

the two extremes of the social distance continuum in contrast with the instability of those in the center. Put in other terms, the more status and social distance are seen as fixed, the easier it is for speakers to know what to expect of one another. In a complex urban society in which speakers may belong to a variety of social groups, relationships among speakers are often very uncertain. These relationships among status equal friends and acquaintances are dynamic, and open to negotiation. There is freedom here but not security. The emergent and relatively insecure nature of these relationships is reflected in the care people take to signal solidarity and to avoid confrontation.

For example, although compliments in the United States are exchanged between intimates and between total strangers, the great majority (*the bulge*) take place within interactions between speakers who are neither intimates nor strangers..

There is considerable evidence for the validity of the bulge theory in the work of sociolinguists over the past several years. Some examples are the work done by Holmes on apologies; by Eisenstein and Bodman on the expression of gratitude; by Beebe on refusals; by D'Amico-Reisner on the expression of disapproval; by Rabinowitz on offers; and by Boxer on indirect complaints. What these studies demonstrate is that this pattern holds for every analysis of speech acts among speakers of American English so far examined

For the purposes of this discussion, I will draw on analyses of data from several English speaking communities. Confirmation of the validity of *the bulge* theory has recently emerged in the work of three separate investigators, all working independently on the speech behavior associated with compliments. In my own most recent work, I have been engaged in collecting and analyzing data not only on the speech act of complimenting, but on the speech sequence which includes the responses to compliments as well. While Manes (1983) has reported on some of our earliest findings regarding compliment responses, and our original joint work included the collection of responses along with the compliments that initiated them, it is only since 1985 that I myself began to focus specifically on the entire complimenting sequence as a speech event which might yield new and important insights into the underlying motivation of this aspect of speech behavior. My findings so far indicate that the compliment/response sequence is a negotiated one in which two or more participants are involved in an often elaborated exchange.

In the earliest of our joint reports on compliments (Manes & Wolfson, 1980; Wolfson & Manes, 1980) we suggested that the function of the act was to create or reaffirm solidarity. My own most recent work as well as that of others (Herbert, 1986;

Holmes, 1987) has verified this hypothesis and provided additional results which add considerable depth and breadth to it.

Thus, Herbert (1986) reports on his analysis of a corpus of 1,062 compliment responses, both spontaneous and experimental, collected at the State University of New York at Binghamton. In a systematic investigation of the responses given by the native speakers of American English sampled, Herbert focused on the frequency of occurrence with which compliments were and were not accepted by addressees. His findings are striking in that speakers were "almost twice as likely to respond with some response other than *acceptance*." (Herbert, 1986:80). As Herbert points out, this finding disagrees with the societal norm requiring that compliments be accepted with thanks.

Herbert raises the question of whether native speakers of other varieties of English follow similar behavior patterns. Basing his analysis on data collected in South Africa, he finds that patterns of acceptances were very different. Indeed, Herbert finds that "*acceptances* . . . accounted for fully seventy-six percent of the South African responses. That is, in place of the approximately one-in-three likelihood of receiving an *acceptance* response from an American speaker, the likelihood is three-in-four among English-speaking South Africans."

In a later paper (Herbert and Straight, 1986) the authors posit an explanation for this phenomenon, pointing out that social stratification is intrinsic to South African ideology. Thus, the paucity of compliments given by South Africans in contrast to the frequency with which they occur in the speech of Americans, along with the fact that Americans tend to reject and the South Africans to accept compliments, has to do with the social systems in which the two groups interact. They point out that Americans give compliments frequently because they are attempting to establish solidarity in a social context in which their own status is uncertain. For the same reason, Americans tend not to accept the compliments they receive, thus further working toward the building of solidarity by stressing equality with their interlocutors. South Africans, in contrast, function in a society in which solidarity with status-equals is assumed, and have no need to make use of compliment negotiations to establish what they already have - certainty as to their relationships with one another. Thus, the analysis put forward by Herbert (1986) and by Herbert and Straight (1986) fits neatly within the framework of the Bulge theory, supporting it through their evidence and their explanation of why Americans and South Africans differ so sharply in their behavior regarding compliment/response sequences.

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In her report of compliment response behavior in New Zealand, Holmes (1989) reports that "it is relatively rarely that New Zealanders overtly reject compliments." Holmes' ethnographic study, which includes a corpus of 484 New Zealand compliment/response sequences, yields many significant findings. Although she does not discuss the underlying ideology which may lead to this speech behavior from the same point of view as that addressed by Herbert (1986) or by Herbert and Straight (1986) it is very possible that New Zealand society, like that in the United States, is sufficiently lacking in stratification to cause speakers to behave in similar ways for similar reasons.

From the point of view of the theory under consideration, the most significant point to be taken from Holmes' study is the clear finding that most New Zealand compliments occur within what I have called the Bulge, thus lending further independent support to this analysis.

Sex-Related Differences in Speech Behavior

It should be mentioned that while I have continued to investigate sex-related differences in compliment/response behavior, both Herbert (in press) and Holmes (1989) have conducted independent studies along the same lines. What is most impressive about the findings and the analyses reported to date is the high degree of convergence in all three studies. That is, it is clear from all three reports that women not only give and receive more compliments than men do, but that their responses indicate that this speech activity functions differently among men and women, with women making far greater use of such compliment/response strategies to create and reaffirm solidarity. The fact that all three studies indicate similar patterns among women as opposed to men may well lead to some significant refinements of the Bulge theory reflecting the status-related social strategies of women.

In my own analysis, I have found that elaborated responses occur in the speech of both intimate and status-unequal females, but that the great majority of lengthy sequences are to be found in conversations among status-equal acquaintances.

An example of the kind of elaborated sequences I have found to be typical in compliment behavior among status equal women is the following exchange:

The context is one in which two female colleagues are discussing the interviewing and hiring of an employee by one of them (B) who has just said that she feels a bit uncertain about her choice.

A: You're an incredibly good judge of people.

B: Really? I never thought of myself that way.

A: Well, you are. You're always right. I've never found you to miss except maybe for a little wrinkle or two. But I'd rank you right up there with X and I've always thought she was the best I'd seen.

B: You just haven't seen the mistakes I've made.

A: I don't think you give yourself enough credit. When I first came here and you warned me to look out for D. I didn't believe you. But you were right and if I'd listened, I'd have saved myself a lot of problems.

B: Well, that one stuck way out -- anyone could have told you the same thing.

A: That's what you think. Plenty of people, including your good friend Y, are completely taken in by D.

B: That's an unusual situation. She plays up to Y -- doesn't treat him the same way she does everyone else.

A: Okay, maybe not. But your assessment of our new director of Blank was incredible. You saw him in a couple of meetings and you told me exactly what to expect. You couldn't have been more right. And I've seen you do it -- peg people right off -- more times than I can remember. You can deny it all you want, but you've got a real talent about seeing through people. I'd go with your judgment any day.

B: I think you're overestimating me. I'm wrong plenty of times and I certainly don't feel very secure about my ability to judge in this situation.

A: Well, I'll be glad to meet your candidate and let you know what I think if it'll make you feel any better.

And a second example:

Middle class white female colleagues in work-related exchange:

A: What's it about?

B: It's in reference to one of the papers in my book.

A: I love your book. I think it's terrific. Remember, I reviewed it for XYZ Journal and I said how good it was. Everybody thinks so.

B: Well, it's nice of you to say so, but I think the second half could have been a lot stronger. There are some really good papers in that section but there are some weak ones too.

A: It's still the best thing there is out on the subject.

B: Well, that's because there isn't much out yet. The field's too new. But I think the book I just finished will be a whole lot better. I'm really pleased with it.

A: From what I say, it looks terrific. I can't wait till it comes out so I can start using it. How long is it?

B: A little less than six hundred pages if you count in the references and index.

A: Six hundred pages! It turned out to be that long? You really are amazing. I don't know how you do it.

Clearly, this degree of elaboration, the repeated pattern of compliment, challenge, and justification, is reflective of a sociocultural value system and an interactional style that demands further attention since it goes to the heart of the entire issue of speech behavior and social dynamics.

Thus, the findings from the ethnographic studies discussed above all converge in revealing a qualitative difference between the speech behavior which middle class Americans use with intimates, status unequals and strangers, on the one hand, and with non-intimates, status-equal friends, co-workers and acquaintances on the other. With respect to the frequency with which a particular speech act or sequence occurs, the degree of elaboration used in performing it, and the amount of negotiation which occurs between interlocutors, the two extremes of social distance show very similar patterns as opposed to the middle section, which displays a characteristic bulge.

The fact that urban middle class Americans live in a complex and open society means that individuals are members not of a single social network in which their own place is well defined, but rather belong to a number of different social networks, both overlapping and non-overlapping, in which they must continually negotiate their roles and relationships with one another. The importance of the bulge theory lies in what it tells us about how the very openness and potential for mobility of American middle class society is reflected in our everyday speech behavior. The fact that very similar findings have emerged in research on complimenting behavior in New Zealand (Holmes 1987, 1989), as well as the report of very different behavior patterns among native speakers of South African English (Herbert and Straight in press) provides additional evidence for the analysis presented here.

Thus we see that a major contribution to the study of speech behavior is that by examining it in the social context in which it occurs, we are able to analyze patterns of social behavior and to gain insights into deep cultural values.

Conclusion

Much more work in the analysis of sociolinguistic rules remains to be done before we are in a position to make the kinds of contrasts that would lead to a full understanding of sociolinguistic relativity and of the diversity of speech behavior upon which it is based. It is only by investigating the variety of such patterns that we may come to appreciate the creativity with which speakers make use of their own unconscious patterns in order to accomplish the work of ongoing social interaction.

This is not to suggest that what already exists in the sociolinguistic literature is not valuable both in itself and for what it can offer us with respect to insights, information, and inspiration for further research. Much of what remains to be done will, I hope, come from students who, seeing the need and the value of the work, will devote their time and energy to adding to the description of the rules of speaking among different speech communities around the world -- descriptions that are necessary if we are to comprehend and enhance communication across cultures.

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