

**An Analysis of Compliment Strategies, Structural Patterns, and Pragmatic
Functions in Gen Z Social Media Interactions****Maharani Laksmi Anindita¹✉, Nurul Apriani Ymaniyar², Nurul Na'imahtul Rahma³**¹Master of Linguistics, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia²Master of Linguistics, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia³Master of Linguistics, Gadjah Mada University, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Article Info	Abstract
<i>Article History:</i> Received 30 June 2025 Approved 31 October 2025 Published 31 October 2025 Keywords: Compliments, Compliment Structure, Generation Z, TikTok	Due to exposure to social media and evolving spoken language, younger generations are highly likely to develop different structure of compliments. This study aims to analyze the compliments used by the younger generation, specifically Generation Z (Gen Z), in social media TikTok. This study focused on the compliments' strategy, structure, and function. This research is a qualitative study with descriptive-comparative analysis. Two different procedures were used to obtain the data on compliments, the first procedure is to observe the TikTok videos and comments under the "Gen-Z Compliments" trend and the second is through naturalistic observation of a wide range of TikTok videos during the last 3 months, from June to August 2025. Of the total of 43 compliments identified, compliments with indirect strategies are more favored by Generation Z. Syntactically, the most used patterns are patterns [I (like/love) you, (please) (neg [don't + v + NP])] and [You ADJ, I'm VP [(Vcont + NP)/(PP)]]. The indirect compliments do not have a fixed syntactic pattern. However, two linguistic features are used: semantic shifts and hyperbole. The function of these compliments also focuses solely on expressing admiration and increasing solidarity.

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INTRODUCTION

Compliment is a fundamental speech act used in human social interaction. Within society, people use compliments to establish, consolidate, and promote interpersonal relationships (Searle 1979). Complimenting is more than just expressing admiration, approval, or praise towards others (Alosaimi and Alenizi 2024); it contains a complex exercise of sociopragmatics aimed at negotiating identity and face, and adhering to the principles of politeness (Brown and Levinson 1978). Furthermore, compliment, as part of a speech act, is inextricably linked to culture and social factors.

The speaker's cultural background and social factors significantly impact compliments (Al-Shboul et al. 2022). One of the social factors that affects the use of compliments is age.

From a pragmatics perspective, compliments are seen as a part of a speech act set—a set of linguistic strategies used to achieve specific social goals (Searle 1979). Pragmatics views language not as a static system of structures, but as actions in context (Yule 2010). Therefore, analyzing compliments means examining specific linguistic forms (such as lexicon, syntax, semantics) and how speakers from different age groups strategically use

✉ Corresponding author:
Email: ranindita002@gmail.com

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these forms to achieve the desired pragmatic effect in a specific communication situation.

Regarding the structure of a compliment, specifically in English, Manes and Wolfson's (1981) large-scale corpus study has identified the formulaic pattern of compliments. The syntactic patterns such as [NP (is/look) (really) ADJ] (The flowers in your garden look really pretty), [I (really) (like/love) NP] (I really love your dress), and [PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP] (She is really a talented pianist) is among the most commonly used pattern of compliment, with 80% fall into one of these three patterns (Manes and Wolfson 1981). Following Manes and Wolfson, research that focused on the syntactic patterns of compliments emerged, and discovered that Manes and Wolfson's patterns are applicable in different languages (Anindita 2025; Madni and Alam 2024; Waheed and Fatima 2024).

In Madni and Alam's (2024) study, the structure of the compliment given by Punjabi ESL speakers in English mostly used either [NP (is/look) (really) ADJ] or [You V (a) (really) ADJ NP], but with slight changes. The NP in the first pattern is often replaced with the pronoun YOU, and an intensifier is always added in the compliment due to their L1 interference (Madni and Alam 2024). Indonesian speakers also used manes and Wolfson's patterns in Maharani's (2025) study. Patterns [NP (is/look) (really) ADJ] and [ADJ NP!] are highly favored by Indonesian speakers, whether they speak in Indonesian or English as a second language (Anindita 2025). Pakistani speakers also showed a similar pattern in the structure of their compliments as shown in Waheed and Fatima's (2024) study. Patterns [NP (is/look) (really) ADJ], [I (really) like/love] NP], and [PRO is (really) (a) ADJ NP] are highly favored, with around 85% of the identified compliments in their study belonging to these three patterns (Waheed and Fatima 2024).

The question arises whether the same formula applies to all age groups. Due to exposure to social media and evolving spoken language, younger generations are highly likely to develop less formulaic compliment. For example, compliments among Gen Z may be heavy on slang, hyperbole, and pop culture references not found in the compliment repertoire of older generations.

So far, the researcher has found three previous studies highlighting the differences in complimenting between older and younger generations (He 2012; Pour and Zarei 2016; Toisuta and Sartini 2023). Persian speakers in Pour and Zarei's (2016) study have their own characteristics based on the age group. The younger generation preferred non-compliment strategies the most, while the older participants preferred explicit unbound semantic strategies. However, despite minor differences, all age groups rarely used future reference, contrast, request, and other strategies in complementing (Pour and Zarei 2016). In Toisuta and Sartini's (2023) study, although Korean speakers do favour the use of non-compliments as their primary strategy of complementing, their younger generation prefers to use slang and idiomatic language to convey their compliments as a result of Western culture influence (Toisuta and Sartini 2023). In Yun He's (2012) study, different generations have different purposes in using the complement. The older generation tends to maintain or enhance their and co-participants' faces by observing conventional cultural norms and values such as modesty. The younger, by contrast, seem to be more concerned about displaying personal traits such as confidence and individualism, which can help achieve a new self-image and identity (He 2012).

As stated before, one of the factors that cause the distinction between the older and younger generations' ways of using compliments is social media. A wide range of linguistic changes has resulted from the rapid expansion of social media platforms and online culture (Chyrvonyi 2024). In addition to reflecting technological advancements, linguistic changes influence social interactions and communication behaviors in digital environments (Thurlow and Mroczek 2011). Since their ease of use encourages users to generate, modify, and adopt newly coined lexemes as part of their online communication, "new media language" is a crucial resource for understanding modern pragmatics exercise and has a considerable impact on the spread of new words and expressions (Karanevych, Ivantsiv, and Kutsa 2024).

One social media worth studying is TikTok, a short video sharing service that allows users to create, share, and explore audiovisual content in various themes (Team 2025). By 2022, 55% of

TikTok users are under 30, with Generation Z (generation born between 1996 – 2010 (Reid, Button, and Brommeyer 2023)) as the most active users. The emergence of “algospeak” within TikTok, a phenomenon where social media users modify or replace certain words with codes or alternative terms to evade detection by platform moderation algorithms (Ru and Domovinskog 2025; Tillewein, Mohon-Doyle, and Cox 2024), is one of the evidences that social media could evolve into a language. This evolution affects the use of certain words, but changes the pattern of specific language structures, including complements. The researcher has observed a rise of a new trend called “Gen-Z compliment” within TikTok, highlighting the unique compliment pattern used among them.

Furthermore, the function of praise itself differs between each age group. For children, praise often serves as a means of reinforcement from authority figures. For adolescents, praise among peers serves as a powerful social glue for building and affirming group identity and membership (Eckert 2000). In the adult professional world, praise can serve as a conversational management tool or even to demonstrate unequal power relations (e.g., a superior praising a subordinate). Therefore, this study aims to analyze the compliments used by the younger generation, specifically Generation Z (Gen Z), in social media TikTok. The study focuses on the compliments' strategy, structure, and function uttered by Gen Z in social media TikTok.

METHODS

Data Collection

This research is a qualitative study with descriptive-comparative analysis. Qualitative research emphasizes understanding social, cultural, or human behavioral events by collecting and analyzing non-numerical, descriptive, and contextual data (Moleong 2004). The data used in this study were taken from TikTok social media. Simak Bebas Libat Cakap Technique (SBLC) and Note-taking Technique were used to collect the data. The SBLC technique is used to obtain compliments from Gen-Z users in the TikTok community without directly participating in the community. The compliments are then collected using note-taking and analyzed based on the research objectives.

Two different procedures were used to obtain the data on compliments. Since “Gen-Z

compliment” has been recognized as a trend within TikTok, the first procedure is to observe the TikTok videos and comments under the “Gen-Z Compliment” trend to obtain the mutually agreed forms of the compliment. The second procedure is through naturalistic observation of a wide range of videos. Compliments occurring organically within these videos and the comments within were documented. This method was chosen to capture compliments in their authentic context. Both procedures were limited to the last 3 months, from June to August 2025.

Data Analysis

The collected data was then analyzed based on the research objectives. The data was first categorized based on the compliment strategies:

- Direct compliment: a compliment delivered directly by the speaker and often does not depend on the context.
- Indirect compliment: a compliment that is delivered indirectly. The form of this compliment is very dependent on the context of the utterance.
- Non-complement: an utterance in which the speaker provides a verbal response to a given situation, but the utterance given can hardly be considered a compliment (Holmes 1988; Ye 1995).

After analyzing the strategies, the structure of the data was analyzed. However, the structure analysis was not based on Manes & Wolfson's (1981) formulaic patterns of compliment. The structure focused on lexical choice, syntactic structure (which differs from Manes & Wolfson's), and pragmatic pattern. Lastly, the data was analyzed to identify its functions.

Based on a synthesis of various experts, this study identified six primary functions of praise. First, compliments strengthen solidarity between individuals (Holmes 1988; Manes and Wolfson 1981). Second, compliment expresses admiration for another person's appearance, abilities, or achievements (Herbert 1990). Third, compliments can substitute for other forms of speech, such as greetings, thanks, apologies, or congratulations (Wolfson 1989). Fourth, compliments serve as a conversation starter, for example, by commenting on the other person's appearance and following up with a related question. Fifth, compliment is a

mitigation strategy in face-threatening acts (FTAs), such as criticism or sarcasm. Finally, a compliment serves as a reinforcer to encourage someone to maintain a specific behavior (Manes and Wolfson 1981).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data of compliments by Gen-Z in TikTok, the researcher identified 43 compliments attributed to this age group. According to Ye (1995) and Holmes (1988), categorization, 16 of those compliments are direct compliments, while the rest are indirect compliments:

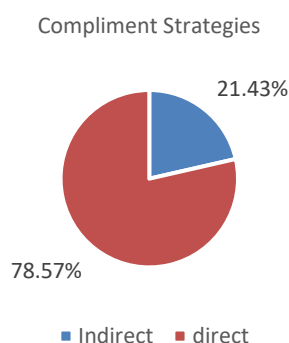


Figure 1. Compliment Strategies

Below are the analysis and discussion for each strategy:

Direct Compliment

The data reveals that 21,4% of Gen-Z compliments are explicit in nature. All direct compliments are bound with consistent syntax and semantic formula, except for two compliments. The list of the direct complements that the researcher had identified is seen in Table 1:

Table 1. Direct Compliments

	Syntax formula	Compliment	Semantic formula
p.1	I (love) NP [whatever + V + ADJ PP]	I love whatever is wrong with you	[direct compliment] + [vagueness]
p.2	ADJ NP (NP [whatever + NP])	Big fan of whatever this is	[direct compliment] + [vagueness]
p.3	I (like/love) you, (please) (neg [don't + v + NP])	I like/love you please don't go bald I like/love you please don't lose your accent	[direct compliment] + [bizarre request]

I like/love you
please don't stub
your toe
I like/love you
please don't explode
I like/love you
please don't get
kidnapped by alien
I like/love you
please don't get fall
of bed
I like/love you
please don't get step
on landmine
You are funny, Im
buying you
You are funny,
Imma follow you
home
You are funny, Im
in your wall
You are funny, Im
under your bed right
now
You are funny, Im
taking you
You are funny, I
own you now
You are funny, Im
locking you away

p.4 You ADJ, I'm
VP [(Vcont + NP)/(PP)]

[direct
compliment]
+ [bizarre
threat]

Syntactic pattern of direct compliment

The syntactic patterns in direct complement, as seen in Table 1, appear to be formulaic in nature. On the surface, these formulas appear to be similar to Manes and Wolfson's (1981) patterns, specifically the [I (really) [like/love] NP] pattern. However, the significant difference is in the direct object of the linking verb, *like* or *love*. In patterns p.1 and p.2, the direct object uses a fused relative clause with *whatever* as the relative pronoun, followed by either a prepositional phrase [whatever + V + ADJ PP] or a noun phrase [whatever + NP]. In pattern p.3, the direct object of the linking verb is the interlocutor, or *you*, and is followed by an imperative subordinate clause [(please) (neg [don't + v + NP])]. Pattern p.4 is the most different formula compared to all of the formulas in Manes and Wolfson's (1981) study. The structure is a compound sentence directly addressing the interlocutor in the first independent clause [You adj]. The sentence does not use a conjunction between the clauses, and the second clauses either use a continuous verb that denotes immediate intention to an action [VP (Vcont + NP)] or a simple verb clause with a prepositional phrase as the object [VP (V + PP)].

What interesting with patterns p.3 and p.4 is that the syntactic structure of the compliment part

are interchangeable with each other. In other word, the compliment part of pattern p.3 could be paired with the bizarre remark of pattern p.4 and vice versa. For example, the figure below showed the switched pattern of the compliment taken from a comment in one of the videos in TikTok:



Figure 2. Example of Mixed Structure

The first semantic part of the compliment above is “*your so funny*”, which belong to the pattern p.4 [You ADJ]. however, the second semantic part of the compliment is an imperative subordinate clause [(please) (neg [don’t + v + NP])], which belong to pattern p.3. Hence, patterns p.3 and p.4 could be used interchangeably depend on the speaker will, which result in the structure:

- Semantic pattern: [compliment] + [bizarre remark]
- Compliment: [I (love) NP] or [You ADJ]
- Bizarre remark: [bizarre request] or [bizarre threat]

Semantic pattern of direct compliment

Based on Table 1, the semantic patterns of Gen-Z compliments in TikTok almost resemble a backhanded compliment. A backhanded compliment is a remark or statement that appears to say something pleasant about the interlocutor, but could also be an insult (Chen, Kalaydjian, and Dwyer 2024). The most common semantic pattern of a backhanded compliment is [compliment + degrading remark], where the degrading remark aligns or discuss similar theme with the compliment. For example, the statement “You have such a pretty face for someone your size!” is implicitly degrading the interlocutor by saying they are a fat (*someone your size*) but concealing it behind a compliment on their face (Reiheld 2020).

However, the compliments found in this study are not, from a semantic point of view, backhanded. Patterns p.1 and p.2, while seemingly containing a backhanded compliment due to the words *whatever* and *wrong*, it is actually implied the speaker's uncertainty or vagueness, that they are

unsure or cannot precisely name the object of their admiration. Furthermore, the word *whatever* in the compliment implied an inclusivity encompassing all factors or topics of the compliment. This word indicates that the statement “I like/love” is intended for the entirety of the undefined quality of the interlocutor.

Regarding patterns p.3 and p.4, the second sentence that follows the compliments “I like you” and “you are funny” is not a degrading remark, but purely a bizarre statement. In pattern p.3, the statement that follows the compliment is a bizarre request relating to the interlocutor's health or safety that does not correlate with the topic or the object of admiration/compliment. For example, the figure below was taken from one of the videos during data collection in TikTok:

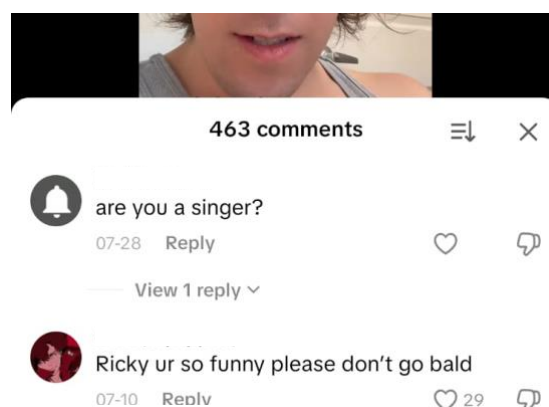


Figure 3. Example of Direct Compliment

The topic discussed in the video was about the user's personal experience regarding his video making, and the comment clearly stated that they wished the user to “not go bald”, even though there was no talk about hair or baldness in the video. So far, the researcher has not yet found any explicit limitation for how bizarre the request could be; in fact, the more bizarre the request, the better, as long as it still wishes the interlocutor for safety. Therefore, this pattern uses humor through incongruity instead of a backhanded compliment. It blends a profound emotional statement (“I like you”/“you are funny”) with a superficial and strange physical concern (“go bald”).

Besides bizarre requests, the complement in pattern p.3 and p.4, these patterns can alternate with each other as stated before, could also be followed by a bizarre threat. However, the threats

here are humor due to exaggeration and absurdity. According to McGraw and Warner (2014), a threat will be considered as a joke when the threat or violation (something that threatens one's sense of how the world "ought" to be) is deemed inconsequential due to the absurdity between the context and the relationship between the locutor and interlocutor (McGraw and Warner 2014). The threats used in pattern p.4 are absurd since it is impossible to be committed due to the nature of the user's relationship in cyberspace. The threat itself followed a semantic pattern, where it could only use a threat that implied "staying close with the interlocutor in the most unsettling way possible", either through stalking, invading, or illegal trafficking.

Indirect Compliment

The data reveals that 78,5% of Gen-Z compliments are implicit in nature. Unlike direct compliments, indirect compliments do not have a formulaic pattern; however, indirect compliments use specific linguistic features, as seen in Table 2:

Table 2. Indirect Compliments

Compliment	linguistic features
c.1 Slay	Semantic shift
c.2 Ate	
c.3 Diva	
c.4 Goat	
c.5 Respect	
c.6 Bestie	
c.7 Babes	
c.8 Preach	
c.9 Witch +	
c.10 Do you do wedding?	
c.11 not my 13 th reason	
c.12 Investing at 12 likes	
c.13 Ho, is you magic	
c.14 4+4	
c.15 8	
c.16 Yk what hell yeah	Pragmatic shift
c.17 Wait no comeback	
c.18 My type I fear	
c.19 I have no one to send this to	
c.20 I didn't speed up this video	
c.21 Sorry for underestimating u	
c.22 Don't forget to thank Beyonce	
c.23 Ill started a parade in your honor	
c.24 We are inducting you into dauntless	
c.25 I hate when people are funnier than me	
c.26 Scrolling feels like divorce	
c.27 Sorry for breathing the same air as you	

Semantic shift in indirect compliments

Semantic shift refers to when the meaning of a word changes over time. Newman (2016) expands the understanding of semantic shift by arguing that this phenomenon not only occurs over long historical timescales, such as the transition from Middle English to Modern English, but can also occur over relatively short periods without being tied to major historical chapters (Newman 2016). This opinion is empirically supported by research by Behera & Mishra (2013), which shows that technological developments—particularly the massive use of the internet and computers—have triggered the emergence of new meanings for various vocabulary words. For example, terms like "window," "virus," and "net" have experienced significant expansion of meaning in the context of the digital world (Behera and Mishra 2013; Muzani 2024).

Some indirect compliments identified in this study result from a semantic shift, where the lexicon or specific lexicon within the phrase gains a new meaning. Three types of semantic shift were found in this study, as seen in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Type of Semantic Shift

Compliment	types	Meaning
Preach	broadening	Agreeing to someone's opinion or argument
Ate		Something, usually clothing, that looks really good
Diva		Someone who is very beautiful or very interesting, both appearance or behaviour
Goat		Greatest person of all time (acronym)
Respect		Applauding someone action
Bestie		Liking a stranger to the point of seeing them as close friend
Babes		Affectionate term given to someone believe to be cool or attractive
Do you do wedding ?		Asking someone to be their groom/bride
not my 13 th reason		Something that does not cause misery to oneself
Investing at __ likes		Supporting content creator by giving like so the video could be famous

magic		Someone who did something so extraordinarily
Slay		Acing something
Witch	amelioration	Someone who did something so extraordinarily
4+4	Semantic displacement	Synonymous with <i>ate</i>
8		Synonymous with <i>ate</i>

The first type of semantic shift is broadening. Broadening or generalization occurs when the word's meaning has expanded into a more general meaning (Chaer 2013; Harris and Campbell 1995). There are 11 lexicons with generalization and additional meanings used as compliments by Gen-Z in TikTok. Below are some examples of those lexicons used within context:

- (1) *Yess girll **preach!!!***
- (2) *That's why he is the **GOAT***
- (3) *Ho, is you **magic***
- (4) *Who is this **Diva**?*

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, preach is a verb that means to deliver a sermon or advocate earnestly. However, in utterance (1), the word was used as a compliment and gained additional meaning as "someone agreeing and applauding to his/her opinion or argument". The word goat in utterance (2) originally refers to the sheep-related mammals, but Gen-Z has given it an additional meaning. Initially, this was an abbreviation for G.O.A.T., short for the greatest of all time. It was used within the gaming community as a title for someone who played the most pivotal role during the game. Nowadays, people, specifically Gen Z, simplified the abbreviation by using the word goat directly, resulting in what originally only refers to a mammal now having a broader meaning to someone believed to be great.

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, magic in utterance (3) means an extraordinary power or influence seemingly from a supernatural source. In TikTok, Gen Z used this word as a compliment, usually on a video about someone showing their talents. The word magic gained a new meaning for someone who did something extraordinarily. The word Diva in utterance (4) has its original meaning, according to the Cambridge Dictionary, as a glamorous and successful female performer or a type of personality. When used as a compliment within TikTok, the word's meaning

becomes more generalized into someone very beautiful or interesting, both in appearance and behaviour. Furthermore, the word *diva* which initially addressed for women, when used as compliment, it could even be used for non-human organism, such as cat, as seen in figure below:



Figure 4. Example of Compliment "Diva"

The second type of semantic shift is amelioration. Amelioration is when a word is given a new meaning with a higher or more refined value within a society (Chaer 2013; Harris and Campbell 1995). Two lexicons of compliment underwent this semantic shift: slay and witch. Below is an example of an utterance that contained this compliment:

- (1) *It's a lot but **slay***
- (2) *You **WITCHHH***

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, slay is a verb denoting a hostile act of killing violently and willingly. However, Gen Z used it as a compliment, giving the word a "better" meaning, such as someone doing something well, or "killing" what they do. Slay is also often used to compliment someone's appearance, as seen in utterance (1), which means the person's clothes or style is really good, they are slaying it. The word witch in utterance (2) initially has a negative meaning of a person, usually a woman, who is credited with malicious supernatural power. This word is given an additional, better meaning as a compliment to "Someone who did something so extraordinarily"; in other words, it is a compliment

for someone with impressive talent, as if someone was using supernatural power to perform it.

The last type of semantic shift is semantic displacement, where the additional meaning given to the word differs significantly from the original (Chaer 2013). Two complement lexicons underwent this semantic shift, and uniquely, both are numbers 4+4 and 8. Below is an example of an utterance that contained this compliment:

(1) *Girl your outfit 4+4*

(2) *That style is an 8*

Both 4+4 and 8 are actually synonymous with each other. The equation 4+4 in utterance (4) is a word play, where the compliment lies in the sum of the equation, which is 8. The number 8 has a similar phonetic sound to the word *ate*; therefore, 4+4, 8, and *ate* all have similar meanings as compliments. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, *ate* is a past tense of eat, but as a compliment, it means broadening into something, usually clothing, that looks really good.

Pragmatic shift in indirect compliments

Unlike semantic shift, in pragmatic shift, the actual meaning of the compliment exists implicitly within the sentence. In this study, the pragmatic shift is divided into two types; implicature and hyperbole:

Table 4. Type of Pragmatic Shift

Compliment	Type	Meaning
Yk what hell yeah	implicature	Supporting a person' action without needing to fully understand what they are doing
Wait no comeback		Liking someone performance so much they wanted the person to perform again
My type I fear		Finding a person attractive when said person is not conveniently attractive
I didn't speed up this video		Really liking or enjoying a video
Sorry for underestimating u		unexpectedly amazed with the person performance
Don't forget to thank Beyonce	hyperbole	Exaggeration of a trend in Hollywood
Ill started a parade in your honor		"I like you so much I want others to like you too"

We are inducting you into dauntless	"you are amazing"
I hate when people are funnier than me	"you are very funny"
Scrolling feels like divorce	"I really like this video"
Sorry for breathing the same air as you	"you are so much better than me"
I have no one to send this to	"I wanted to show others about your greatness"
Im dying	"you are so funny"

The first type of pragmatic shift is implicature. Implicature is an additional meaning conveyed by a speaker that is not literally contained in the utterance itself, but must be inferred by the listener based on the context, the speaker's intention, and the principles governing the conversation (Leech 1983). In implicature, the denotative or literal meaning differs from the connotative meaning, and in this study, the compliment lies within the connotative meaning. Some examples of these utterances are:

(1) *Wait no comeback*

(2) *I didn't speed up this video*

Utterances (1) and (2) were found in a video about a person performing and explaining archery. The denotative meaning in utterance (1) is "asking someone not to leave and return back". This meaning does not align with the context of the video, where the person only stayed in one place, explaining archery, and never left. The connotative meaning of this utterance is related to the feature of the TikTok application itself, which sometimes, the video will automatically "scroll away", or continue to the next video once one ends. Therefore, the compliment here means that the person likes the video so much they do not wish to watch others' videos and want them to "comeback". Utterance (2) has a similar context, where the connotative meaning is related to the feature in the TikTok application. The denotative meaning of utterance (2) is "watching the video in normal speed". However, TikTok has a feature that allows the user to speed up the video by pressing the left or right side of the screen (if watched in a phone), and users use this feature if they are not invested in the video and want to reach the end quickly. Therefore, saying that they do not "speed up the video" has connotative meaning that

the person really enjoyed the video and thoroughly watched it.

The second type of pragmatic shift is hyperbole. Hyperbole is a language style that uses exaggerated statements to achieve a particular effect (Avong 2023). In line with this, research by Tomenchuk and Tiushka (2024) categorizes hyperbole as one of the stylistic characteristics that have contributed to the evolution of English on social media platforms, alongside elements of humor and informality (Tomenchuk 2024). Its use can be seen in the example of the sentence "I have a million things to do," which is not literally accurate but aims to convey the impression of being very busy while injecting a humorous nuance. Some compliment utterances that used hyperbole in this study are:

- (1) *Ill started a parade in your honor*
- (2) *Scrolling feels like divorce*
- (3) *Im dying*

All comments that use hyperbole cannot and should not be interpreted literally. For example, in utterance (1), the speaker does not intend to start a parade, simply exaggerating their way of saying "I like you so much I want others to like you too". Utterance (2) also does not mean that the speaker will get a divorce, it is an exaggeration of them parting with the video they like. Utterance (3) is often used in response to something funny, implying that something is so entertaining that it seems to make someone "die of laughing." Expressions like this are clearly not meant literally, but rather to provide dramatic emphasis.

Function of the Compliment

Out of the six compliment functions used in this study, the Gen-Z compliments found in TikTok social media are only used as an expression of admiration and as an act to increase solidarity. The cause of these compliments primarily functions as an expression of admiration tied to the purpose of the social media, in this case, TikTok itself. TikTok predominantly functions as entertainment media, meaning the content creators within the app tailor their videos to fulfill the viewers' demand for entertainment through a talent show, humorous clips, or others (Firth 2024; Kruger and Rooy 2018). Hence, the viewers' responses, mostly Gen-Z (Team 2025), are

compliments expressing their likes (admiration) and support.

Compliments such as "scrolling feels like divorce" clearly show the relationship between the platform and the type of compliment. The compliment uses the features of the TikTok application, such as scrolling, as the context. This compliment implicitly means that the speaker likes or admires the content creator so much that they are reluctant to scroll away or leave their video, to the point that it feels like a divorce. This compliment in the comment also uses hyperbolic structure to emphasize the humor, since the comments in TikTok also aimed to match the excessive humorous entertainment that the platform provided.

The second function of the compliment is to increase solidarity between the speakers. This function is indicated by the constant use of slang as a compliment. The majority of indirect compliments identified in this study, such as lexicons *slay*, *ate*, *goat*, *diva*, etc, are slang belonging to Gen-Z (Kämäräinen 2025; Orolic 2023). Slang is an informal language that consists of vocabulary typically used within a specific social group or subculture (Yule 2010). The primary function of slang is to create a sense of belonging within a community, since the terms are only comprehensible to the group members who use the language (Yule 2010). Speakers will establish membership of a particular social group or take part in a trend by adopting the language variety present within the group. Therefore, when a speaker utters a compliment containing a slang word in TikTok, they express their admiration and secretly express solidarity among Gen-Z within the platform.

Discussion

Data analysis shows that the compliment used by the Gen-Z age group in TikTok social media is primarily an indirect compliment. This result in compliment strategies is quite different from several previous studies investigating the strategy of compliments used by the younger generation, mostly Generation Z, in social media (ALsaqr and Mahzari 2025; Matley 2018; Toisuta and Sartini 2023). In Toisuta & Sartini's (2023) study regarding compliments found in social media YouTube, American and Korean Generation Z

YouTube users prefer explicit compliments over implicit compliments. However, they also tend to follow up their explicit compliment, Korean users will follow it with a non-compliment, while American users will follow it with an implicit compliment (Toisuta and Sartini 2023). Both Matley (2018) and Alsaqr & Mahzari (2025) analyze the compliments found in social media Instagram. Both of their study showed that there is a delicate balance between explicit and implicit compliments used by Generation Z in Instagram; however, both studies also showed that, regarding implicit compliments, the most favored form is using emojis instead of lexicons or other linguistic forms (ALsaqr and Mahzari 2025; Matley 2018).

Regarding the structure of the compliment itself, several studies also discovered a new syntactic formula for direct compliment employed by Generation Z in social media (ALsaqr and Mahzari 2025; Indah and Rifana 2017; Waheed and Fatima 2024). Direct compliments on social media, such as Instagram, tend to use minimal syntactic patterns and are realized by adjectives rather than verbs (Indah and Rifana 2017). Compared to the comments in other platforms, such as Facebook, which can be commented longer, in IG, the comments consist of the 'main' compliment act and sometimes followed by any other supporting information. Therefore, Instagram users favor a simple structure with only ADJ or NP, instead of the formal compliments Manes & Wolfson identified in their study. This simplified compliment is also found in Waheed & Fatima's (2024) study, where both Pakistani and Punjabi ESL speakers also prefer to use structures like [ADJ NP!] or [You V NP] when complimenting in English (Waheed and Fatima 2024). In this study, single-word compliments are instead found in implicit compliments. Unlike these previous studies, the single lexicon uses slang words instead of simple adjectives or noun phrases as compliments.

The tendency to replace the long, formal compliment with a single word or a simple phrase is in line with the study regarding the language of the internet. Internet language, or netspeak, is a language variety present online (Crystal 2001). According to Crystal (2001), the fundamental characteristics distinguishing face-to-face interaction from online communication on social

media lie in speed and spontaneity. Internet communication tends to be less spontaneous and slower than face-to-face conversations because composing a text message takes longer than simply speaking (Crystal 2001). This process allows users to revise or even cancel messages before sending. However, users expect such communication to be fast despite the technical slowness. This expectation of speed has created more concise and efficient language forms. To meet this demand, internet language has evolved by adopting various simplified forms, which have ultimately developed into distinctive features, while remaining easy to understand. Hence, the form of the compliment also becomes simplified, resulting in the constant use of a single-word compliment or being replaced with emojis.

The functions of complement found in this study are aligned with Toisuta & Sartini's (2023) findings. Their study also showed that compliments uttered by the younger generation on social media have the primary function of being an expression of adoration (Toisuta and Sartini 2023). Furthermore, Toisuta & Sartini's (2023) study discovered that the expression of adoration also functions as encouragement, a function that this study does not share. Yun He's (2012) study showed a very different function of the compliment shown by the younger generation in their study. They discovered that the younger generation used compliments to increase self-image and identity by displaying such personal traits as confidence and individualism. This finding contradicts the idea that one of the main functions of the older generation is to increase solidarity between their social group (He 2012). Nevertheless, it does not change that the younger generation, especially Generation Z, views compliments differently from the older generation, either in structure or function.

CONCLUSION

Younger age groups, especially Generation Z, have developed unique and distinctive compliment patterns inseparable from social media's dominant influence. Platforms like TikTok, whose users are predominantly Generation Z, are among the platforms that produce the most new language patterns, including compliment patterns. These patterns no longer

follow the compliments structure that has been confirmed by previous studies, such as the compliments structure formula proposed by Manes and Wolfson (1981). The results of this study prove the assumption that Generation Z has created a different compliments structure. Of the total of 43 compliments identified, compliments with indirect strategies are more favored by Generation Z. Syntactically, the most used patterns are patterns [I (like/love) you, (please) (neg [don't + v + NP])] and [You ADJ, I'm VP [(Vcont + NP)/(PP)]]. Uniquely, the structures of these two patterns can be used interchangeably. Furthermore, semantically, the structure of direct compliments from Generation Z on TikTok uses a pattern almost identical to backhanded compliments. However, instead of using derogatory expressions as backhanded expressions, they use odd statements, with the structure [compliment] + [bizarre request/threat].

On the other hand, indirect compliments given by Generation Z on TikTok do not have a fixed syntactic pattern. However, two linguistic features are used: semantic shifts to replace or give new meaning to compliments that focus only on a single lexicon, and hyperbole. The function of these compliments also focuses solely on expressing admiration and increasing solidarity. This study still has many limitations, particularly regarding the data used. Therefore, the researcher hopes that this study will benefit the pragmatic study of compliments in social media and inspire other researchers to delve deeper into the analysis of language structures that emerge in social media.

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