

# Compliments in virtual dialogs

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## Abstract

This paper studies the realization of the compliments by native Russian and German speakers in electronic communication (Internet forums). Whereas the native German speakers spelled their compliments in a standard way and used normative vocabulary, the native Russian speakers mostly used the colloquial and jargon expressions and spelling.

## 1 Introduction

Beginning from the Manes und Wolfson's (1981) study of compliments in American English, numerous studies of compliments have been conducted with the aim to characterize their use in direct communication. Based on the recordings of natural talk, the studies of German compliment sequences (Golato, 2005) proved that compliments can not be analyzed irrespectively of the communicative situation in which they occur. In certain cultures, realization of compliments in public and private communicative situations differs significantly (Fukushima, 1990).

Whereas the direct interaction can be either public or private, the forms of communication occurring in Internet contain features of both public and private communication. The aim of the present study is to find out which pragmatic norms dominate in virtual compliments.

## 2 Methodology

A random selection of about 80 Russian and German forums (education-, popular-science-, art-, and literature-related) was searched for positive assessments of certain persons. In both Russian and German forums related to the photographic art compliments were found more often than in the others; correspondingly, 20 top-liner photo forums resulted from the searches with Google and Yandex were selected. On the corresponding web-sites voting was organized to select the top-rated pictures, which should remain in the gallery. Viewer's ratings could be accompanied with comments. 128 Russian and 123 German compliments were found. Judging by the nicknames, the most of the forum participants were males in both cultures.

## 3 Results

Table 1 contains the expressions which occurred more than once in at least one of the cultures.

No	expression	Ru	De
1	очень	25	
very	sehr		25
2	!!!(+)	23	14
3	красив- (о, ый)	14	
nice(-ly)	schön		19
4	such так (-ой), как (-ой)	21	
(what a)	so (-lch, ein, was... für ein)		10
5	класс	4	
fine	Klasse		24
6	супер (-ский)	14	
super	super		14
7	нравится, понравилось, нра	15	
I like it	gefällt		11
8	good хорош- (о, ий)	13	
(well)	gut		12
9	здорово	8	
great	toll		15
10	чудо	1	
wonder	wunder (-)		9
11	интересн- (о, ый)	6	
interesting	interessant		2
12	вау	3	
wow	wow		5
13	впечатляет	3	
impressive	überzeugend, beeindruckend, eindrucksvoll		5
14	абсолютно, совершенно	0	
absolutely	absolut		8
15	исключительн- (о, ый)	3	
unique	einzigartig		4
16	отличн- (о, ый)	5	
excellent	ausgezeichnet		2
17	действительно	1	
really	echt		6
18	гениальн- (о, ый)	0	
brilliant	genial		7
19	круто, сильно	0	
cool	stark		6
20	безупречн- (о, ый)	0	
perfect	perfekt		5
21	симпатичн- (о, ый)	3	
pleasant	sympathisch		0
22	великолепн- (о, ый)	0	
imposing	großartig		3
23	с ума сойти, обалдеть	0	
crazy	Wahnsinn		3

Table 1. Numbers of occurrence of different expressions in Russian and German compliments

The numbers shown in the Ru and De columns of the Table 1 were compared using the chi-square test. Certain equivalent expressions occurred in both languages with similar frequencies (No 1-3, 6-9 in Table 1). Some words or expressions occurred with significantly different frequencies (No 4 and 5) or were repeatedly used in only one language (in the latter case the chi-square test could not be performed).

As follows from the data presented above, 159 expressions of assessment were repeatedly found in the Russian compliments and 213 in the German ones (the totals of the corresponding columns of Table 1, single occurrences not counted). This suggests that the cliché constructions are more frequently used by German authors of compliments than by Russian ones (the difference is very significant). The conventionality of assessment expressions could also be traced at the syntactical level: though most of the sentences used in assessments were incomplete, there was a significant difference between 23 Russian and 37 German assessments realized only by means of full sentences.

The average length of Russian and German positive assessments was 6.4 and 12.5 words, correspondingly. That can only partially be explained by the absence of the definite and indefinite articles in Russian language. Syntactic compression of assessments was significantly higher in Russian than in German: 30 assessments consisting of a single word were found among Russian compliments, and only 7 – among German ones.

In Russian, the compression means typical for the Internet jargon were utilized as well, e.g. the single word *очень* (*very*) without an adjective or adverb used as an expression of assessment. Among the Russian compliments, 68 were made using the colloquial or Internet jargon words and/or spelling, i.e. *философски* (jargon spelling) ~ *philosophically*. All of the German compliments were realized using the standard spelling, only 4 of them contained colloquial expressions; all of the 3 neologisms found were placed in inverted commas. Thus, the frequencies of the slang use in Russian and in German Internet compliments were significantly different.

The most of the compliments were paid on the quality of the photo or author's skills; nevertheless, there were found 38 Russian and only 2 German positive assessments of not the author's work but of the persons, objects, or places pictured, the difference that should be considered as

very significant. Moreover, only those assessments have been responded.

## 4 Discussion

Both Russian and German compliments have three primary functions:

- a) contacting a person;
- b) flirting with a person;
- c) appraising the achievements of a person.

The third function (appraising the achievements) was dominating in the compliments found in the forums related to photographic art. However, the positive assessments of the photographed persons, objects, or places (which occurred mostly in Russian forums) were definitely made to contact other forum participants. That function was successfully realized in most cases. The less frequent use of cliché compliment expressions suggests that the function of contacting is more important for Russian compliments than for German ones, since the use of uncommon expressions when making new acquaintances is typical for Russian private communication. Probably, the frequent use of colloquial and jargon words and spelling in Russian compliments was also aimed to make them look more original and to induce verbal reaction to them.

## 5 Conclusion

Realized in more conventional way, the German compliments could be considered as public-oriented communicative tactics; the Russian compliments were both public- and personally-oriented.

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