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Introduction

Compliments are a very important communicative phenomenon, since they are often used to express solidarity or positive politeness, which are key-elements for the establishment of human interactions: without compliments many conversations would not start or develop, and many people would not get the opportunity to know each other. Because of their importance, compliments -how they are used and what they are used for – are a speech act that has been thoroughly analysed.

The following analysis will focus mainly on the gender of the participants in the compliment exchange, i.e. the person who pays and the one who receives the compliments, which topics people are typically complimented on and which specific function is carried out by the compliment.

The analysed compliments will be taken from the medieval-fantasy TV show "Game of Thrones". A TV show is a likely candidate for the retrieval of a large number of various types of speech acts in a short time, therefore it could easily provide a broad variety of compliments. This TV show belongs to the fantasy genre, which is characterized by a medieval-like environment, usually spiced up with unrealistic creatures and magic. As with any other TV show, dialogues are written to be recited, therefore no claim is made here as to the relevance of the results with respect to real world exchanges. Nonetheless, however removed for everyday reality, all successful TV shows must share some common ground with their audience and the cultural context in which they are produced and consumed. In short, all products of the contemporary cultural industry are in a dialectical relationship with the socio-cultural conditions of its consumption. This TV show is no exception and the type of social and cultural universe it portrays tells a lot about the ways in which human relationships are conceived nowadays. The analysis of compliments in particular is a way through which certain preoccupations with the relationship between the genders are dealt with.

The compliments will be retrieved manually, both reading the script and watching the episodes. The following step will be to analyse each compliment using

Holmes and Brown's¹ model with 8 features: this will help spot the tendencies in complimenter and complimentee's gender, topic and structure. This will later be compared with the results of the main studies on compliments.

The results will likely follow the main tendencies on topics, gender of the participants, syntactic structure and use: they will probably be mostly female to female or male to female compliments on possession or appearance, made in order to develop a conversation and negotiate solidarity.

The dissertation will be divided into three chapters. In Chapter 1 there will be a summary of the main studies on the topics of compliments and compliment responses. Chapter 2 will provide a detailed description of "Game of Thrones" with particular reference to the season taken into account for the study. In Chapter 3 the compliments retrieved from the series will be analysed and the results compared with those from previous studies.

¹Holmes, Janet and Brown, Dorothy F. (1987) "Teachers and Students Learning about Compliments". *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 21 (No. 3): pp. 523-546

Chapter 1: Literature review on compliments

This chapter will explore the results obtained by some famous scholars in their research studies on the topics of compliments and compliment responses. Each section deals with the approach adopted by one scholar and their relative results.

1.1 Alfonzetti's view on compliments and compliment responses²

Compliments are not paid much attention in the classification of speech acts: they are often assimilated to congratulations, or classified as a sub-category. Despite their similarity, it is necessary to make a distinction: congratulations are a reaction to reality, while compliments reflect the opinion of the speaker, which must be positive. A positive evaluation is not a simple matter, it involves different cultural meanings and personal attitudes: the speaker and the addressee must share these aspects, for a compliment to be considered as such.

Compliments can be expressed with a direct speech-act, using conventional forms and semantically positive words, or with an indirect speech-act, when the judgement is implicated in contextual information.

The illocutionary force can often be problematic because of its ambiguity: because of that, it is necessary to consider a compliment together with the addressee's response.

The range of responses is quite wide: due to the dual illocutionary forces there can be an acceptance (expressed with thanks or other tokens of appreciation) or a rejection; there can also be a conflict between modesty and agreement, so the compliment can be said to be true or false.

The most common responding techniques are: downgrading, referent shifting, returning the compliment, offering a comment, using meta-communicative remarks (which involves humour) or to just ignore it.

² Alfonzetti, Giovanna "Compliments". In Sbisà, Marina and Ken Turner (eds.) (2013)*Pragmatics of Speech Actions*, Berlin: de Gruyter, pp.555-586.

According to the reaction of the recipient, there can be different types of compliment-response sequences. In the “non-sequence” the addressee does not acknowledge the compliment. However, in the adjacency pair the acceptance of, agreement on or return of the compliment closes the exchange. In addition, there can be a four turn sequence, when there is an insertion in the adjacency pair model in which the recipient downgrades and questions the compliment, before the speaker confirms it. Alternatively, there can be a pre-sequence, if the speaker wants to check whether the preconditions of the upcoming compliment exist. As additional options, in expanded sequences, the addressee adds information about the object of the compliment; in repetitive cycles, we have the repetition of similar sequences; finally, in choral sequences, several people are involved in the compliment-response sequences.

Regardless of the type, sequences can be modulated following two directions: mitigation and reinforcement. The speaker uses verbal and non-verbal strategies: interrogative pronouns, interactions, strong stress, low or loud voice and so on.

Also, the addressee can reduce the amount of praise with scaled down agreement or disagreement.

Compliments are a multifunctional speech act, used not only to satisfy the universal need to praise and be praised, but also: as conversation starters, as a ritual, to give motivation, as a softener for face-threatening act and as a way to reinforce greetings. It is therefore clear that compliments have an important role in human interactions, and that they are connected to social and cultural dynamics.

One major feature concerns gender: almost everywhere women, especially the younger ones, receive more compliments, both from men and other women. This gender related difference may occur due to the fact that we see compliments as a social judgement, so as a reminder for women to behave in socially approved ways. However they can also be seen as conversation openings and as a way to express affection and may even have sexual connotations: because of that men are not as inclined as women to use compliments.

Women are usually complimented on physical attributes, while men on their possessions and accomplishments, following the traditional assumption that men should not care about their appearance, because caring would show a hypothetical homosexuality.

Even female refrain from giving appearance compliments to male, fearing that would be misinterpreted or would attract unwanted attention.

1.2 Herbert's approach on compliments and compliment responses in American English³

The majority of compliments are produced following three formulaic frames: *I like* + NP; *that's a* ADJ + NP; NP *is* ADJ. Compliments also tend to be drawn from a limited stock of concerns such as personal appearance, possession or results of skills and efforts. Anyhow, since their main purpose is to make the addressee feel good, they are structured so as to limit the possibility of misinterpretation.

Both compliments and responses serve the function of negotiating solidarity, but this cannot be fully understood without considering the whole context: sex, race, location, relationship and presence of other people in the conversation are elements of great influence.

Sex is the biggest issue: women prefer the formula *I (really) like/love* NP over *PRO is (really) a* ADJ + NP, while men use both formulas with the same frequency.

Another distinction is made observing the "personal focus": women prefer personalized forms (which is a demonstration of their other-oriented and supportive style), whereas men-offered compliments are impersonal. The personal focus predominates among female speakers and in male to female compliment, but is rare in the speech of males when the addressee is another male.

It is common among English speakers the belief that the "correct" answer to a compliment is "thank you", as children find written in many text books. However, American speakers show an enormous amount of variations, which are probably derived from the dual semantic-pragmatic components of compliments: assertion and "verbal gift". The addressee's dilemma is to respond simultaneously to both components: how can one agree without seeming to be praising oneself. The basic strategies exploited are twelve:

- Appreciation token, a verbal or non verbal acceptance, not linked to the

³ Herbert, Robert K (1986). "Say 'Thank You' - Or Something". *American Speech*, Vol. 61 (No. 1): pp. 76-88.

Herbert, Robert K (1990) "Sex-Based Differences in Compliment Behavior". *Language in Society*, Vol. 19 (No. 2): pp. 201-224.

compliment (thank you)

- Comment acceptance, providing information on the topic
- Praising upgrade, when the compliment force is considered insufficient
- Comment history, providing observation that shift the force of the compliment from the addressee
- Reassignment, the compliment is accepted but the compliment force is transferred on a third person or to the object itself
- Return, the compliment is returned
- Scale down, the addressee spot some flaws in the object
- Question the sincerity of the compliment
- Disagreement, the complimented object is not worth the praise
- Qualification, weaker than disagreement is used with “but, well, thought” etc.
- No acknowledgement, the addressee provides no response or shifts the topic
- Request interpretation, the addressee doesn't perceive the compliment as such

Compliments offered by males are more likely to be accepted than compliment offered by females: the sex of the speaker influences the acceptance rate. Male compliments are also frequently accepted with simple appreciation tokens, while there is a high incidence of “non acceptance agreement” (like comment history) of compliments made by women. “Non agreement” occurs in Female-Female interactions, whilst “Question” and “No acknowledgement” responses are more used in Male-Male interactions.

The greater likelihood of male compliments being accepted shows that acceptance is more common among people with different status: this feature concerns even social distance, since the majority of compliments are exchanged by people that are neither stranger nor intimates.

Compliments from men are usually not an offer of solidarity, but an actual assertion, and their frequency is lower than female's, which are usually used as tokens of good will.

This distinction is reflected in the responses: male's compliments elicit “acceptance”, while female's “non acceptance”.

1.3 Holmes and Brown's study on how to use and respond to compliments in New Zealand⁴

Paying compliments is a complicated aspect of learning English, since many people from different cultural backgrounds find it difficult to understand why they are used so frequently.

Compliments can also be the cause of cross-cultural misunderstanding of the illocutionary force, since its interpretation involves knowledge of subtle cultural norms: knowing if a compliment is appropriate or not is part of a speaker's communicative competence.

The topic of a compliment is also an important issue: in the United States, for example, the safest compliment to offer is about possessions. However, judging which topic is appropriate to comment also involves cultural knowledge.

Compliments are expressed by means of a very restricted range of lexical items (positive adjectives like *nice*, *beautiful*, *good* and positive verbs such as *like*, *love*, *admire*) and topics; in the U.S. the most common ones are appearance and personal ability.

The topics that attract most compliments are new objects and some aspect of appearance that is the result of the complimentee's effort (e.g. hair-dos), while the second frequent one is the quality of something produced thanks to the addressee's skills.

Compliments can be found at the beginning and at the end of speech events, preceded by greeting and followed by farewells, but they also occur as transition points: in this case, their presence has to be justified. In general, they are used in English speaking communities to encourage, to express gratitude, to soften a criticism and to replace other speech acts like apologies, thanks and greeting.

The majority of compliments that are given to people belonging to the same age and social status occur as a part of the greeting exchange, while in an encounter between status unequals they are given by the person in the higher position: the other way around requires some confidence on the part of the speaker.

The sex of the participants has great relevance in the exchange of compliments: women are the ones that offer and receive more compliments, especially on their

⁴ Holmes, Janet and Brown, Dorothy F. (1987) "Teachers and Students Learning about Compliments". *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 21 (No. 3): pp. 523-546

appearance, while men exchange less compliments, and the majority of the ones received are from females. Besides, regardless of sex, it is not considered appropriated to give appearance-related compliments to higher-status male, especially in the workplace: clearly, both social status and sex have influence in the determination of the acceptability of a topic.

Analysing the data she collected in New Zealand, Holmes noticed that women are far more likely than men to receive compliments, and to use a syntactic form that strengthens the positive force of the compliment. Women also compliment each others on appearance, while compliments on possessions are used more often by males. This data is influenced, anyway, by the fact that the compliments collector was also a female.

1.4 Jucker's point of view on typical methods for the study of compliments⁵

The Oxford English Dictionary defines compliments as “a ceremonial act or expression as a tribute of courtesy, usually understood to mean less than it declares [...]”: this definition covers several categories, such as “personal compliments”, “ceremonious compliments”, “season compliments” and “free gifts compliments”.

Personal compliments can be explicit, implicit or indirect and are, following Holmes' definition “a speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes credits to someone other than the speaker [...], for some good which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer”, where there must be a link between the target of the compliment and the addressee of the compliment.

The explicit compliments are the prototypical ones, when something positive is said directly to the addressee; nowadays the research is mostly concentrated on these ones.

Implicit compliments, on the other hand, are utterances in which participants can infer an intended compliment even if it is not explicitly said.

Finally, indirect compliments are the ones made not directly by the speaker but quoting somebody else.

Ceremonious compliments is a comprehensive term that embraces verbal and non-verbal interactions, for everyday but also for ceremonious situations, that are all forms

⁵ Jucker, Andreas H.(2008) “Speech act research between armchair, field and laboratory: The case of compliments”. *Journal of Pragmatics* (41): pp 1611–1635.

Jucker, Andreas H “Fishing for compliments: Precision and recall in corpus-linguistic compliment research”. In Jucker, Andreas H. and Taavitsainen, Irma (eds.) (2008) *Speech Acts in the History of English*: pp. 273–294

of initiating and maintaining contact: greetings, regards, recommendations, invitations and so on.

Season compliments are the ones only used on special occasion such as Christmas cards or those associated with spam e-mails, while free gifts compliments, for example, are followed by the sponsor of “the gift”. Both of them do not attribute credit to the addressee, but are a designated formula for gracious behaviour.

Compliments are investigated using three different ways of doing pragmatic research: “armchair”, “field”, and “laboratory”.

The armchair method works not with actual language data, but with reflections on language, using a philosophical approach. This analysis stated four different types of rules for each speech-act, the so-called ‘felicity conditions’ for the production of effective speech acts: the propositional content, the preparatory condition, the sincerity condition and the essential condition.

The field method is based on the observation of data, which makes it a strictly empirical approach. All the conversations analysed must be real, with a communicative end, and produced outside the research project. This kind of data can be retrieved in different ways: in the notebook method the researcher takes note of the compliment he or she encounters in his or her daily life; in the philological method the researcher notes down all the compliments that can be found in specific fictional material, from a novel to a movie (fictional languages cannot be included); the conversation analytical method uses transcriptions of actual conversations.

In any case, two types of corpus searches can be distinguished: the search for the speech-act verbs, that can occur performatively, descriptively and in negotiations, or for syntactic patterns and lexical elements typical of compliments.

The laboratory method relies on the cooperation of informants: they are asked to imagine communicative situations and to state how they would behave in such situations. This might be seen as something unnatural, but allows the researchers a great control over many different variables. This method has two approaches: in discourse completion, the participants are asked to complete a dialogue where an utterance is missing, while in the role play method they are asked to act out a conversation in particular situations described by the researchers.

A corpus search of speech acts depends on the availability of typical patterns: for

compliments, this is difficult, since they do not display standard devices, so many search strings used produce results that are not compliments. The results obtained with this method are very limited, and do not allow the identifications of patterns that have been identified in advance. The philological method, on the other hand, does not show this problem, since the researcher can decide in each case whether the utterance is a compliment or not. Manual searches, however, are extremely time consuming and can be affected by the fatigue of the researcher.

A corpus search, besides, may retrieve a range of compliment sequences realized with syntactical and lexical patterns, but it does not allow a meaningful analysis of the speaker and the recipients' demographics.

1.5 Pomerantz's investigation on compliment responses⁶

Compliment responses are coordinated with the compliment they follow, like in the system of chained actions: two actions are linked since the first one provides the possibility of the appropriate performance of the second one.

For example, recipients of a compliment can either perform an acceptance or a rejection of it: in this case the compliment is a supportive action. The addressee can also agree or disagree with it: in this action, compliments have the status of assessment.

Acceptance is referred to as a model behaviour in a talk, while rejecting a compliment is considered troublesome: these two reactions are non equivalent, and, in addition to that, they inhabit different turn and terminations in the sequences.

Acceptances are usually performed with "appreciation tokens", so that the addressee does not have to maintain a focus on the referent. A major type of agreement is achieved with a second comment on the referent performed by the one that offers the compliment. Appreciation and agreement are not sequentially interchangeable: the first one tends to occur more frequently and has less restricted conditions.

Rejections often contain appreciation contents and usually provide an explanation of why the compliment is not being accepted: this is performed by disagreement.

There is a system of constraints governing how parties can avoid to credit themselves: the "self praise avoidance". When the praise is performed, the speaker can enforce the constraints by incorporating a disclaimer (e.g. I don't like to brag, but...)

⁶Pomerantz, Anita (1987) "Compliment responses: Notes on the co-operation of multiple constraints". J. Schenkein (Ed.), *Studies in the organization of conversational interaction*, New York, NY: Academic Press, pp. 79-112.

by qualifications (e.g. I shouldn't say that, but...). Self-praise is something that should be avoided since is often turned into a gossip item, a complaint and so on.

This system also bears on how crediting is done: the participants usually play a praise activity, which is a display of respect. For example, announcements of accomplishments are often initiated by one on behalf of another present.

Avoiding self-praise and accepting a compliment at the same time is a complicated matter, since agreement and acceptance are co-implicated. One solution type includes responses that exhibit both agreement: scaled-down agreement.

Scaled-down agreements usually exhibit agreement tokens followed by an expression of agreement, and they do not occur after a compliment that directly praises the addressee, but that contains terms that refer to objects, activities and so on: they retain the “other-than-me” referents.

Disagreements are performed by stating that the referee is being over-credited, and proposing a diminution of credit. In this technique, the recipient does not negate or deny the compliment, but down-grades the prior terms. In the following fragment, the speaker that proffers the praise may challenge or disagree with the diminution of classification and reassert praise.

A large set of agreement and disagreement responses are scaled-down, so downgrade is a technique that partially satisfies each of the participants.

A second type of solution concerning responses is the “referent shift”: if the addressee is praised indirectly he or she can perform a subsequent praise which has an other-than-self referent.

This methods can be performed in two different ways: shifting the referent of the compliment or changing the focus of the exchange. The first one displays a sensitivity of self praise avoidance, while the second one is partially supportive of the prior praise.

Return is another kind of referent shift, constructed as agreements, where a recipient of the compliment may proffer a return compliment, similar to the prior one. As a solution type, this technique offers a procedure that satisfies the self-praise avoidance.

Compliment responses are, then, sensible to the cooperation of two constrain systems (supportive actions and self-praise avoidance), and contain references of the prior compliment that can fall in two main groups: evaluation shifts (praise down-grade) and referent shift (other-than-self referent).

1.6 Wolfson's viewpoint on compliment forms and topics⁷

Compliments are one of the speech acts that, more than other things, need to be taught in classrooms, since their meaning can change very much across different cultural and linguistic communities. In English, for example, money is not a topic of compliments (another person's attractiveness does not depend on that), while in Japanese it is: this kind of differences might lead to misunderstandings, since one can understand the words uttered but not the rules for interpreting them. Proverbs and other ritualized phrases can also be used as a compliment, and this adds a further complication, since their meaning is not restricted to the lexical items.

In order to be able to teach such features, an analysis of the most common patterns that govern the use of a language must be done. An initial examination of English data reveals that the English speakers lack in originality, since almost all of the compliments are made with a positive verb or adjective: despite the large amount of variety in the English language, the majority of them fall within the restricted number of seventy-two.

The mostly used verbs in compliments are *like* and *love*, while the two most common adjectives are *nice* and *good*: their extensive use is justified by the fact that they are semantically vague, and so they can be connected with almost every noun.

Three other common adjective are *beautiful*, *pretty* and *great*: while the last one is more specific than the other two, all occur in conjunction with a lot of different topics.

The compliment structure is highly repetitive even at a syntactic level, since the most common patterns are: NP + is/looks + (really) + ADJ, I (really) + like/love + NP, and PRO is (really) (a) + ADJ + NP.

The high frequency of these five adjectives and the almost exclusive use of these three patterns make the production of compliments easier for the English learners.

In American English, compliments occur in a lot of different situations: to produce or reinforce solidarity, in greeting, thanking and apologizing and as conversation starters. This leads to a great use of compliments, which may embarrass people from cultures where approval is not frequently displayed.

Thus, we see how compliments vary from culture to culture, since they may be frequent or hardly exist or be realized as a formula or with a proverb: recognizing these variations is important for sociolinguistic descriptions of the language in use.

⁷ Wolfson, Nessa (1981) "Compliments in Cross-Cultural Perspective". *TESOL Quarterly*, Vol. 15, (No. 2): pp. 117-124

Wolfson, Nessa (1984) "Pretty Is As Pretty Does: A Speech Act View of Sex Roles". *Applied Linguistics*, Vol 5: pp.236-44.

The way of performing compliments, anyway, shows differences even within the same language: sex and status of the addressee have an important effect on the topic of the interaction.

Among males, the one of higher status performs the compliment if the topic is ability or performance, and since male are usually in a higher position than women, the addressee is often a woman, while there is no difference if the topic is appearance/possessions.

Since compliments are an expression of approval or an encouragement, this can be explained by the fact that American middle class women are expected to look attractive: complimenting them is a way to encourage a good social behaviour, and this is not influenced by the woman's professional status.

On the basis of this, it is normal that women receive more compliments than men, and that sex overrates status: females compliment each other despite differences in their status, while males do not compliment one another very often.

Compliments about the physical dimension are explicitly made to women, but among people who do not know each other is considered “lower class”; however, this kind of behaviour is very common, even at work, where men do not hesitate to compliment the appearance of their female colleagues in the form of jokes: the way a woman is spoken, no matter what her status is, is often a way to perpetuate her subordinate role in society.

1.7 Nelson, Al-Batar and Echols’ study on compliments and their responses in ESL ⁸

For non-native English student learning how to compliment is an important issue. But for people studying English in the USA, learning how to respond to compliments is even more important, since Americans compliment very often.

A compliment response is defined as a verbal acknowledgement made by the addressee by reacting to the previous compliment. The recipients should follow two principles that stand in potential conflict: avoid self-praise and accept the compliment. Usually American English speakers try to solve this problem by maximizing agreements between self and others and minimizing disagreement by self and others.

An experiment between speakers of Egyptian Arabic and American English shows

⁸ Nelson, Gayle L. Al Batale, M. Echols, E. (1996) “Readings in politeness”. In Cutting, Joan (eds.)(2008) *Pragmatics and Discourse*. London: Routledge, pp. 169-189.

that in both languages compliments tend to be adjectival, but in the first language they are usually longer and contain more metaphors.

In another experiment, the English data was collected among eighty-nine students of the south-west of the United States, while for Damascene Arabic there were thirty-two interviews. The responses were then divided into three categories: mitigation, acceptances and rejections.

Acceptance accounted for the fifty per cent of the US compliment responses, and the sixty-seven per cent of the Syrian one.

In America, the most common response (in the acceptance category) is the appreciation token (e.g. thank you) while in Syria only one was of this type.

The agreeing utterance usually occurs in English when two people are talking about a third party, and in Arabic this was noted only among male speakers.

Compliment returns, where the recipient both contributes to maintain equality and accept the force of the compliment, were seven per cent in English and thirteen per cent in Arabic.

An acceptance technique that did not occur in the America data, but that is the most common one in the Arabic data is the 'agreement + formula': formulaic expressions are often used on many occasions.

Mitigating a compliment includes two strategies: providing informative comment and requesting a repetition. The first one accounted for thirty-two per cent and the second one for thirteen per cent of the American compliment responses, while in the Arabic data the distribution is respectively of twenty-five and eight per cent.

Rejection is totally absent in Syrian Arabic, and not very common, as the absence of response, in American English since not agreeing with the speaker might cause some damage to the relationship.

In Syrian and in American data the gender did not influence the type of responses (both males and females employed most of the compliments types) and they both are much more likely to accept a compliment than to reject it: USA recipients usually use appreciation tokens, that seem a little flat in Arabic where the responses are usually supplemented by additional words.

In addition, Americans do not use formulaic expressions, which contain a lot of words: Arabic responses are much longer than English ones, and so are the whole sequences.

Chapter 2: Game of thrones

Game of thrones is an American fantasy drama, based on George R. R. Martin's novels series "A Song of Ice and Fire". The pilot episode aired, in the United States, on April 17, 2011. The series is filmed in a studio in Belfast and on locations in Croatia, Iceland, Malta, Northern Ireland, Spain and Morocco. In 2016 it counts six seasons, each containing ten episodes.

2.1 Season 1

The first season's script follows closely the original work and it's multiple story lines.

The first scene shows us three man of the Night's Watch (a brotherhood that shields the Seven Kingdom from the "free folks") being attacked by what seems a group of undead people. The action then moves to Winterfell where Ned Stark, warden of the North, has to execute a deserter from The Watch that claims to have seen the dead arise. He is later told that his friend and king, Robert Baratheon, is coming to visit with his wife and his heirs. As they arrive, Ned is asked to be the chief adviser (known as the Hand of the King) since the previous one, Jon Arryn died.

While the Royal Family is in Winterfell, Ned and his wife Catelyn receive a letter from Catelyn's sister, Lysa. that gives them reason to believe the Lannister – family to which the King's wife Cersei belongs– was the cause of Arryn's death. This leads Ned to accept the role as Hand of the King, and he leaves for King's Landing with his two daughters, Sansa and Arya, leaving home his sons Robb, Bran, Rickon and his illegitimate son Jon Snow. After an investigation he finds out what Arryn himself died trying to expose: queen Cersei and her twin brother Jamie have had an incestuous relationship for years, which eventually led to the birth of three children, that everyone believe to be Robert's. Jamie is, also, responsible for Bran's fall from one of Winterfell tower, since he had caught the two siblings in the act: the boy loses the use of his legs, but he discovers the ability of entering the mind of his direwolf.

Ned confronts the queen about what he discovered, but she does not look worried about what he has to say: she had already planned to kill his husband. King Robert, in fact, is just after hit by a boar during a hunt: his squire, following Cersei's orders, gave

him too much wine in order to make him unable to hunt properly. Right before he dies, Robert appoints Ned as the Lord Regent until his son Joffrey comes to age. Once the king is dead Ned tries to take the role he was appointed for, but instead he is accused of treason and, later, beheaded.

This event leads to a rebellion in the North: the heir of Winterfell, Robb Stark, calls all his banners: he wants to avenge his father death and free his two sisters that, he believes, are still in King's Landing: only Sansa is being held hostage in the capital, while Arya managed to escape. In order to arrive in King's Landing on time, he agrees to marry one of Walder Frey's daughter, since otherwise he would not let him pass through his castle's bridge. Later, in one battle, they kidnap Jamie Lannister.

Meanwhile, north of the wall, after a short period at Castle Black as a Night Watch's brother, Jon snow is appointed as the steward of Captain Mormont: one night, the dead body of one of their brother raises from the death and tries to kill Mormont. Jon Snow, thanks to his direwolf Ghost, manages to stop it. Later they leave Castle Black in order to discover if the rumor about a new wildlings army is true. During the journey they stop at Craster's house: the host is a man that marries his daughters and, as Jon snow later finds out, gives his male sons to the White Walker in order to please them.

In the eastern continent of Essos, Viserys Targaryen –son of the last Targaryen king in The Seven Kingdoms– sells his sister Daenerys to Khal Drogo, in order to gain an army to conquer back his title. As a wedding gift the girl receives three dragon eggs: dragons had disappeared a long time before, but a legend says that their blood still runs in the Targaryen family. Viserys doesn't get his army right away, so he decides to follow Khal Drogo's khalasar, with the exiled lord Jorah Mormont: his impatience is later the cause of his death. Meanwhile Daenerys gets pregnant but, as she was giving birth, the baby dies: without knowing it, trying to save the wounded Khal Drogo's life, she trades her son's life with the one of the husband. Khal Drogo lives, but he is in an everlasting coma. Since the witch that performed the ritual knew its consequences, Daenerys decides to execute her: as the woman is burning, Daenerys enters the fire with the three eggs. When the fire is extinguished, in front of Jorah's unbelieving eyes, Daenerys rises– unburnt -with three little dragons.

2.2 Season 2

In the Seven Kingdoms the “War of the Five Kings” has started: Robb Stark, the King

in the North, wins one battle after another against his opponent, Tywin Lannister, that fights for his grandson King Joffrey; meanwhile Stannis and Renly Baratheon, the two brothers of the late king, fight each other to determine who is the rightful heir, since all of their nephews are not actually Robert's children.

The fifth king is Balon Greyjoy, lord and, as he wishes, king of the Iron Islands. When his only living son, Theon, was little he was taken by Ned Stark as a hostage. Because of that he and Robert grew up together: the young King, trusting Theon, sends him back to the Iron Islands in order to obtain his father's ships. Theon real goal is, actually, to raise again him, in order to conquer the North. Once he gets home he discovers that his father doesn't see him anymore as Greyjoy, and that his sister has grown to be the actual heir of the family. When Balon gives him only one ship to raid fisherman's villages, he is convinced by one member of his crew to take the North by himself.

In Winterfell things are being administrated by Maester Luwin and Bran Stark. The young boy and his brother Rickon are the only Stark left, since their brother Robb is away leading the war, when Theon arrives with his crew, so Bran is forced to yield. Since Theon sees he and his brother as a treat, they escape the castle with Osha -a wildling working for the Stark family-, Hodor -a simple-minded servant- and their direwolf. Theon, in order to make everyone believe he found them, burns the body of two farm boys, who are later displayed as a the proof of Bran end Rickon's death in Winterfell.

Meanwhile, Arya Stark is marching north disguised as a boy named Arryn. She had managed to escape King's Landing thanks to a Night Watch's scout, that she is traveling with. With them there are the new recruits of the brotherhood: one of them- Gendry -, without knowing it, is actually the only King Robert's living son left. In fact, Joffrey, knowing that Robert's sons would have been a threat, ordered his soldiers to kill them all. Because of that, the convoy is attacked: when the battle is over, and Gendry is believed to be dead, they are taken to Harrenal. There, people are tortured in order to gain information about "The Brotherhood Without Banners", an outlaw group working against the Lannister. When Gendry is about to be questioned Tywin Lannister arrives at the castle, ordering his men to put the prisoners at work.

As soon as he sees Arya he understand that she is a girl, and hires her as his cup-bearer. At his service, Arya discovers a lot of information about his brother. When Tywin leaves Herrenal she decides to leave too, with the help of his mysterious friend,

Jaquen H'ghar. Jaquen is a Braavosi man that owes her three deaths, since she helped him and his two companions escape a fire. As she is leaving with Gendry, Jaquen gives Arya a coin, telling her to use it whenever she wants to go to the free city of Braavos, to train with the Faceless Men.

Robb Stark meets after a battle a young healer from Volantis named Talisa, that will later become his wife. At the same time he sends Catelyn, his mother, to negotiate an allegiance with Renly Baratheon, whose army is mostly made by the soldiers brought by his new wife, Margarey Tyrell. Renly is fighting against his brother, Stannis, that, helped by the red priestess Melisandre of Asshai, kills him. A member of Renly kingsguard, Brienne of Tarth, is accused of the murder: she manages to escape with Catelyn, to whom she swears the oath to take back home her two daughters. As the two women come back to Robb's camp, they discover about the betrayal of Theon: Robb is torn between the war and going home, but one of his banner man, Roose Bolton, offers to contact his illegitimate son to take Winterfell back. Catelyn, desperate about her two young boys being in danger, frees Jamie Lannister, in order to retrieve at least Arya and Sansa, and asks Brienne to take him to kings landing. Because of that she is imprisoned by her son for treason.

North of the Wall, Jon Snow and the other men of the Night Watch are still on a quest to find the wildlings' army lead by Mance Ryder, a deserter of the brotherhood. The groups splits and Jon asks to join Qhorin Halfhand's group. As they are marching to the Skirling Pass, they come across a small group of wildlings: after a brief fight Jon snow finds himself lost with Yigitte, a young girl that eventually take him captive and brings him to Mance. As they arrive there Jon is convinced by Qhorin (that had been taken captive too) to join the wildlings army, and to kill him in order to prove his loyalty.

Back in King's Landing Tyrion Lannister is serving as Hand of the King instead of his father, Tywin, trying to protect the realm- and Sansa -, from his nephew and king, Joffrey. Even though he is thwarted multiple times by his sister Cersei, he manages to defend the city from the attack of Stannis' navy, using a high inflammable substance, the Highfire, to burn the ships. As he is leading the attack, a man sent by Joffrey tries to kill him: when he wakes up, horribly disfigured, he finds out the battle was saved by his father and the Tyrell's army.

In Essos, Daenerys and her small khalasar are crossing the desert, looking for a place to live. They are eventually invited by the city of Qarth, where they are accepted as

guest of the wealthiest men of the city, Xaro Xhoan Daxos. He offers Daenerys all the gold she needs for fulfilling her dream to conquer back the Seven Kingdoms, but she has to marry him. Daenerys does not accept the offer and tries to find aid appealing the Spice King. He, as the other merchants of the city, refuses to help her. As she goes back to Xaro's place she finds out that her dragons are missing. When she meets the thirteen members of the city's council she discovers that Pyat Pree, a sorcerer, holds her dragon in The House of the Undying, and that Xaro want to seize control of the city. Daenerys enters the House of the Undying, where she has a series of visions about her family. She manages to escape using the power of his dragons. When she goes back to Xaro's house she finds him in bed with one of her maid: hurt by the betrayal she locks them in the merchant's warlock, keeping to herself enough gold to buy a ship.

2.3 Season 3

The Seven Kingdoms are still gripped by the civil war: Robb Stark is still fighting against the Lannisters, even though his home, Winterfell, is occupied by the Greyjoy. The cruel boy-king Joffrey just won an important battle against his uncle Stannis, and he even manages to secure the allegiance with the Tyrell agreeing to marry Margaery Tyrell. Since Sansa is now free from his engagement with the king, Tywin forces his son Tyrion to marry her, since she is now considered the key for the North.

After being defeated, Stannis falls into depression. The red priestess Melisandre assures him that there is still a way to win the war, and it is related to the power that lies in the king's blood: there must be a sacrifice, and the designated victim is Gendry, King's Robert illegitimate son.

Gendry is still traveling with Arya Stark after they escaped Harrenhal: after the men of Brotherhood Without Banners find them they are taken to the Command of the brotherhood in the Riverlands. There arrives Melisandre, who takes Gendry with her in order to use his blood for a spell. Meanwhile Arya, after escaping from the Brotherhood, is kidnapped by the Hound -ex personal guard of King Joffrey- who intends to take her to her brother in order to receive gold as a reward.

In the North, Roose Bolton's son, Ramsey, manages to take back Winterfell, secretly capturing Theon, torturing and mutilating him. After brainwashing him, Ramsey gives him the name of Reek and keeps him as a servant.

Meanwhile Bran, Rickon, Osha and Hodor, headed to the Wall, come across Jojen

and Meera Reeds: Jojen possesses “the sight” and had been looking for Bran in order to take him to the Three Eyed Raven, who is north of the Wall. Osha has no intention to go back there, so Bran sends her and Rickon to the Umber's castle, where they will find shelter.

North of the Wall Jon is led into the tent of Mance Rayders, where he tries to convince the-king-beyond-the-wall that he wants to be one of them. During a trial period he is asked about Castle Black's defenses: because of his answer, and also thanks to his relationship with Ygritte, he is accepted in the army. The two of them join the group led by Tormund Giantsbane to climb the wall. Arrived on the other side, they make camp: as they are resting they see a man with a horse and Jon is once again asked to prove his loyalty by killing the man. Since he is not able to do it, he steals the horse and runs away. Ygritte manages to catch up with him and to shoot three arrows at him: Jon, even badly injured, arrives at Castle Black where now he has to organize the resistance.

Jaime continues to be escorted by Brienne to King's Landing. On their way there, they are spotted by some men of the House Bolton. After being captured, Jaime and Brienne are taken to Harrenhal. On the way there, because of his arrogance, Jaime's sword-hand is amputated. Once arrived in Harrenhal Jaime's infected stump is treated, and he is freed by Lord Bolton, that decides to keep Brienne in Harrenhal for treason. After leaving, Jaime finds out that they are actually going to kill Brienne, so he goes back in order to rescue her.

As he frees Jaime, Roose Bolton departs to attend the marriage of Edmure Tully, Robb's uncle, at the Frey's castle. The marriage was arranged to offset the fact that Robb's promise to marry one of the Frey girls was broken when he married Talisa, that is now pregnant. Once they all got there, and the marriage is celebrated a slaughter begins: the Frey and the Bolton's men start killing the Stark's ones. In the main room of the castle Talisa, Robb and Catelyn are killed by Roose Bolton, in front of a satisfied Walder Frey. Outside the gate the Hound with Arya, understood the situation, moves away from the castle.

In Essos Daenerys' ship arrived in the city of Ashtapor: there she intends to buy an army of Unsullied, slaves trained since they were little to be blindly obedient to their masters. Daenerys doesn't have enough gold to buy all of the Unsullied available, so she agrees to trade one of her dragons. Just about when the trade was taking place, she orders the dragons, using the word “Dracarys”, to burn the city and the traders. With her

new army she marches to another slave city, Yunkai, where the rulers of the city try to bribe her by providing the gold and the ships that she needs to transport her army to Westeros. In exchange, Daenerys would have to leave Yunkai in peace. She does not accept the offer, and she command them to free all of their slaves: as a response, they hire “The Seconds Sons”, a group of mercenaries that end up siding with her thanks to Daario Naharis -one of the three captain- intercession. Daenerys manages to free the city: the slaves, showing gratitude, starts calling her “mhysa”, mother in their language.

Chapter 3: Analysis of compliments

3.1 Methodology

The compliments retrieved from the first three seasons of the American TV show “Game of Thrones” were 213. The first season premiered on HBO April 17, 2011, and concluded on June 19, 2011; the second season was aired from April 1, 2012 to June 3, 2012; the third season premiered on March 31, 2013, and concluded on June 9, 2013. Each season consists of ten episodes: the episodes analysed were 30.

The compliments were retrieved manually by both analysing the script and watching the episodes. Each individual compliment was recorded for the analysis using Holmes and Brown’s model with 8 features⁹: linguistic form, response, topic, context, complimenter, receiver, discourse position, alternative function.

The linguistic form feature consists in reporting the exact compliment (e.g. Well done.); the response is how the complimentee reacts to the compliment (e.g. Thank you.); in the topic feature the main topic of the compliment is described (e.g. Performance); the context is about the extra-linguistic environment in which the compliment has been uttered (e.g. Unknown time of the day, Winterfell); the complimenter feature is the analysis of who utters the compliment, his/her age, sex and role (e.g. Septa Mordane middle 60s; female; teacher/nanny); in the receiver section the complementee age, sex and role are registered (e.g. Sansa 13; female; daughter of the lord of Winterfell); in the discourse position the place of the compliment in the whole discourse is specified (e.g. After another compliment; Beginning of the exchange); the alternative function feature is the analysis of the purpose and the type of the compliment (e.g. Reinforcing the previous compliment; [Direct compliment]).

⁹Holmes, Janet and Brown, Dorothy F. (1987) “Teachers and Students Learning about Compliments”. *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 21 (No. 3): pp. 523-546

3.2 Analysis of the data

3.2.1 Linguistic forms used to convey a compliment

According to Wolfson's analysis¹⁰ the three most common linguistic patterns are YOU LOOK AP (ADV + ADJ), NP BE AP (ADV + ADJ) and I LIKE NP (NOUN).

The compliments retrieved from the “Game of Thrones” episodes show a different tendency, since Wolfson's three most common patterns were used only in 14 out of the 213 compliments found: YOU LOOK AP (ADV + ADJ) in 5 compliments, NP BE AP (ADV + ADJ) for 1 compliment and I LIKE NP (NOUN) in 8 compliments.

In the analysed data the main tendency was to use Implicit compliments (59), mainly used by males (M-M 23, M-F 22). The fact that this complimenting strategy is used mostly by men can be related to the fact that the data is retrieved from a TV show set in a medieval-like fictional world. It may therefore point at particular social norms that are in place in that social environment. In particular, direct compliments among males could be understood as a hint to a hypothetical homosexuality, and thus its avoidance (which is constructed as a paramount feature for a warrior in such a society) may constitute a way to mark one's heterosexual orientation and masculine identity. On the other hand, a direct compliment to a woman (of a high social status, as in most of the compliments examined) could be rude and contrary to the stylization of this social environment as an ideal, courteous, round-table-like society. A possible confirmation of the validity of this interpretation is the fact that this strategy is mostly used by educated men and women.

Two other common patterns were NP (ADJ + NOUN) and YOU BE NP (ADJ + NOUN), each one used for 19 compliment. The first form was mainly used by men (M-M 11, M-F 4), while the second one was used almost with the same frequency both by women and men (F-M 9, F-F 1, M-F 2, M-M 7).

Only three other regular pattern were found in the text: YOU BE AP (ADV + ADJ) (13), YOU BE AP (ADJ) (10) and 3rd Person-Pron BE NP (ADJ + NOUN) (10). The form YOU BE AP (ADV + ADJ) was mainly used by women (F-M 7, F-F 1) as well as the YOU BE AP (ADJ) form (F-F 5, F-M 1). The 3rd Person-Pron BE NP (ADJ + NOUN) pattern was mostly used by men (M-M 5, M-F 3).

The amount of compliments with link verbs was 13, and the verbs used were *like* (6),

¹⁰Wolfson, Nessa (1984)“Pretty Is As Pretty Does: A Speech Act View of Sex Roles”. *Applied Linguistics*, Vol 5: pp.236-44.

love (1), appreciate (2) and admire (4). Men are the ones that use this pattern the most (11): the analysed data shows a different tendency from Herbert work¹¹, according to which this kind of pattern is preferred by women

3.2.2 The topics of the compliments

According to Holmes and Brown’s analysis of U.S and New Zealand data,¹² the main topics of English compliments are: some aspect of appearance that is the result of the complimentee’s effort (e.g. hair-dos), the quality of something produced thanks to the addressee's skills and new objects.

The main linguistic studies on the frequency of compliments, moreover, suggest specific features based on gender: according to Alfonzetti’s analysis¹³ women are the ones that receive most compliments, both by other women and by men; on his article on the topic Herbert¹⁴ says that compliments to men are low in frequency.

The analysis of the compliments retrieved from the “Game of Thrones” episodes shows some different tendencies, if we consider the relation between topic and gender as shown in the table below:

	APPEARANCE	SKILLS	PERFORMANCE	PERSONAL POSSESSION	PERSONAL TRAITS	OTHER	Tot.
F-M	4	3	6	6	21		40
F-F	6	5	6	3	3		23
M-F	26	9	7	2	18		62
M-M	9	11	29	5	34		88
TOT.	45	28	48	16	76		213

These differences can be related both to the frequency of dialogues featuring females or males in the script, but also to social elements.

The most frequent topic is personal traits, followed in order by performance, appearance, skills and personal possession.

Appearance is a topic that, according to Alfonzetti's work, is often avoided when the complimentee is a man, both if the complimenter is male or female. This tendency is partially reflected in the analysed data as well, since the cases of female-to-male

¹¹Herbert, Robert K (1990)“Sex-Based Differences in Compliment Behavior”. *Language in Society*, Vol. 19 (No. 2): pp. 201-224.

¹² Holmes, Janet and Brown, Dorothy F. (1987) “Teachers and Students Learning about Compliments”. *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 21 (No. 3): pp. 523-546

¹³ Alfonzetti, Giovanna “Compliments”. In Sbisà, Marina and Ken Turner (eds.)(2013) *Pragmatics of Speech Actions*, Berlin: de Gruyter, pp.555-586.

¹⁴Herbert, Robert K (1990)“Sex-Based Differences in Compliment Behavior”. *Language in Society*, Vol. 19 (No. 2): pp. 201-224.

compliments on appearance are just a few. This topic is mostly found in male-to-female (e.g. “You look quite nice.”, “Widowhood becomes you.”, “More ravishing than ever”) and male-to-male compliments (e.g. “You got bigger”, “You're looking well.”, “You've got an interesting face”)

In the analysed episodes of “Game of Thrones”, females compliment each other about skills and performance, while the personal trait topic is mostly used in male to male and male to female compliments. Male also compliment other males about their performance, but this topic is not frequent if the complimentee is female. Male are complimented for their performance if it is war or battle related (e.g. “Well struck”, said after the complimentee defeated his opponent) or diplomacy and ruling related (e.g. “What a fine job you've done.”, said to the king in relation to what he did for his people), while is more important for women that their action is driven by kindness (e.g. “I can't tell you how touched I am by your concern for my welfare”), both if the complimenters are male and female. Of course this does not apply to those kind of character that do not conform to the standard, such as female warriors (e.g. “You protected me better than most...”, said to a female knight).

Compliments on personal possession are the less frequent, especially in the male to female interaction, while the most used compliments are those that focus on personal traits: the male to male compliments on this topic are the most frequent. Male are usually complimented for their intelligence (e.g. “So clever.”, “Aren't you always so clever”) and courage (e.g. “and you're brave”), and if the complimenter is a female also kindness (e.g. “You're very kind”, “You are too kind”). Kindness is also the most common female's personal trait complimented (e.g. “You're very kind”, “you have a gentle heart”).

3.2.3 Compliment responses

Pomeranz's studies on compliment responses¹⁵ show that the delivery of appreciation tokens is the most common type of compliment response.

In the analysed data, on the contrary, the largest proportion of compliments had no responses, whether because the compliment was part of a longer stretch of speech or because the complimentee decided to ignore it.

Appreciation tokens are a small proportion of compliment responses, and are usually

¹⁵Pomerantz, Anita (1987) “Compliment responses: Notes on the co-operation of multiples constrains”. J. Schenkein (Ed.), *Studies in the organization of conversational interaction*, New York, NY: Academic Press, pp. 79-112.

used by female.

When a second comment on the referent was provided by the complimentee, scaled down agreement was often performed, but not in every case: in some responses self praise was intentionally not avoided in order to show confidence and strength, and to intimidate the other speaker. This strategy is used mostly by male complimentee, but also by those women that do not conform to the feminine standard and that behave like men.

Only in few cases disagreement (e.g. the response to “You look well suited for battle” is “Well, I'm not.”) and referent shift (e.g. the response to “You've done so well” is “Give Lord Renly my regards”) were performed, while returning the compliment was often used, especially by females (e.g. the response to “I believe you grow more beautiful every day” is “You are too kind”).

3.2.4 Compliments, compliment responses and gender

In the analysed data most of the complimenter and complimentee are males, which can be related to the fact that most of the script features dialogues among male characters. The TV show is set in a fictional world that resembles the medieval age where, with few exceptions, important decisions are made by men, as men are the characters who play the most important roles. A lot of male to male compliments, moreover, have a sarcastic and ironic purpose: because of that, and for the long speeches given by characters in the dialogues, most of the compliments are not acknowledged and have no response. The main topic of male to male compliments is personal trait, followed by performance, skills, appearance and personal possession. Personal trait compliments are mostly related to courage (e.g. “You're very brave.”) and honour (e.g. “I believe no man here could ever question your honour.”), performance and skill to battles and negotiation elements (e.g. “A bold move”, referred to a political move) and personal possession to war related items (e.g. “Very handsome armour.”): these four topics are directly influenced by the setting, and contribute to create both an ideal masculine identity and a warlike ethic for this fictional society.

Female to male compliments' most frequent topic is personal trait (e.g. “I hope to repay your kindness someday”), followed by personal possession (e.g. “It's beautiful”, referred to a weapon) and performance (e.g. “You have served the Realm long and faithfully”), appearance (e.g. “You look very handsome”) and skills (e.g. “You're a great warrior”). The topics of female to male compliments is mainly influenced by the nature

or social status of the complimenter: strong or common women that do not care about the social conventions compliment men about topic such as skills and appearance (e.g. “You're a pretty lad”), while compliant or high-born women would not. This difference lies on their attitude: a woman that not conform to the standard of the fictional society will likely behave like a men, even when compliments are involved. Female to male compliments will be mostly made for the sake of the conversation, to express gratitude and as a way to convince the complimentee to do something; the compliment will often have no response, or it will involve referent shift (e.g. the response to “You've done so well” is “Give Lord Renly my regards”).

Male to female compliment are the second ones for frequency, in which the most frequent topic is appearance (e.g. “You are [...] far too beautiful.”), followed by personal trait (e.g. “you have a gentle heart”), skill (e.g. “ I think your true talents are wasted on them.”), performance (e.g. “I can't tell you how touched I am by your concern for my welfare”) and personal possession (e.g. “That's a lovely gown”). Male to female compliments are mostly made for courtesy or for the sake of the conversation, if the complimentee is a high status woman (e.g. “You look very beautiful”), and for sexual purpose if she is a commoner (e.g. “None like you”, after being asked if there were any women were he came from.): this difference is due to the fact that status in the show's fictional society is an important issue that influences how the women are seen and treated. The responses to these compliments are usually appreciation tokens or other compliments.

Both female to male and male to female compliments, even if in some cases only, feature irony: this can be found among relatives that do not have a good relationship, and usually there is no response.

Female to female compliments are the least frequent: this is linked to the fact that the script features only a few dialogues among females. Appearance and performance are the most common topic, followed by skills, personal trait and personal possession. The female to female compliments retrieved are mostly made among high status women, that in the show's medieval-like society are supposed to occupy a secondary position in the political establishment: because of that most of the female to female compliments are made to start or develop a conversation, while only a few have a more practical intent.

In the analysed data, Herbert's theory¹⁶ is both confirmed and denied. Often male to male compliments do not have any response, which is in agreement with his theory, but women tend to respond to compliments using both appreciation tokens or another compliment -regardless whether the complimenter is a man or another woman- (e.g. the response to "I admire you" is "And I admire you"), rather than disagreeing with them; cases of disagreement are, in fact, more common in male to male exchanges (e.g. "you were a good father" is "If I was a good father, he'd still be here").

¹⁶Herbert, Robert K (1990) "Sex-Based Differences in Compliment Behavior". *Language in Society*, Vol. 19 (No. 2): pp. 201-224.

Conclusion

Compliments can be considered as a multi-use linguistic device that can have different purposes, usually linked to solidarity and positive politeness: they are often used to create connection among the speakers, starting or developing a conversation, but also to soften a face-threatening act. Because of this, compliments can be considered one of the devices that hold together human relationships, at least on the linguistic side.

The objective of this dissertation was to analyse compliments from a sociolinguistic and pragmatic point of view: the gender of the participants, the topics, the linguistic structure and the various functions that compliments are put to use in.

The compliments were retrieved from the American TV show “Game of Thrones”. Looking for compliments in a TV show, with fictional dialogues and situations, is less time-consuming than looking for them in real life, since there is no need to wait for them to happen. The choice fell on “Game of Thrones” because of the type of fictional social and cultural environment it has constructed, a fantasy-medieval world that could give unexpected results, very distant from the main tendencies spotted in previous studies, but still in a dialectical relation with our everyday expectations.

The compliments were retrieved manually, firstly by reading the script in order to spot the compliments, then by watching the episodes in which the specific dialogues were performed in order to determine the time frame. The following step was to apply Holmes and Brown’s model with 8 features¹⁷: linguistic form (later simplified in its syntactic fragment), response, topic, context, complimenter, receiver, discourse position and alternative function. The use of this model helped spot the main tendencies on topic, gender, syntactic fragment, discourse and function. These were later compared with the results of other studies on the topic, in order to find out the main differences and similarities.

The results were largely influenced by different elements. In the first place, the issue of gender: since the majority of the characters are male, most of the dialogues took place amongst men; it seems natural, then, that most of the times both the complimenter and the receiver were male. The social environment also is another important element: in the show's fictional, medieval-like world, women's role did not involve any important decision, which leads to the fact that most female-to-female and female-to-male

¹⁷ Holmes, Janet and Brown, Dorothy F. (1987) “Teachers and Students Learning about Compliments”. *TESOL Quarterly* Vol. 21 (No. 3): pp. 523-546

compliments are only made for the sake of the conversation, without any practical purpose.

Lastly, the fact that the compliments are retrieved from a TV show will evidently result in notable differences with everyday expectations, but as it happens in our world, performance constructs identities and rapport. This means that compliments are one device that scriptwriters use to schematically delineate characters' personalities and relationships. In this show, for example, the variable of social class is linguistically enacted by means of compliments characterized by a complex structure for the high born, while intelligence, sense of humour and maliciousness are realized by means of indirectness, irony and ambiguity.

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