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## Transfer of Arabic formulaic courtesy expressions used by advanced Arab learners of Spanish

Ana Ramajo Cuesta<sup>a\*</sup>, María Cecilia Ainciburu<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, Reem island, Abu Dhabi, PO Box 38044, United Arab Emirates

<sup>b</sup>Nebrija Universidad, Pirineos 55, Madrid, 28040, Spain

### Abstract

In Spain and Arab countries, the way of celebrating feasts and occasions is gathering with family and enjoying a meal together. In this communicative situation, compliments on the delicious food prepared will take place.

The purpose of the study is analyzing compliment/compliment responses used by advanced Arab learners of Spanish (C1) with an advanced knowledge of English and French (C1 level). In order to compare this speech act with the native production, the researchers considered three groups of participants: native speakers of Spanish, native speakers of Arabic and Lebanese learners of Spanish. The research variable is “origin”. “Gender” and “age” variables are not included in this study. A muted video is the instrument to collect the data.

Compliment/compliment responses in Arabic and Spanish are analyzed following a taxonomy created by the researchers. In Spanish, explanations were used, whereas in Arabic the use of formulaic courtesy expressions was frequent. In the production of Lebanese learners of Spanish, pragmatic transfer of Arabic formulaic expressions and the influence of foreign languages (French and English) occur.

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**Keywords:** politeness, formulaic courtesy expressions, Levantine Colloquial Arabic, Arab learners of Spanish, pragmatic transfer, compliment/compliment responses

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +97126569137. Fax: +97126501197.  
E-mail address: [Ana.Cuesta@PSUAD.AC.AE](mailto:Ana.Cuesta@PSUAD.AC.AE), [anitaramajo@yahoo.es](mailto:anitaramajo@yahoo.es).

## Introduction

Culture is a determinant factor in encoding and decoding utterances. This cultural awareness is an essential prerequisite for successful intercultural communication (Nuredeen, 2008, p. 280). Compliments may vary cross-culturally (Mursy & Wilson, 2001, p. 133 apud Manes & Wolfson, 1981; Manes, 1983; Holmes 1988, 1995; Herbert, 1989; Conlan, 1996; Lund, 1997; Besson et al., 1998, among others). How people perceive compliments and the way to respond to them may differ from one culture to another.

In Arabic, courtesy expressions are part of the beauty and richness of the language and they play an important role in Arabic culture (Ramajo Cuesta, 2013). Arab speakers compliment in the form of “proverbs and other precoded ritualized expressions” (Wolfson, 1981) and may use religious references when responding to compliments (Farghal & Haggan, 2006; Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001; Nelson et al, 1996).

In Arabic, formulaic expressions are frequently used when accepting a compliment (Ramajo Cuesta, 2012; Farghal & Haggan, 2006; Farghal & Al-Khatib, 2001; Nelson et al., 1996). The expression *maashaallah*, ‘may God protect you’, is frequently used when complimenting. This protective invocation is used upon seeing or observing valued things, “such as wealth, beauty, offspring, and social achievements, so as to guard them from vanishing. Such use is derived from Arab-Islamic sociocultural norms about “the evil eye” and is related to its Quranic use as a marker of God’s will” (Migdadi et al., 2010, p. 485).

### 1. Purpose of the study and research participants

The purpose of the research is analyzing compliment/compliment responses used by advanced Arab learners of Spanish (C1 level according to the CEFR) and observing if transfer of Arabic formulaic expressions occurs. The independent variable of the study is ‘origin’.

Research participants are as follows:

- Female native speakers of Spanish;
- Female native speakers of Arabic;
- Female advanced Arab learners of Spanish (C1 level) with an advanced proficiency level of English and French (C1 level).

The data was collected at Paris-Sorbonne University Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, at Saint Joseph University (Master students) and in Instituto Cervantes (groups C.1.1., C.1.2 and conversación nivel superior), Beirut Lebanon. A muted video was the instrument to collect the data for this study. The video was recorded in Beirut and shows a Lebanese family dinner. Participants are requested to recreate the dialogue between the characters that appear in the video and to participate in the communicative interaction. Once the data is collected, the researchers started the data analysis. Compliment responses were analyzed according to a functional taxonomy validated in an earlier phase of the research (Ramajo Cuesta, 2012, p.121).

### 2. Data analysis

#### 2.1. Female native speakers of Spanish

“Giving an explanation” was the most common compliment response used by native speakers of Spanish. Other strategies were “expressing happiness” and “thanking”, as illustrated in Table 1 below:

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