
Exploring the Sociocultural Dynamics of Compliments and Criticisms in Moroccan Arabic

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Abstract

Language serves not only as a means of communication but also as a social tool, necessary for maintaining relationships and societal equilibrium. In Moroccan Arabic communication dynamics, the acts of complimenting and criticizing are both fundamental and complex. Drawing upon Brown & Levinson's (1978) framework, this qualitative study investigates these speech acts, exploring a variety of linguistic strategies, such as interrogatives, metaphors, irony, tautology, and honest deceptions. Employing diverse data collection methods including interviews, participant observation, content analysis, and introspection, we examine these dynamics within the linguistic variety spoken in Errachidia, south-eastern Morocco. By adopting purposive sampling and the researcher's introspective insights as a native speaker, we aim to capture the intricate nuances and subtleties of compliments and criticisms in communicative interactions. Our findings shed light on how cultural backgrounds shape the interpretation and expression of these speech acts, enriching our understanding of language, culture, and social dynamics within the Moroccan Arabic-speaking community. This study not only contributes to scholarly discourse but also offers practical implications for fostering effective communication and nurturing interpersonal relations.

Keywords: Compliments, criticisms, culture, face, Moroccan Arabic, Speech Acts

1. Introduction:

Traditional linguistic studies have predominantly viewed sentences as mere vehicles for reporting facts or describing situations. However, a deeper understanding suggests that sentences also serve as instruments of action, influencing beliefs and behaviours (Lyons, 1977). In this respect, Bourdieu (1992) argues that language is not solely a medium for information exchange; it is also a mechanism for asserting power and influence. The present study tries to lay emphasis on the speech acts of complimenting and criticizing within the context of Moroccan Arabic. Two central research questions guide our inquiry:

- (i) What strategies do native speakers of Moroccan Arabic employ when engaging in the speech acts of complimenting and criticizing?
- (ii) To what extent do socio-pragmatic and socio-cultural factors inform, give essence to and shape the performance of these speech acts within the Moroccan Arabic-speaking community?

Our examination comprises both direct and indirect approaches to complimenting and criticizing, drawing upon Brown and Levinson's (1978) distinction between "bald on-record" and "off-record" strategies. These include interrogatives, metaphors, irony, tautology, and honest deceptions (Ezzouia, 2020; Jerrar, 2023; Leech, 1969). The importance of such studies lies in their focus on the pragmatic and socio-cultural dimensions of language, extending beyond its structural aspects. Pragmatics, as put by Traugott and Pratt (1980) consider language as a purposeful behaviour, emphasizing not just linguistic competence, but also socio-pragmatic competence—the ability to produce and interpret utterances within specific communicative contexts.

The present research comprises two main sections. The first is a review of some of the respective literature, exploring the intersection of communication, culture, and language. It includes discussions on the theory of Speech Acts, the Cooperative Principle, and the Politeness Principle, examining their relevance to understanding speech act strategies (Al-Hindawi et al., 2014; Hudson, 1981; Maliki, 2021a). Furthermore, cultural values and norms play a central role in communication, often leading to misunderstandings and breakdowns in intercultural interactions (Evans et al., 2017; Rose, 2009). The second part of our study concerns the analysis of complimenting and criticizing in Moroccan Arabic, through examining the strategies employed by native speakers in light of these cultural dynamics.

Overall, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of language use in social contexts, particularly within the Moroccan Arabic-speaking community. By exploring the pragmatic and socio-cultural dimensions of speech acts, we intend to shed light on the intricate interplay between language, culture, and communication.

2. Literature Review

This section investigates the multifaceted relationship between language, culture, and communication, emphasizing the intricate driving forces which shape linguistic interactions. It attempts to show how language functions not only as a vehicle for conveying information, but also as a system for performing social actions and imposing cultural identity. First, it examines communication and culture as well as the socio-pragmatic competencies essential for effective interaction across diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Second, it tackles some foundational theories, such as Austin's Speech Act theory, Grice's Cooperative Principle, Face theory and Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and the strategies used to operate through face-threatening situations within varying cultural contexts.

2.1. Communication and Culture

Language use in communication is governed by a complex interplay of contextual, social, interpersonal and cultural factors, including social and physical circumstances, identities,

attitudes and beliefs of the communicating participants (Hudson, 1981; Maliki, 2020; Maliki, 2019). Effective communication relies on socio-pragmatic and cultural competence, which includes being cognizant of not just what to say, but also whom to address, under what circumstances, with what social dynamics, and with what purpose (Al-Hindawi et al., 2014; Thomas, 1983; Traugott & Pratt, 1980).

Language and culture, it should be clear, are two inherently intertwined and inseparable entities in the sense that language is a vehicle and/or a vessel of culture and the latter, in turn, shapes the language of its community. Language usage transcends the act of conveying meaning, and serves as an instrument to create, foster and maintain social relationships, preserve the societal equilibrium and assert identity (Liddicoat, 2020). When using a specific language, speakers are unconsciously and implicitly aligning themselves with the cultural specificities of their community and reflecting that community's cultural properties.

However, Jackson (2014), Nadler et al. (1985) and Smith (1991), make it clear that cross-cultural interactions present challenges when participants possess divergent cultural backgrounds, a fact which leads to potential conflicts grounded in contrasting cultural norms and assumptions (Evans et al., 2017; Maliki et al., 2019). Understanding the impact of culture on linguistic behaviour is crucial for finding one's way through effective communication across cultural boundaries.

Underneath the taken-for-granted of everyday life, there is much that is problematic about the effect of culture on our linguistic behavior. Communication is made up of interactive moves and countermoves between speakers and listeners who actively collaborate to produce meaningful interaction (Canale, 1983; Kreidler et al., 1988). Moreover, there is nothing intrinsic or inherent to what people say; what they say derives meaning and significance from a shared interpretation, cooperation and negotiation. Attention, therefore, should be given not to the communicative act or piece of discourse per se, but rather to the creative contribution of the listener during their response to that specific communicative act (Jackson, 2014, Maliki, 2020; Maliki et al., 2019;).

Cultural values, norms and assumptions are decisive factors in communication. Drawing from completely different cultural backgrounds and relying on different schemata, speakers of different languages bring into interactions values identified with their own cultures, which is unquestionably the source of most misinterpretations, miscommunication and most intercultural communication breakdowns (Evan et al., 2017; Maliki et al., 2019; Rose, 2009).

2.2. Speech Act Theory

One of the key things of addressing language in terms of use is the assumption that language is not merely a means of conveying information, but also a vehicle for performing actions. In other words, saying is doing and utterances are acts or actions which can have significant consequences (Ezzaoua, 2020; Lyons, 1977; Smith, 1991; Thomas, 1983; Traugott & Pratt, 1980). Speech Act theory, pioneered by Austin and later developed by Searle, posits that utterances are acts performed within a context and aimed at achieving communicative purposes (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1975; Searle, 1979).

Different frameworks have been put forward for the description of language use in context. One of these frameworks is Speech Act theory, which was first developed by Austin in the 1960s and later adopted by other language philosophers (Searle, 1979). As its name indicates, Speech Act theory considers utterances as acts performed by speakers in a context in relation to their interlocutors. According to Austin (1962) and subsequently Searle (1979), not all utterances are used to produce statements; the transmission of language, thus, is not always an end per se. When people communicate a proposition to another person, they do so because they intend to influence in some way that person's beliefs, attitudes and/or behaviour. To be more precise, to produce an utterance is to engage in a social interaction, i.e., to produce a speech act (Austin, 1962, Lyons, 1977; Searle, 1979).

Performing a speech act includes different elements, namely a locutionary act, i.e., (i) the act of uttering or the act of producing a recognizable grammatical utterance in the language, and (ii) an illocutionary act, i.e., the attempt to accomplish the intended communicative purpose, and (iii) the perlocutionary act, i.e., the resulting effect (Searle, 1979; Traugott and Pratt, 1980). Still, interpreting illocutionary force can be complex, particularly in natural language contexts, where multiple interpretations may arise (Levinson, 1983; Maliki, 2020). The reason for this, in Linde's (1988) view, lies in the assumption that the illocutionary force represents the speaker's intention.

A close look through this procedure, however, reveals that it is not without its problems. For example, it is not at all certain to arrive at the speaker's intention. It must be realized that if the task of speech act theorists has been relatively easy to arrive at the speaker's intention, it is because they have relied to a great extent on invented, fabricated and decontextualized sentences. In the case of natural and more complex examples, in contrast, it is not that easy because analysts may come up with different interpretations for one and the same sentence (Harder, 1978).

2.3. Indirect Speech Acts

In addition to direct speech acts, indirect speech acts play a significant role, where the surface form may differ from the intended illocutionary force (Traugott & Pratt, 1980). Contextual cues are essential for distinguishing between direct and indirect speech acts, with indirect communication often used when directness is deemed inappropriate (Ezzaoua, 2020; Jerrar, 2023). Oftentimes, utterances in indirect communication are intentionally ambiguous in their communicative function. The question, here, is how this ambiguity is accounted for. The context usually plays a significant and vital role, for it serves as the basis for drawing a line between direct and indirect speech acts. More specifically, indirect speech acts occur only in contexts where the act, as literally carried out, is certainly going to be inappropriate (Khorshidi et al., 2016; Levinson, 1983; Traugott & Pratt, 1980).

For example, if an utterance like "can you please tell me the time?" is taken literally as a question about the addressee's abilities, it will certainly prove inappropriate in so far as it goes without saying that the addressee is capable of telling the time. In this context, given that the literal meaning of the act is rejected based on appropriateness conditions, then it is clear that the interrogative sentence is not used to ask a question, but to perform something different which,

though different from the literal act, is associated with it in a way or another (Ezzaoua, 2020; Jerrar, 2023; Traugott & Pratt, 1980).

Indirect communication, i.e., the fact of not explicitly saying what one plans to communicate, raises an interesting social question related to why do addressees take what is said into account even when they encounter an obviously inappropriate utterance instead of simply deciding that it is inappropriate. In other words, the question pertains to why hearers continue to seek an alternative meaning so they can try to make sense of what appears to be superficially inappropriate, absurd and nonsense. The answer to the search beyond the literal meaning is the implicature (Greenall, 2006, 2009; Housni et al., 2019; Leech, 1969; Maliki, 2020; Traugott & Pratt, 1980). Indirect communication, it should be noted, relies on implicatures, where hearers infer intended meanings beyond literal interpretations, guided by cooperative principles and contextual cues (Greenall, 2006, 2009; Housni et al., 2019; Leech, 1969; Maliki, 2020; Traugott & Pratt, 1980).

2.4. Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP)

Communication works and operates by virtue of a basic, shared assumption that speakers and listeners share a fundamental intention of achieving purposeful communication within a given context (Levinson, 1983). Such an assumption is referred to as the "Cooperative Principle", i.e., an appropriateness condition that governs language use (Leech, 1983). The Cooperative Principle (CP), proposed by Grice, forms the cornerstone of effective communication and emphasizes the inherent social nature of human language (Leech, 1983; Traugott & Pratt, 1980). Unlike instinctive animal languages, human communication aims not only to convey information but also to foster relationships and maintain social equilibrium by avoiding conflicts (Grice, 1975).

Grice (1975) has made it clear that social interactions, including conversations, comply with a certain logical framework where participants strive to decode the intended meaning behind utterances, although these utterances appear to be initially inappropriate (Grice, 1975). In other words, they try to get at what is meant behind what is literally said based on the premise that communication is a kind of social cooperation. This adherence to the CP stresses the cooperative nature of language use, in which individuals mutually accept certain norms to facilitate effective communication (Leech, 1963). The CP consists of four maxims, namely Quantity, Quality, Relevance, and Manner, which govern communicative interactions by delineating norms for informative, truthful, coherent, and clear expression, respectively (Grice, 1989).

The maxim of Quantity stipulates that contributions to a conversation should be as informative as necessary without being excessively wordy. Similarly, the maxim of Quality emphasizes truthfulness, through encouraging participants not to say or state what they believe to be untrue. The maxim of Relevance stresses the importance of sticking to the topic at hand in order to ensure coherence and interpretability of what they say within the context of the conversation. Finally, the maxim of Manner advocates for clarity in expression, by inciting participants to use

language that is clear, orderly, and ambiguity-free (Greenall, 2006; Grice, 1989; Grice, 1975; Jeffries et al., 2010).

Grice's maxims operate on the premise of human rationality, of which the aim is to bridge interpretive gaps between explicit utterances and inferred meanings (Grice, 1989). They, therefore, guide communicative interactions by describing the rational principles that underlie language use (Grice, 1975). However, while these maxims are grounded in human rationality, they are not absolute and adherence to them may vary. Participants may and do sometimes flout them in certain situations so that they can find their way through interpersonal dynamics and ultimately mitigate face-threatening acts (Greenall, 2009; Rings, 1987; Nuguchi, 1987).

Participants often navigate communicative exchanges while trying to balance the need for politeness, which involves considering the feelings of others to maintain social equilibrium (Reiter, 2000). Politeness, as observed by Leech (1983), serves as a mechanism for mitigating conflicts and fostering harmonious social interactions. Other studies have further made clear the subtle interplay between the Cooperative Principle and socio-cultural dynamics in communication, shedding more light on how linguistic norms adapt to diverse social contexts (Leech, 2003; Leech, 1983; Levinson, 1983; Traugott & Pratt, 1980).

2.5. Face Theory

The notion of "face," as introduced by Goffman (1967), serves as a cornerstone in the framework of politeness theory, particularly as elaborated by Brown and Levinson (1987). It comprises the positive social value that individuals claim for themselves in social interactions, representing a multi-partite image of approved social attributes. Brown and Levinson's theory put forward two fundamental aspects of face, namely negative face and positive face. Negative face reflects individuals' desire for freedom of action unimpeded by others, whereas positive face concerns the desire for social approval of and acceptance of self-image. (Bargiela-Chiappini, 2003; Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967).

Central to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory is the classification of communicative acts based on their potential threat to an individual's face, considering the seriousness of the potential danger posed. This assessment of the severity of face-threatening acts (FTAs) is, according to Brown and Levinson (1978, p. 74), impacted by various sociological variables. These variables are the social distance (D) between the speaker and hearer (a symmetric relation), the relative power dynamics (P) of speaker and hearer (an asymmetric relation) and the absolute ranking (R) of imposition within a given cultural context. These factors interact dynamically to influence the perceived weightiness and seriousness of an FTA and guide individuals' choice of politeness strategies.

Distance is related to the horizontal relationship which centres on whether the interactants are familiars or strangers. In other words, it designates the degree of intimacy and social closeness between participants in an encounter. Power, on the other hand, concerns such questions as whether the speaker stands lower or higher than the addressee. That is, if speaker, for example, is higher in status than hearer, speaker is not supposed to elaborate strategies of indirectness. If,

however, speaker is subordinate, then speaker has reason to be polite and to use elaborate indirect strategies.

Finally, ranking of imposition (R) is linked to the degree to which actions are said to interfere with an agent's wants and self-determination (i.e., time), their negative and positive face wants. This includes, for instance, the expenditure of services (i.e., time) and of goods, including non-material and intangible goods like information, sacrifice and the like. It follows from this that the 'weightiness' or 'riskiness' of an FTA is a function of the combination of the social distance between speaker and hearer, the power of the addressee over the speaker and the culturally measured intrinsic threat posed by the act. This is clearly shown by Brown and Levinson's (1987, p. 81) figure, which we reproduce below for convenience:

$$W_x = D(S, H) + P(H, S) + R_x$$

These variables, however, are not stable. They are context-dependent and tend to vary from one situation to another; they are impacted by complicated factors such as the size of imposition, cross-culturally different assessments of relative power or social distance, and value judgments (Al-Hindawi et.al., 2018; Ezzaoua, 2020). Brown and Levinson (1987) also distinguish five categories of politeness strategies, which range from those that involve very little risk of loss of face, i.e., "Bald-on-record" strategies, to those of saying nothing due to the greatness of the potential danger. In an intermediate position, we find the other strategies, including positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness, according to Brown and Levinson (1987, p.106), represents redress directed to the addressee's positive face, their perennial, eternal and enduring desire that their wants (or the actions/acquisitions/values resulting from them) be thought of as desirable. Redress consists in partially satisfying that desire by communicating that one's acts (or some of them) are in some respects similar to the addressee's wants (Kádár et al, 2017; Kádár et al.,2013; Maliki,2020; Mills, 2003).

These strategies are referred to by Scollon and Scollon (1983) as solidarity politeness in the sense that they emphasize communality and common grounds of the participants' relations. They imply that there is little distance (minus D) and only a slight power difference between them. Positive politeness assumes communality and is addressed to the hearer's desire to be thought of as a supporting member of their society; however, negative politeness, which is defined by Brown and Levinson (1987, p.134) as "redressive action addressed to the addressee's negative face_his want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded", is thought of as a deference politeness strategy since it focuses on (plus D) and impositions are done carefully to allow the hearer an escape route or an evasion path (Maliki,2020b; Kim et al., 1994).

This very fact will of course lead us to invoke the distinction between individualism and collectivism as a cultural tendency or orientation. In this connection, Hofstede (2004) points out that "individualism" is characteristic of communities where social ties are not strong and where individuals enjoy more independence in their decisions. Members of such individualistic communities tend to focus on the sense of privacy, personal freedom and independence. Conversely, societies with collectivist tendencies and orientations are supportive and unified

communities where cohesion, harmony and collective values are favoured; the sense of ‘togetherness’ and collective interests take precedence over individualism (Kim, 2010). Accordingly, speakers from collectivist cultures are more group-oriented and they, thus, opt for directness.

A critical examination of politeness theory, however, reveals its cultural specificity and limitations in cross-cultural applicability. While the theory offers a valuable framework and valuable insights for understanding the dynamics of interpersonal communication, its universality has been questioned, particularly concerning individualistic versus collectivist cultural orientations. Its application requires careful consideration of the cultural context and the fluidity of communicative norms, for, as many scholars have noted, politeness strategies may vary significantly across cultures, reflecting differing values and norms regarding interpersonal relationships and social hierarchy. Besides, recent research has emphasized the need for a more subtle understanding of politeness in intercultural communication contexts, considering the complex interplay of cultural, social, and situational factors. Moreover, contemporary perspectives highlight the dynamic nature of cultural identities and the evolving nature of communicative norms in multicultural societies.

3. The Speech Acts of Complimenting and Criticising

3.1. Speech Acts of Complimenting

Complimenting, an essential component of social interaction, encompasses the expression of approval towards someone’s behaviour, belongings or physical appearance. Downes (1984) characterizes compliments as supportive actions that implicitly attribute credit to the recipient for a perceived ‘good,’ fostering positive judgments and valued interactions. He states that they are «akin to offers, gifts and congratulations which sequentially imply an acceptance or a rejection as a second pair part”. According to Olshtain and Cohen (1991), compliments are inherently courteous gestures that make it easy for speakers to express interest in the addressee or third parties, thus fostering rapport and social harmony. However, despite their seemingly harmless and polite nature, compliments can sometimes pose challenges, particularly regarding the addressee’s response and the preservation of social harmony (see also Holmes, 1988; Homes, 1998).

Acceptance of compliments is often straightforward; in such cases, addressees express their gratitude or agreement with the content or message of the compliment. However, rejections or understated responses may also occur, especially if the recipients try to avoid self-praise, maintain humility, or navigate complex social dynamics (Alharbi, 2017; Morales, 2012). In other words, while compliments are usually used as “phatic communion” (Hudson, 1981) to start a conversation, build a relationship, express solidarity and enhance the addressee’s social status, they may have opposite results. If the addressee accepts the enhancement of their status, they may decrease solidarity, a fact which runs counter to their desire to present a positive self-image. Interestingly, female recipients may strategically reject or downplay compliments, seeking validation and sincerity from the speaker while avoiding perceptions of arrogance or self-aggrandizement (Alharbi, 2017; Kádár et al, 2029; Morales, 2012).

Despite their ostensibly or seemingly positive intent, compliments can unintentionally threaten the recipient's negative face, particularly if they imply envy or desire towards the recipient's possessions (Astuti, 2017; Septiyani et al., 2016). Cultural norms and values heavily influence the interpretation of compliments, with well-intentioned remarks sometimes being misconstrued or even leading to confrontations (Maliki, 2020; Reits, 2018). For instance, in Arab and Muslim societies, complimenting a female family member in public may be perceived as impolite or insulting, a fact which stresses the delicate and subtle balance between expressing admiration and respecting cultural sensitivities (Al-Ali, 2018; Al-Ali et al, 2019; Maliki, 2020; Maliki et al., 2018).

It is important to note that using and understanding compliments within a given society requires sensitivity to the cultural norms, socio-pragmatic factors, gender dynamics, and interpersonal relationships of that very society, for, as Al-Musawiet al. (2010), Holmes (1998), Mau (2006), Rose (2006), and Trosborg (1995) have stressed, culture plays a crucial role in shaping linguistic norms and communicative practices, and ultimately understanding complimenting practices as well as the variability of politeness phenomena in diverse cultural settings. By understanding the nuances of complimenting practices and employing tactful communication strategies, individuals can foster positive interactions and mutual respect in diverse cultural contexts.

3.2. Speech Acts of Criticizing

Criticism, the act of disapproving of someone's behaviour or possessions, comprises various dimensions within linguistic discourse. Al-Aadel (2013), drawing on Austin's theory of performative verbs, situates criticism as an explicit performative verb belonging to the category of behabitives, indicating a "reaction to someone else's past or imminent conduct. «In other words, it is the expression of one's negative attitudes, dissatisfaction of some aspects of the hearer's positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 71; Fagan et al, 2004).

Nguyen (2005) further elaborates on the nature of criticisms, defining them as negative evaluations of the hearer's choices or words, evaluated based on felicity conditions. These conditions include the appropriateness of the criticism in light of agreed-upon evaluative criteria, the speaker's belief in the negative societal impact of the criticized action, the sincerity of the speaker's dissatisfaction, and the speaker's belief in the potential for change. Monti et al. (2002) distinguish between destructive and constructive criticisms, where the former aim to hurt or offend the hearer personally, while the latter focus on behaviour rather than the person, with the intention of prompting change or improvement. Criticisms, like compliments, are culture-bound and are to a large extent influenced by the value systems and cultural associations of the speech community (Al-Kahtany, 2004; Alkayed et al, 2019; Khalfi, et al., 2016; Maliki et al., 2019; Maliki et al., 2017). The cultural context plays a crucial role in interpreting criticisms; statements that are construed as criticisms in one culture may potentially be perceived as compliments in another. In conclusion, understanding the subtleties of criticisms within linguistic discourse requires sensitivity to cultural context and socio-pragmatic conventions (Al-zaidi, 2013; Khalfi et al, 2016

4. Methodology and Research Design

Any research work relies on specific ‘procedures for collecting, analyzing, interpreting and reporting data’ (Creswell et al. 2007, p. 58). These procedures are referred to as the research design, i.e., the overall plan for relating the conceptual research problems with relevant empirical research. In other words, the research design determines the procedure as to the required data, the methods to be applied to collect and analyze this data, and how all of this will answer the initially posited research questions (Grey, 2014; Robson, 2002).

4.1 Research Design:

The present study, trying to gain in-depth insights into the dynamics of compliments and criticisms and seeking to capture the richness and complexity of human experiences and beliefs, adopts a qualitative approach. This method involves techniques, such as interviews, participants’ observations, and content analysis. It also offers a more comprehensive understanding of the research topic. The research design is categorized into exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory phases. Each phase serves a distinct purpose, with exploratory research aiming to illuminate new areas of inquiry, descriptive research providing a comprehensive description of observed phenomena, and explanatory research investigating causal relationships and underlying mechanisms. By integrating these phases, the research design facilitates an in-depth understanding of the speech acts of complimenting and criticizing within the context of Moroccan Arabic (Blumberg et al, 2005; Punch, 2005).

4.2 Sampling Methodology:

A purposive sampling technique is employed to select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to the research objectives. This deliberate approach ensures the inclusion of individuals who possess firsthand experience and insights into the speech acts under investigation, i.e., knowledge taken directly from source (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Purposive sampling is particularly advantageous in studies focusing on in-depth analysis and thorough understanding, making it possible for researchers to target specific subgroups within the population that are most pertinent to the research questions (Brown, 2006; Gliner et al, 2017; Saunders et al., 2007; Singh, 2007).

4.3. Data Collection Procedures:

Data collection involves a combination of natural and arranged speech situations, covering diverse contexts and scenarios where complimenting and criticizing occur organically and as a natural course; in other words, some speech situations that required complimenting or critical acts were intentionally triggered and the participants were recorded. These participants, males and females belonging to different age groups, were informed that the recordings were going to be used for scientific research, without specifying that the focus was the speech acts of complimenting and criticizing. Most of the data is related to the variety spoken in a south eastern Moroccan city called Errachidia. Additionally, introspection and participant observation, i.e., instances in which the researcher acted as a source of data, is utilized as a supplementary data collection method, taking advantage of the researchers' introspective insights as a native speaker of the Moroccan Arabic variety under study. This multifaceted approach to data collection

enriches the study by capturing a broad spectrum of speech acts and contextual nuances inherent in communicative interactions (Gliner et al, 2017; Lunenburg, 2007; Nikolopoulou, 2022; Salkind, 2010).

5. Results and Discussion

5.1. Compliments and Criticisms in Moroccan Arabic

A close examination of the dynamics of complimenting and criticizing within Moroccan Arabic discourse reveals that these speech acts are not merely exchanges of words but complex social interactions that are greatly impacted by cultural norms, interpersonal relationships, and individual perceptions. Compliments in Moroccan Arabic often function within the framework of adjacency pairs, where they can be accepted or rejected. Acceptance is typically demonstrated through expressions of gratitude or understated agreement with the content of the compliment, as is shown below in examples (1) and (2), respectively. It should be noted that the Arabic transliteration system used throughout this article (see appendix) is adapted from E/CONF (2017).

Example 1:

A:

Moroccan Arabic

راك خدام مزيان ا العفريت

Transliteration

Rak khddammzyān a l'afrit

English translation

You are doing well buddy

B:

Moroccan Arabic

الله يرحم الوالدين

Transliteration

Allah y rhamlwalidīn

English translation

May God Bless your parents
and have mercy on them

Example (1) is a compliment paid by a student to one of their classmates who took an exam and got a good grade. It appears that the response is ironical as in the case of French in which compliments are not often followed by an expression of thanks, and if so, it is taken as an ironical statement. However, in Moroccan Arabic, this does not seem to be the case, for the use of the expression (May God Bless and have mercy on your parents), usually used as an expression of thanks in Moroccan culture, is a sincere response.

Example 2:

A:

Moroccan Arabic

واعة عندك هادالجاكيطة

Transliteration

Wā'ra 'andk had jjakita

English translation

You have a nice coat

B:

Moroccan Arabic

اوا قاضيا حاجة وصافي

Transliteration

Iwa qadyahājaoṣāfi

English translation

Not that nice; better than nothing

In example (2), the speaker expresses his admiration of the addressee's coat; the latter shows his acceptance of the compliment using an understatement or a kind of mitigation of what the speaker says. The use of understatement implies the addressee's desire to show humility and modesty, which is essential to preserving one's positive face in Moroccan culture.

The findings have also shown that compliments can pose threats to the addressee's 'face' or social image, and, therefore, lead to rejection. This rejection may stem from a reluctance to engage in self-praise. In other words, if the recipient accepts the enhancement of their status, they may decrease solidarity, a fact which runs counter to their desire to present a positive self-image. The rejection can also be a means for the addressee, particularly females, to gauge the sincerity of the compliment; by pretending not to accept or to disagree with the compliment, females are in fact seeking confirmation from the issuer of the compliment. Examples (3) and (4) below are illustrations of the above claims:

Example (3):**A:****Moroccan Arabic**

فيديك العومان يا وزون

Transliteration*F yddīkl 'umānyawzzūn***English translation**

You are a good swimmer buddy

B:**Moroccan Arabic**

غير كا يجيب ليك الله

Transliteration*Ghīrkayjīblik Allah***English translation**

This is not true; it just appears to you

Example (4):**A:****Moroccan Arabic**

راكي ليوم فنهارك

Transliteration*Raki lyūm fnhārk***English translation**

You look beautiful today

B:**Moroccan Arabic**

عقتنا بيك غير كادوخ علينا

Transliteration*'aqna bīk ghīr kaddukh 'alina***English translation**

You are just kidding. You can't be serious

Cultural Sensitivities, family Bonds and the notion of "self":

As James (1980, p. 130) has rightly postulated, mentioning some of the hearer's possession in complimentary terms may perhaps be interpreted in the Arab world as a request for that possession, which, in turn, might be considered impolite given that nobody would like to give his possessions away. Also, compliments related to certain topics, such as female family members, can unintentionally cause offense due to the cultural significance of family ties in Moroccan society; in other words, good intentions may be misinterpreted and things can get particularly troublesome. For instance, mentioning a female character in someone's family (i.e., wife, sister, daughter, niece, etc.) in complimentary terms in public will be conceived as an insult or an impolite statement and may sometimes lead to confrontation, as is clear from example (5) below:

Example (5)**A:****Moroccan Arabic**

اختك طرف يا العم

Transliteration*Khik trf ya l'am***English translation**

Your sister is really beautiful buddy

B:**Moroccan Arabic**

دروكنوض نيك أمك

Transliteration*Drūk nnūd nīk mmuk***English translation**

I'll screw your mother; I'll screw you

The unexpected response on the part of the recipient reveals the vital role of family ties in defining a person's "self" or self-image". Love day, cited by Maliki et al (2019) and Maliki, (2020b), shows that families are tied together in a functional interlocking complex and form a network that satisfies many of the same functions that governments in western societies satisfy. Therefore, sisters and all other female characters in the family represent a sacred link between families and should remain above and beyond any reproach from society.

It is imperative to recognize that when men safeguard their sisters, wives, daughters, or nieces, they are not only protecting them but also safeguarding their own reputation and sense of self. In Arab societies, where communal bonds and familial ties hold significant sway or influence, an individual's "self" or "identity" is not solely rooted in personal achievements, but is intricately linked to their familial relationships. Thus, a man's 'self-image' extends beyond personal accomplishments to include societal perceptions of the female members within his family circle (Kashmoola et al, 2019; Maliki, 2019).

This observation triggers an investigation of cross-cultural differences as to the significance placed on reputation, which varies markedly across different societies. Such variations align with sociological concepts such as "cultures of honor," which are associated with heightened sensitivity to reputation and can lead to increased incidences of violence in defense of honor. Studies on the psychological underpinnings of honor reveal that individuals raised in cultures emphasizing honor tend to react more aggressively to perceived insults compared to those from cultures where honor holds less prominence (Bloom et al., 2020). Moreover, the very definition of what constitutes an "insult" can vary significantly from one culture to another, highlighting the complexity of cross-cultural differences in the perception of honor and its implications.

Cross-cultural differences and socio-cultural values, as we have already stated, influence the interpretation of compliments. Complimenting attributes that are not culturally valued or praising possessions may be perceived negatively. In certain contexts, the misinterpretation of physical attractiveness in men might be a source of problems. In Morocco, for example, praising physical attractiveness in men may not be perceived as a positive attribute deserving of compliments. Such compliments could potentially carry negative implications, suggesting that the man in question is effeminate or womanly. This association stems from the belief that physical beauty or attractiveness is traditionally linked with femininity. Consequently, complimenting a man's physical appearance might be interpreted as expressing sexual interest towards him or a kind of harassment. For an illustration, consider example (6) below:

Example (6):**A:****Moroccan Arabic**

راك فسر يا وزون

Transliteration*Rak fsryawzzūn***English translation**

You are 'beautiful', buddy

B:**Moroccan Arabic**

بحال اختك

Transliteration*Bhāl khtk***English translation**

Like your sister

As is clear from the response in the above example, the recipient (B) may certainly have noticed that the speaker's statement bears something impolite and is not innocent, which irritated him and made him respond in the way he did.

Furthermore, complimenting the addressee on their health or the well-being of their children might inadvertently carry negative connotations, necessitating the use of mitigating expressions to alleviate any potential offense. This phenomenon can be understood within the framework of concepts such as the "evil eye" or perceptions of 'witchcraft' (Brown & Levinson, 1987), as illustrated by the following example:

Example (7):**A:****Moroccan Arabic**

خوك تراس يا صاحبي

Transliteration*Khūk trrās ya ṣaḥbi***English translation**

Your brother is very strong

B:**Moroccan Arabic**

ماشى بخبز باك

Transliteration*Māshi b khubz bbāk***English translation**

Not with your father's food; It is not your father who feeds him

The speaker's statement takes on a negative tone due to the inclusion of the term "trrās" (very strong), which carries significant cultural load. This word is typically avoided in polite discourse as it is associated with jealousy and the malevolent "evil eye," believed to bring about misfortune, harm, or even death. To counteract or soften the potentially harmful impact of such compliments, various expressions like "mashaallah," "khamṣawkhmīs," and "tbarklaah" are commonly employed. These phrases emphasize the speaker's genuine goodwill and intention behind the compliment.

Interpersonal dynamics and previous experiences are other factors that can have a great impact on the interpretation of compliments, a fact which can lead to varied responses or to no response at all. An act of complimenting may be construed negatively due to the interactants' previous experience and the type of relationship prevailing between them, as is clear from the example below:

Example (8):

A:

Moroccan Arabic

حميمة عندك سخطة

Transliteration

Hmiyma ‘andk sakhṭa

English translation

You have a nice pigeon; your girlfriend is “coquette”; very beautiful

B: No response

In the scenario described, a person compliments another individual on the beauty of his girlfriend, despite knowing that the speaker has a history of romantic involvement with the same girl. Within the context of their relationship, the recipient of the compliment chooses not to acknowledge it, effectively rejecting it. This lack of response suggests that the recipient interpreted the speaker’s remark as insinuating that the recipient’s girlfriend should not be regarded with excessive pride, as her reputation may have been tarnished or compromised.

Example (9) below reveals that, like compliments, criticisms are also culture-bound. They go hand in glove with the value systems and cultural associations of the speech community in question. That is, the given society’s cultural value systems and people’s representations (Maliki et al, 2019; Maliki et al,2017) play a capital role in interpreting criticisms and in determining whether an act is a criticism or not.

Example (9):

Moroccan Arabic

انت ما يَحَطِّشِي خُداك بنادم
لَفَعَى كَزْطِيطة

Transliteration

*Nta mayḥṭṭshi ḥdāk
bnādm laf‘a garṭīṭa*

English translation

We can’t trust to leave even a poisonous snake with you

The statement is typically intended as a criticism, implying that the recipient is driven by uncontrollable sexual desire, willing to engage in intimacy with any woman encountered. It implies that the recipient’s priorities are solely focused on fulfilling primal or primitive desires, to the extent that others may view him as unpredictable or even dangerous, similar to leaving someone unguarded with a venomous snake. However, within certain cultural contexts, such remarks might paradoxically be interpreted as compliments. In societies where traits associated with machismo hold significant sway or have a great impact, expressions of lust and obsession may be viewed as affirmations of masculinity and virility, rather than as condemnations. Thus, what might be perceived as negative qualities in one cultural setting could be regarded as positive attributes in another, illustrating the complexity of cultural interpretations and norms surrounding notions of sexuality, masculinity and male prowess.

In short, in Moroccan Arabic, complimenting and criticizing are intricate social practices influenced by cultural norms, interpersonal relationships, and individual perceptions. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for effective communication and maintaining social harmony.

5.2. Strategies of Complimenting and Criticizing

The data employed in the present study indicates that Moroccan Arabic native speakers employ diverse strategies when offering compliments or criticisms, emphasizing their tendency to comply with prevailing social norms that serve as guiding principles for people's verbal behaviour. These strategies can be broadly categorized into "bald on-record" and "off-record" approaches, as delineated by Brown and Levinson (1987, p.73). Bald on-record strategies align with Grice's maxims, representing a straightforward compliance with and adherence to conversational principles aimed at facilitating effective communication (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Such strategies involve direct speech acts that leave little room for ambiguity or multiple interpretations. For instance, Example (10) serves as a clear illustration of bald on-record strategies.

Example (10):

Moroccan Arabic
غزالة يا أختي هاد الكسوة
عندك

Transliteration
*Ghāla yakhti hād
lkaswa 'andk*

English translation
Oh sister, your skirt is very nice

In the preceding example, the act of complimenting is executed on-record in the sense that the speaker believes her statement does not require any indirectness or mitigation. This direct approach, often observed among females, suggests that the compliment poses no threat to the recipient's face. Compliments, as observed earlier, are employed for the purpose of establishing social rapport, serving as instances of phatic communion.

Similarly, on-record strategies are also used in delivering criticisms, depending on certain social dynamics such as power and solidarity. For instance, when a teacher addresses a student or a boss communicates with an employee, there appears to be little necessity to employ off-record tactics to soften potential face threats. In such scenarios, power dynamics play a significant role; the speaker, aware of their superior rank and authority over the recipient, may opt for direct criticisms to reprimand or express disapproval of the recipient's actions or choices. In doing so, they assert dominance over the recipient's face without risking damage to their own. Consider the following example for clarification:

Example (11):

Moroccan Arabic
أش هاد الخدمة ديال تاخير
الزمان

Transliteration
*'āsh had lkhadma dyāl
takhir zzamān*

English translation
*This is the work of end times; what
the hell have you done*

In this example, the boss employs an on-record approach to criticize an employee whom the boss believes will refrain from responding angrily due to the risk of job loss. The boss, in this context, is unlikely to suffer any loss of face. Additionally, factors such as solidarity and intimacy can also prompt the use of on-record strategies in criticisms. When participants share a close relationship as friends, relatives, or siblings, the speaker may feel comfortable issuing direct

criticisms. However, to mitigate the impact of the criticism, it may be delivered in the form of a joke, eliminating and obviating the need for excessive politeness.

Example (12)

Moroccan Arabic	Transliteration	English translation
لا، أشحازك انت، دِير الجُنَاح	<i>Lā, 'āsh ḥāzzk nta, dīr jnāh</i>	No, that is not enough. Get wings and fly

In situations where a speaker perceives their discourse to be in the hearer's interest, employing on-record strategies, even when conveying criticism, is deemed acceptable. Moreover, on-record strategies are used in criticisms by taking advantage of routine expressions or proverbs. These linguistic tools are used because they make it possible for the speaker to highlight the addressee's flaws or misdeeds without directly accusing them, thereby upholding and obeying politeness norms. The following example can be used as an illustration.

Example (13):

Moroccan Arabic	Transliteration	English translation
حَسَّنْ دِيكَ اللّٰحِيَّةِ وَاَنْتِ دَايِر بُحَالْ لِي طَالٌ مِّنْ شَيْءٍ يُنُو	<i>Hassn dik llahya wnta dayr bḥal lliṭal mnshi ppnu</i>	It's time you shaved that beard. You look as if you were peering out of a tire

Examples (12) and (13) above are likely to evoke more amusement than offense. For instance, in Example (12), the implication is that the addressee exhibits excessive arrogance and boasts without displaying humility. Similarly, in Example (13), likening the beard to a car tire suggests that it does not complement the addressee's facial features. The humorous tone serves as a means of softening the critique; therefore, the recipient may not necessarily react negatively. According to Brown and Levinson (1987), humour represents a fundamental positive-politeness technique aimed at putting the recipient at ease.

Off-record strategies are employed when speakers deliberately seek to provide an 'exit route' and a "way out", thus sharing the responsibility for interpretation with the listener. By intentionally deviating from commonly accepted or the agreed upon norms, speakers avoid committing themselves to a specific interpretation. This approach engages the listener and encourages them to actively participate in deciphering or decoding the speaker's intentions, and consequently increasing the listener's accountability for any potential repercussions or negative consequences that may ensue.

In this context, Fraser (1980, p. 342) argues that speakers often seek to soften and mitigate the impact of their statements by leaving the real message (what they actually intend to say) undetermined and ambiguous. This, in turn, is in line with the notion that much of communication occurs beyond explicit verbal expression, i.e., is unspoken and unsaid. Traugott and Pratt (1980, pp. 236-237) support this concept, suggesting that in indirect communication, utterances that may seem inappropriate prompt listeners to seek the underlying motivation

behind the literal message. Rather than attributing such perceived inappropriateness to the speaker's lack of understanding or lack of competence, listeners, drawing from shared knowledge, recognize that speakers communicate with a "purposeful and effective intent" in that particular communication in that context.

In essence, both speakers and listeners engage in cooperative communication. A cooperative speaker aims to adhere to and comply with pragmatic rules, which state that each utterance should contribute to new and meaningful information. Conversely, a cooperative listener trusts the speaker and believes that there is a rational purpose behind their speech. Even when a speaker's statement initially appears nonsensical, a cooperative listener strives to extract meaning from what may seem superficially nonsense and absurd. To achieve politeness, speakers may flout the maxims of the Cooperative Principle and involve listeners in interpreting their utterances. Some individuals may strategically offer statements that evade commitment, while others may utilize metaphors or imagery to stress the addressee's flaws. Although these expressions may resemble questions or inquiries, their true intent lies in conveying criticism indirectly.

Another scenario where on-record strategies of criticism are employed occurs when the speaker addresses matters in the listener's best interest, intending to draw attention to the listener's errors. In such cases, criticism may resemble advice to some extent. Consider the following example for illustration:

Example (14):

Moroccan Arabic

نوض تخدم على راسك وانت
دايمن كُنْسَعْدِرُ بُكَا يُوْجَعْنِي
راسي وتبقى ناغس النهار
كامل

Transliteration

*Nūd tkhdm 'larask w nta
dāymn katssa 'dr b
kaywjā 'ni rāsiw tbqa nā 's
nnhār kāml*

English translation

Go and look for a job to support
yourself instead of always pretending
you are sick as a pretext to spend the
whole day in bed

In the given example, the speaker directly criticizes the addressee, asserting that he is lazy and consistently seeks excuses and pretexts to avoid work. This criticism is implicitly directed at the addressee, and the speaker seems personally invested and emotionally involved in offering this critique. The directness of the criticism can also be attributed to cultural factors. Unlike in Western societies, were, as Wierzbicka (1985, p. 84) makes it clear, "every individual would want, so to speak, to have a little well around him/her, at least part of the time, and that this is perfectly natural and very important", in Moroccan culture, however, notions like privacy or individualism are not highly valued. Instead, individuals act as integral parts of a larger group and the interest of the group comes first (See also and Wierzbicka 1997, 2003). Furthermore, the use of proverbs or adages is another strategy for issuing criticisms using on-record methods. These linguistic tools allow speakers to highlight the addressee's flaws without appearing to do so directly. Examples (15) and (16) illustrate this approach effectively.

Example (15):

Moroccan Arabic

المشتاق الى فاق واعر
حالو

Transliteration

*Lmshtāq ila fāq wā 'r
hālu*

English translation

Wealth changes manners; newfound
wealth may lead to arrogance, selfishness,
or mistreatment of others

Example (16):

Moroccan Arabic

لي كاليك أنا عبدك، لا
تكلوشيرواح للسوق
نبيعك

Transliteration

*Llī gallik ana 'abdk
la tgullushi rwaḥ
lssūq nbi 'k*

English translation

Lit: If someone says "I am your slave", don't
take them to the market place to sell them)
(Paraphrase: if someone is too kind, do not
take advantage of their kindness

In example (15), the speaker's statement implies that the addressee is perceived as an opportunist who, having experienced poverty and hardship, tends to excessively indulge in newfound opportunities or pleasures. Specifically, the implication here is that despite lacking previous romantic experiences, upon finally entering a relationship, the addressee neglects other obligations and responsibilities in favor of spending excessive time with their partner. On the other hand, in example (16), the suggestion is that when given the slightest opportunity, the addressee habitually seeks more, akin to the expression "give him an inch and he'll take a mile." This implies a tendency to take advantage of small favors and opportunities to request more without regard for boundaries or limits. Though both examples employ indirect methods of criticism, they meet or converge on a common theme, i.e., the addressee's perceived tendency to prioritize personal desires over other responsibilities or considerations.

Concerning off-record strategies, there is a consistent link to acts that carry aspects of impoliteness. According to Brown and Levinson (1978, p. 216), an act is deemed off-record when it is performed in a manner that does not clearly convey a single communicative intention. Essentially, the actor provides themselves with various defensible interpretations, allowing for ambiguity. This approach serves to mitigate the force of the act (Fraser, 1980, p. 342).

In simpler terms, by leaving the force of the act open to interpretation, the speaker encourages the listener to actively decipher the intended meaning. As the listener invests more effort in understanding the speaker's intention, they also assume greater responsibility for the resulting conclusions (Fraser, 1980, p. 346). Off-record strategies often involve flouting Grice's maxims to uphold the principle of politeness. For instance, in the context of giving compliments, one may go off-record by making broad statements that can be interpreted in various ways depending on the context. When addressing a beautiful girl, someone might say:

Example (17):

Moroccan Arabic

بحالك لي تصلاح تكون مولات
الدار

Transliteration

Bḥālkllitslaḥtkūnmulātddār

English translation

It is women like you that can make
good wives

Example (18):**Moroccan Arabic**

الله يعمي عليك العين الشينة

TransliterationAllah ya 'mi 'lik l'in
shshina**English translation**

May God protect you from evil eye

In example (17), the speaker likens the addressee to girls who possess qualities desirable in a spouse, implying that not only is she beautiful but also holds a commendable and virtuous reputation. This act of complimenting is executed subtly, as the speaker merely hints at their admiration, thereby violating the maxim of manner. The addressee is left to infer the intended meaning, placing the onus and obligation on her to decipher the compliment's implications.

In example (18), the speaker suggests that the lady being addressed is exceptionally beautiful, evidenced by their assertion that she is susceptible to the evil eye—an affliction believed to befall those with distinctive qualities, such as beauty. This act of complimenting carries the risk of flouting the maxim of manner due to its prolixity, wordiness and ambiguity, requiring the addressee to make significant effort to discern and perceive its implications on her own.

Speakers may employ rhetorical questions as a form of off-record strategy. For instance, in the context of criticizing, a speaker might disguise or conceal their disapproval as a real inquiry or request for information, even though the speaker already knows the answer. To illustrate this concept, consider the following examples:

Example (19):**Moroccan Arabic**واش والدا ليك عقرب تحت
لسانك**Transliteration**Wāsh wāldalik 'agrab
taht lsānk**English translation****Literal:** Has a scorpion laid and hatched
out its eggs under your tongue**Paraphrase:** You are always divulging
other people's secrets**Example (20):****Moroccan Arabic**واش مربع ليك شي حمار
في دماغك**Transliteration**Wāsh mrabba 'lik shi
hmār f dmaghk**English translation****Literal:** do you have a donkey crouching
down inside your brain)**Paraphrase:** Why are you so stupid/
foolish?)

In the examples provided above, we observe violations of the maxims of the Cooperative Principle. In example (19), for instance, the speaker flouts the maxim of quality by making an absurd statement; it is impossible for a scorpion to lay eggs under a human being's tongue. Additionally, there is a violation of the maxim of manner due to the implicit nature of the utterance, making it difficult to perceive and understand the intended meaning. However, based on shared background, the hearer will likely interpret the implied message appropriately, i.e., that the addressee tends to chatter, gossip and cannot keep a secret.

In example (20), the speaker intends to convey that the addressee is perceived as slow or unintelligent. This is achieved through the metaphor of a donkey, which is culturally associated

with stupidity, depicted as squatting inside the addressee’s head. However, this metaphor violates the maxim of quality due to its falsity and the maxim of manner due to its lack of clarity in force. While the speaker could have directly stated their intention, this might have been perceived as impolite.

Indirectness is also employed through overgeneralizations, where the hearer is left to determine whether the general rule applies to them or not. In Moroccan Arabic, this often involves using impersonal pronouns like “*lwāḥd*”(one), “*l’insān*”(Man), “*bnādm*”(Man), among others. This softens the impact of the acts particularly those that could be seen as impolite. The following utterances are cases in point:

Example (21):

Moroccan Arabic	Transliteration	English translation
الواحد خاصو يكون نتاع راسو	<i>Lwāḥd khāssu ykūn ntā’ rāsu</i>	One should be independent and able to decide for themselves

Example (22):

Moroccan Arabic	Transliteration	English translation
الانسان هو لي يواجه ويكون قاسح	<i>L’insān huwa lli ywajh w ykūn qāsh</i>	A real person is he who faces hardships and does not give in

In example (21), the speaker criticizes the addressee for their conformity and dependence on others, insinuating that they blindly follow the crowd, regardless of personal conviction. However, this criticism is delivered in an unclear manner, leaving it up to the addressee to realize the intended message, thus violating the maxim of manner. Additionally, there is a violation of the maxim of quantity, as the statement is too general and vague, providing insufficient information. In example (22), it also appears that the maxim of quantity is flouted, as the actor provides inadequate information, leading to ambiguity in the intended meaning. The statement implies that the addressee is emotionally fragile and exhibits what are stereotypically perceived as “weak” or “feminine” emotions. In both examples, the hearer is expected to rely and draw upon their background knowledge and past experiences to infer the true intent behind the statement.

Figures of speech are capital in both complimenting and criticizing, often serving as “classic off-record strategies” (Brown & Levinson, 1978, p. 217). These rhetorical devices, such as metaphors, irony, tautology, hyperbole, and litotes, inherently flout Gricean maxims and can be effectively utilized to convey speech acts. Metaphors, for instance, exploit the maxims of the Cooperative Principle and are frequently employed in complimenting and criticizing. For instance, when talking about a football player with a friend, one might say:

Example (23):**Moroccan Arabic**يا صاحبي هداك العشرة
عندكم طائرة**Transliteration***Yāsaḥbi hadak
l'ashra'andkum
tayyāra***English translation**Oh, my friend, the player number 10 in
your team is a plane; He is fast and
unstoppable

In this example, the metaphor comparing the football player to a plane may seem semantically odd, as it is not a direct association. However, the speaker intends to convey admiration for the player's speed, endurance, and constant movement on the field by likening him to a plane. This metaphor violates the maxim of manner, as the hearer must make great efforts to interpret the intended meaning. Metaphors, particularly in compliments, serve not only to maintain politeness but also to express real admiration. However, in acts of criticism, metaphors are often employed to achieve indirectness and lessen the impact of the criticism. For instance, when discussing someone known for their insincerity and for constantly shifting opinions, one might use the following metaphor:

Example (24):**Moroccan Arabic**

هداك راه تمحباوش يا خويا

Transliteration*Hadak rāh tmḥbāwsh
ya khuya***English translation**(Look brother, that person is a real
chameleon); he's like a weather vane,
always changing direction with the wind

In the provided example, the speaker implies that the person being criticized is a hypocrite who adjusts their opinions and positions based on their audience and personal motives or interests. In other words, the person concerned is described as "a weather vane, always changing direction with the wind", which suggests that the mentioned person lacks consistency and constantly changes his opinions and attitudes depending on the prevailing circumstances. This critique is delivered through the violation of the maxim of quality, as comparing a human to a chameleon is illogical. Additionally, the maxim of manner is flouted due to the indirect nature of the act, requiring the hearer to infer the speaker's intent, thereby sharing responsibility for the impact of the statement.

Besides metaphor, other tropes, such as irony, hyperbole and litotes, inter alia, serve as tools for indirectly issuing compliments and criticisms. Irony, along with hyperbole and litotes, distort reality, albeit in different ways. While hyperbole exaggerates and litotes understates, irony presents or implies the opposite of what is apparent, leading the listener to a deeper understanding of reality or truth. Irony, as Leech (1983, p. 142) aptly notes, can be a way to appear polite while actually being impolite, risking a violation of the Cooperative Principle. To illustrate this, let us consider a situation in which a man, addressing another man who takes charge of the housework and does everything for his wife, says the following:

Example (25):

Moroccan Arabic

يا سعادات لي داتك

Transliteration

Ya sa 'dāt lli ddatk

English translation

Lucky is your wife; Lucky is she who will be your wife

In the provided example, the speaker appears to express admiration for and praise the addressee's conduct. However, considering the shared background and societal values and norms of the speech community, both speaker and hearer understand that the speaker's statement is insincere and disingenuous. The speaker does not genuinely believe what he is saying and actually means the opposite of what he expresses. This results in a violation of the maxims of quality and manner, as the statement is untrue and the speaker's true intent is unclear, respectively. Consequently, the hearer is required to infer and deduce the underlying meaning based on contextual clues and shared background knowledge, i.e., that he is 'henpecked', 'submissive' and 'under his wife's thumb'.

Examples (26) and (27) below clearly show how hyperbole (overstatement) and litotes (understatement) are used to achieve irony in criticisms.

Example (26):

A:

Moroccan Arabic

زوينة مرات علي، ياك؟

Transliteration

Zwīnamrāt Ali ,yāk?

English translation

Ali's wife is beautiful, isn't she?

B:

Moroccan Arabic

كتقطر بالزين؛ الزين
عندها خيط من السماء

Transliteration

*Katqatṭr bzzīn;
zzīn 'andha khīṭ mnssmā*

English translation

Her beauty pours down on her face like a downpour; her beauty pours cats and dogs

This phrase uses exaggerated language and irony to convey the idea of beauty in a humorous and ironic way.

In B's response to A's statement about Ali's wife, B's reply involves exaggerated language and irony to convey the idea of beauty in a humorous and ironic way. By providing more information than necessary, B flouts the maxim of quantity. However, this exaggerated response serves to subtly convey to A that the lady in question may not be as beautiful as A implied, thus violating the maxim of quality. This tactic allows B to avoid direct accusation of having a specific intention, as A's understanding of the implied message may also result from A's participation in interpreting B's response.

Example (27) below illustrates irony conveyed through understatement. A drunkard was causing a disturbance by shouting and insulting passers-by on the street. Upon being arrested by a policeman and taken to the police station, the drunkard was questioned by an officer about the incident. The policeman then replied:

Example (27):

Moroccan Arabic	Transliteration	English translation
لا والو، غير مسكين كان سكران، ودابير شويا ديال الفوضى في الشارع	<i>Lā wālu, ghīr mskīn kān skrān w dāyr shwiyya dyaḷ lfuda f shshari'</i>	Nothing, he was just a little drunk and caused a little mess and stirred up trouble in the street

The action described in example (27) constitutes a violation of the maxim of quantity, in the sense that the information provided is insufficient and less than what is required for the circumstances. The policeman insinuated that the man's disruptive behavior was due to intoxication, suggesting that he caused trouble and insulted passers-by. However, the use of the adjectives "*skrān*" (drunk) and "*mskīn*" (poor thing) creates an inconsistency, as the words "drunk", "mess", "stir trouble" and the words "poor thing, a little" are incompatible. This incongruity or incompatibility serves to reveal the true intent behind the statement, especially considering societal values and attitudes towards such types of behavior. In fact, by employing irony, the policeman intentionally understates the situation, distorting reality (saying too little) and conveying criticism with subtlety. While the intention may not be explicitly impolite, the understatement sharpens the criticism, demonstrating that indirectness can serve not only to maintain politeness but also to intensify criticism.

A final off-record strategy in issuing speech acts of complimenting and criticizing involves the use of tautology. In such cases, speakers employ non-informative utterances that are devoid of any meaningful content because they are self-evidently true. This constitutes a violation of the maxim of quantity, among others, as the information provided is redundant and excessive. As a result, the reader is left to decipher the implicature or communicative intention behind the statement, leading to a struggle in interpretation. For example, consider a situation where a person realizes that a young girl in the neighborhood, known for her beauty, chastity and piety was unfairly accused of engaging in sexual relations with several men out of wedlock. In an attempt to convey that she is beyond reproach and suspicion, the person said:

Example (28):

Moroccan Arabic	Transliteration	English translation
الملحة غير ملحة	<i>Lmalḥa ghīr malḥa</i>	Salt is salt

The tautological statement above clearly violates the maxim of quantity by being non-informative and void of any meaningful content. It fails to provide new or relevant information, which is essential according to pragmatic rules. Additionally, the maxim of relevance is flouted, as there appears to be no apparent connection between the girl being accused and the mention of salt.

However, in such cases, the surface meaning is not what holds significance; rather, it is the underlying value of significance that matters ((Lyons, 1977). Drawing upon one's background knowledge of the external world, particularly the properties and characteristics of salt regardless

of external factors, leads to a deeper interpretation. In this context, the comparison to salt implies that, just as salt is inherently stable and does not decay or deteriorate over time, the girl's reputation is beyond reproach. The intention is to convey that there is no doubt that she couldn't have done anything of what she was accused of.

Another example of off-record strategies performed through the use of tautological statements can be provided by the exchange below:

Example (29):

A:

Moroccan Arabic
راه عاود مشا عندها هداك
النم

Transliteration
*Rah 'awd msha 'andha
hadāk nnam*

English translation
That bloody guy went to see
her again

B:

Moroccan Arabic
البيمة غير بهيمة

Transliteration
Lbhīma ghīr bhīma

English translation
A beast is but a beast

In the provided example, Speaker B violates the maxim of quality by offering no additional information, thereby being less informative. His statement, "a beast is but a beast," merely states the obvious. Furthermore, Speaker B breaches the maxim of relevance by responding with an utterance that does not directly address A's statement. Instead, the implied message is that the proverb "you cannot teach an old dog new tricks", applies to the person in question who is akin to an old dog resistant to change, as evidenced by their persistent behavior despite his friends' advice to stop seeing a treacherous woman who, on many occasions, had betrayed his trust and loyalty through her dishonest actions. The comparison to a beast signifies the individual's disregard for advice and his inability to recognize which side his bread is buttered on and his interest lie, like someone who refuses to see the truth. This criticism is not explicitly stated but inferred from our understanding of the situation.

In Moroccan Arabic, speakers employ both on-record and off-record strategies in issuing speech acts of complimenting and criticizing. The selection of these strategies is influenced by various factors, including power dynamics, social distance, and the perceived risk associated with the force of the act. It is worth noting that indirect strategies often violate the maxims of the Cooperative Principle, emphasizing the cooperative nature of communicative acts.

6. Conclusion:

In this study, we investigated the speech acts of complimenting and criticizing within Moroccan Arabic discourse, exploring the strategies employed to execute these acts effectively. We began by reviewing pertinent literature, including Austin's (1962) and Searle's (1979) theories of speech acts, highlighting their limitations and the challenges they pose in understanding real face-to-face interactions. Additionally, we proposed the Cooperative Principle as a viable framework to analyze not only indirect speech acts but also instances of indirectness without the need for strict rules or felicity conditions. Furthermore, we suggested integrating the Politeness

Principle with the Cooperative Principle to account for indirectness in various utterances.

Turning our focus to the properties of complimenting and criticizing, we tried to clarify how these acts can threaten both negative and positive face, emphasizing the critical role of cultural background knowledge and value systems in their interpretation. Besides, we examined the strategies used by native speakers of Moroccan Arabic in performing these speech acts, detailing both on-record and off-record strategies and their linguistic manifestations. We highlighted that the selection of these strategies is intricately related to factors such as power dynamics, social solidarity, relational distance, and cultural nuances.

However, our study does not claim to be complete and falls prey to some limitations. The operation of the Cooperative Principle, intertwined with the notion of ‘face’, is inherently language and culture-specific, raising questions of whether the findings and interpretations would hold true across diverse demographic groups. Specifically, our data collection focused on university students, who may exhibit different interactional patterns owing to their exposure to diverse cultures. Conversely, older individuals often adhere to traditional cultural norms, displaying a more direct approach in complimenting while being slightly more indirect in criticizing. Moreover, qualitative studies focusing on a specific group of informants in a particular context may provide rich insights into localized phenomena but may lack generalizability to other settings. A quantitative study based on a representative sample from various backgrounds could make it possible for future research to draw more generalizable conclusions about the dynamics of using compliments and criticisms in Moroccan Arabic.

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Appendix: Arabic transliteration symbols

Transliteration alphabet	Arabic alphabet	Transliteration alphabet	Arabic alphabet
'	همزة (ء)	'	ع
A, a	ا	Gh, gh	غ
B, b	ب	F, f	ف
T, t	ت	Q, q	ق
Th, th	ث	K, k	ك
J, j	ج	L, l	ل
H, h	ح	M, m	م
Kh, kh	خ	N, n	ن
D, d	د	H, h	هـ والتاء المربوطة في نهاية الكلمة
Dh, dh	ذ	W, w	و
R, r	ر	Y, y	ي
Z, z	ز	A, a	فتحة قصيرة
S, s	س	Ā, ā	فتحة طويلة
Sh, sh	ش	U, u	ضممة قصيرة
Ş, ş	ص	Ū, ū	ضممة طويلة
Ḍ, ḍ	ض	I, i	كسرة قصيرة
Ṭ, ṭ	ط	Ī, ī	كسرة طويلة
Ẓ, ẓ	ظ	Doubling the letter	شدة

Source: E/CONF (2017).