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## **A Systematic Review of Compliments among Iranian Persian Speakers: Past, Present, and Future Directions\***

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### **Abstract**

Compliments (Cs) and compliment responses have been a prevailing topic of study in pragmatics due to their pivotal role in effective intercultural and transcultural interactions. This paper provides a comprehensive survey of research on compliments in the Persian language conducted over almost about the past four decades. It summarizes key findings of compliments in the Persian language used by Iranian speakers of Persian, discusses the significance of these findings, and speculates the future directions of research on complimenting studies on Persian language. An extensive bibliographical search on studies on this particular area yielded a database of nine studies on Persian Cs for this systematic review. After a brief exploration of the background of compliment studies done by prominent scholars in other languages, we provide a working definition of compliments. We then examine studies to date of complimenting behavior in Persian, highlighting similarities and differences, and any emerging trends. We provide a synthesis of the research conducted in this area, the theoretical frameworks, and the methodologies used in different studies, including data collection and data analysis. Based on the review of previous studies, we speculate on some possible directions for future research in this area.

**Keywords:** Compliment, Complimenting Behavior, Iranian Persian Speakers, Systematic Review.

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### **Introduction**

The indispensable role of pragmatics in learning, teaching, assessment, and research in English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts has been acknowledged over the last four decades (Birjandi & Derakhshan, 2014; Chalak & Abbasi, 2015; Cohen, 2018; Culpeper, Mackey, & Taguchi, 2018; Derakhshan, 2015, 2019a, 2020; Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018; Derakhshan & Eslami, 2015, 2020; Derakhshan, Shakki, & Sarani, 2020; Eslami & Derakhshan, 2019, 2020; Eslami, 2005; Ishihara, & Cohen, 2014; Malmir & Derakhshan, 2020; Shakki, Naeini, Mazandarani, & Derakhshan, 2020; Sonnenburg-Winkler, Eslami, & Derakhshan, 2020; Taguchi, 2019; Taguchi & Kim, 2018). Pragmatics pertains to the appropriate use and interpretation of language by language users in different sociocultural settings (LoCastro, 2013). It entails the relationships between utterances and the functions that speakers aim to perform through these utterances (Bachman, 1995). According to Taguchi (2019), “pragmatic competence is postulated as the knowledge of form–function–context mappings—which forms to use for what communicative functions in what social contexts” (p. 3).

Units and constructs of analysis in pragmatics illustrate the multiplicity of pragmatic competence. This multiplicity is manifested through speech acts, conversational implicatures, routines, prosody, humor, etc. Speech acts are the most prevailing and extensively-researched aspects of pragmatic competence (Cohen, 2017; Chalak & Abbasi, 2015; Derakhshan, 2014, 2019b; Derakhshan, Eslami, & Ghandhari, in press; Derakhshan, Malmir, & Greenier, in press; Derakhshan & Shakki, 2020; Eslami & Liu, 2013; Eslami & McLeod, 2010; Malmir & Derakhshan, in press). Compliments, as one of the frequently used speech acts, can play different functions based on the situational and sociocultural values of different societies (Li, Woodfield, & Ren, 2012). Brown and Levinson (1987) postulated that complimenting is a positive politeness strategy aimed at praising the addressees for a past or present action. Compliments are prime instances of speech acts that consider the hearer’s desires, wishes,

goods, and needs. Holmes (1988) referred to compliment as “a polite speech act which explicitly or implicitly attributes value to someone other than the speaker” (p. 446). For Holmes (1988), explicit Cs are those speech acts whose meaning is understood literally, and implicit Cs are those whose meaning can be induced by participants using specific situational and contextual variables.

Considering the functions of Cs, Holmes (1988) reiterated that Cs are often uttered to praise the complimentee for positive characteristics that are valued by the complimenter and the speech community. The most prevailing topics receiving Cs are appearance, possessions, skills, and achievements (Holmes, 1988). Compliments are used in conversations to establish, sustain, or terminate a dialog. They can also convey gratitude and enhance the conversational exchange by expanding the rapport between the interactants (Jin-pei, 2013). As Wolfson (1989) submitted, Cs are employed to ‘grease the social wheels’ and function as ‘social lubricants’. While Cs appear to be straightforward at first sight, they are complex and multifaceted speech acts. Although one of the main functions of Cs is to strengthen solidarity between speakers (Wolfson, 1989), as Brown and Levinson (1987) claim, Cs can be face-threatening (FTA) at times. In fact, as put forward by Brown and Levinson, complimenting is a positive politeness strategy that addresses the positive face of the complimentee; at the same time, it can be considered as an FTA when the addresser attempts to gain something belonging to the addressee. Similarly, Holmes (1988) asserted that Cs might serve to reinforce unity between interlocutors as well as serving as a threat to the negative face of the hearer. Put it differently, Cs are a multidimensional speech act with different functions and characteristics, and they can be considered as either face-threatening or face-saving behaviors (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

The impact of a compliment on the addressee can sometimes be different from the speaker’s intention (Eslami & Derakhshan, in press). For instance, in some societies, it is common for people to praise interlocutors from both genders on their looks and beauty, while in other cultures, it can convey messages not intended by the speaker

(Eslami, 2004; Eslami, Yang, & Qian, 2020; Rose & Kwai-Fun, 2001). As Golato (2003) asserted, the same expression could be a compliment, sarcasm, reprimand, or insult in different societies or contexts. That is why complimentary expressions can sometimes be complex, ambiguous, and culture-specific. Thus, how to pay suitable compliments, how to recognize them, and how to react accordingly are crucial factors of communicative competence (Brown, 2007). It seems that studying Cs, as Kim (2003) pointed out, can deepen our awareness of what is valued in other cultures and societies. Its importance in intercultural and intracultural communication has inspired scholars to investigate complimenting behavior in different languages, resulting in numerous studies that have been accumulated in the field of pragmatics (cf. Chen, 2010).

After the seminal publication of Pomerantz (1978) on Cs and compliment responses (CRs) in American English, a vast amount of literature accumulated, investigating complimenting behavior in different varieties of English (Chen, 2010). Studies on complimenting behavior extended to languages other than English in subsequent years (see Chen, 2010; Dehkordi & Chalak, 2015; Placencia & Eslami, 2020; Sharifian, Chalak, & Dehkordi, 2019; Strubel-Burgdorf, 2018 for a review).

In this paper, we focus on studies conducted on complimenting behavior in Persian compared with other languages (e.g., Ansarin & Morady Moghaddam, 2016; Behnam & Amizadeh, 2011; Boroujeni, Domakani, & Sheykhi, 2016; Eslami & Derakhshan, in press; Karimnia & Afghari, 2011), some of which have taken factors such as gender, age, and educational background into consideration (e.g., Shahidipour & Zarei, 2016, 2017; Yousefvand, 2010).

This study is the first systematic review of research conducted to examine the speech act of compliment on the Persian language. In this review, we have examined the theoretical frameworks, data collection and data analysis instruments, and overall findings of the previous studies included in this synthesis. Furthermore, situational variables (e.g., age, gender, educational background, culture) have been

considered as well. Finally, based on the research synthesis, directions for future studies on complimenting behavior in Persian have been provided.

### **Review of the Literature**

#### **Theoretical frameworks of complimenting behavior**

Various theoretical frameworks have been embarked on to scrutinize complimenting behavior, including (a) Conversational Analysis (CA); (b) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFG); (c) Politeness Theory; and (d) Ethnography.

Conversational Analysis (CA) offers a well-adapted taxonomy of analysis for culturally defined speech events since it employs video/audio-taped samples of non-elicited face-to-face interactions. The data gathered by employing CA methodology demonstrate what speakers are actually doing in conversation (Golato, 2002). Several researchers employed CA to investigate complimenting behavior among different speakers. For instance, Wieland (1995) recorded seven dinner conversations in French between French and American speakers. Analyzing the gathered data, she found that there were significant gender differences in compliment topics and the frequency of compliments among French and American complimenters. Subsequently, Wang and Tsai (2003) explored compliments in Taiwan Mandarin using a conversational corpus. Their findings showed that both men and women speakers complimented more on someone's appearance than on his/her ability, personality, or possessions.

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFG) is another theoretical framework of complimenting behavior which was developed by Halliday (2003). There are two fundamental ideas in SFG. SFG is systemic since language is perceived as a series of choices (systems) from which speakers choose various options to make meaning (Thompson, 2004). In addition, the term 'functional' refers to the view held by Halliday (2003) that language is as it is due to what it has formed to do. Therefore, language "reflects the multidimensional nature of human experience and interpersonal relations" (Halliday, 2003, p. 29). This framework is appropriate for the analysis of Cs since it enables

the researchers to approach compliments from a systemic perspective and to fully understand human experience and interpersonal relationships (Hunston & Thompson, 2000). Some scholars conducted their compliment studies on the basis of SFG. For instance, Maíz-Arévalo (2013) explored online compliments among Spanish speakers. Analyzing data based on a netnographic and systemic functional approach, she found that two aspects of disembodiment and asynchronicity have a crucial impact on how online users give compliments. Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) is also used as one of the theoretical frameworks to analyze complimenting behavior. Leech (1983) defined “Politeness” as a type of behavior that enables the participants to engage in a social interaction in an atmosphere of relative harmony. Subsequently, Brown and Levinson (1987) postulated that politeness is a complex system for softening face-threatening acts (FTAs). In their theory, communication is perceived as potentially dangerous and antagonistic. This theory is beneficial for the analysis of compliments as politeness strategies because its interest in compliments lies predominantly in their use in redressing FTAs. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), employing a compliment is a positive strategy that addresses the complimentee’s positive face. This is due to the fact that the act of complimenting signals concerns about the addressee’s positive face by attending to the addressee’s face desires (Johnson & Roen, 1992). Various studies on compliments employed politeness theory to analyze complimenting behaviors. Among them, one can refer to Ningrum, Suharsono, and Suwono’s (2018) study in which four EFL teachers’ compliments were analyzed based on politeness theory. The findings represent that female teachers tend to use negative politeness strategies more in making requests and both males and females tend to use positive politeness strategies in paying compliments in the classroom context.

Complimenting behavior has also been examined from the perspective of other research traditions (i.e., corpus linguistics, ethnographics, relevance theory, and variational pragmatics), in addition to the ones mentioned above. Among them, one can refer to

ethnographics as the most important one. Ethnographic frameworks are useful for examining the actual use of language. They enable researchers to create new ideas and hypotheses about the topic and to sample as large a variety of speech situations as possible (Van Ham, Manley, Bailey, Simpson, & Maclennan, 2012; Wolfson, 1989). Sifianou (2001) reported some valuable findings of Greek compliments on the basis of 450 compliment exchanges collected ethnographically. Of the 450 compliments, 79 % of them were uttered by women, and 83 % were received by women. In contrast, only 5% of these compliments were between men. Besides, compliments paid to women were largely about appearance, while those paid to men were mostly about ability (Sifianou 2001, p. 401).

### **Classification schemes of compliments**

A multitude of classification schemes/models has been conceptualized for categorizing compliments. Chronologically, one can refer to Chafe and Danielewicz (1987), and Johnson and Roen's (1992) models in which Cs were divided into three main strategies based on their functions:

1. Compliments redressing particular criticisms and suggestions: This strategy encompasses matching a compliment with a specific FTA to decrease the impact of the FTA.
2. Compliments redressing global FTA: It includes developing a relationship with the complimentee by the use of opening/closing positive politeness strategies.
3. Framing strategies: It involves both opening and closing discourse strategies (politeness strategies). In this case, a letter opening with positive comments accompanied by a global FTA and ending with positive comments is considered to have a framing strategy.

Similarly, Yuan (2002) divided compliment acts into three types: Compliment, Non-compliment, and Opt out. He argued that semantic formulas for Cs could be categorized into two types, namely, bound and unbound semantic formulas. Unbound semantic formulas are those expressions that can act independently as Cs, while bound formulas are

those utterances that cannot be considered as Cs by themselves. In fact, to be recognized as a part of a compliment, bound semantic formulas must be attached to one of the unbound formulas. Yuan further divided unbound semantic formulas into two subcategories of implicit Cs and explicit Cs. Bound formulas are also categorized into six components of information question, future reference, explanation, contrast, advice, and request. Explicit Cs pertain to context-free Cs, being understood by a series of conventional formulas. Put it differently, explicit Cs contain at least one positive semantic value. On the other hand, implicit Cs are those expressions that can be induced from what is said in a specific context. Non-complimentary act refers to those expressions that cannot be considered as Cs, whether it is a simple expression of thanks, a bound semantic formula that occurs on its own, or a response that does not carry any positive semantic value. Finally, Opt out applies to situations where somebody indicates, “I wouldn’t say anything.” when a complimentary expression is expected in that condition.

Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) categorized Cs based on their linguistic structures into two different types (see Figure 1 below for detail).

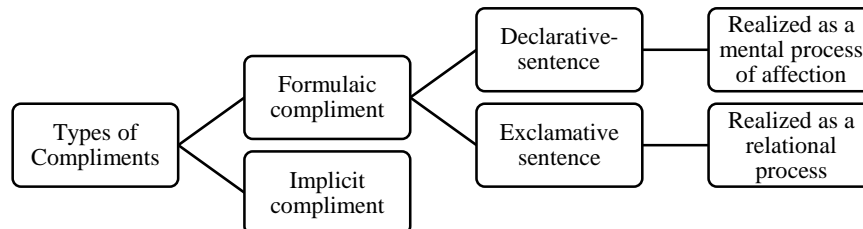


Figure 1. System of face-to-face compliments: Linguistic realization

Concerning online contexts, Placencia and Lower (2013) have developed a model in which online Cs are classified into three main categories:

- Verbal: Explicit and Implicit



- Nonverbal: Emoticon and Clicking ‘like’
- Mixed: Both verbal and nonverbal

Facebook users have a range of options when they intend to extend a compliment to another user’s profile image. They may decide to use verbal strategies, non-verbal strategies, or mixed strategies (i.e., verbal and non-verbal). Placencia and Lower (2013) considered the use of ‘like’ and emoticons to be non-verbal Cs unless other verbal strategies were used. However, ‘like’ and emoticons are characterized as external modifiers if they were used in combination with a verbal complimenting strategy.

### **Data collection methods in compliments**

Different data collection methods are used in studying Cs. They include: (a) Discourse completion tasks (DCTs) (e.g., Yuan, 2002), (b) recordings of naturally occurring conversation (Golato, 2005; Pomerantz, 1978); (c) role-plays (e.g., Grabowski, 2008); (d) field observations (e.g., Wolfson, 1989; Jucker, 2009), and (e) recall protocols (e.g., Bacelar da Silva, 2003). Golato (2003) has discussed the advantages and disadvantages of each data collection method, noting that each of them allows the researcher to investigate different facets of the topic at hand (e.g., intuitions, frequency, distribution, sequential organization, perception, etc.).

Among different data collection methods, DCTs are the most frequently used instruments for investigating Cs. In DCTs, subjects are presented with a context in which a compliment/compliment response is considered to be the next appropriate action. Then, subjects are asked to mention what they would say or how they would respond in this context (Golato, 2005). This data collection instrument has several advantages, such as enabling researchers to control particular variables (e.g., age, situational factors) and to easily collect large amounts of data, thus making it possible to compare responses of participants from different groups (Billmyer & Varghese, 2000). However, some researchers (e.g., Holmes, 1993) have stated that data gathered through this method do not always correlate with natural data. Similarly,

intuitions of native speakers about the language associated with speech completion tasks do not represent real-time interactional orders (Golato, 2005; Wolfson, 1989). In addition, DCTs and interviews do not exhibit the interactional dimensions of a speech event (Golato, 2005). Despite these weaknesses, due to their simplicity of use and a high degree of control over variables, DCTs are commonly used in the fields of intercultural communication, pragmatics, and second language acquisition (SLA).

Researchers working within a conversational analysis framework analyze naturally occurring conversations to demonstrate how patterns of interactions unfold. CA data involve non-elicited, audio/video taped face-to-face interactions, and audio-taped spontaneous mobile conversations. CA's strength lies in the fact that its methodology enables researchers to accurately analyze natural and authentic language use and the utterances in their sequential setting (Golato, 2002). Besides the strengths, within this method, due to its labor-intensive analysis, it is difficult to gather a large body of datasets, demonstrating the phenomenon being studied (Kasper, 2001). Moreover, this methodology has been criticized because implementing this approach makes it somewhat impossible to regulate some variables, such as social status, power, and age differences between interlocutors (Yuan, 2002).

Comparing different forms of elicited data, role-plays generate more naturalistic data: "They represent oral production, full operation of the turn-taking mechanism, spontaneous decision making, and negotiation of both global and local aims" (Kasper & Dahl, 1991, p. 228). However, as Kasper (2001) commented, role-plays, whether open-ended or fixed, are mainly motivated by the researcher's purpose rather than those of the participants. Role-plays and naturally occurring conversations cannot be considered as the same if it is presumed that the goal of the conversation is its structuring force (Kasper, 2001). In addition, while speakers can interact with each other, the setting of their interactions within role-plays is commonly assumed, and thus not authentic (Golato, 2005). Despite the above drawbacks, role-plays are widely utilized in

the area of interlanguage pragmatics, mainly because the variables can be controlled for comparability purposes and as online production tasks include characteristics similar to those of real conversations (Kasper, 2001). A valuable study in this area is Eslami and Mirzaei (2014) study in which they explored using different forms of DCTs (written and oral) in Persian. They then compared the responses from oral DCTs (ODCTs) vs. written DCTs (WDCTs) in terms of the response length, range and content of the expressions, formality level, and spoken vs. written language forms. The findings showed that the two measures elicit different production samples from the students. ODCTs induced longer, more elaborate responses, and more linguistic forms representing spoken variety of the language than WDCTs. In WDCTs students mixed different styles (spoken and written) and used both formal and informal linguistic devices in one situation. Based on the result of their study, Eslami and Mirzaei claim that WDCTs may be inappropriate for collecting data in Persian language, which has marked differences between spoken and written variety and highly complicated stylistic variations.

A large number of compliment studies have applied field observation to collect data (e.g., Jucker, 2009; Wolfson, 1989). Field workers are usually involved in data collection and instructed to write down the Cs they encounter in their lives and to mention the exact exchange as well as other situational details (e.g., location, age, and gender) as soon as possible after the interaction has occurred. The greatest benefit of this data collection method is that it enables the researcher to gather the required database from a large sample of speakers and across various contexts (Kasper, 2001). However, there are some potential shortcomings with this data collection method. Since most field workers do not use audiotapes/ videotapes of the conversations, they need to use their memory and observational abilities. Trying to retrieve linguistic data after some hours will result in data that could be restricted in both quantity and quality (Labov, 1984).

Finally, in recall protocols, participants are required to recall the last compliment they received or uttered and to explain the context in which it took place. While this task targets some natural data, scholars who use it need to consider human memory limitations. For example, it has been represented that bilingual speakers are not able to precisely remember which language they used in a particular context (Gumperz, 1989). Psycholinguistic work has explicated that recalling utterances is deficient, even in the most desirable conditions (Zangoei, Nourmohammadi, & Derakhshan, 2014a). Several research studies have expounded that while listeners can truly retrieve the meaning of a sentence, they will not accurately remember its syntactic form unless they are explicitly instructed to do so (Hanson & Bellugi, 1982; Zangoei, Nourmohammadi, & Derakhshan, 2014b). In addition to memory-related issues, recall protocols often fail to generate the interactional characteristics associated with a specific speech act, and thus do not lead to natural data. Another shortcoming of this data collection method is that participants are chosen based on convenience and not based on random sampling, which is readily achieved with other data collection methods such as DCTs and role-plays.

Compliments are considered and categorized based on their topics, functions, and linguistic realizations, which will be explained in the following sections.

### **Compliment topics**

Compliments can be given on different topics as reflected in cultural values of different societies (Manes, 1983). Despite the wide range of compliment topics found in previous studies, the topic of the most Cs are limited to a few general ones. Based on the U.S. data, Manes and Wolfson (1981) and Wolfson (1989) cogently argued that compliment topics fall into two general categories of (a) appearance and possessions and (b) ability and accomplishment. Regarding the first category, it is common to offer compliments on clothing, jewelry, and hairstyle. Desirable comments on the beauty of one's children, animals, and even husbands/wives also fall into this category, as do Cs on possessions, compliments on ability and accomplishments involve those relating to

the complimentee's ability or performance, e.g., a well-performed job, a skillfully-played game, etc. According to Manes and Wolfson's (1981) study, the greatest number of appearance and possession Cs are carried out by associates, colleagues, and close friends. As submitted by Placencia and Lower (2013), a difficulty in comparisons on compliment topics is that authors do not consistently group compliments in one category or the other. For example, Placencia and Lower (2017) place compliments on personality and friendship into two categories, whereas Holmes (1988) combines them under one category.

### **Compliment functions**

Depending on the purpose and context, compliment functions may vary. People may use Cs to sustain or re-establish a social relationship, to enhance the desired action, or to soften the force of FTAs (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Compliments usually aim to make someone feel good. The main function of a compliment is social and emotional in nature, rather than informative or referential (Brown, 2007). They are generally defined as positively affective speech acts that serve to strengthen the unity between the complimenter and complimentee. Briefly, Cs mainly aim to 'grease the social wheels' and thus act as 'social lubricants' that establish or sustain rapport (Wolfson, 1989). In the same vein, Holmes (1988) postulated that Cs are considered complex speech acts which function as "solidarity signals, attenuating demands, commenting on friendships, smoothing ruffled feathers and bridging gaps created by probable offenses" (p. 464).

In some cases, Cs may act as praise and encouragement. Herbert (1990) argued that, rather than offering unity, some Cs serve as expressions of praise and admiration. As such, the relationship between people is essential in understanding the functions of a compliment.

Compliments may also have a dark side. Brown and Levinson (1987) elucidated that Cs might be applied to convey sarcasm, to put someone down, and to threaten the complimentee's negative face.

### Linguistic patterns of compliments

Compliments are formulaic speech acts which are realized by a limited number of lexical and syntactic patterns (Manes & Wolfson, 1981). Manes and Wolfson (1981) found that 85 percent of the spoken Cs consisted of three core syntactic patterns (NP is/looks (really) ADJ, I (really) like/love NP, & PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP). They also found that five adjectives of *beautiful*, *pretty*, *nice*, *good*, and *great* accounted for the majority of the adjectives that complimenters employed. Likewise, only two verbs (i.e., *like* and *love*) represented 86% of the positively evaluative verbs.

The formulaic nature of Cs is also proved in other languages, such as in Persian (Ansarin & Moghaddam, 2016; Boori, 1994; Eslami, Jabbari, & Kuo, 2019; Eslami & Derakhshan, in press; Tajeddin & Yazdanmehr, 2013). Analyzing a corpus of 838 Persian complimenting events, Boori (1994) found that two syntactic patterns, including “NP (ADV) ADJ V” and “NP ADJ (V)” accounted for 78.2% of the compliments. Similarly, five adjectives (*khoob*, *khoshgel*, *ghæshæng*, *shik*, and *khoshtip*) accounted for most of the adjectival compliments.

In a similar vein, Tajeddin and Yazdanmehr (2013) examined the structural pattern of compliments used by 30 EFL learners. They found that two structures of ‘sub. + adv. +obj. /adj. +v.’ and ‘exclamation word + adj. /adv. +v.’ are the most frequent structural compliments employed by participants.

More recently, Eslami and Derakhshan (in press) reported the most frequently occurring syntactic and semantic compliment patterns. They found that five structures accounted for 88.07% of the Cs. These syntactic structures included (PRO) What NP ADJ (V), followed by (PRO) NP (ADV) ADJ (V), (PRO) (NP) How ADJ (NP) (V) (PRO), NP (ADV) ADJ NP V, and ADV NP ADJ. Regarding semantic structure, they reported that the most frequently used adjectives were *ghæshæng* (beautiful) (28.71%) followed by *khoshgel* (beautiful) (19.14%) and *khoob* (good) (9.24%).

Having reviewed the basic definitions and functions of compliments, compliment topics, linguistic patterns, methods of data collection, and the classification schemes and theoretical frameworks used by different researchers, we now provide a systematic review of the studies done on compliments in Persian language.

The following research questions guided our study:

1. What theoretical frameworks and classification schemes have been used to explore Iranian Persian speakers' complimenting behavior?
2. What are the most frequent data collection/analysis methods used?
3. Do intervening variables (i.e., age, educational background, gender) affect Iranian Persian speakers' complimenting behavior?

## **Method**

### **Databases and search keywords**

The procedures for this review were guided by those of a systematic review (e.g., Risko et al., 2008), to the extent that was possible. A systematic review includes four steps: a) a general search for relevant studies, b) a review of titles and abstracts to determine if the studies meet inclusion criteria, c) a quality analysis of identified articles, and d) a quantitative and qualitative synthesis of all studies included.

To address the above mentioned research questions, electronic bibliographic searches were conducted to locate all the Persian compliment studies published up to 2020, the time of writing this article. All journals, book chapters, and conference monographs were searched through different databases, including CIVILICA, Google Scholar, ERIC, LLBA, Magiran, ProQuest, and Web of Science. To locate the related studies, the keywords of 'compliment', 'praise or praising', and 'encouragement' were used.

### **Criteria for inclusion and exclusion**

Manuscripts were included in this systematic review if they met the following criteria:

1. Studies investigated Persian Cs;
2. Studies were reported or published from 1994 to 2020;

3. Studies were written in English/Persian;
4. Studies were published in local/international journals.
5. Studies were analyzed compliments across cultures.

Studies were excluded if they were:

1. Studies which mainly examined CRs;
2. Studies which focused on the effects of instruction on Cs.
3. Studies on compliments in other languages.

The initial search yielded 50 manuscripts. From 50 manuscripts, three studies were omitted in the first step in the review process since they focused on the teachability of compliments and the probable effects of instruction on compliments. Of the remaining 47 articles, 39 articles were excluded for further analysis using the exclusion criteria mentioned above. Most of these studies examined compliment responses, which is not the focus of our systematic study. Some of them (Boroujeni, Domakani, & Sheykhi, 2016; Karimnia & Afghari, 2010, 2011; Sadeghi & Zarei, 2013; Sorahi & Nazemi, 2013; Yousefvand, 2010) included compliment in their titles, but their research questions focused on CRs. Finally, nine articles were selected for conducting a systematic review and for further analysis. Table 1 provides a comprehensive list of manuscripts and their details.

Table 1. Description of Persian studies on compliments

Study	Theoretical Framework	Classification Schemes	Sample Size	Educational Background	Age	Gender	L1
Boori (1994)	Conversational Analysis (CA)	–	838 Persian Cs	–	–	–	Persian



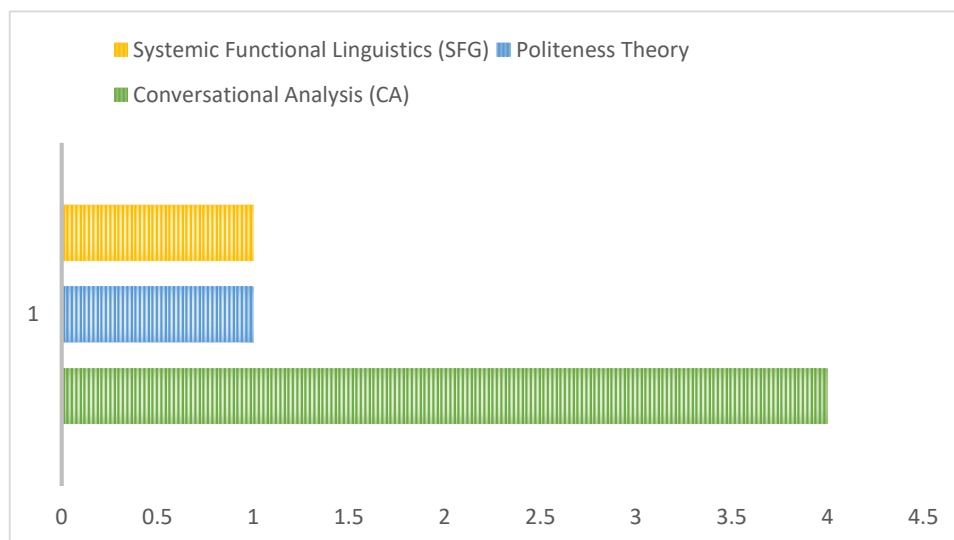
Behnam and Amizadeh (2011)	Conversational Analysis (CA)	–	16 interviews	–	–	–	Persian , English
Zarei (2011)	Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFG)	Johnson and Roen (1992)	65 students	Senior university students	–	–	Persian
Tajjedin and Yazdanmehr (2012)	Politeness Theory	Manes and Wolfson (1981)	30 students	Intermediate EFL learners	18-35	–	Persian
Shahidpour and Zarei (2016)	–	Yuan (2002)	200 speakers	–	50 under18, 50 between18-30, 50 between 31-40, and 50 above 40 years old	100 males, 100 females	Persian
Ansarin and Morady Moghadam (2016)	–	Yuan (2002)	120 speakers	Postgraduate & undergraduate students (Iranian), non-degree participants or high school level, BA/BS , MA, PhD (Native English speakers)	21-50	–	Persian , English

Shahidipour and Zarei (2017)	–	Yuan (2002)	200 speakers	40 under high school diploma, 40 high school diploma, 40 BA or BS, 40 MA or MS, and 40 PhD or MD holders	–	100 males, 100 females	Persian
Eslami et al. (2019)	Conversational Analysis (CA)	Placencia and Lower (2013)	4,301 Cs	–	Average age: 30.7	26 males, 18 females	Persian
Eslami and Derakhshan (in press)	Conversational Analysis (CA)	Manes and Wolfson (1981)	123 students	–	18-31	88 females, 35 males	Persian

### Trends and issues in the use of Cs

#### Theoretical frameworks of Cs

As shown in Figure 2, of nine Persian studies that studies compliments, four studies employed conversational analysis (CA) to analyze complimenting behaviors. Other studies analyzed Cs through other

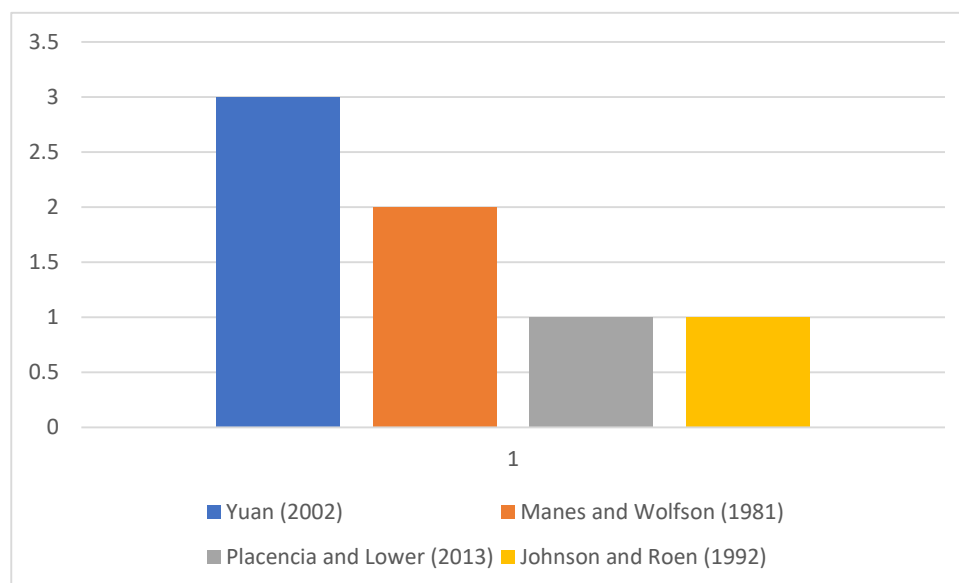


theoretical frameworks, including systemic functional linguistics (SFG), and politeness theory.

Figure 2. Theoretical frameworks employed

### Classification schemes of Cs

Figure 3 delineates that three Persian studies used Yuan's (2002) classification model to categorize different compliments' patterns and



strategies. Of the remaining six studies, two articles implemented Manes and Wolfson's (1981) model; the rest grouped Cs through other categorization schemes, including those of Johnson and Roen (1992), and Placencia and Lower (2013).

Figure 3. Classification schemes of Cs used by Persian studies

### Data collection methods used

Figure 4 illustrates that the majority of the included studies (78%) drew on DCTs and naturally occurring data to explore different compliment strategies. The remaining compliment studies (22%) implemented other instruments to collect data, including interviews and essay writings.

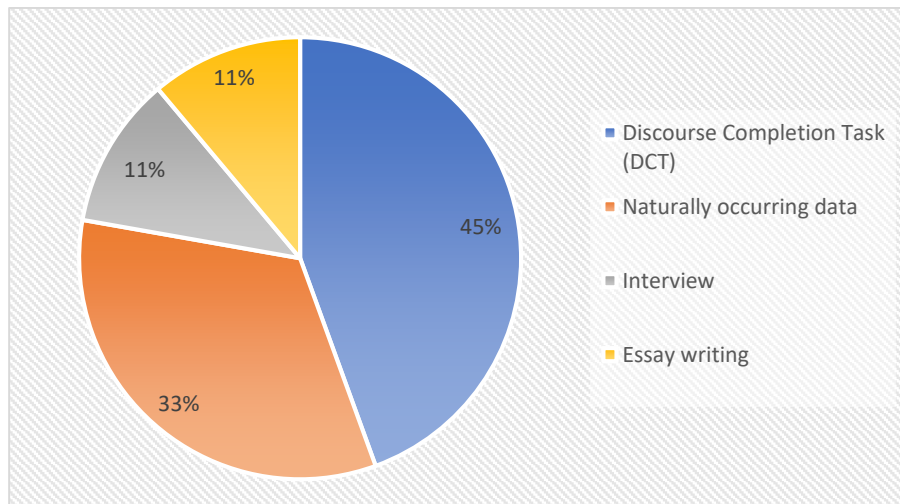


Figure 4. Data collection methods used

As can be seen in Table 2, compliment studies represented variability in different compliment strategies used by Persian speakers. However, the majority of studies showed that Persian speakers are more likely to use explicit strategies to give compliments.

Table 2. Compliment strategies used

Study	Data Collection Methods	Sample Size	Educational Background	Age	Gender	L1	Compliment Strategies
Shahidpour and Zarei (2016)	DCTs	200 speakers	–	50 under 18, 50 between 18-30, 50 between 31-40, and 50 above 40 years old	100 males, 100 females	Persian	Explicit strategies 35.16% Implicit strategies 6.94% Explanation 5.69% Information 9.26% Future Reference 1.37%

							Contrast 1.37% Advice 3.56% Request 2.25% Non-compliment 27.72% Opt-out 6.19% Other 0.43%
Ansarin and Morady Moghadam (2016)	DCTs	120 speakers	Postgraduate and undergraduate students	21-50	–	Persian, English	Explicit strategies (f=333)>Implicit strategies (f=286)>Opt-Out (f=39)
Shahidipour and Zarei (2017)	DCTs	200 speakers	40 under high school diploma, 40 high school diploma, 40 BA or BS, 40 MA or MS, and 40 PhD or MD holders	–	100 males, 100 females	Persian	Explicit strategies 35.16% Implicit strategies 6.94% Explanation 5.69% Information Question 9.26% Future Reference 1.37% Contrast 1.37% Advice 3.56% Request 2.25%

							Non-compliment 27.72% Opt-out 6.19% Other 0.43%
Eslami et al. (2019)	Naturally occurring data	4,301 Cs on profile pictures	–	Average age: 30.7	26 males, 18 females	Persian	Verbal 6.9% (Explicit strategies 67%) (Implicit strategies 33%) Non-verbal 89.4% Mixed 3.7%
Eslami and Derakhsan (in press)	Naturally occurring data	123 students	–	18-31	88 females, 35 males	Persian	Face to Face (FTF): Explicit strategies 98.36%, Implicit strategies 1.64% Facebook: Explicit strategies 67%, Implicit strategies 33%

The differences in findings might be partly due to variation of methodology as Golato (2002, 2003) has demonstrated how different data collection methods/instruments (e.g., DCTs, natural conversations, observations, and interviews) can affect the use of compliment strategies. Additionally, as put forward by Yuan (2002), different

classification models can also cause variations in the findings. Furthermore modality of the setting used (FTF vs. online) can be another variable leading to differences in compliment strategies used.

### **Gender differences in complimenting behavior**

Gender as a variable was used in 2 studies one FTF and the other one online. The results of Ansarin and Morady Moghaddam's (2016) study represented that females give more compliments than males in face to face interactions. In addition, both male and female Persian speakers are most likely to use explicit compliments. However, males are inclined to use explicit compliments more frequently (53%) than females (49%).

Regarding online interactions, Eslami et al. (2019) demonstrated that females give more compliments on Facebook than males, which corroborates the findings of studies on face-to-face interaction. Moreover, both male and female Facebook users tend to use explicit and formulaic compliments more than implicit and non-formulaic ones.

### **Age differences in complimenting behavior**

Among the nine studies that investigated the complimenting behavior of Persian speakers, only one study examined the differences in giving compliments across age groups. Using DCT, Shahidipour and Zarei (2016) results showed that while the younger Persian speakers mostly preferred non-compliment strategies, the older ones mostly preferred explicit unbound semantic formula strategies. Despite the differences, all age-groups were reluctant to use future reference, request, contrast, and 'other' strategies.

### **Educational background differences in complimenting behavior**

Of the nine Persian studies conducted on compliments, Shahidipour and Zarei (2017) considered Educational background differences. Analyzing 1598 compliments uttered by native Persian speakers, Shahidipour and Zarei (2017) reported that lower educated participants (i.e., under high school diploma, high school diploma) tended to use non-compliment strategies, while the higher educated ones (i.e.,

BA/BS, MA/MS, PhD/MD holders) were most likely to use explicit semantic formula strategies to give compliments.

### **Cultural differences in complimenting behavior**

Behnam and Amizadeh (2011) conducted a comparative study of complimenting behavior between English and Persian speakers. They gathered both English and Persian data using video-taped and transcribed TV interviews. Analyzing compliments made by Persian and English complimenters, they demonstrated that English native speakers were most likely to give compliment about the ability of complementee, while Persian native speakers tended to offer compliment about the personality of the compliment receiver.

Subsequently, Ansarin and Moghaddam (2016) probed compliments paid by 120 native English speakers and Iranian EFL learners. Using a written DCT, they gathered different compliments. Their analysis revealed that Iranian EFL learners offered more explicit compliments ( $f= 333$ ) than English native speakers did ( $f= 305$ ). The findings also suggested that Iranian EFL learners were less inclined to use opt-outs ( $f= 39$ ) than native English speakers ( $f= 52$ ).

### **Conclusion**

This review article was a comprehensive state-of-the-art review of relevant research on the speech act of Cs in Persian. The review included a thorough discussion of research methods and approaches used to study compliments in Persian. Compliments, their functions, linguistic strategies used for their realizations, and the effect of variables such as age, gender, and culture were covered in the synthesis.

The findings of the present systematic review revealed some major trends in complimenting behavior of Persian speakers. Firstly, we found that compliments are offered using a limited number of linguistic strategies and lexical items. The formulaic and explicit nature of compliments indicate their high frequency of use in everyday interactions and wide array of functions they perform. As stated by Chen (2010), it is the repeated use and occurrence that leads to formulaic nature of language structures.



Second, the relationship between the complimenter and the complimentee in terms of gender and age is established as major variables in complimenting behavior. Gender as a variable was used in two studies one FTF and the other one online. Ansarian and Morady Moghaddam's (2016) study findings indicate that females give more compliments than males in face-to-face interactions and that males were more inclined to use explicit complimenting strategies compared to females. Eslami et al. (2019) study on online compliments reveal that contrary to face-to-face complimenting, in online settings cross-gender complimenting is used quite often. They claim that cyberspace seems to break social and cultural boundaries and constraints imposed on female speakers' language use and promotes more democratic use of language. There was only one study that examined age related differences in complimenting behavior of Persian speakers (Shahidpour & Zarei, 2016). Their finding showed that the older users mostly preferred explicit unbound semantic formula strategies compared to the younger group.

As Swales (2004) puts it, review articles often have a look back into the recent past, rather than a look forward into the immediate future. However, such review papers might be read not only for an up-to-date and detailed overview of what is happening, but also for getting information on where improvements, new research agendas, better research methodologies, and so on might help move the field forward. Thus, in the following section, we provide insights into a few areas in which this line of research can further expand our knowledge of language use and the area of speech acts and pragmatics.

### **Directions for Future Research**

Our review of previous studies done on compliments in Persian, provides insights for areas of research in which can expand our knowledge on this topic. Some ideas for future research are presented below.

#### **Ethnic variations and compliment patterns**

Analyses of the existing body of literature have identified that the effects of ethnic variations (e.g., Azeris, Kurds, Lors, Arabs, Baluchs,

Turkmans, Mazanis, and Gilaks) on implementing Cs have not been investigated. Ethnicity is one of the macro-social dimensions of Variational Pragmatics (VP) (Barron & Schneider, 2009). Variational pragmatics is characterized as the systematic analysis of the effects of regional and social factors on language in action and interaction (Pishghadam, Ebrahimi, Naji Meidani, & Derakhshan, 2020). It intends to systematically investigate the effects of synchronic macro-social pragmatic variation, encompassing factors as region, ethnicity, age, social status, and gender on language in (inter)action and on intralingual pragmatic conventions (Barron, 2019). As Sifianou (2013) has postulated, types of strategies used to give Cs are subject to variation because of a range of cultural, social, and individual variables. Therefore, future studies should fill this lacuna by examining the effects of ethnicity on employing compliment strategies among Persian speakers.

#### **Using natural methods to collect compliments**

Due to the simplicity of use and a high degree of replicability, 45% of Persian studies on Cs used DCTs to gather data (Ansarin & Morady Moghaddam, 2016; Shahidipour & Zarei, 2016, 2017; Tajjedin & Yazdanmehr, 2012). However, the discourse completion task is not a valid instrument for measuring pragmatic actions since it indirectly reveals participants' reported responses (Golato, 2005). Accordingly, the participants' Cs gathered by DCTs may not reflect natural and authentic language use patterns. We suggest that future compliment studies embark on natural data collection methods (e.g., recordings of naturally-occurring interactions, field observations, and role-plays) to collect more reliable and valid data. Through using these methods, researchers can gather a large database from a wide range of speakers and across different contexts. Having a large database allows for rigorous statistical analyses, which can strengthen the findings of the study (Golato, 2003).

#### **Compliment patterns in films**

The application of films in L2 teaching has been well established for more than a decade (Derakhshan & Arabmofrad, 2018; Derakhshan &

Eslami, 2020; Rose, 2001; Xiaoqiong & Xianxing, 2008). Films are, of course, an appropriate resource for teaching language skills, notably speaking and listening and should be employed for these aims. Besides this ‘mainstream’ use of films, many scholars (e.g., Abrams, 2014; Birjandi & Derakhshan, 2014) have declared that films can function as both a model to students and a source for pragmatic data collection and analysis. However, the latter use of films that is, analyzing pragmatics appears to be far less developed than the former. The use of films for the purpose of investigating different topics and issues of pragmatics (e.g., Cs) is even less established. In this regard, Rose (2001) postulated that films are representative of the actual language use and what real-life characters utter in face-to-face encounters. Hence, further studies in Persian are suggested to observe and collect compliments and other speech act data using a range of genres and contextual variables in films.

### **Linguistic patterns of compliments**

Many research studies around the world have examined syntactic patterns of Cs (e.g., Golato, 2005; Maíz-Arévalo, 2010; Manes & Wolfson, 1980, 1981). However, only a few Persian studies have focused on linguistic structures used in Persian compliments in different situations and settings (Boori, 1994; Eslami et al., 2019; Eslami & Derakhshan, in press). For instance, Eslami and Derakhshan (in press) examined Persian compliments used by Iranians to figure out the range of syntactic patterns that are used. Using natural data, they found that “(PRO) What NP ADJ (V)!” and “(PRO) NP (ADV) ADJ (V)” are the most frequent syntactic structures employed by Persian speakers. Considerably, more work will need to be done to determine the diachronic and synchronic changes in the structural patterns of compliments and also to investigate the effect of internal and external situational variables on the use of different syntactic structures.

### **Compliment patterns in online contexts**

Most of the studies on Persian compliments have investigated Cs in face-to-face interactions (Ansarin & Morady Moghaddam, 2016; Behnam & Amizadeh, 2011; Boori, 1994; Shahidipour & Zarei, 2016,

2017; Tajjedin & Yazdanmehr, 2012; Zarei, 2011); however, only a few studies have investigated compliment patterns in online interactions (Eslami et al., 2019; Eslami & Derakhshan, in press). Taking the growing popularity of online communication into account, it is worth examining how compliment patterns change when Persian speakers interact in online contexts (e.g., Facebook, WhatsApp). As such, future studies need to be done to scrutinize the extent to which affordances provided by technology can influence what compliment strategies are used by Persian speakers.

### **Investigating compliment patterns among Persian celebrities and athletes**

Our review study has revealed that the majority of Persian studies have focused on compliment strategies, functions, and topics used by students and teachers. Only one study (Behnam & Amizadeh, 2011) analyzed compliment patterns used by eight Iranian celebrities. Their findings indicated that the most frequent compliment topic used by Iranian celebrities was about the personality of the complimentee. Due to the paucity of studies of complimenting behavior among different Persian speakers, future research can, therefore, concentrate on the investigation of congratulatory remarks among celebrities and athletes or other groups rather than learners, students, and teachers to broaden the scope of compliment studies.

### **Using the conceptual model of CLA (Cultuling Analysis) to examine Persian compliments**

Inspired by the ideas of Halliday (1994), Vygotsky (1986), and Sapir and Whorf (1956), which imply the relationship among culture, thought, and language, Pishghadam (2013) expounded the concept of “Cultuling”, that is, ‘culture in language’. He postulated that investigating and identifying the cultulings of each society not only can pave the way for the faster detection of right and wrong cultural behaviors but also can facilitate the cultural reforms which lead to linguistic excellence. Hence, analyzing compliments as the prime instances of cultuling would be beneficial. Different models have been conceptualized for analyzing cultulings, among which one can refer to

Pishghadam, Ebrahimi, and Derakhshan's (2020) conceptual model of CLA in which cultural, emo-sensory, and linguistic differences are considered. Using this comprehensive model, researchers can scrutinize different cultulings (e.g., compliments) and provide the necessary information for policymakers and planners to improve the quality of life in a society.

### **Longitudinal Studies**

Due to globalization and advancements in technology there has been drastic changes happening in cultural values reflected in language use. There is a need for researchers to conduct longitudinal studies on complimenting behavior similar to a study done by Mirzaei and Eslami (2013) on wedding invitations, to investigate if modernization and exposure to dominant western cultural norms has resulted in change in complimenting behavior of Persian users in Iran. If language use practices reflect social values, and if social and cultural values change, then we expect to observe these changes in language use practices as well.

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