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The Psychopragmatics of Compliment Speech Acts in Teacher Student Classroom Interaction

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the psychopragmatic aspects of compliment speech acts in teacher–student interactions among Grade VIII students at SMP Nizamia Andalusia, Jakarta. The research aims to identify the forms and functions of compliments and to analyze their perlocutionary effects within classroom communication. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through direct observation and analysis of naturally occurring utterances during classroom interactions from July to September 2025. The findings indicate four types of compliment speech acts: ability, personality, possession, and appearance, with ability-based compliments appearing most frequently. The dominant communicative function identified is positive evaluation, followed by expressions of solidarity, mild verbal teasing in humorous contexts, and expressions of admiration. From a psychopragmatic perspective, compliments serve not only as linguistic evaluations but also as psychological reinforcement that fosters positive emotions and interpersonal harmony. The perlocutionary effects include increased self-confidence, stronger learning motivation, and the development of social values such as empathy and cooperation. This study contributes to psychopragmatic scholarship and offers practical implications for teachers in developing effective and supportive classroom communication strategies.

1. Introduction

Human communication is a fundamental aspect of social life, allowing individuals to convey ideas, emotions, intentions, and social meanings. Communication can be expressed through verbal and non-verbal forms. In educational settings, especially in classroom interactions, verbal communication plays a crucial role in shaping the relationship between teachers and students. Effective classroom communication not only facilitates knowledge transfer but also builds trust, motivation, and emotional security, creating a supportive learning environment (Yanti, 2021). When humans

use language, they are not only producing utterances but also performing actions through them. This concept is explained in speech act theory introduced by Austin and further developed by Searle, which distinguishes locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. One expressive speech act that frequently occurs in classroom interaction is praise (Yanti, 2021). Praise reflects the speaker's psychological attitude toward the listener and is commonly used by teachers to appreciate students' efforts, reinforce positive behavior, and increase motivation and self-confidence. However, the effectiveness of praise depends not only on its linguistic form but also on psychological conditions, cultural norms, and interpersonal relationships (Fatma, 2020).

Psychopragmatics, an interdisciplinary approach combining psychology and pragmatics, analyzes how psychological factors influence language use and interpretation. From this perspective, praise is not merely a linguistic expression of appreciation but also a psychological tool that can shape students' self-perception and learning behavior. In Indonesian culture, where politeness and social harmony are highly valued, compliments are often conveyed indirectly, especially in formal settings such as schools (Fatma, 2020). This cultural dimension makes classroom praise an important subject of study. Several previous studies have examined psychopragmatics and speech acts in various contexts, such as media discourse, family interaction, advertising, and film (El-Dakhs, 2021; Keshavarz et al., 2020; Sari, 2023). However, most were conducted outside formal classroom settings or focused on different types of speech acts. Research specifically addressing praise speech acts within teacher–student interaction at the junior high school level remains limited. Bibliometric mapping using VosViewer also indicates that psychopragmatic studies on classroom praise are still underexplored.

Given this gap, this study seeks to analyze the psychopragmatic features of praise speech acts in teacher–student classroom interaction at SMP Nizamia Andalusia Jakarta. This study adopts Holmes' classification of compliment topics, including praise on possession, ability, physical appearance, personality, and quality, and focuses particularly on the perlocutionary effects of praise (Dayter, 2021). Therefore, the objective of this research is to describe the forms of psychopragmatic praise speech acts used by teachers and to analyze their perlocutionary effects on eighth-grade students at SMP Nizamia Andalusia, Jakarta.

2. Methodology

Instruments

This study employed three primary instruments to ensure that the research procedures could be replicated accurately. First, a digital audio recorder with a minimum sampling rate of 44.1 kHz was used to capture natural classroom interaction without the researcher's physical presence, allowing the data to reflect authentic teacher–student communication. Second, structured observation guidelines were prepared to direct the identification of relevant complimenting utterances, focusing on contextual cues such as participant roles, instructional

setting, and interactional sequences. Finally, semi-structured interview protocols were utilized to clarify ambiguous utterances identified during transcription, enabling deeper understanding of psychological and pragmatic intentions within the compliments.

Data Collections

Data were collected at SMP Nizamia Andalusia, East Jakarta, involving one Indonesian language teacher and twenty students from Class VIII.E during the period of July to September 2025. Table 1 shows the participants characteristics.

Table 1. Participant Characteristics

No.	Class	Number of Students	Indonesian Language Teacher
1	VIII E	20 students	1 teachers

The teacher operated the audio recorder during multiple classroom sessions, ensuring that the natural flow of interaction was preserved. The collected recordings captured instructional dialogue, spontaneous exchanges, questioning sequences, and peer interactions. As part of the non-participatory observation design, the researcher later reviewed the recordings through the “simak–sadap” technique, listening repeatedly to identify and classify complimenting acts. Supplementary classroom documents such as teacher evaluations and student reflection notes were also collected to enhance contextual interpretation of how praise functioned within the learning environment. Clarification interviews were conducted after data collection to verify specific utterances that required deeper explanation.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed a descriptive qualitative approach, integrating thematic analysis and psychopragmatic interpretation. All recordings were transcribed verbatim, including speaker markers, pauses, and relevant contextual notes. The transcripts were then coded using predetermined categories related to psychopragmatics, such as types of compliments, communicative functions, contextual background, and associated psychological responses. These coded segments were subsequently grouped into broader themes to identify recurring patterns in how compliments were delivered and interpreted by students.

Psychopragmatic interpretation was applied to examine intentions, interpersonal meaning, emotional influence, and the social force embedded within each complimenting act. Triangulation was conducted by cross-referencing audio data, interview responses, and classroom documents to strengthen the reliability of the findings. Prolonged engagement and repeated listening were carried out to ensure the accuracy of interpretations. The full coding scheme used in this study is summarized in Table 2, which outlines the analytical categories applied to classify all complimenting speech acts.

Table 2. Psychopragmatic Analysis Table of Complimenting Speech Acts

No.	Context (Situation & Participants)	Utterance Type	Function	Psychosocial Aspect	Psychopragmatic Interpretation
1					
2					
3					
4					

Notes :

Type of Compliments :

1 = Personality

2 = Ability

3 = Appearance

4 = Possession

Function of Compliments :

1 = Expressing solidarity

2 = Expressing positive evaluation

3 = Expressing mild verbal teasing

4 = Expressing envy/admiration

Research Procedure

The research procedure followed a systematic sequence beginning with the preparation of instruments, followed by in-class audio recording, transcription, coding, thematic analysis, triangulation, and final interpretation. The steps were designed to ensure that each stage could be replicated by future researchers wishing to study similar psychopragmatic phenomena. The flow of the procedure highlights the transition from raw audio data to interpretive findings grounded in linguistic and psychological analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study along with an integrated discussion, in accordance with the research objectives and formulated problems. Results are displayed using tables, which serve as the primary conveyors of quantitative information, while the narrative focuses on the interpretation, significance, and implications of the findings rather than repeating numerical data. The results and discussion are arranged together to highlight the process of meaning-making behind the findings and to illustrate how they contribute to the academic understanding of psychopragmatic complimenting strategies in educational communication settings.

The data were collected from recorded interactions occurring across 14 effective classroom meetings involving teachers and students of Class VIII E at SMP Nizamia Andalusia, Jakarta. A total of 82 utterances categorized as containing psychopragmatic complimenting acts were identified from verbal interactions throughout the learning process. These utterances were classified based on their forms and communicative functions, resulting in a structured analysis that offers insights into the psychological and pragmatic roles of compliments in classroom dynamics. Table 3 presents the distribution of forms and communicative functions identified in the complimenting acts.

Table 3. Analysis Summary of the Forms and Functions of Complimenting Utterances

Form of Compliments	Total	Function of Compliments	Total
Personality	29	Solidarity Expression	47
Ability	51	Positive Evaluation	66
Appearance	5	Mild Verbal Teasing	17
Possession	6	Expression of Envy	3

The findings presented in Table 3 reveal the complexity and multidimensional nature of complimenting utterances within the classroom learning environment. Compliments were not used merely as markers of approval, but rather as strategic tools that contributed significantly to pedagogical interaction and emotional development. Their presence shaped the tone and direction of learning activities and helped construct a communication culture characterized by mutual respect, emotional support, and academic encouragement. Understanding the underlying motivations and contextual functions behind each complimenting form enables deeper insight into how language influences human relationships within educational institutions.

The predominance of ability-related compliments demonstrates the teacher's deliberate emphasis on motivating students academically. Ability-related compliments appeared consistently in response to student performance when answering questions, presenting solutions, completing tasks, or showing progress in classroom exercises. Rather than simply stating evaluative praise such as "good job" or "well done," the teacher often specified the behavior being recognized. For example, an utterance such as "That is a very clear explanation, you organized your ideas well" not only praises but also highlights the exact skill being valued. This style of compliment gives students concrete feedback about their strengths, reinforcing behaviors that lead to academic success. By identifying specific achievements rather than offering general praise, the teacher provides meaningful reinforcement that encourages intrinsic motivation and self-regulated learning.

Psychopragmatically, such compliments serve more than a linguistic purpose. They intentionally construct emotional scaffolding that allows students to take academic

risks without fear of judgment. Observation showed that after receiving compliments, students demonstrated increased willingness to engage in classroom discussions (Keshavarz & Asit, 2020). Their answers became longer, more confident, and more analytically developed. Compliments encouraged students who were initially hesitant to speak to actively participate. This behavioral shift highlights the psychological effect of praise in reducing performance anxiety and promoting cognitive readiness. In this context, compliments function as language tools that enhance learning by stimulating emotional security and mental engagement (Rumbati, 2020).

Furthermore, the frequency of solidarity-based compliments illustrates the relational component of classroom interaction. These compliments fostered feelings of community among participants, strengthening the perception that every member of the class belongs to a supportive group. Solidarity-based compliments appeared in situations where the purpose extended beyond academic recognition, for example when a teacher said, “You’re always helping your friends, that’s really kind of you.” The compliment acknowledges a social contribution rather than academic output, promoting values related to cooperation and empathy. This reflects the educational expectation that character building is an important dimension of school culture (Rumbati, 2020).

The psychopragmatic significance of solidarity compliments lies in their role in establishing symmetrical interpersonal relations (Keshavarz & Asit, 2020). Rather than asserting authority, the teacher uses praise to distribute power relationally and engage with students as partners in communication. This communicative approach differs from traditional teacher-centered models where authority is unquestioned, and students adopt passive listening roles. The shift toward collaborative interaction increases students’ sense of agency. They feel respected and recognized as individuals whose contributions matter in the learning process. The presence of laughter and positive emotional reactions during such exchanges illustrates the shared sense of comfort and relational warmth sustained through consistent positive reinforcement (Dayter, 2021).

The role of humor in compliment exchange also deserves attention. Humorous teasing appeared frequently, especially among students, and was often associated with expressions of camaraderie. Such humor might appear risky in more formal contexts, but within this classroom culture, it became a bonding mechanism. A brief instance such as a student saying, “Wow, your handwriting looks like calligraphy today!” while laughing with peers demonstrates humor as a soft compliment. The teacher often responded by joining the laughter, showing acceptance and encouragement rather than disapproval. The reaction of the classroom smiling, laughing, relaxed body posture indicates that playful teasing reinforces friendship and reduces hierarchical tension. In this way, humor operates as an indirect compliment that acknowledges improvement or quality while maintaining a playful tone (Fatma, 2020).

The meaningful aspect behind humorous compliments lies in the emotional regulation they support. When learning becomes tense or cognitively demanding,

humor acts as a relief, reducing stress and improving cognitive openness. Observations showed that humor often followed moments of academic challenge, functioning as a cooperative coping mechanism (Yanti, 2021). This supports theories suggesting that emotional experience significantly influences learning outcomes. Humor-based compliments encourage resilience by transforming pressure into enjoyment. Students maintain engagement rather than withdrawing under stress, and teacher-student interactions remain positive even during demanding tasks. Therefore, humorous teasing is not merely a casual speech form but an element of emotional intelligence embedded in classroom communication.

Compliments focused on personality contribute to moral education and identity development. Adolescence is a period characterized by social comparison and emotional vulnerability. Receiving compliments about personal qualities such as responsibility, politeness, or perseverance helps students form positive self-concepts. Personality-based compliments showed strong psychological effects, often resulting in visible emotional reactions, such as smiling, straightening posture, nodding confidently, or increasing participation (Keshavarz & Asit, 2020). When a teacher stated, “You are very responsible to finish this even though it was difficult,” students responded with greater determination. Such expressions affirm student values and indirectly encourage others to emulate similar behavior. From a psychopragmatic perspective, personality compliments show appreciation for internal traits rather than external performance. They reinforce the idea that students are valued as individuals beyond academic outcomes (Dayter, 2021).

The limited number of compliments related to appearance demonstrates awareness of ethical boundaries within school culture. Appearance compliments risk causing discomfort or reinforcing social stereotypes. Their restricted presence suggests conscious avoidance by participants to prevent misinterpretation. When appearance compliments did occur, they often surfaced casually and humorously among students (Keshavarz & Asit, 2020). A compliment such as “You look fresh today after cutting your hair” tended to focus on change rather than physical attractiveness, minimizing the risk of objectification. This pattern reflects maturity in communication norms where sensitivity is required to maintain psychological safety. Teachers refrained from complimenting appearance directly, implying awareness of power imbalance and potential misunderstanding within teacher-student relationships (Revita, 2019).

Compliments related to possessions also served as social connectors to build informal rapport. Though limited, they helped maintain positive peer relationships. A student saying “Your book cover looks really cool” acknowledges ownership without engaging in comparison. Possession compliments appear unrelated to academic performance but serve to equalize social interaction by recognizing individual uniqueness (Sari, 2023). These compliments strengthen social bonds through interpersonal appreciation. Unlike academic compliments, which reinforce structured behavior, possession compliments contribute to organic relational closeness and casual peer engagement.

The results collectively illustrate that classroom communication is not merely transactional, focused on content transfer, but relational and emotional. Compliments function as mechanisms for constructing social norms that support academic and emotional growth. The emotional resonance created by praise shapes a learning environment in which students feel safe, valued, and connected. Psychopragmatically, compliments affect both affective stance and behavior. Students who received praise increased their willingness to sustain attention, attempt challenging activities, collaborate with peers, and respect classroom expectations (Keshavarz & Asit, 2020). The teacher's consistent practice of reinforcing desirable behavior through compliments reduces the need for disciplinary measures because students internalize values rather than simply obey rules.

Additionally, the reciprocity of compliments among students reflects maturity in communicative competence. Peer compliments, such as acknowledging improvement in group work or academic performance, demonstrate emotional awareness and social responsibility. This reciprocity transforms praise into a cultural practice rather than a hierarchical act. Participants collectively maintain an emotionally supportive classroom environment. Students became more aware of the importance of appreciation, learning to use language respectfully and meaningfully. This demonstrates the success of the teacher's communication model in shaping socially competent behavior (Dayter, 2021). From a broader perspective, the findings highlight the implications of compliment strategies in educational practice. Compliments contribute to character building, emotional intelligence, and academic development. Their use encourages a learning model centered on humanistic communication principles rather than authoritarian structure. These characteristics align with modern pedagogical needs that emphasize student agency, collaborative learning, and emotional wellbeing. Effective use of compliments may improve academic performance, attendance, classroom participation, and relational harmony among students (Sari, 2023).

The study also suggests that schools seeking to build constructive learning environments should train teachers in positive communication strategies including complimenting. Compliments are low-cost yet powerful pedagogical tools. They require no special technology or financial resources but can substantially strengthen student engagement. Incorporating structured praise into teacher training programs may enhance teaching quality and emotional climate in classrooms. Schools could benefit from workshops focused on delivering specific, authentic, and contextually sensitive compliments to develop supportive communication culture.

4. Conclusion

This study concludes that complimenting speech acts play a crucial role in shaping positive teacher–student interactions within the Grade VIII classroom at SMP Nizamia Andalusia. The analysis demonstrates that four major types of compliments personality based, ability-based, appearance-based, and possession-based were used to support students' emotional, social, and academic development.

Among these, ability-based compliments appeared as the most dominant, reflecting the teacher's emphasis on reinforcing students' performance and confidence. The identified communicative functions expressing solidarity, expressing positive evaluation, mild verbal teasing, and admiration highlight how praise serves both interpersonal and pedagogical purposes. From a psychopragmatic perspective, compliments function as linguistic and psychological tools that generate positive perlocutionary effects, including increased self-confidence, emotional comfort, motivation, and pro-social behavior among students.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted in only one classroom within a single educational institution, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to broader contexts. Second, the study focused primarily on verbal compliments and did not explore non-verbal supportive behaviors that may also influence students' psychological responses. Third, the qualitative design relied on observational and interpretative analysis, which may involve subjective interpretation despite triangulation efforts. Future research is recommended to involve multiple schools, different educational levels, and mixed-method approaches to obtain more comprehensive insights into psychopragmatic complimenting practices in educational settings.

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