

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

Pragmatics is a branch of linguistics that studies meaning in relation to language use and context. It focuses on how speakers convey intended meanings and how listeners interpret those meanings beyond the literal meanings of words and sentences (Yule, 1996). More comprehensively, Huang (2014) defines pragmatics as the systematic study of meaning that depends on language use, encompassing major areas such as implicature, presupposition, speech acts, deixis, and reference. This definition emphasizes that meaning is not determined solely by linguistic forms but also by the context in which language is used. Pragmatics also examines the functions of language in communication, including how speakers achieve particular communicative goals and how meaning is shaped through sociocultural interaction (Cutting & Fordyce, 2021), except when the speaker suffers from neurotic disorders (Bara, 2011). Since meaning cannot be separated from the circumstances in which communication occurs, context is considered a fundamental element in pragmatic studies because it influences how utterances are produced and interpreted (Jiangli, 2021). Therefore, pragmatics can be understood as the study of how meaning is communicated, interpreted, and negotiated through language use within specific contextual, social, and cognitive environments. As communication involves not only conveying information but also performing actions through

language, speech act theory has become one of the central areas of pragmatic inquiry.

One of the key areas in pragmatics is speech act theory, which explains how language is used to perform actions in communication. Speech act theory was first introduced by the British philosopher John Austin and was later developed by John Searle, who explained that utterances are not merely used to convey information but also to perform actions through language (Félix-Brasdefer, 2024). Austin proposed that every utterance may involve three dimensions of action, namely locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts, while Searle further refined the theory and emphasized its role in everyday communication (Félix-Brasdefer, 2024). Searle (1976) states that speech acts are the basic units of human linguistic communication because speakers do not merely produce utterances to convey information but also to perform particular actions and express specific intentions. He categorizes speech acts into five major types, namely representatives (or assertives), directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations, each serving different communicative functions. Similarly, Bach (2006) argues that speech acts can be classified according to the attitudes expressed by speakers and the responses intended from hearers. Through speech acts, speakers can make statements, requests, promises, apologies, compliments, and various other communicative acts that reflect their attitudes and purposes in interaction. Therefore, speech act theory provides an important framework for understanding how speakers use language to perform

actions, express intentions, and achieve communicative goals in social interaction.

While speech acts serve various communicative functions, expressive speech acts are particularly significant because they reveal the speaker's feelings, attitudes, and emotional responses. Expressive speech acts are closely related to the ways language is used to express feelings, attitudes, and interpersonal relations in communication. Ogiermann & Bella (2021) highlight that expressive speech acts are reflected in everyday interactions, especially in the expression of emotions such as greetings, thanks, apologies, and wishes. A similar observation was reported by Ngasini et al. (2021), who analyzed expressive speech acts in *The Ellen Show* interview with Billie Eilish and identified six categories of expressive speech acts, namely apologizing, thanking, congratulating, greeting, wishing, and attitudes. Among these, congratulating emerged as the most dominant type, indicating that expressive speech acts play a central role in creating positive and supportive interaction between speakers. Among the various types of expressive speech acts, compliments are recognized as a means of expressing approval, appreciation, and admiration toward others. Searle & Vanderveken (1985) classify compliments as expressive speech acts used to convey the speaker's positive evaluation of the hearer. In a similar line, Komorowska & Ohrimovich (2018) define compliments as a speech act performed to influence the recipient positively by expressing admiration toward personal qualities, appearance, behavior, or abilities, which aims to create a

favorable reaction and strengthen interpersonal relations. Furthermore, Muzafarovna (2022) explains that compliments as speech acts function as a form of positive evaluation that can build solidarity, maintain social bonds, and create a pleasant atmosphere in communication, although they may vary in terms of sincerity and communicative purpose. Therefore, expressive speech acts such as compliments play an important role in communication because they serve not only to express positive evaluation and emotions, but also to maintain and develop social relationships between speakers and hearers. This makes compliments one of the most frequently realized forms of expressive speech acts in daily communication.

As one of the most common forms of expressive speech acts, compliments are used to express a speaker's positive evaluation, admiration, or approval toward another person. In social interaction, compliments perform important pragmatic functions by expressing positive attitudes, creating a friendly atmosphere, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and maintaining social harmony. Their interpretation is highly dependent on context, sociocultural norms, and the communicative situation, making compliments a significant object of pragmatic investigation (Nizamova, 2025). Consequently, compliments have attracted considerable attention in pragmatic studies because of their multifunctional role in everyday communication. To better understand how compliments are realized in interaction, Holmes (1986) classifies compliment topics into four major categories based on what is being praised, namely appearance, ability, possession, and character. These categories demonstrate that compliments

are not randomly produced but systematically directed toward particular aspects of the hearer, reflecting the speaker's intention to express appreciation and maintain social harmony. Building on Holmes' framework, Yuliyani (2016) compared complimenting behaviours between Australian English and Indonesian speakers and found that ability was the most frequently preferred compliment topic in both groups, although some gender differences appeared in the use of compliment strategies. Similarly, Şakırgil & Çubukçu (2013) investigated compliment speech events in English and Turkish by examining both compliment topics and compliment formulas. Their study revealed that compliments in both languages were highly formulaic and exhibited both similarities and differences in their structural patterns, indicating that compliment production reflects speakers' pragmatic competence. These previous studies suggest that compliments are influenced not only by sociocultural factors but also by systematic linguistic patterns. Therefore, beyond identifying what is being complimented, it is equally important to examine how compliments are linguistically constructed, particularly in terms of their syntactic forms.

Equally important is the syntactic realization of compliments, as the structure of an utterance can influence how it is interpreted. Rather than being randomly constructed, compliments often follow established syntactic patterns that enhance their clarity and communicative effectiveness. In their seminal study on compliments in American English, Manes & Wolfson (1981) identified several recurrent syntactic patterns, including "*NP is/looks (intensifier) ADJ*," "*I (really) like/love NP*," and "*PRO is (really) ADJ*." These patterns

demonstrate that compliments are highly formulaic and serve as conventional linguistic structures for expressing positive evaluation in everyday interaction. Supporting this view, Indah & Rifana (2018) examined the syntactic patterns of compliments on the topic of skill or ability among Instagram users using Manes & Wolfson's (1981) framework. Their findings revealed that compliments were generally short and characterized by minimal syntactic patterns, with adjectives occurring more frequently than verbs. The study also showed that compliment expressions in online interactions consistently followed systematic linguistic structures despite being produced in digital communication. Similarly, Sierra Reinoso (2024) analyzed compliments in American and British late shows to investigate their syntactic patterns, pragmatic intentions, and suprasegmental features. The findings demonstrated that compliments employed more varied syntactic patterns than those identified in previous studies. The study also revealed that some compliments simultaneously performed additional speech acts besides expressing praise, indicating that compliment structures are pragmatically multifunctional and may vary depending on the communicative context. In another context, Deveci et al. (2023) found that in academic settings, the "*You + Verb + NP*" pattern was the most frequently used structure for expressing appreciation. This finding suggests that while compliments are expressed across different communicative settings, speakers tend to rely on particular syntactic patterns that have become conventional within their discourse communities. Furthermore, Ahmed et al. (2022) explain that per-

formative verbs contribute to determining the illocutionary force of an utterance, while compliment speech acts function to express praise and facilitate social interaction. Their study highlights that the choice of linguistic structure is closely related to the speaker's communicative intention and the pragmatic function of the utterance. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that compliments exhibit systematic syntactic patterns while remaining sensitive to variations in communicative contexts and interactional purposes. Therefore, examining the syntactic patterns of compliments in America's Got Talent and Britain's Got Talent is expected to provide further insights into how judges formulate positive evaluations in televised talent competitions.

A compelling context in which compliments can be observed is talent shows, particularly reality talent shows where spontaneous interactions frequently occur. Two prominent examples are America's Got Talent (AGT) and Britain's Got Talent (BGT), internationally recognized competitions featuring diverse performers and unscripted exchanges between judges and contestants. Both programs are part of the globally successful Got Talent franchise, which has been recognized as the most successful reality television format worldwide (Guinness World Records, 2014). As influential media platforms with large audiences, AGT and BGT provide rich opportunities for examining naturally occurring communication. Within these interactions, judges frequently produce compliments that not only express praise but also provide emotional support and public recognition. Previous research has shown that compliments in talent

show discourse function as expressive speech acts that foster relational closeness and shape audience perceptions (Wedawati & Ayomi, 2024). These findings suggest that talent shows are not merely platforms for evaluating performances but also spaces where interpersonal meaning is constructed through language. Although AGT and BGT share a similar format, they may reflect different cultural and interactional styles in delivering compliments. Therefore, both programs offer valuable and authentic data for analyzing the realization and structure of complimenting speech acts in talent show discourse.

Several studies have demonstrated that compliment speech acts in talent shows and social media contexts are influenced by gender, cultural norms, linguistic strategies, syntactic structures, and interactional settings. Hanifah & Marlina (2022) reported that judges' compliments in *America's Got Talent* vary based on gender, topic, and syntactic structure, with male judges giving more compliments on performance while female judges focus more on appearance and show different syntactic tendencies. Charoenroop (2021) revealed that Simon Cowell's compliments in *America's Got Talent* and *Britain's Got Talent* are realized through both explicit and implicit strategies, with the American context tending to employ more explicit forms, whereas the British context shows greater indirectness, reflecting cross-cultural pragmatic variation. Similarly, Keshavarz et al. (2020) investigated compliments and compliment responses in *America's Got Talent* 2017. Their findings revealed that ability was the most frequently occurring compliment topic, explicit compliments were the

dominant compliment strategy employed by the judges and the host, and appreciation tokens, particularly the expression "*thank you*," were the most common compliment responses produced by the contestants. Dwiarman & Ariatmi (2024) emphasized that compliment functions in *America's Got Talent* comment sections include admiration, evaluation, encouragement, and rapport-building, with positive evaluation being the most dominant function among audience responses. ALsaqr & Mahzari (2025) found that Instagram users employ diverse syntactic patterns and compliment strategies influenced by gender, cultural expressions, and religious language, with adjectives and evaluative expressions being the most frequently used forms. Likewise, Fajri & Sudarwati (2024) compared compliment strategies and syntactic patterns in celebrity Instagram and TikTok comments using Ye's theory and Manes & Wolfson's (1981) framework. Their findings indicated that direct compliments were predominantly used on both platforms and identified seven recurrent syntactic patterns of compliments. The study further revealed that the *ADJ NP!* pattern was more frequently used on Instagram, whereas the *NP is/looks (really) ADJ* pattern appeared more frequently on TikTok, demonstrating that compliment realization varies according to the characteristics of different social media platforms. Meanwhile, Anindita (2025) highlighted that gender influences compliment strategies and functions in English and Indonesian talent show contexts, where direct strategies dominate Indonesian data while English shows greater variation, and compliment functions such as admiration and encouragement re-

main consistently dominant across both languages. Overall, these studies confirm that compliments in mediated interactions are shaped by gender, compliment topics, strategy choice, syntactic structure, compliment responses, and socio-cultural context.

To address this gap, the present study aims to analyze both the topics of compliments delivered by judges in America's Got Talent (AGT) and Britain's Got Talent (BGT) and the syntactic structures through which they are expressed. By combining semantic and syntactic perspectives, as well as incorporating a comparative approach, the research seeks to provide a more comprehensive account of how compliments operate in public and performative discourse across similar talent show contexts. Furthermore, the study contributes to broader discussions in pragmatics and syntax by highlighting how linguistic forms are strategically employed to achieve specific communicative goals in different yet related settings. Accordingly, this research aims to identify the topics of compliments used in the judges' comments in America's Got Talent and Britain's Got Talent, to analyze the syntactic structures employed to express those compliments, and to compare the similarities and differences of complimenting speech acts between the two shows.

B. Research Focus

This study focuses on the complimenting utterances delivered by judges in America's Got Talent (AGT) and Britain's Got Talent (BGT). The analysis focuses on the topics of compliments and the syntactic structures employed in expressing them, while comparing their use across the two talent shows.

C. Research Problems

The research questions of this study are formulated as follows:

1. What topics of compliments are used by the judges in America's Got Talent (AGT) and Britain's Got Talent (BGT)?
2. What syntactic structures are employed by the judges in expressing compliments in America's Got Talent (AGT) and Britain's Got Talent (BGT)?

D. Purpose of the Study

The purposes of this study are:

1. To identify and classify the topics of compliments used by the judges in America's Got Talent (AGT) and Britain's Got Talent (BGT).
2. To analyze the syntactic structures employed in expressing compliments in the judges' utterances in America's Got Talent and Britain's Got Talent.

E. Significance of the Study

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it adds to the body of knowledge in pragmatics, particularly in understanding expressive speech acts such as compliments within talent show discourse. It also contributes to syntactic studies by illustrating how grammatical structures shape pragmatic meaning. Furthermore, by incorporating a comparative analysis between America's Got Talent (AGT) and Britain's Got Talent (BGT), this study provides insights into how complimenting speech acts vary across similar yet distinct interactional contexts.

Practically, the findings may serve as a reference for future researchers interested in complimenting strategies in public communication and assist educators, public speakers, or talent show judges in crafting more effective and socially appropriate praise in comparable communicative settings.

F. Definition of Operational Keyterms

1. Pragmatics: A branch of linguistics that studies the meaning of utterances in context.
2. Speech Act: A communicative act performed through language, including informing, requesting, promising, or complimenting.
3. Expressive Speech Act: A type of speech act that expresses the speaker's psychological state or attitude toward a situation, including praise.
4. Complimenting: A positive utterance used to express admiration or appreciation of someone's attributes, performance, or appearance.
5. Syntactic Structure: The grammatical arrangement of elements in a sentence, particularly relevant here in constructing complimenting utterances.