COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLIMENT RESPONSES IN ROMANIAN CONVERSATIONAL DISCOURSE

Diana Hornoiu[*]

Abstract: The present paper is a corpus-based analysis of compliments and compliment responses in naturally occurring talk-in-interaction in Romanian. The analysis is carried out within a theoretical framework that blends conversation analysis and the theories of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983, 2013). Compliments and compliment responses are viewed as social actions which are co-produced and negotiated among participants in the talk exchange. The aim of the study is to identify the types of possible compliment responses allowed by a mechanism that works under two opposing constraints: express agreement with addressee (see Brown and Levinson's positive politeness strategies) or give symbolic gifts to addressee, such as praise (see Brown and Levinson's positive politeness strategies), on the one hand, and minimize praise to self (see Leech's maxim of modesty), on the other. The compliment sequence is considered within the extended interactional environment, with a view to highlighting the interconnectedness of sequential organization, preferred seconds and communicative function. The article also addresses the use and function of various particles occurring in compliments and compliment responses and their role in how speaker alignments and misalignments are achieved.

Keywords: compliment responses, positive politeness, negative politeness, maxim of modesty, speech acts, sequential organization

1. Introduction

Compliments have been said to "grease the social wheels" and thus their main communicative function is to serve as "social lubricants" (Wolfson 1983: 89). Given their wide-spread use, compliments and compliment responses have become the focus of attention in a wide range of studies coming from different fields and from various languages.

The speech event of complimenting is structured as an adjacency pair (Schegloff and Sacks 1973, Sacks et al. 1974). The first part of the adjacency pair includes the compliment itself, while in the second part the addressee provides a respond/ acknowledgement to it. As a multifunctional speech act, compliments can express gratitude, soften a criticism or request or they can play a role in the overall organization of a conversation as opening or closing sequences (Wolfson 1983, Brown and Levinson 1987, Billmyer, 1990). Despite their apparent simplicity, compliments evince a certain degree of complexity due to their functioning not only as positive politeness strategies, but also, on some occasions, as face-threatening acts. Consequently, compliments and compliment responses are subject to two systems of constraints.

The present paper is a corpus-based analysis of compliments and compliment responses in naturally occurring talk-in-interaction in Romanian. The analysis is carried out within a theoretical framework that blends conversation analysis and the theories of politeness proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) and Leech (1983, 2013). Compliments and compliment responses are viewed as social actions which are

[*] "Ovidius" University of Constanţa, dianahornoiu@gmail.com.

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2. Methodology

Compliments and compliment responses have been studied within various theoretical frameworks, using different tools of scientific investigation and methods of data collection including: (i) conversation analysis and discourse analysis (Pomerantz 1978, Wieland 1995, Golato 2005); (ii) field observation (Wolfson and Manes 1980, Herbert and Straight 1989, among others); (iii) discourse completion tasks and questionnaires (e.g. Barnlund and Akari 1985, Yuan 1996); (iv) role play (Saito and Beecken 1997).

For the present study, the data collection and analysis were carried out within the framework of Conversation analysis. CA provides a particularly well-suited framework of analysis for culturally determined speech events since it makes use of video and/or audiotaped samples of non-elicited face-to-face or telephone interactions. The data collected by employing CA methodology are spontaneous and consequently represent what speakers are actually doing in conversation. Thus, CA data and methodology allow for a fine-grained analysis of a phenomenon in its sequential context.

The data were taken from a corpus of 10 hours of non-elicited audio taped conversation, between close friends and family members. The data were collected over nine months, from February 2001 to April 2004 in Constanţa, Romania and include speakers from this city as well as from the Constanţa metropolitan area.

Participants were audiotaped during activities that they would normally engage in. Such activities include dinners, get-togethers over drinks or coffee and cake, and card games. The speakers ranged in age from 15 to 64 years, with the majority being in their early twenties and thirties. All speakers held or were pursuing a university degree or held white-collar positions in Romania (social workers, sales representatives, teachers, accountants, physical therapists). All in all, the 24 speakers produced 20 compliment sequences[1]. The data were transcribed using the transcription conventions proposed by Jefferson (1983, 1985) and Sacks et al. (1974).

[1] Another corpus of Spoken Romanian worth mentioning is Oancea (2016). Compliment sequences in Romanian Adolescent talk are rather scarce. We hypothesize that a consistent use of compliment and compliment responses should be correlated with linguistic choices related to the construction of a fully-fledged gender identity.

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In order to maintain ethical research standards, all participants were informed of the process prior to the commencement of the recording. Additionally, they were provided with an information leaflet which took the form of a written guarantee regarding issues of confidentiality anonymity of transcripts and confidentiality of any personal details concerning any of the speakers. Once the recordings were carried out, all participants were requested to complete speaker consent forms granting permission to use the data in the recording. Once permission had been received for all the recordings to be used, the data were transcribed. Once the data transcription was carried out, all participants were presented with the opportunity to view their transcripts and withdraw, edit or remove any information. All names are fictionalised to protect participants' identity.

3. Research question

As Pomerantz (1978: 81) points out, recipients of compliments are under the influence of two conflicting constraints which are "concurrently relevant but not concurrently satisfiable". The first system of constraints stems from the fact that compliments can be seen as assessments, i.e. the speaker is evaluating some state of affairs (some object, some action, some person). When compliments are seen as assessments, relevant responses are agreements or disagreements with prior compliments. In the agreement/disagreement system, the preferred response, in the next turn, to an assessment is an agreement with the assessment, which usually takes the form of a second assessment (Pomerantz 1984: 62). Unlike agreements, disagreements are dispreferred seconds.

Under the second system of constraints, compliments function as supportive actions. This supportive nature makes them similar to offers, invitations, gifts, praises, etc. Pomerantz (1978: 81). As such, they have an acceptance of the compliment as their preferred next action in the second part of the adjacency pair and a rejection as a dispreferred second part.

Pomerantz (1978) points out that these two systems of constraints are closely interrelated. There is an affiliation between the preferred and the dispreferred responses across the two systems: agreements are associated with acceptances and disagreements with rejections.

Given the general preference for selecting preferred second parts, we would expect a consistent use of agreements and acceptances as compliment responses. However, empirical data, at least in some languages (e.g. American English), run contrary to this expectation. A high occurrence of disagreements and rejections as compliment responses seems to be accounted for in terms of a second constraint on speakers which conflicts with the first constraint: they should minimize praise to self (cf. the maxim of modesty proposed by Leech 1983, 2013: "Minimize the expression of praise of self; maximize the expression of dispraise of self").

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4. Analysis of the data

This section addresses the types of compliment responses that are available to a speaker of Romanian. These patterns have been identified in the corpus that provided the empirical basis for the present study.

4.1 Acceptances and agreements

4.1.1 Acceptances

The analysis of our data showed that an acceptance is not the most frequently used response to a compliment in spoken Romanian. However, when acceptance are used as compliment responses, they are regularly realized as appreciation tokens such as *mulţumesc* 'thank you', *mulţumesc* (*foarte*) *mult* 'thank you so much', and *mulţumesc frumos* 'thank you kindly'.

(i) Appreciation token

A feature of an appreciation token is that it recognizes the status of the prior turn as a compliment without being semantically fitted to any of the details of that compliment.

Subsequent to a compliment, the appreciation token is performed in a next turn, as shown in (1):

(1) A: arăţi foarte bine
'you look great'
B: mulţumesc
'thanks'

In doing an appreciation, a recipient interprets the prior turn not merely as a compliment, but as that sort of compliment which warrants an acceptance. In other words, an appreciation is treated as a symbolic gift that should be accepted and thanked for. At the same time, in doing an acceptance-appreciation, the recipient of the appreciation can be seen to implicitly agree with the prior compliment.

4.1.2 Agreements

As we have seen in the previous example, when compliments are taken as symbolic gifts (e.g. praise, appreciation), relevant responses take the form of expressions of gratitude and are realized as appreciation tokens. When taken as assessments, compliments may be followed, in the next turn, by agreements. The excerpts in (2) and (3) illustrate agreements as responses to compliments.

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(2) A: vai dar ăştia sînt super mişto[2]
wow, but these are so cool
(...) îmi plac la nebunie
'I'm crazy about them'
B: da
'yeah'

(3) A: şi spuneam că Zamfira-i năzdrăvană
'and I was saying Zamfira is so droll'
B: este
'she is'

(ii) Agreements as second assessments

A major type of agreement construction in compliment-related environments takes the form of a second agreement. A characteristic feature of such assessments is referent preservation across the pair parts. This type of agreement is illustrated in the examples in (4) and (5):

(4) A: o tipă de treabă – îmi place de ea
'she is a nice lady – I like her
B: şi mie îmi place de ea
'I like her too'

(5) B: am obţinut o bursă la Queen Mary University of London
'I've been offered a scholarship at Queen Mary University of London'
A: wow super
'that's fantastic'
B: fain, nu-i aşa?
'isn't that good?'

(iii) Agreement + upgraded assessment

The example in (6) illustrates an instance when, in expressing his agreement with the prior assessment, current speaker (B) upgrades his assessment.

(6) A: nu-i aşa că-i drăguţ?
'isn't he cute?'
B: daa, e adorabil
'yeah he's adorable'

[2] The excerpts analyzed in this paper have been transcribed phonetically. Thus, I depart from some of the current spelling rules in Romanian that apply to the letters <î>/<â> in word-medial position. I use the letter <â> only in such words as *roman*, *românesc*, *româneşte*, *România*. Similarly, I use two variants for the verbal forms of *a fi* 'to be' in first person singular and plural and in second and third persons plural *sînt*/*sunt*, *sîntem*/*suntem*, *sînteţi*/*sunteţi*, *sînt*/*sunt*, according to how my informants pronounce these forms.

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(iv) Acceptance + (scaled-down) agreement

Responses to compliments may take the form of acceptance components followed by agreement components within the same turn. Example (7) illustrates those two components co-occurring in recipient's next turn to a compliment:

(7) A: ţi-a ieşit foarte bine lecţia
'your lesson turned out very well'
B: măi, mersi uh a ieşit destul de bine [şi:: uh
'well, thanks uh it turned out rather well [and uh'
A: [mm mhm
['mm mhm'

Subsequent to a compliment, scaled-down agreements evince features of both agreements and disagreements. Their format is that of agreement turns. They frequently have initially positioned agreement tokens (e.g. *da* 'yeah') or appreciation tokens (e.g. *mulţumesc* 'thank you'). Despite being scaled down relative to the compliment in the prior turn, they are, nevertheless classed as positive evaluations. Thus, they are regularly treated by co-participants as agreements with prior compliments. This interpretation is supported by the fact that praise profferers tend to respond to such recipient's scale-down assessments with minimal responses functioning as markers of agreement.

While acceptances and agreements are affiliated/interrelated components (as evidenced by their co-occurrence in the same turn), they are not sequentially interchangeable. Empirical data show that speakers tend to use agreements less frequently than appreciations. Moreover, agreements seem to have more restrictive conditions for their productions. As responses to compliments, appreciations are preferentially selected over agreements in sequences where the compliment is accepted.

4.2 Rejections and disagreements

4.2.1 Rejections

Subsequent to such supportive speech acts as offers and invitations, dispreferred second parts take the form of rejections. Rejections often include appreciation components (*nu, mulţumesc* 'no, thanks') and/or accounts of why the dispreferred seconds occurred. These accounts include some reference to the occasion, taking the form of background material intended to avoid giving the impression that one just declined to perform the requested action, but rather that the refusal is due to circumstances beyond one's control. The example in (8) is a case point:

(8) A: vrei puţin suc?
'do you want some juice?'
B: nu, mulţumesc, mă cam doare stomacul, ştii
'no, thank you, I've got a stomach ache, you know'

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(i) Agreement + rejection

In contrast to the type of rejections to offers or invitations, rejections to compliments are not formed with (negated) appreciation followed by an account. Rather, the primary way in which compliments are rejected is with disagreements or qualifications of the prior complimentary assertions. To illustrate this feature, consider the example in (9):

(9) A: ce bine vă stă tunsă aşa
'this haircut looks great on you'
B: e perucă
'it's a wig'
C: nu contează, vă stă foarte bine
'it doesn't matter, it looks great on you'

On some occasions, rejections may include an acceptance component followed by a rejection of the speech act, as shown in (10):

(10) A: ce bine arăţi
you look great
B: aşa este, dar nu-mi mai spune
'yeah, but don't tell me anymore'

4.2.2 Disagreements

Recipients of compliments tend to disagree with prior compliments. One way of disagreeing is by explicitly rejecting the prior assertion as in (11):

(11) A: uite, tu ai un zîmbet frumos, serios
look, you've got a beautiful smile I mean it
B: am un zîmbet oribil
I have a horrible smile

(ii) Diminution of credit

Another way of disagreeing is by implying that the crediting within prior compliments is overdone, exaggerated and proposing that lesser amounts of credit are justified:

(12) A: ai luat o to::nă de bunătăţi
you brought a ton of goodies
B: doar câteva:::
just a few little (goodies)

In selecting diminutions of credit as responses to compliments, recipients generally do not altogether express their disagreement with prior assertions but rather mitigate the assessment. Disagreements as responses to compliments are frequently treated as

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qualifications of the prior compliments rather than directly contrastive counter-assertions. Markers of disagreement employed in such qualification turns include *însă/totuşi* 'though', *încă* 'yet', and *dar* 'but'.

Although these compliment responses are not contrastive opposites but are rather diminutions and qualifications of prior praise, nevertheless speakers tend to treat them as disagreements. Subsequent to diminutions of credit, praise profferers may challenge or disagree with them and reassert praise, as shown in excerpt (13):

(13) A: ai luat o to::nă de bunătăţi
'you bought a ton of goodies'
B: doar câteva:::
'just a few little [goodies]'
A: glumeşti, arată grozav
'are you kiddin? they look awesome'

(iii) Questioning the compliment assertion+ second downgrading evaluation

In response to A's complimentary assessment, B does a second evaluation, i.e. her own evaluation, which stands in disagreement with the prior one. Disagreement mechanism is applied with respect to recipient's selection of a contrastively classed (negative) term, *e veche* 'it's old', from the positive one contained in the prior, *bine* 'nice'.

(14) A: wow, ce bine îţi vine rochia asta
'wow, you look nice in this dress'
B: crezi?
'do you really think so?'
e veche, e a soră-mi
'it's old, it's my sister's'

4.3 Solution types for two conflicting preferences

My data on compliment responses display sensitivity to the two potentially incompatible sets of constraints addressed in section 3. The analysis of the data reveals that the compliment responses below may be seen as types of "solutions" to the multiple face preferences.

4.3.1 Questions – neutral stance

This type of response displays the following structure:
A compliments B
B questions compliment assertion
A confirms compliment

The excerpt in (15) is an illustration of this type of response:

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(15) A: vai, dar ăştia sînt super mişto
'wow, but these are so cool'
B: îţi plac?
'do you like them?'
A: îmi plac la nebunie
'I'm crazy about them'

4.3.2 Evaluation shift – downgrade

This type of response displays features of both agreements and disagreements. The sequence unfolds as follows:
A compliments B
B scales down compliment assertion
It should be pointed out that, while scaling down of the compliment assertion, B does not reject it altogether.

(16) A: tenu' tău e foarte bun
'your complexion is very good'
B: câte ceva tot tre' să
'there should be something though'

4.3.3 Evaluation shift – qualification

Subsequent to compliments, agreements/disagreements which retain prior referents are interpreted as agreements/disagreements with praise of self.
A: praises of B
B: agreement/disagreement with praise of self[3]

In (17), as a response to A's praise (*foarte frumoşi* 'very nice'), B uses a qualification that down scales the praise by highlighting another aspect (*mă înţeapă* 'they're itching me') that she does not consider as positive as the one mentioned by A. This shift in evaluation is reinforced by the use of a disagreement marker, *însă* 'though' and by the intensifier *de nu mai pot*.

(17) B: uite ce pantaloni mi-am luat, mari, vezi?
'look what trousers I've bought myself, mari, see?'
A: foarte frumoşi
'very nice'
B: însă mă înţeapă de nu mai pot
'but they're itching me, hhh I can't stand them'

[3] Research (e.g. Pomerantz 1978) has shown that there is a system of constraints governing how parties may credit or praise themselves. In minimizing or avoiding self-praise there is a preference for such constraints being enforceable by self and/or other, in this order.

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4.3.4 Referent shift – away from self

Another solution type of compliment responses meant to minimize praise to self involves referent shifts. In a compliment a recipient is praised either directly or indirectly (A1); as a response to this type of compliment, the recipient performs a subsequent praise (A2) which has other-than-self as referent.
A1: A praises B
A2: B praises other-than-self

Two kinds of referent shifts, differentiated with respect to constructional and sequential features, have been identified in my data.

(iv) Referent shift – to addressee/co-participant

Credit may be shifted to addressee following a compliment in which other-than-self is praised:

(18) A: foarte bună prezentarea well done
'very good presentation well done'
B: nu m-aş fi descurcat fără ajutorul tău
'I wouldn't have managed without your help'

(v) Referent shift – to another-than-self referent

In responding to a compliment, a recipient may reassign the praise by shifting the credit from himself to another-than-self referent, (e.g. an object). In (19), B is praised as being "very good at parking" (*parchezi foarte bine*). In B's response to A's compliment, the parking space is praised as "large enough" (*locul de parcare e suficient de mare*). In his response to a compliment which makes him the target of praise, B formulates a positive evaluation in which the referent being praised is shifted from himself to other-than-himself, namely the parking space, thus shifting the target of praise.

(19) A: parchezi foarte bine
'you're very good at parking'
B: aici e uşor de parcat, locul de parcare e suficient de mare
'parking is convenient here, the parking space is large enough'

4.3.5 Referent shift – compliment return

Another kind of referent shift is a type of response that includes return compliments. Within compliment returns, a recipient of a compliment may respond with a return compliment which is a compliment similar to the prior compliment. Return compliments use an agreement construct. Empirical data show that, unlike prior credit shifts (from the recipient of the compliment to another referent) that are typically viewed as disagreements (i.e. as recipients' creditations of "it, not me"), returns are formulated as agreements (i.e. *şi tu la fel* 'and you too').

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(20) A: arăţi foarte bine
'you're lookin' great'
B: mersi, şi tu la fel
'thanks, so are you'

One characteristic feature compliment returns have in common with other agreement constructs is that they provide possible completion points for praise sequences.

4.3.6 Reinterpretation

The compliment responses for spoken Romanian considered so far corroborate of Pomerantz's (1978, 1984) findings for American English. My empirical data, however, reveal three more patterns of compliment responses, as solutions for the two conflicting sets of constraints.

My data documents instances when compliments may be reinterpreted as requests. Under this reinterpretation the relevant response action may be an offer, as is illustrated in (21):

(21) A: foarte frumoase acuarelele
'the watercolours are very beautiful'
B: pe asta ţi-o dau ţie
'you can have this one'

4.3.7 Non-evaluative comment

Another possible response to a compliment may take the form of a non-evaluative comment on the item/trait that was complimented. Consider the example in (22) where the recipient of the compliment supplies a non-evaluative comment which includes some details regarding the history of the item which is the focus of the compliment:

(22) A: uite-i uite-i stai că ăia sînt ai Alinei, sub ţoalele mele acolo=
'there they are! wait! those are Alina's, under my clothes, there'
B: aha marfă şi sînt d-aia
'aha, cool'
A: sînt cu brăduţ
'they've got a fir tree [DIM] pattern'

4.3.8 Ignoring

Occasionally, the recipient may ignore the complement entirely:

(23) A: da mă sînt mişto de tot foarte ca lumea
'yeah, they're so cool, they're awesome'
B: tu cît ai zis că ai dat pe ai tăi?
'how much did you pay for yours?'

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Table 1. Complement responses in Romanian conversational discourse

	Response type	**Example**
4.1	**4.1.1 Acceptances** A compliments B B accepts compliment	
	Appreciation token	A: arăţi foarte bine 'you look great' B: mulţumesc 'thanks'
	4.1.2 Agreements A compliments B B agrees with compliment assertion	A: vai dar ăştia sînt super mişto wow, but these are so cool (...) îmi plac la nebunie 'I'm crazy about them' B: da 'yeah' A: şi spuneam că Zamfira-i năzdrăvană 'and I was saying Zamfira is so droll' B: este 'she is'
	Agreements/second assessments	A: o tipă de treabă – îmi place de ea 'she is a nice lady – I like her' B: şi mie îmi place de ea 'I like her too' B: am obţinut o bursă la Queen Mary University of London 'I've been offered a scholarship Queen Mary University of London' A: wow, super 'that's fantastic' B: fain, nu-i aşa? 'isn't that good'
	Agreement + upgraded assessment	A: nu-i aşa că-i drăguţ? 'isn't he cute?' B: daa, e adorabil 'yeah he's adorable'
	Acceptance + (scaled-down) agreement	A: ţi-a ieşit foarte bine lecţia 'your lesson turned out very well' B: măi, mersi uh a ieşit destul de bine [şi:: uh 'well, thanks uh it turned out rather well [and uh' A: [mm mhm ['mm mhm'

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4.2	**4.2.1 Rejections** A compliments B B rejects compliment assertion	
	Agreement + rejection	A: ce bine arăţi 'you look great' B: aşa este, dar nu-mi mai spune 'yeah, but don't tell me anymore'
	4.2.2 Disagreements A compliments B B disagrees with compliment assertion	A: ai un zîmbet frumos, serios 'look you've got a beautiful smile, I mean it B: am un zîmbet oribil 'I have a horrible smile'
	Diminution of credit	A: ai luat o to::nă de bunătăţi 'you brought a ton of goodies' B: doar câteva::: 'just a few little (goodies)'
	Questioning the compliment assertion + second downgrading evaluation	A: wow, ce bine îţi vine rochia asta 'wow, you look nice in this dress' B: crezi? 'do you really think so?' e veche, e a soră-mi 'it's old, it's my sister's'
4.3	**Solution types for two conflicting preferences**	
	4.3.1 Questions – neutral stance A compliments B B questions compliment assertion A confirms question/compliment	A: vai dar ăştia sînt super mişto 'wow, but these are so cool' B: îţi plac? 'do you like them?' A: îmi plac la nebunie 'I'm crazy about them'
	4.3.2 Evaluation shift – downgrade A compliments B B scales down compliment assertion	A: tenu' tău e foarte bun 'your complexion is very good' B: câte ceva tot tre' să 'there should be something, though'
	4.3.3 Evaluation shift – qualification A compliments B B qualifies compliment assertion	B: uite ce pantaloni mi-am luat, mari, vezi? 'look what trousers I've bought myself, mari, see?' A: foarte frumoşi 'very nice' B: însă mă înţeapă de nu mai pot 'but they're itching me, hhh I can't stand them'

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	4.3.4 Referent shift – away from self A compliments B B compliments other-than-self	
	Referent shift – to addressee/co-participant	A: foarte bună prezentarea well done 'very good presentation well done' B: nu m-aş fi descurcat fără ajutorul tău 'I wouldn't have managed without your help'
	Referent shift – to another-than-self referent	A: parchezi foarte bine 'you're very good at parking' B: aici e uşor de parcat, locul de parcare e suficient de mare 'parking is convenient here, the parking space is large enough'
	4.3.5 Referent shift – compliment return A compliments B B compliments A	A: arăţi foarte bine 'you're lokin' great' B: mersi şi tu la fel 'thanks so are you'
	4.3.6 Non-evaluative comment A compliments B B comments on item/gives history	A: uite-i uite-i stai că ăia sînt ai Alinei, sub ţoalele mele acolo= 'there they are! wait! those are Alina's, under my clothes, there' B: aha marfă şi sînt d-aia 'aha, cool' A: sînt cu brăduţ 'they've got a fir tree [DIM] pattern'
	4.3.7 Reinterpretation A compliments B B reinterprets compliment	A: foarte frumoase acuarelele 'the watercolours are very beautiful' B: pe asta ţi-o dau ţie 'you can have this one'
	4.3.8 Ignoring A compliments B B ignores compliment	A: da mă sînt mişto de tot foarte ca lumea 'yeah, they're so cool, they're awesome' B: tu cît ai zis că ai dat pe ai tăi? 'how much did you pay for yours?'

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5. Conclusions

The speech act of complimenting is under-researched in spoken Romanian, although it has received much attention from sociolinguists working in a wide variety of speech communities (e.g. Pomerantz 1978, Wolfson 1983, Herbert 1986, Herbert and Straight 1989, Ravetto 2012). The two main issues this paper examined are: (i) the degree of solidarity in Romanian compliments and compliment responses; (ii) the most salient communicative functions of Romanian compliments.

The analysis of my data show that the Romanian informants in the sample under consideration exhibit high compliment-offering but low compliment-accepting. This can viewed as a strategy for Romanians to use compliments for the (re)negotiation of solidarity. Romanians tend to use compliments as markers of solidarity. The Romanian informants tend to use fewer accept strategies and to exhibit a preference for a consistent use of evade and reject strategies in their compliment responses. My informants express appreciation for and agreement with a compliment less and use various strategies for downgrading the illocutionary force of the act such as evaluation shift, referent shift, reinterpretation, non-evaluative comment, compliment return or even ignoring. Instances of rejection are not very common, but are possible.

The empirical data show that, for the Romanian informants, an implicit and "detouring" approach seems at least to be as desirable as an explicit compliment response. This is in line with the modesty maxim "minimize praise to self, maximize praise to others" (see Leech 2013).

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