

## STRUCTURAL-SEMANTIC MODELS OF COMPLIMENTS IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK LITERARY DISCOURSE: A COMPARATIVE PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract**

This article presents a comparative pragmatic analysis of the structural-semantic models through which compliments are realised in English and Uzbek literary texts, drawing on Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* and Said Ahmad's satirical comedy *Kelinlar qo'zg'oloni*. The study identifies nine principal structural-semantic models distributed across the two corpora and demonstrates that English compliment structures are predominantly analytic, scalar, and direct, while Uzbek compliment structures are predominantly synthetic, metaphorical, and multidimensional. These architectural differences are not superficial stylistic variations but reflect the divergent cultural values, rhetorical traditions, and social functions of complimenting in Victorian England and Soviet-era Uzbekistan. The analysis integrates speech act theory, politeness theory, construction grammar, and linguoculturology, situating the structural findings within a comprehensive account of the cultural and social logics that shape compliment production in each tradition. Findings contribute to cross-cultural pragmatics, literary linguistics, and intercultural communication research.

### **Keywords**

compliment, structural-semantic model, cross-cultural pragmatics, English, Uzbek, literary pragmatics, speech acts, construction grammar, politeness

### **Introduction**

The comparative pragmatic study of compliment behaviour across culturally and linguistically distinct communities has been one of the most productive areas of sociolinguistics and cross-cultural pragmatics since the foundational work of Wolfson and Manes (1981) and Holmes (1988). Research in this tradition has consistently demonstrated that compliments are not culturally neutral expressions of positive evaluation but are profoundly shaped by the social structures, cultural values, and rhetorical conventions of the communities in which they are produced (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Wierzbicka, 1991). While the structural and semantic dimensions of English-language complimenting have been extensively

documented, far less attention has been paid to the systematic comparison of English and Uzbek compliment structures within a literary pragmatics framework.

Recent scholarship has begun to address this gap. Jabbarov (2025) explores the cultural nuances of compliments within English and Uzbek societies, noting that Uzbek compliment culture – rooted in the concepts of *xushomad* and *iltifot* – reflects deeply embedded societal norms and traditions that diverge markedly from Anglophone conventions, and that both cultures deploy compliments as essential tools for nurturing social connections, albeit through structurally different means. The present article builds on this line of inquiry by providing a detailed comparative analysis of the structural-semantic models through which compliments are realised in two culturally contrasted literary texts: Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895/2024) and Said Ahmad's *Kelinlar qo'zg'oloni* (1960). Both are comedies whose satirical projects are constructed through the deployment and violation of social norms governing evaluative speech, and both authors' sociological acuity and linguistic precision make their dramatic dialogue particularly rich sources for the study of how compliment structures encode cultural values (Beckson, 1998; Ellmann, 1988; Leech & Short, 2007).

### **Speech Act Theory and Politeness**

The foundational framework for the structural analysis of compliments is provided by speech act theory, as developed by Austin (1962) and systematised by Searle (1969, 1979). For compliments specifically, Searle (1979, p. 15) classifies them as expressives: speech acts whose illocutionary point is to express the speaker's positive evaluation toward a state of affairs. The structural realisation of this illocutionary point varies enormously across languages and cultural contexts, and this variation is the primary object of the present analysis. Wolfson and Manes (1981, pp. 118–119) demonstrated that the structural realisation of complimentary illocutionary force in American English is highly formulaic: a small number of syntactic patterns account for the overwhelming majority of all compliments in their corpus, the dominant being the predicative adjectival construction NP + copula + (intensifier) + ADJ.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory provides an important framework for understanding why specific structural choices are made in compliment production. Compliments are paradigmatic positive politeness strategies (Brown & Levinson, 1987, pp. 101–103), and the structural forms they take reflect the social relationships and face-concerns of the interactants. The preference for elaborate, metaphorical structural forms in Uzbek complimenting – as documented in the present analysis – reflects a cultural orientation that values richness of social expression as itself a form of positive face enhancement. Watts' (2003) relational theory of politeness further draws attention to the degree to which structural choices in polite speech are determined by institutional and social-relational context: elaborate structural forms signal greater social deference and

investment, while simpler forms signal greater social equality or dominance (pp. 165–167).

### **Construction Grammar and Linguoculturology**

Construction grammar, as developed by Goldberg (1995), proposes that the grammatical units of a language are form-meaning pairings – constructions – that directly encode both syntactic form and semantic-pragmatic content. Applied to compliment analysis, this framework suggests that the structural models identified in each corpus are not merely syntactic patterns but culturally specific form-function pairings whose social meaning is encoded in the construction itself (Goldberg, 1995, pp. 4–5). The predicative adjectival compliment construction in English encodes not only a specific syntactic structure but the pragmatic function of direct positive evaluation and the cultural values of the tradition within which it is deployed. The metaphorical comparative construction in Uzbek similarly encodes the pragmatic function of culturally allusive positive evaluation and the rhetorical tradition of figurative compliment discourse.

Linguoculturology, as developed within the Uzbek and Russian scholarly tradition by Vorobyev (1997) and Maslova (2001), provides the analytical lens through which structural findings are interpreted as reflections of cultural values. Maslova (2001, p. 34) defines linguoculturology as the field that investigates language units which encode, store, and transmit cultural information. The structural-semantic analysis in the present article proceeds from this principle: the structural models of complimenting in each literary tradition are treated not merely as syntactic data but as linguocultural evidence of the values and social structures of their respective communities. Wierzbicka's (1991, p. 69) complementary argument – that differences in communicative behaviour reflect deep differences in cultural values and conceptual frameworks – further grounds the interpretation of structural divergence as culturally meaningful rather than arbitrary.

### **English Structural-Semantic Models in Wilde's work**

The structural analysis of compliment sequences in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Wilde, 1895/2024) identifies three primary and two secondary structural-semantic models. The first and most dominant is the predicative adjectival construction (NP + copula + (intensifier) + ADJ), illustrated by Algernon's "Dear me, you are smart!" (p. 312), Jack's "quite perfect, Miss Fairfax" (p. 312), and the description of Cecily as "excessively pretty" (p. 325). This model delivers evaluative content with maximum economy and directness, placing the evaluative adjective in a position of maximum syntactic focus. The semantic architecture is primarily unidimensional: a single evaluative property is attributed to the subject, whose evaluative force is amplified by intensifiers (quite, excessively) that locate the evaluation at an admirable position on the scalar continuum – conforming exactly to the most frequent form documented by Wolfson and Manes (1981, pp. 118–119) and Holmes (1988, p. 447).

The second English model is the nominal predicate construction (NP + copula + evaluative NP), most strikingly illustrated by Algernon's "perfect pessimist" (Wilde, 1895/2024, p. 329). Unlike the predicative adjectival model, this construction uses the interaction between a positive modifier and an inherently negative noun to create a paradoxical, multidimensional evaluation whose pragmatic force depends on the hearer's ability to decode the gap between the literal positive evaluation and the ironic critical meaning. Sperber and Wilson's (1986, pp. 237-243) relevance-theoretic account of irony – as echoic utterances that invoke and distance themselves from culturally established beliefs – provides the most precise theoretical account of how this structural model achieves its ironic effect.

The third major English model is the verbal admiration construction (subject pronoun + evaluative verb + NP), illustrated by Jack's "I have admired you more than any girl I have ever met" (Wilde, 1895/2024, p. 315). This model encodes the complimentary evaluation through an assertion of the speaker's internal evaluative state rather than through direct predication of a property to the addressee, foregrounding the speaker's subjectivity and emotional investment and creating a more intimate evaluative frame than the impersonal directness of adjectival predication (Leech & Short, 2007, p. 125). Two secondary models complete the English typology. The cumulative predicative construction involves the successive attribution of multiple intensified properties, as in Gwendolen's ecstatic praise of the name Ernest: "It is a divine name. It has a music of its own. It produces vibrations" (Wilde, 1895/2024, p. 320), producing what Labov (1984, p. 43) terms the speaker's "commitment to the extreme position" through accumulated independent evaluative claims. The exclamatory construction constitutes the fifth model, in which an affective interjection marks the utterance as an unguarded spontaneous reaction, adding a performative dimension of authentic surprise to the formal evaluative claim.

### **Uzbek Structural-Semantic Models in Said Ahmad's work**

The structural analysis of compliment sequences in *Kelinlar qo'zg'oloni* (Said Ahmad, 1960) reveals a fundamentally different architectural logic. The primary and most distinctive Uzbek structural model is the metaphorical comparative construction (NP + copula + NP + -dek), in which the complimentary evaluation is encoded through an explicit comparison between the person being praised and a culturally valued entity. The construction is synthetic: it integrates the subject of evaluation, the cultural reference point, and the evaluative logic into a holistic nominal unit whose cultural resonance provides the evaluative content. The most prominent examples involve the comparison of a bride to an unridden horse (*minilmagan toydek*), invoking the Central Asian cultural tradition in which horses embody vitality, pride, and social desirability, and the description of a character's strategic wisdom through the cultural symbolism of the lion as strength and tactical intelligence in Central Asian and Islamic tradition.

The metaphorical comparative construction is semantically multidimensional in a way that the English predicative adjectival model is not. Lakoff and Johnson's (1980, p. 5) analysis of conceptual metaphor demonstrates that metaphorical comparisons activate entire networks of cultural association simultaneously, creating evaluative richness through partial mapping of the target domain onto the source domain. When a bride's vitality is evaluated through the horse metaphor, the comparison activates associations not only with the horse's physical attributes but with its cultural significance as a prestige object and social symbol within Central Asian tradition. As Jabbarov (2025) notes, Uzbek compliment culture is deeply rooted in cultural traditions that have no direct structural equivalent in English compliment conventions, and this metaphorical richness exemplifies how the rhetorical traditions of Persian and Turkic literary culture – in which the skilful deployment of figurative language is a valued demonstration of cultural literacy – shape the structural models available to Uzbek complimenters.

The second major Uzbek structural model is the mock-heroic titular construction (honorific title + NP), which fuses the subject and the evaluation into a single nominal unit, applying the prestige of one social domain (military hierarchy) to authority figures in another (domestic and communal hierarchy). Forms such as "General kampir" and "Marshal kampir" applied to respected elder women generate evaluative force through institutional analogy: the mother-in-law's domestic authority is positively evaluated by being compared to a form of socially recognised formal authority. Qodirov (2004, p. 158) identifies this as Said Ahmad's signature satirical technique – the mock-heroic elevation of domestic authority through the vocabulary of official hierarchy – noting that it simultaneously acknowledges genuine authority and gently satirises the pretensions that authority supports.

The third Uzbek structural model is the narrative evaluative construction, in which the compliment is embedded within a descriptive narrative sequence that presents the valued quality through action or behaviour rather than through direct predication. The description of a character's tactical wisdom as proceeding "like a lion: retreating one step before making a leaping attack" exemplifies this model: the complimentary evaluation is not stated directly but is presented through a narrative account of behaviour from which the positive evaluation is inferentially derived. This construction places the interpretive work on the recipient, who must construct the complimentary evaluation from the narrative evidence presented, producing a social effect of greater objectivity and credibility. A fourth model, the domestic competence rhetorical question, combines evaluative assertion with a rhetorical question inviting communal endorsement, creating a participatory evaluation structure in which the compliment is built collaboratively through the interaction of multiple voices – reflecting the mahalla (neighbourhood community) culture's treatment of individual social worth as a matter of collective assessment rather than individual assertion (Wolfson & Manes, 1981).

### Comparative Typology

The comparative typology of structural-semantic models reveals a fundamental architectural difference between the two compliment systems. English structural models are analytic and direct: they separate the person evaluated from the evaluation through syntactic predication, delivering evaluative force through lexical choice in a transparent syntactic structure. Uzbek structural models are synthetic and indirect: they integrate person, evaluation, and cultural framework into holistic evaluative units – metaphorical comparisons, titular honorifics, narrative descriptions, rhetorical invitation sequences – that require greater cultural literacy to decode but produce richer and more socially embedded evaluative meanings.

This architectural contrast can be expressed as a principle: English compliment structures prioritise economy and directness (maximum evaluative force with minimum structural investment), while Uzbek compliment structures prioritise cultural depth and social embeddedness (evaluations that demonstrate the speaker's cultural literacy and social awareness). The relationship between structural complexity and social power identified by Watts (2003, pp. 165–167) is directly applicable: in *Kelinlar qo'zg'oloni* (Said Ahmad, 1960), the elaborate structural forms of the brides' flattery are not merely rhetorical choices but social performances of deference that reinforce the power asymmetry of the bride-mother-in-law relationship. Said Ahmad exploits this connection as a satirical device: by revealing the strategic motivation behind structurally elaborate flattery, he exposes how the social conventions of elaborate compliment expression can be deployed as instruments of power navigation rather than genuine appreciation.

### The Cultural Logic of Structural Divergence

The structural divergence between English and Uzbek compliment models is not an arbitrary typological difference but reflects a systematic divergence in the cultural values and social structures of the respective communities. Wierzbicka (1991, p. 69) argues that differences in communicative behaviour across cultures reflect deep differences in cultural values and conceptual frameworks: “the way people speak reflects the values, the assumptions, and the culturally specific ‘scripts’ of the societies to which they belong.” From this perspective, the structural models of complimenting in each tradition are linguocultural evidence of the values that each community considers most worthy of praise and the social mechanisms through which praise is most effectively communicated.

In Victorian English culture as represented in Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895/2024), the primary values indexed by compliment structures are aesthetic sophistication, social elegance, and intellectual wit – the values of the Aesthetic Movement that shaped upper-class Victorian culture (Beckson, 1998, pp. 34–36; Ellmann, 1988). The structural economy of English compliment models reflects the aesthetic premium placed on witty economy in expression: the most admired compliment achieves the maximum social effect with the minimum

linguistic means, demonstrating the speaker's own cultural sophistication in the very act of praising another. Gwendolen's praise of the name Ernest as "divine" (Wilde, 1895/2024, p. 320) achieves this economy perfectly: a single adjective from the elevated aesthetic register delivers an extravagant evaluation with minimum structural apparatus.

In the Soviet-era traditional Uzbek world represented in Said Ahmad's *Kelinlar qo'zg'oloni* (1960), the primary values indexed by compliment structures are moral virtue, domestic competence, and respect for social hierarchy. The structural elaboration of Uzbek compliment models reflects the cultural premium placed on social investment and cultural knowledge: the most socially effective compliment is one that demonstrates the speaker's deep familiarity with the cultural traditions and symbolic resources of the community. A bride who praises her mother-in-law through an elaborate metaphorical comparison invoking cultural symbolism of horses or lions demonstrates not merely appreciation but cultural literacy, and this demonstration of cultural belonging is itself a form of social tribute. As Jabbarov (2025) documents, such culturally embedded compliment conventions are deeply tied to Uzbek linguistic and cultural identity, operating according to different social scripts from those of Anglophone communities.

Blum-Kulka et al.'s (1989, pp. 18–20) Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realisation Project (CCSARP) identified a consistent cross-cultural dimension: the degree of directness in speech act realisation varies systematically across cultures, with some cultures strongly preferring direct expression and others preferring indirect or conventionally indirect forms. The structural contrast identified in the present analysis – between the direct predicative adjectival models of English complimenting and the indirect metaphorical and honorific models of Uzbek complimenting – conforms to this broader typological dimension. The English preference for direct adjectival predication reflects a cultural orientation toward communicative directness and evaluative transparency; the Uzbek preference for metaphorical and titular models reflects a cultural orientation toward communicative indirectness and evaluative richness. Thomas's (1983) cross-cultural pragmatic failure analysis further contextualises these findings: misreading of complimentary intent across cultural boundaries frequently involves the projection of one culture's structural conventions onto another's evaluative discourse, and the structural gap documented here between English and Uzbek compliment models is precisely the kind of difference that generates such failure in English-Uzbek intercultural contact.

### Conclusion

The comparative structural-semantic analysis presented in this article has identified nine principal structural-semantic models distributed across the two literary corpora, demonstrating that the structural repertoires of English and Uzbek complimenting differ not merely in the frequency of specific structures but in their fundamental architectural principles. English structures, as represented in The

Importance of Being Earnest (Wilde, 1895/2024), are predominantly analytic, scalar, and direct – reflecting Victorian aesthetic values of economy, wit, and individual evaluative authority. Uzbek structures, as represented in *Kelinlar qo‘zg‘oloni* (Said Ahmad, 1960), are predominantly synthetic, metaphorical, and communally embedded – reflecting Central Asian cultural values of moral richness, social deference, and collective evaluation.

These structural differences are not arbitrary typological features but culturally significant choices embedded in the social logics of each tradition. Construction grammar theory (Goldberg, 1995) and linguoculturology (Maslova, 2001; Vorobyev, 1997) together support the central claim: structural models of complimenting are form-meaning pairings that encode the cultural values of the communities in which they are deployed. The predicative adjectival construction encodes the English cultural valorisation of direct, economical social expression; the metaphorical comparative construction encodes the Uzbek cultural valorisation of allusive, culturally embedded social evaluation.

The findings have direct implications for cross-cultural pragmatics research, intercultural communication training, and translation practice. An English speaker who produces a direct predicative adjectival compliment in a Uzbek social context may be perceived as insufficiently invested or culturally illiterate; a Uzbek speaker who produces an elaborate metaphorical compliment in an English social context may be perceived as excessively indirect or culturally alien. Understanding the structural logic of each tradition’s compliment conventions is a prerequisite for the culturally sensitive management of cross-cultural evaluative speech (Thomas, 1983). The present analysis contributes to that understanding by mapping the structural landscape of two major but undercomparatively studied compliment traditions – a gap increasingly recognised in the scholarly literature on Uzbek pragmatics (Jabbarov, 2025). Future research might extend this structural-semantic analysis to naturally occurring spoken data from English-Uzbek bilingual communities, and the application of corpus linguistic methodologies to large collections of Uzbek compliment data would enable quantitative confirmation of the patterns identified through the close reading of Said Ahmad’s literary corpus.

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