keep up the good work!'
- (64) *J'admire votre façon de jouer au football et moi à ta place j'en ferais d'avantage pour évoluer dans un club en étranger.* [CMF]
 'I admire your play style in soccer and if I were you, I would train more in order to play in a club abroad.'

4.4.7. *Requesting*

This external modifier was used to ask for either information, help, or anything that would help the speaker to stay in contact with the compliment receiver (e.g. phone number, autograph, etc.). The respondents of both French varieties did not show any statistically significant difference in the use of this strategy (CMF (n = 4) vs. CF (n = 3)), and this supportive move was most frequent in the sports situation (S4) in both data sets. Some of the requests were also intensified by another supportive move (e.g. *promise* or *advice*).

- (65) *Comment tu fais pour être aussi bon ? Il faut que tu m'apprennes. Je vais revenir à tous tes match.* [CF]
 'What do you do to be so good? You have to teach me. I'll attend all your games.'
- (66) *Vous jouez très bien, continuez dans la même lancée, un orthographe SVP si possible votre numéro.* [CMF]
 'You play very well, keep up the good work, can I please have an autograph, your phone number if possible?'

4.4.8. *Promising*

By using this external modification, the speaker made a promise to the compliment receiver in connection with the compliment topic (e.g. to pay another visit, to come pick up the recipe, etc.). This strategy was used in one instance in the CMF data and three times in the CF data. As the examples below show, the speech act of promising functioned as an

intensifying device, by which the speaker showed a very strong interest in the complimented object.

- (67) *Merci pour votre repas il était vraiment bien, je passerai pendre la recette pour moi.* [CMF]
 ‘Thanks for the meal, it was really good, I’ll come pick up the recipe for myself.’
- (68) *Je vais venir souvent. C’est très bon chez vous. C’est quoi la recette ? C’est un des meilleurs plats que j’ai jamais mangés.* [CF]
 ‘I’ll come by very often. The food tastes very good here. What is the recipe? It is one of the best dishes I have ever had.’

4.4.9. Other external modifications

There was one example of *expressing joy* in the CMF data and one instance of *joking* in the CF data. Both strategies functioned as positive politeness devices. In the Cameroonian example, the speaker expressed joy in having watched the match, thus reinforcing the preceding compliment. The CF speaker used a jocular expression (intensified by laughter) to tease the compliment receiver.

- (69) *Merci pour le spectacle, vous avez merveilleusement joué et j’étais vraiment heureux d’avoir assisté à ce match.* [CMF]
 ‘Thanks for the performance, you played very well and I was very happy to have watched the game.’
- (70) *Ton exposé était bon. Mais le mien était meilleur [rire].* [CF]
 ‘Your presentation was good. But mine was better (laughter).’

4.4.10. Situational distribution of the external modifications

The analysis of the supportive moves also revealed some interesting differences with regard to their frequency and distribution across the three situations. Tables 5, 6, and 7 recapitulate the situational distribution of the external modifications in both French varieties.

Table 5: Frequency of supportive moves in situation 2 (meal)

| External modifications | CMF | CF |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Frequency | Frequency |
| Thanking | 39 | 28 |
| Pre-compliments | 12 | 6 |
| Wishing | 3 | 0 |
| Questioning | 1 | 2 |
| Requesting | 1 | 0 |
| Commenting | 3 | 2 |

| | | |
|-----------|----|----|
| Promising | 1 | 2 |
| Total | 60 | 40 |

Table 6: Frequency of supportive moves in situation 4 (sports)

| Supportive moves | CMF | CF |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Frequency | Frequency |
| Pre-compliments | 24 | 9 |
| Thanking | 1 | 1 |
| Wishing | 9 | 6 |
| Questioning | 1 | 2 |
| Requesting | 3 | 3 |
| Commenting | 2 | 2 |
| Promising | 0 | 1 |
| Advising | 5 | 3 |
| Expressing joy | 1 | 0 |
| Total | 46 | 27 |

Table 7: Frequency of supportive moves in situation 14 (presentation)

| Supportive moves | CMF | CF |
|------------------|-----------|-----------|
| | Frequency | Frequency |
| Pre-compliments | 39 | 21 |
| Wishing | 7 | 4 |
| Questioning | 4 | 0 |
| Commenting | 6 | 2 |
| Joking | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 56 | 28 |

In both varieties of French, pre-compliments were the most favoured means of external modification in the presentation situation (S14), while thanking occurred more in situation 2 (meal) and not at all in situation 14 (presentation). This result suggests a tendency to accompany compliments on food with the expression of gratitude. External modifications were mostly used with compliments on culinary skills (situation 4) by speakers of the two groups.

5. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis revealed similarities and differences in the way speakers of Cameroon French and Canadian French realized compliments on skills.

Head act strategies: The informants of the two groups employed head acts, albeit with some differences. While the Cameroonians showed a preference for double head acts, the Canadian participants employed single head acts more frequently. It was also found that indirect realizations of head acts occurred only in the Cameroonian data set. The analysis

also revealed some differences with regard to situational distributions of the head act strategies.

Lexical and syntactic devices in the head acts: In general, the repertoire of positive evaluation markers in the Cameroonian data was larger and more varied. Number, age and gender variation may account for these differences. The Cameroonian population was larger than the Canadian (Cameroon: 55 vs. Canada: 39) and the Cameroonian respondents were slightly older than their Canadian counterparts. Based on Macaulay's (2009: 60) observation that "older adolescents use more complex constructions and [develop] a range of communicative styles", it could be argued that age may explain the complexity and higher number of positive evaluation markers found in their compliments. Gender differences may also be relevant: The Canadian population was predominantly male (74%), the Cameroonian group was predominantly female (70%)¹⁵.

External modifications: The participants of both groups made use of many other speech acts to externally modify their compliments. Overall, the most favoured external modifiers were (in decreasing order of frequency) pre-compliments, thanking, wishing, and commenting. The use of alerters showed some striking differences. It was found that the CMF informants displayed a strong preference for greetings and self-introductions, whereas only one Canadian response contained a greeting formula. This result may indicate differences in the perception of compliments to strangers. By employing so many greetings to open their compliments, the Cameroonian participants seemed to regard compliments to unknown people as face threatening acts that needed to be softened. To them, giving a direct compliment in such situations entailed the risk of provoking negative responses. The greetings were therefore employed as a face-saving strategy. The Canadian informants also perceived this fact, but mostly preferred other types of pre-compliments, namely apologies and address forms, as mitigating devices for compliments to strangers. In general, the use of external modifiers showed that the participants of both groups considered complimenting as a complex activity that comprises other speech acts. The abundant use of external modifications may indicate that the compliments served as pretexts to reach other communication goals. In general, the complex repertoire of lexico-semantic devices and structures found in the Cameroonian compliments could be perceived as part and reflection of a complex politeness system in a postcolonial multilingual context (cf. Anchimbe & Janney 2011).

The results of this study should not be over-generalized, since we focused on a rather small group of respondents. Further research should include data from other sources (natural conversations, interviews, role-plays, etc.), from larger target groups and respondents in other cities/regions in Canada and Cameroon, and from other varieties of French in order to capture more subtle regional differences in complimenting. It is hoped that this article will contribute to "variational pragmatics" in general and the study of pragmatic variation in French in particular, a pluricentric language that has not received enough attention.

¹⁵We thank the reviewer for drawing our attention to these aspects, which need a more detailed analysis.

References

- Anchimbe, Eric A., and Richard W. Janney (2011) Postcolonial pragmatics: An introduction. *Journal of Pragmatics* 43: 1451-1459.
- Barron, Anne (2005) Variational pragmatics in the foreign language classroom. *System* 33: 519–536.
- Barron, Anne (2008) The structure of requests in Irish English and English. In Klaus Peter Schneider, and Anne Barron (eds.), *Variational Pragmatics. A Focus on Regional Varieties in Pluricentric Languages*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 35-67.
- Barron, Anne, and Klaus Peter Schneider (2009) Variational pragmatics: Studying the impact of social factors on language use in interaction. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 6: 425-442.
- Bernicot, Josie, Judith Comeau, and Helga Feider (1994) Dialogues between French-speaking mothers and daughters in two cultures: France and Quebec. *Discourse Processes* 18: 19-34.
- Biloua, Edmond (2003) *La langue française au Cameroun*. Bern: Peter Lang.
- Bilodeau, Chantale (2001) Des moyens d'expression de l'intensité dans le langage des jeunes Québécois. Mémoire de maîtrise. Université du Québec à Chicoutimi. Available at <http://constellation.uqac.ca/910/1/12335073.pdf>.
- Blum-Kulka, Shoshana, Juliane House, and Gabriele Kasper (eds.) (1989) *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and apologies*. Norwood: Ablex Publishing.
- Dubois, Caroline (2000). La grammaire de l'exclamation. Aspects théoriques, français de référence et français québécois. Mémoire de Maitrise, Université de Sherbrooke. Available at <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk2/ftp01/MQ61741.pdf>.
- Dumont, Pierre (1983) *Le français et les langues africaines au Sénégal*. Paris: Karthala.
- Félix-Brasdefer, César J. (2009) Pragmatic variation across Spanish(es): Requesting in Mexican, Costa Rican and Dominican Spanish. *Intercultural Pragmatics* 6: 473–515
- Gea Valor, María Lluisa (2000) *A Pragmatic Approach to Politeness and Modality in Book Reviews*. Valencia: SELL Monograph.
- Herbert, Robert K. (1989) The ethnography of English compliments and compliment responses: A contrastive sketch. In Wieslaw Oleksy (ed.), *Contrastive pragmatics*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 3-35.
- Holmes, Janet (1986) Compliments and compliment responses in New Zealand English. *Anthropological Linguistics* 28: 485-508.
- Holmes, Janet (1988) Paying compliments: A sex-preferential politeness strategies. *Journal of Pragmatics* 12: 445-465.
- Jaworski, Adam (1995) “This is not an empty compliment!” - Polish compliments and the expression of solidarity. *International journal of Applied Linguistics* 5: 63-94.
- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine (1998) *Les interactions verbales*. Vol. 3. Paris: Armand Colin.

- Kerbrat-Orecchioni, Catherine (2005) *Les actes de langage dans le discours*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Macaulay, Ronald K.S. (2009) Adolescents and identity. *Intercultural pragmatics* 6: 597-612.
- Manessy, Gabriel (1994) *Le français en Afrique noire. Mythes, stratégies, pratiques*. Paris : L'harmattan.
- Martineau, France, Raymond Mougeon, Terry Nadasdi, and Mireille Tremblay (2009) *Le français d'ici. Études linguistiques et sociolinguistiques sur la variation du français au Québec et en Ontario*. Toronto: Éditions du GREF.
- Mendo Ze, Gervais (1999) *Le français, langue africaine. Enjeux et atouts pour la francophonie; éléments de stratégies*. Paris: PubliSud.
- Mougeon, Raymond, and Édouard Beniak (1989) *Le français canadien parlé hors Québec. Aperçu sociolinguistique*. Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval.
- Mulo Farenkia, Bernard (2006) *Beziehungskommunikation mit Komplimenten. Ethnographische und gesprächsanalytische Untersuchungen im deutschen und kamerunischen Sprach- und Kulturraum*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Pöll, Bernhard (2001) *Francophonies périphériques. Histoire, statut et profil des principales variétés du français hors de France*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Pöll, Bernhard (2005) *Le français langue pluricentrique? Étude sur la variation diatopique d'une langue standard*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang.
- Rohrbacher, Andrea (2010) *Der Sprechakt der Bitte in Frankreich und Quebec. Ein interkultureller Vergleich aus dem Bereich der Variational Pragmatics*. Saarbrücken: VDM.
- Schneider, Klaus P. (1999) Compliment responses across cultures. In M. Wysocka (ed.), *On language theory and practice*, vol. 1. Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, pp. 162-72.
- Schneider, Klaus P. (2010) Variational Pragmatics. In Mirjam Fried, Jan-Ola Östman, and Jef Verschueren (eds.), *Variation and change: Pragmatic Perspectives*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 239-267.
- Schneider, Klaus P., and Anne Barron (eds.) (2008) *Variational Pragmatics: A Focus on Regional Varieties in Pluricentric Languages*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Schölmlberger, Ursula (2008) Apologizing in French French and Canadian French. In Klaus P. Schneider, and Anne Barron (eds.), *Variational Pragmatics: A Focus on Regional Varieties in Pluricentric Languages*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, pp. 329-350.
- Thibault, André (ed.) (2008) *Richesses du français et géographie linguistique*. Vol 2. Brussels: De Boeck.
- Traverso, Véronique (1996) *La conversation familière. Analyse pragmatique des interactions*. Lyon: Presses Universitaires de Lyon.
- Wierzbicka, Anna (2003²) *Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The Semantics of Human Interaction*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Wiesmath, Raphaële (2006) *Le français acadien. Analyse syntaxique d'un corpus oral recueilli au Nouveau-Brunswick/ Canada*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

Yu, Ming-chung (2005) Sociolinguistic competence in the complimenting act of native Chinese and American English speakers: A mirror of cultural value. *Language and speech* 48: 91-119.

Zang Zang, P. (1998) *Le français en Afrique*. Munich : Lincom Europa.