

## **“You’re an inspiration before and after this. <3”:** A case study of compliments as supportive resources in a YouTube conflict\*

### **“Eres una inspiración antes y después de esto. <3”:** un estudio de caso de cumplidos como recursos de apoyo en un conflicto de YouTube

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**Abstract:** Comments section on YouTube is one of the most characteristic features of the platform. In fact, users share reactions of all nature in this section, and there is even space for conflicts among commentators. When conflicts emerge, comments allow comprehending the relationship between video-bloggers and their audience by means of linguistic supportive resources such as compliments. Complimenting enhances the value of the video-blogger and of the community as well. Thus, this case study examines explicit and implicit compliments produced by YouTube commentators on a specific video. It focuses on the analysis of the different syntactic formulae which are commonly utilised in a conflict. As a result, the study demonstrates the strategic use of formulae in compliments to show support. Also, it explains the variability of the functions of compliments according to the formulae and topic.

**Keywords:** compliments, syntactic formulae, online communication, YouTube

**Resumen:** La sección de comentarios en YouTube es uno de los rasgos más característicos de la plataforma. De hecho, los usuarios comparten reacciones de cualquier índole en esta sección, e incluso hay espacio para conflictos entre los comentaristas. Cuando surgen conflictos, los comentarios permiten comprender la relación entre el video-blogger y su audiencia a través de recursos lingüísticos de apoyo como los cumplidos. Hacer cumplidos incrementa el valor del video-blogger y de la comunidad también. Este estudio de caso examina los cumplidos explícitos e implícitos producidos por comentaristas de YouTube en un vídeo específico. Se centra en el análisis de las diferentes fórmulas sintácticas que se utilizan habitualmente. Como resultado, el estudio demuestra el uso estratégico de fórmulas en cumplidos para mostrar apoyo. Además, explica la variabilidad de las funciones de los cumplidos según las fórmulas y temas.

**Palabras clave:** cumplidos, fórmulas sintácticas, comunicación online, YouTube

## **1. Introduction**

The YouTube industry has given rise to the possibility of visualising and enjoying common interests such as the video-based content of a video-blogger. As time goes by, YouTube has grown to become the most influential video-

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hosting site for individuals who pursue a career as online content-creators for audiovisual entertainment (Riboni, 2017a). Thus, one of the most relevant features is *self-presentation* (Bedijs *et al.*, 2014). This feature goes in line with the usage of the most appropriate mechanisms to increase social reach and visibility online (Riboni, 2017a; Spyer, 2013). Therefore, Riboni (2017a, 2017b) points out that YouTube video-bloggers pay great attention to communicative strategies to engage and maintain their audience. Likewise, they pursue avoiding conflict and dissolving differences. Notwithstanding, once content is exposed, any kind of reaction may occur from (dis)likes, comments to conflicted situations, etc.

Video-bloggers make the most of their brief period of time in the clip to engage their followership, and spectators are also allowed to deliver comments to share their feedback regarding the content or to reply to other commentators. Then, comments may perform as a response to the rapport claims YouTube content-creators show. Accordingly, even when conflict emerges, engaged followership or community of practice (Wenger, 1998) will develop linguistic strategies to enhance the value of their shared microcelebrity. This may happen when the microcelebrity is particularly offended by one party of the community due to disagreement with his/her content or performance. As in any other online or offline event, when conflict occurs interactive participants resort to a varied array of linguistic supportive tools to defend the offended individual. YouTube conflicts in comments sections and *polylogues* (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010; Lorenzo-Dus *et al.*, 2011; Bou-Franch *et al.*, 2012) have been analysed from the viewpoint of impoliteness (Pihlaja, 2012). Opposed to what it has been examined so far, this article aims at detecting compliments as supportive resources in a conflict situation in a YouTube community. The present case study aims to analyse comments delivered in a conflict episode on a YouTube video. With a total of 7 sections, the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews some literature on YouTube, online communities, and commenting practices. Section 3 provides a theoretical framework on complimenting. Section 4 outlines work of relevance concerning conflict management and conflict in YouTube communities. Section 5 provides the sequential procedure of the analysis. It is followed by section 6 which covers the results obtained from the quantitative analysis together with the interpretation of the data from a qualitative approach. Ultimately, section 7 concludes the paper with some final remarks and future directions in line with the study.

## 2. Commenting on YouTube

YouTube was launched with the purpose to share content in audiovisual format. Nonetheless, it has grown to be a source of video-based data for entertainment and knowledge-sharing. The frequent interaction between YouTube video-blogger and spectators promotes the development of a sort of community of practice (CofP) following the definition of Wenger (1998), that is: a group of individuals who continuously interact and exchange personal

information. Following the criteria of Holmes and Meyerhoff (1999) about what categorises a CofP, Pihlaja (2012: 33-34) claims that the organisation of YouTube users mirrors entirely a CofP owing to their “shared mutual engagement, joint negotiated enterprise and shared repertoire of negotiable resources”.

On YouTube constant interaction between two parties via the production of videos and comments turns out to be a personal information exchange and a crucial element for the development of a CofP. Personal information exchange allows the negotiation of the values, rules and learning from the interests of the audience. The result of this negotiation is understood as a “conversational contract” (Fraser and Nolen, 1981: 93-4). Thereupon, YouTube comments and their feedback are a rich source of personal information for the YouTube content-creator to (in)directly know his/her spectatorship. Commenting practices may involve many types of interactional acts: compliments, suggestions, etc. Nonetheless, to date most of the literature focuses on conflicted situations or impoliteness (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010). And, little research covers the syntactic structure or functions of other types of speech acts which can be found in YouTube comments. What this paper defends is that some linguistic resources or feedback in comments can perform as evaluative data. It also explores to what extent the syntactic formulae of these linguistic resources might portray the cognitive processes of e-users when eliciting feedback in relation to the YouTube microcelebrity (Marwick, 2015; Riboni 2017a, 2017b; Spyer, 2013).

### **3. Complimenting Behaviour**

Regarding politeness, the speech act of compliment has gained interest in the last three decades. Both compliments and compliments responses are a subfield in politeness and rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2000). Most research is centred on face-to-face interaction (Manes and Wolfson, 1981). Yet with the emergence of online environments, many theorists are addressing their interest into compliments in virtual encounters. The first analyses afford a comprehensive definition of *compliments* (Holmes, 1986: 448; 1988: 446, 1995: 117): “speech act[s] which explicitly or implicitly attributes credit to someone other than the speaker, usually the person addressed, for some 'good' (possession, characteristic, skill etc.) which is positively valued by the speaker and the hearer.” As shown in earlier work, compliments are defined from formulaic syntactic expressions (Manes and Wolfson, 1981; Holmes, 1986). Among others, the function of these face-enhancing acts is to reinforce solidarity from the interlocutors (Manes and Wolfson, 1981) in face-to-face interaction and equally in social networks (Placencia and Lower, 2013). Nonetheless, their patterns and syntactic structures may vary according to many variables such as gender (Holmes, 1988) or culture (Golato, 2005).

Other studies have focused on the classification of compliments based on “personal focus” (Herbert, 1991). This claims a preference for third-person compliments or impersonal compliments in American English. What is completely opposed to what Manes and Wolfson’s (1981) research shows; they demonstrated that second-person compliments were more frequently deployed. Among all structures proposed, Figure 1 displays the most regularly used which were suggested by Manes and Wolfson (1981: 120-121):

Pattern	Formula	Illustrative example
(1)	NP {is/looks} (really) ADJ	Your hair looks nice
(2)	I (really) {love/like} NP	I love your hair
(3)	PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP	This is really a great meal
(4)	You V (a) (really) ADJ NP	You did a good job
(5)	You V (NP) (really) ADV	You really handled that situation well
(6)	You have (a) (really) ADJ NP	You have such beautiful hair
(7)	What (a) ADJ NP!	What a lovely baby you have
(8)	ADJ NP!	Nice game!
(9)	Isn’t NP ADJ!	Isn’t it pretty!

Fig. 1: Main syntactic formulae in compliments and illustrative examples (in Lorenzo-Dus and Izura, 2017: 68-82 from Manes and Wolfson, 1981: 120-121)

Nevertheless, syntactic structures may be slightly modified depending on the context and study. Similarly, the classification of topics addressed in compliments may vary according to the research. For instance, Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez (2013) distinguish appearance, personality and skills/ability. Whilst Lorenzo-Dus and Izura (2017) include ability, performance, personality, possessions, physical appearance and other. Some research has paid attention to semantics, Mane and Wolfson’s corpus (1981) showed a preference for the use of verbs such as *like*, *love* and *admire* as well as descriptive adjectives to address appearance such as *nice*, *good*, *beautiful*, *pretty* and *great*.

In the last years, recent research has demonstrated interest in online social networks such as Facebook (Placencia and Lower, 2013; Placencia *et al.*, 2016) to understand complimenting behaviour as politeness strategies in self-presentation platforms. Social media can be identified as individual cultures (Bedijs *et al.*, 2014) with their own communicative features. Placencia and Lower (2013: 642) found that the nature of the social network or its purpose affects determinants like formality levels in the frequency of some syntactic structures over others. In other words, like in actual cultures, the syntactic formulaicity may have variations according to the medium.

Aside from the formulaicity of compliments, another element of importance is the function of compliments (Yusof *et al.*, 2014: 83). Compliments may have diverse syntactic forms and perform as linguistic positive evaluations. Mostly, they act as enhancing speech acts to give credit to

someone. From this assumption, compliments can be also employed as supportive resources when negative events (arguments, failure, etc.) take place to show solidarity (Manes and Wolfson, 1981). This means that compliments need to be analysed in context to comprehend their functionality and purpose. Also, Bedijs (2014) analyses YouTube comments addressing (non)linguistic content when two parties with different opinions are found in the same contextual situation, and how, aside from differences, compliments are employed as a proof of solidarity to avoid confrontation.

#### **4. Conflict in a YouTube Community**

The multiparty feature of polylogues (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2004; Lewinski, 2011; Lorenzo-Dus *et al.*, 2011; Bou-Franch *et al.*, 2012) characterises the conversational nature of YouTube interactions in comments sections. Despite this, the lack of common ground in online social encounters frequently triggers conflict situations together with a wide range of polarised and hyperbolic linguistic strategies to face confrontation (Garcés-Conejos Blitvich, 2010). E-users have developed various techniques to avoid conflict and misunderstandings such as emoticons, still conflict exists when different opinions emerge. The absence of historical common ground together with anonymous profiles (Herring, 1996; Kiesler *et al.*, 1984) participate in causing conflicted episodes on social media. Although in a YouTube community most commentators are persistent and regularly visit the same channel, others are passers-by or new viewers who do not know the microcelebrity well or how the YouTube community works. This may cause misunderstandings, particularly if those new viewers opt for sharing their negative evaluation or for attacking the content-creator. And, as a result this may disrupt the cohesiveness of the group and cause impoliteness in the polylogue. Thus, in the present study I aim to investigate an online conflict situation in which a common ground has already been formed over the years in a YouTube community around a microcelebrity.

### **5. Methodology**

#### **5.1. Selection process of YouTube data**

The collection of comments was obtained from the official website of YouTube. In fact, comments were downloaded using a YouTube comment scraper<sup>1</sup>. Then, I resorted to alphanumeric codes to identify comments as well as to simplify the quantitative analysis. To select a sample of a conflict in a YouTube community, I proposed some criteria for the selection based on a previous ethnographic pilot study. As understood in this paper, to prove the existence of a followership and community and to be considered YouTube content-creators with celebrity status or microcelebrities, they must have a CofP which implies a historical curriculum on YouTube as well as a consistent

<sup>1</sup> <http://ytcomments.klostermann.ca/>

followership or spectatorship. Thereby, the main criteria for the selection of the content-creator are: (a) having more than eight years of experience producing videos on YouTube, (b) having more than one million subscribers, (c) having more than 100 videos on the site, (d) posting at least once a week; and (e) being an embodied video-blogger<sup>2</sup>.

After selecting the three most subscribed beauty gurus in the UK, I chose the three most viewed videos within the collection of clips per channel. The massive production of comments may help in the detection of a conflict. After going through all videos, a conflict was found in the channel of Samantha Maria <https://www.youtube.com/user/beautycrush>, who is a British YouTube beauty and how-to content-creator. The comments were obtained from the YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuxzYeyBwD4> *The Domestic Abuse*. She has been posting videos for more than nine years and has published more than 700 videos since she joined YouTube in 2009. Now, Samantha has more than 1.800.000 subscribers and 179.000.000 views in her main channel.

## 5.2. Scenario of the conflicted event

The conflicted event is triggered when Samantha decides to publish a video on YouTube as a response to another video which was previously posted on the same platform, but later deleted. In the video, Samantha decides to talk about her personal experience as a victim of a domestic abuse. The video has obtained a duration of 13,39 minutes, it was released on 26 August 2014 and it got more than 1,356,000 views. After making the video public, the community of Samantha was divided in two groups. Some believe her story whereas others do not believe her as well as they do not agree with sharing personal experiences of that nature on YouTube. The spectators knew the two individuals involved in the conflict: Samantha and her ex-partner. The latter was accused of domestic abuse and he was a frequent guest in the videos of Samantha. Thus, he was known by the followership and CofP of Samantha.

## 5.3. Procedure

The analysis involves three main phases: prephase or observational phase; first phase and quantitative analysis; and, second phase and qualitative analysis.

### 5.3.1. Prephase: Observational phase

Following an ethnographic approach, here I observe the data in its raw status and in its natural scenario. Then, I analyse the conflict and the different types of comments delivered and their linguistic content. The focus of attention is comments with positive or supportive evaluations. In this phase, I select an

<sup>2</sup> An embodied video-blogger makes reference to content-creators who appear in their own videos.

amount of 100 comments from unique users to find syntactic patterns with the purpose of identifying the formulaic structures which are more frequently used.

### 5.3.2. First phase: Examination of the frequency of data

In this phase, I examine all compliments found in the corpus of 100 comments, which became a total amount of 197 compliments from various users. The purpose is to identify the formula of each compliment. In addition to analysing the data, this phase helps in the quantification of each syntactic pattern of compliments to recognise their frequency.

Research focused on compliments has deployed combined procedures to examine the structure of compliments and, consequently, their functions in context. Halliday’s systemic functional linguistics (2003) is the most frequently employed by linguists to detect patterns in syntactic formulae. Thus, as followed in previous studies on the syntax of compliments (Maíz-Arévalo and García-Gómez, 2013), I used previous structures as Figure 2 illustrates. They were later adapted to the given context with some examples from the corpus:

Nr.	Formula	Example
	You {are/look} (intensifier) (a)	
(1)	(ADJ) NP	<i>you truly are a strong person.</i>
(2)	You {are/look} (really) ADJ	<i>you’re gr8</i>
(3)	You V (NP/ADV)	<i>Sam, you did the right thing!</i>
(4)	You have (a) (really) ADJ NP	<i>You had the strength to love yourself.</i>
(5)	I (really) {love/like} NP	<i>I admire your strength</i> <i>I have so much respect for your Sammi and</i>
(6)	I V (intensifier) NP	<i>Captain Riley &lt;3</i>
(7)	I {be} ADJ you {be/V}	<i>Im glad you are happy now</i>
(8)	it is ADJ (to)	<i>It’s so brave to even post this video.</i>
(9)	ADJ (NP) PP	<i>good for you for telling the truth</i>
(10)	NP	<i>such an inspiration</i>
(11)	Other	

*Fig. 2: Taxonomy of types of compliments in conflict situation*

For the identification of topics, I follow the classification provided by Lorenzo-Dus and Izura (2017) which consists of ability, performance, personality, possessions and physical appearance. And, I opted for omitting the option *other*.

### 5.3.3. Second phase: Linguistic examination and variability

In the second phase, I aim to understand the functionality of the different formulae and the interpretation of the data obtained in the quantitative information. The goal is to combine all variables mentioned in the first phase to provide knowledge regarding the functions of compliments, and how different formulae can have several functions.

## 6. Results and discussion

After the examination of compliments and their structure, the formulaic structure which stands out is *you {are/look} (really) ADJ* followed by *you {are/look} (intensifier) (a) (ADJ) NP (for)*. Out of the 197 compliments analysed 52% (29% and 23% respectively) of compliments are characterised by you-sentences. In fact, both syntactic structures are relatively similar. They centre on the YouTube content-creator in the online confrontation. Opposed to what studies on compliments have shown so far (Manes and Wolfson, 1981), this research demonstrates that compliments on *appearance* are not always the most frequently employed. In this case, the above-mentioned formulae are addressing mostly *personality* traits. Additionally, another pattern which is chosen systematically is based on I-sentences. Thus, *I (really) {love/like} NP, I {be} ADJ you {be/V}* and followed by *other* implicit or alternative structures are the following preferred syntactic formulae. The two first structures are first-person utterances which focus their attention on the complimenter. As Figure 3 depicts, they are mostly utilised for all topics except for *appearance*, which is clearly the least addressed in this type of formulae. In the case of other structures, they are particularly used to compliment *performance*. This might be related to the fact that the focus and trigger of the video is her performance toward a controversial topic. Although Samantha does not ask for support or acknowledgement, her followers may assume that supporting her is the expected reaction. This also explains that the main topic in comments is based on the central theme addressed in the video. The fifth preferred option to support Samantha (9%) is using more complex structures which are found in the option *other*. Usually her followership exalts her *personality* by using indirect mechanisms as in this example: *it takes a lot of courage to voice out your inner pain and the experiences that you said that you went through*. The following syntactic formulae *you have (a) (really) ADJ NP, ADJ (NP) (PP)* and *you V (NP/ADV)* are utilised between 4-5% of the cases. The pattern *you have (a) (really) ADJ NP* regularly addresses *possessions*. While the other two structures praise *performance*. Indeed, they resort to structures which contain adjectives to assess her performance. Other formulae which are also employed, but less frequently, are *it is ADJ (to), I V (intensifier) NP* and *NP*. They are similarly distributed in all topics.

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Formula	Ap <sup>3</sup>	Po	Per	Pef	Ab	To	%
I {be} ADJ you {be/V}	0	6	4	6	2	18	9%
I (really) {love/like} NP	2	1	5	5	9	22	11%
I V (intensifier) NP	0	1	1	0	0	2	1%
You {are/look} (intensifier) (a) (ADJ) NP (for)	3	1	32	6	4	46	23%
You {are/look} (really) ADJ	8	5	31	1	12	57	29%
You have (a) (really) ADJ NP	0	5	3	0	1	9	5%
You V (NP/ADV)	0	0	2	5	1	8	4%
ADJ (NP) (PP)	0	0	1	5	4	10	5%
it is ADJ (to)	0	2	1	2	1	6	3%
NP	0	1	0	0	1	2	1%
Other	0	2	10	3	2	17	9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>197</b>	
<b>%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>12%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>19%</b>		

*Fig. 3: Frequency of syntactic formulae in compliments*

With respect to the topics addressed in these compliments, *personality* is the favourite by the commentators. As mentioned previously, this might be associated to the context. In fact, 46% of compliments covers the way she is and behaves. The subsequent two preferred topics are *ability* and *performance* which may bear some similarity. Both involve 19% and 17% of comments respectively. *Personality*, *ability* and *performance* refer to Samantha’s characteristic attributes that only the community knows because of their common history. Curiously, *possessions* (12%) and *appearance* (7%) are the attributes least frequently praised. When showing admiration for her beauty, commentators deploy one of the most basic explicit structures: *You {are/look} (really) ADJ*. Indeed, complimenters state repeatedly the phrase “you are beautiful”. The low rate of attention toward physical appearance may point out that, under the given circumstances, commentators resort to the most pertinent linguistic strategies to accentuate that the YouTube video-blogger is the victim in the conflict as well as to empower her persona. This would justify the high frequency of other formulae together with of other complimenting topics. Due to the context, complimenting her appearance might be worthless.

### 6.1. Topic-based syntactical structures

Both *performance* and *ability* are among the favoured topics when complimenting. When addressing *performance*, commentators resort to the whole array of choices provided. Indeed, no specific syntactic structure stands out in Figure 4.

<sup>3</sup> The abbreviations used in Figure 3 refer to: Ap – *appearance*; Po – *possession*; Per – *personality*; Pef – *performance*; Ab – *ability* and To – *total*

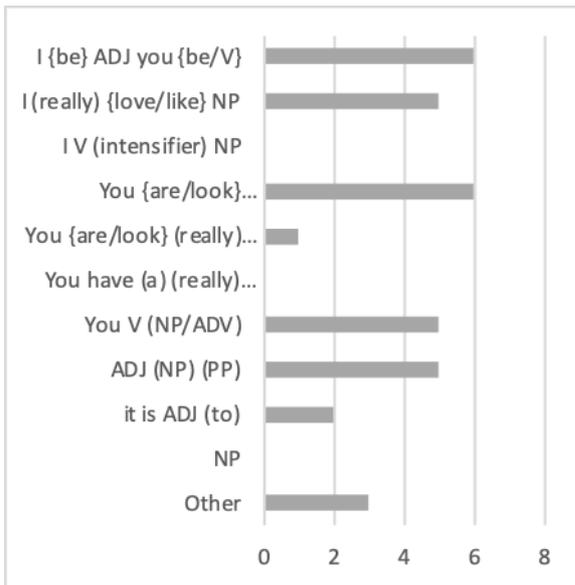


Fig. 4: Formulae in complimenting performance

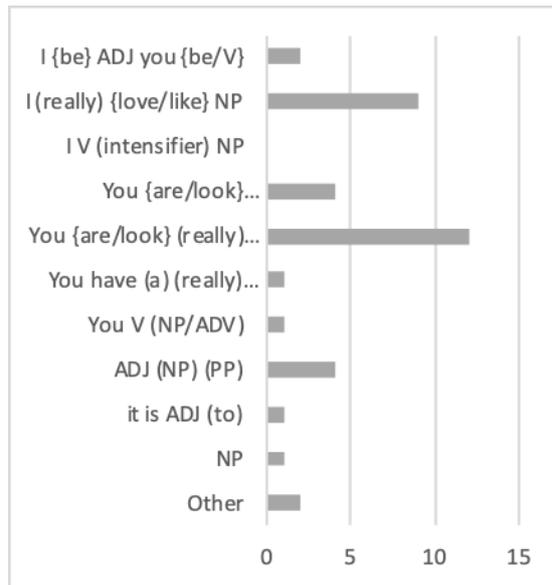


Fig. 5: Formulae in complimenting ability

Clearly, performance-based complimenting structures such as *You are*, *I V* or *NP* are not used evenly. Considering the addressed topic, this exclusion is reasonable. Commentators go for first-person sentences so as to express arguments by emphasising their historical and relational experience with the content-creator. When praising *abilities/skills*, commentators opt for two specific structures: *You {are/look} (really) ADJ* and *I (really) {love/like} NP*. They may make use of the former structure with the purpose of designating the skills with adjectives. Likewise, these followers use relational expressions so as to exalt the ability they like about the victim. First-person statements are included as a way to state that they share a background and relation with her. Concerning complimenting behaviour dealing with *possession*, the quintessential formula is undoubtedly *You have (a) (really) ADJ NP*. This is not the most frequently used; it is indeed *I {be} ADJ you {be/V}*. Either commentators formulate compliments according to complex structures which focus on their own feelings regarding what the YouTube content-creator own. Or they express directly what they own by means of the former structure (*You have (a) (really) ADJ NP*).

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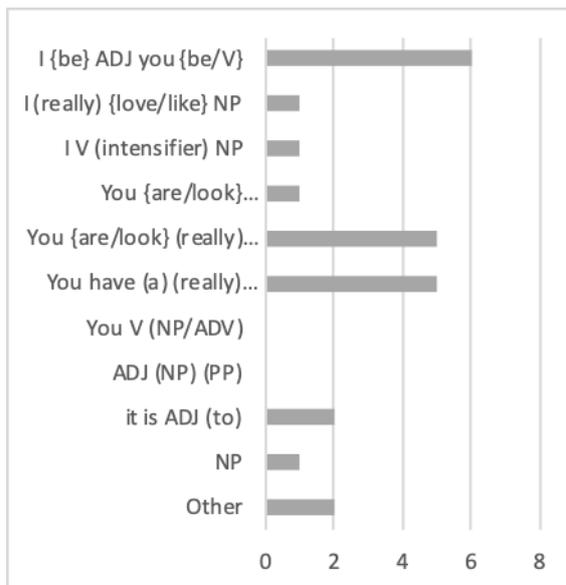


Fig. 6: Formulae in complimenting possession

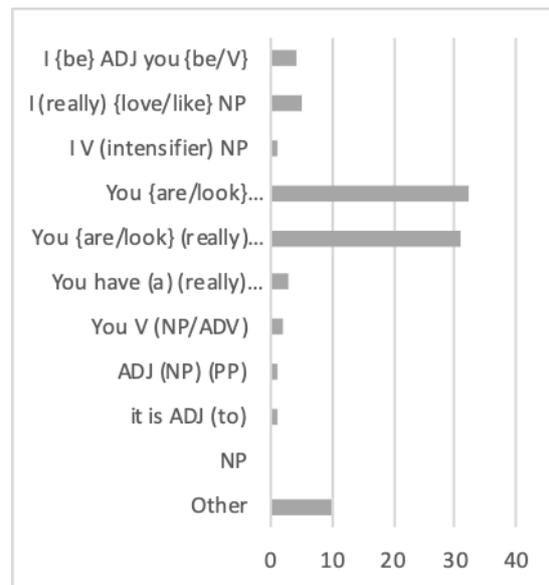


Fig. 7: Formulae in complimenting personality

In this situated event, the favourite complimented topic is *personality*. There is a preference for you-sentences. In fact, commentators resort to explicit syntactic structures to address her personality traits. This may be a way to enhance her personality over any other attributes to prove that they really know her.

## 6.2. In-comment examples of compliments

As shown in example (1), the *you are/look ADJ* compliment is incorporated as a truth and argumentative resource to support the online microcelebrity. The compliment opens the comment, which may be interpreted as a strategic way to show alignment with the YouTube content-creator from the very beginning. Furthermore, the commentator adds *I support you all the way*. This utterance confirms the supportive role of the compliment in the conflict. Likewise, the commentator also reports *I have so much respect for you for posting this!!* In the collected corpus, this statement was identified as a compliment of type *I V (intensifier) NP* and as an indirect way to say *I respect you*. One can identify how the you-pronoun statement serves as a direct way to pay tribute to the video-blogger. This is followed by a first-pronoun sentence to stand out their relation.

- (1) *You’re amazing Sam! I support you all the way, I have so much respect for you for posting this!! Stay strong <3 <3 <3 (C18)*
- (2) *You’re a strong person, Sam. I admire your strength and courage, I just can’t imagine how difficult it was to tell this and deal with what you have gone through. Keep your head up and enjoy all the good that is happening to you! (C3)*

It occurs similarly in example (2). Again, the comment is started with one of the preferred formulae: *you (are/look} (intensifier) (a) (ADJ) NP*. In comments (1) and (2) one can find the same syntactic pattern as well as the same in-comment structure: in the first two utterances of the examples *You {are/look} (really) ADJ* is followed by *I V (intensifier) NP*. Through the combination of both formulae complimenters demonstrate both relational and affective processes to praise the complimentee. In this way, they show their perception of the target. They tend to first use second-person structures such as *you are/look ADJ* as in the first example: *You're amazing Sam!* (1) and *You're a strong person, Sam.* (2). Once said, they display their affection through declaratives such as *I admire your strength and courage,* (2) and *I have so much respect for you for posting this!!* (1). These declaratives reinforce the compliments with second-person structure. That is, in the first two patterns, second-person sentences as relational evaluative mechanisms are used in the supportive and argumentative section of the text. Adjectives mean the description and enhancement of her personality traits.

- (3) Hey Sammi I just want to say that I think *you're so BRAVE* for going through that and getting out of that relationship and then going through all of the shit people say online. I can't imagine how hard it is. And I think this being your channel, you have every right to make this video and people can say what they want (people love to gossip and make accusations), but who knows whether it's really right or wrong...*from what little I see of you through youtube you seem like a nice, genuine person.* I just think *you're gr8* and I'm sorry this crap won't leave you alone I guess xxx (C2)

Example (3) summarises this observation from a perception-oriented viewpoint. The commentator claims explicitly *from what little I see of you through youtube*, in this way the user wants to prove his/her brief historical relation. Once this is revealed, the complimenter goes on with perception-based statements by choosing the verb *seem*. By doing so, the commentator exposes personality traits with the function of argumentative and supportive data such as *you seem like a nice, genuine person* in the conflict event. Other syntactic structures found in the same comment are *you're so BRAVE* and *you're gr8<sup>4</sup>*, both introduced by the opinion phrase *I think*. Before and after voicing their relation, the commentator uses opinion markers together with the beliefs the person has got about her.

In the examples below, one can recognise other alternatives in complimenting practice. Example (4) may seem a commentary instead because

<sup>4</sup> Gr8 refers to *great*

of the length. All speech acts may perform as arguments which aim to enhance the image of the YouTuber. First, the follower starts the comment by stating their historical relation when mentioning *I’ve been watching your videos for so long*. Then, with the combination of an explicit and implicit compliment, praise is expressed under the statements of *You glow now. There’s something radiant about you [now] that maybe wasn’t as intense before*. In a way, the length of the comment may indicate the use of creative mechanisms to praise the persona of the video-blogger. Respectively, both compliments allude to the *possession* of intangible attributes by means of *glow* and *radiance*. Later on, the commentator addresses the performance by point it out as *the bravest thing ever*. This speech act supports the main idea defended. Eventually, the message is concluded with the enhancement of her persona by referring to her as an *inspiration*.

- (4) I’ve been watching your videos for so long, Sammi, and you can spot the difference right away. *You glow now. There’s something radiant about you [now] that maybe wasn’t as intense before*. It’s terrible that you have to sit in front of the camera to defend yourself, but *it’s the bravest thing ever*. Don’t listen to any of those ignorant people trying to stir up controversy for the sake of some attention. [...] I hope you can continue finding courage to keep moving forward, to rise every day, and keep your head held up high. *You’re an inspiration before and after this.*  
<3 (C53)
- (5) *You’re a very strong woman. I bet your Mum is extremely proud of you.*xx (C69)
- (6) *This was really brave, well done* xx (C70)

Yet, implicit comments are also found in shorter comments such as in example (5): *I bet your Mum is extremely proud of you*. And other less common explicit syntactic patterns such as in example (6), *this*-utterance and *ADJ (NP) (PP)* for the acknowledgement of her performance. In the three examples above (4), (5) and (6), comments are completed with the inclusion of greetings as closing utterances with ASCII codification *i.e.* <3 or abbreviations *i.e.* xx. In this way, loyal users can show their membership toward the group and microcelebrity.

## **7. Summary and final remarks**

To conclude, I have offered a preliminary description of complimenting behaviour as supportive resources in a conflict in a YouTube polylogue. In this study compliments are employed as linguistic mechanisms to enhance the value of the offended YouTube content-creator and victim of the situational

event. Likewise, these mechanisms are deployed to indirectly attack the offenders and enhance the image of the offended as well as to show solidarity and support. The favourite formulaic structures aim to defend their online celebrity and their historical and relational common ground. Some additional findings are that the in-comment positioning of comments reveals how commentators cognitively disclose and organise their thoughts in this type of situations. Nonetheless, this does not claim that those who are critical of the post are not part of the community of practice. Instead, it pays attention to the response from the audience and to what extent they focus on the enhancement their common nexus and bond when disagreement occurs. This study has also proven that in complimenting practices the choice of a topic depends on the context. Likewise, the variability of syntactic patterns is subject to the situated communicative act. More research is still required to better comprehend the features and functions of compliments, more specifically in online contexts. What looks like mere arbitrariness in expressing good evaluations finds its grounds in multiple determinants such as the context itself. This study, for example, does not consider gender, age or culture, or even time. Nonetheless, they could be considered in future studies as well as other determinants such as the length of the comment or in-comment position of the compliment.

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