

A Comparative Study of User-Generated Written Compliments in English: Analyzing a Compliment Object ‘Tom Yum Goong’ with Two Semantic References

การศึกษาเชิงเปรียบเทียบข้อความเขียนชมเชยโดยผู้บริโภคตัวจริงในภาษาอังกฤษ:
วิเคราะห์สิ่งที่ได้รับคำชม 'ต้มยำกุ้ง' กับสองความหมายเชิงปรัชญาศาสตร์

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Abstract

Numerous studies investigated spoken compliments on characteristics of an entity or a person based on Holmes’ (1988) definition (Charoenroop, 2021; Ebadi & Pourzandi, 2015; Lin, 2020; Lin et al., 2012, Yuan, 2002). A handful of studies, however, explored written compliments on characteristics. With the rise of Web 2.0 technology, user-generated content (UGC) has become an increasingly popular form of content among users of various backgrounds to encode their messages using English to bridge intercultural interaction. This study compared user-generated compliments for the characteristics of ‘Tom Yum Goong’ (TYG)—a compliment object with at least two semantic references: (i) ‘food’ and (ii) a ‘movie’. The data were collected from 100 non-Thai users who made compliments in English on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and some personal blogs between 2015 and 2021. There were 114 compliments for TYG as food, 108 compliments for TYG as a movie. Results showed that strategies for spoken compliments are present in written compliments. Regardless of the semantic references, the use of positive adjectives and evaluation occurred the most frequently with a wide range of syntactic units. Most of the user-generated compliments were short and straightforward. The explicitness allows readers of various backgrounds to quickly identify the UGCs as compliments.

Keywords: Compliments, Compliment strategies, Compliment object, User-generated content

บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยจำนวนมากศึกษาคำพูดชมเชยที่เกี่ยวข้องกับลักษณะของสิ่งของหรือบุคคล โดยใช้คำจำกัดความของ Holmes (1988) (เช่น Charoenroop, 2021; Ebadi & Pourzandi, 2015; Lin, 2020; Lin et al., 2012, Yuan, 2002) อย่างไร้ตามพางานวิจัยจำนวนน้อยที่ศึกษาข้อความเขียนชมเชยเกี่ยวกับคุณลักษณะต่าง ๆ ด้วยความก้าวหน้าทางโซเชียลแบบมีส่วนร่วม ข้อความที่ถูกสร้างขึ้นโดยผู้บริโภคตัวจริง (UGC) จึงได้รับความนิยมอย่างมากในหมู่ผู้บริโภคที่มีภูมิหลังทางภาษาและวัฒนธรรมที่ต่างกัน แต่เลือกใช้ภาษาอังกฤษเป็นภาษากลางเชื่อมการสื่อสารระหว่างวัฒนธรรม งานวิจัยชิ้นนี้จึงเลือกเปรียบเทียบข้อความเขียนชมเชยที่ผู้บริโภคตัวจริงเขียนเพื่อชมเชยคุณลักษณะของ 'ต้มยำกุ้ง' (TYG) ซึ่งมีความหมายเชิงอรรถศาสตร์อย่างน้อยสองชนิด คือ (i) 'อาหาร' และ (ii) 'ภาพนิทรรศ' ข้อมูลถูกรวบรวมจากผู้ใช้ชื่่นไม่ใช่คนไทย จำนวน 100 คน เขียนข้อความชมเชย 'ต้มยำกุ้ง' ด้วยภาษาอังกฤษในทวิตเตอร์ เฟสบุ๊ค ยูทูป และบล็อกส่วนตัว ระหว่างปี พ.ศ. 2558–2564 เป็นคำชี้ที่มีความหมายเชิงอรรถศาสตร์เกี่ยวกับอาหาร 114 คำชี้ และภาพนิทรรศ 108 คำชี้ ผลการวิจัยพบว่ากลวิธีการชมเชยในคำพูดปรากฏในข้อความเขียนชมเชยเช่นกัน เมื่อพิจารณาความหมายเชิงอรรถศาสตร์ทั้งสอง พบรการใช้คำคุณศัพท์เชิงบวกในข้อความเขียนชมเชยแบบตรงมากที่สุดและพบการชมเชยด้วยการประเมินเมื่อเขียนชมเชยแบบไม่ตรงมากที่สุด โดยข้อความเขียนชมเชยเหล่านี้ปรากฏในรูปแบบภาษาสัมพันธ์ที่หลากหลาย มักมีขนาดสั้นและสื่อความอย่างตรงไปตรงมา ความซัดเจนนี้ช่วยให้ผู้อ่านที่มีภูมิหลังหลากหลายทางภาษาและวัฒนธรรมระบุได้ทันทีว่าข้อความเหล่านี้เป็นการชมเชย

คำสำคัญ: การชมเชย, กลวิธีการชมเชย, สิ่งที่ถูกชมเชย, เนื้อหาที่ผู้บริโภคตัวจริงสร้างขึ้น

1. Introduction

At present, dining culture has become increasingly accessible globally, as can be seen in the rise of Thai restaurants around the world. This is in part due to Thai restaurants serving unique and delicious dishes such as Tom Yum Goong (TYG), a hot sour soup typically served with shrimp.

Moreover, the Thai film industry, which produces dramatic combat and martial arts films such as ‘Tom Yum Goong’, has gained international popularity as evinced by being the recipient of national and global awards. Based on these observations, the same compliment object has at least two semantic references. One may assume that the vast majority of Thais are well familiar with these semantic references. In order to better understand the intelligibility of how Thais regard TYG, a questionnaire¹ was developed and later distributed to a hundred and fifty Thai informants. The results revealed that most considered TYG to mean ‘food’ (73%), ‘movie’ was the second most frequent (24%), and ‘financial crisis’ the least frequent (3%), the last referring to the 1997 Asian financial crisis that began in Thailand. Even though Thai nationals speak and share the same language and cultural backgrounds, some perceive the semantic references of TYG differently. This is perhaps not surprising given that the intelligibility of this word can vary among non-Thais who have different languages and cultural backgrounds. It is quite interesting to examine and compare a compliment, an expressive speech act, given by non-Thais to the characteristics of TYG when the same word entails two different semantic references.

A number of studies (Charoenroop, 2021; Ebadi & Pourzandi, 2015; Lin, 2020; Lin et al., 2012; Yuan, 2002) have investigated spoken compliment strategies. In these studies, compliment objects include individuals’ characteristics, which are prescribed by Holmes (1988) as a possible kind of compliment objects. However, little has been done on the analysis of written compliments (Cenni & Goethals, 2021; 2020). Following a classic claim by Tannen (1982), spoken and written strategies are two distinctive entities that have their own characteristics. This paper, therefore, explored written compliments that are under-researched to see whether the written strategies are similar to or different from those in spoken compliments. In addition, the paper compared two semantic references of TYG when non-Thais produced user-generated content (UGC) to compliment the characteristics of TYG, as food and a movie, in English. Clearly, this is a situation where people engage interculturally because the non-Thai users are expressing their gratitude to some positive characteristics of food or a movie related to Thai culture using English as the medium of international communication. This paper poses two research questions.

¹ The question is “If we’re talking about the word called TYG, in what context do you mention it?” 100 Thai participants answered this question via the Google Form.

1. Which spoken compliment strategies are present in user-generated written compliments when non-Thai users positively commented on ‘Tom Yum Goong’, a compliment object with two semantic references?
2. To what extent are there any similarities or differences in terms of compliment strategies when referring to TYG as food and a movie?

2. Review of Literature

2.1 Intelligibility of Tom Yum Goong in two semantic references

According to Ngampramuan (2016, p. 6), “intelligibility means the ability to fully understand text itself, message and situations.” This definition is generic and can be applied to any fields of study. In the realm of intercultural interactions, the definition of ‘intelligibility’ might be incomplete. To ensure that the level of ‘intelligibility’ is sufficient for people who are culturally and linguistically diverse, the ‘intelligibility’ should be reconceptualized as “the ability to fully understand [or recognize] the text or message [that presents an idea not available in one’s home culture]”. Obviously, the intelligibility of ‘Tom Yum Goong’ can be low for non-Thais who come from different backgrounds. However, the rise of Web 2.0 technology and globalization at present has made a wide range of unfamiliar concepts in one particular culture more familiar to people of another culture. The intelligibility of TYG as food and a movie among non-Thai people has become higher than that in the past, especially when more opportunities for intercultural encountering can be seized easily.

For this study, the first semantic reference of TYG is in terms of food and uses the frameworks of Duangsaeng and Chanyoo (2017), Ngampramuan (2016), and Srisonka and Yanasugondha (2019). Their research aimed to investigate intelligibility of the noun when translated from English to Thai or from Thai to English as it frequently appears on signs of local street food venders and as it appears on Thai menus. In fact, there are a number of ways that

TYG is spelled². For instance, some significant adjectives appeared in online compliments in this study such as delicious, tasty, and yummy that would help communication be understood more clearly and could not be used into any category except food. Moreover, TYG in terms of food is one of the most popular Thai street food menu items that people mention. It attracts foreign tourists which is evident from the countless orders placed for it (Duangsaeng & Chanyoo, 2017; McCall & Lynn, 2008; Ngampramuan, 2016; Srisongka & Yanasugondha, 2019). In fact, CNN Travel announced that Thailand's famous spicy hot and sour soup, TYG, ranked "No. 8 amongst the world's 50 best foods in 2021" and best of all is that the price is cheap (Tourism Authority of Thailand, 2017). The second semantic reference of 'Tom Yum Goong' is in terms of the Thai martial arts movie. 'Tom Yum Goong' and 'The Protector', two of Thailand's most famous international films starring Tony Jaa, were high grossing films (Rithdee, 2013; Thepbamrung, 2013). In both of Jaa's films, the plots focused on the Thai martial arts known as Thai boxing which has become famous worldwide as not only a valuable form of self-defense and exercise but also as a sport that has been embraced by Thais and foreigners (Brock, 2014). Moreover, the films showcase and feature many important aspects of Thailand such as historical landmarks, geographical regions well-known for their mountains and beaches, cityscapes, elephants, and local culture in the form of song and the lives of local people. These films additionally provide an opportunity to highlight Thai tradition, religious rites, and ceremonial rituals. The fascination with martial arts and, in particular, Thai boxing, has helped to attract a more global clientele to conduct business across cultures. The entertainment industry seems to have played a vital role in effectively nourishing a strong appetite for things Thai, leading to a workforce that is ever eager to find ways to improve and develop Thailand. It is the policy of several Thai entertainment industries, such as Thai entertainment and media, Thailand digital content, Thai film industry, and government bodies such as the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Tourism and Sports, to cooperate through the use of advertisement, media outreach, and the social world of online streaming. These resources have all been involved and used to classify 'Tom Yum Goong' in terms of martial arts in the film category to attract a wider audience (Erker, 2012). The fact that many websites and entertainment sources post reactions and comments from moviegoers such

² A form or something that differs in some respect from other forms of the original or from a standard. This paper refers to "Tom Yum Goong" because it does not exist in English and it has a number of spelling variations.

as those of the combat sports and striking analyst Jack Slack who made remarks such as, “This is the best fight in movie history” and, commenting on the loud applause from film audiences, helped to propel the TGY movie into global consciousness.

2.2 Strategies for spoken compliments on ‘characteristics’

Taking Holmes’ (1988, p. 446) definition, “a speech act 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”, into account, compliment strategies can be primarily realized explicitly and implicitly. Further studies (Charoenroop, 2021; Ebadi & Pourzandi, 2015; Lin, 2020; Lin et al., 2012; Yuan, 2002) similarly defined explicit compliment strategies as the ones with positive semantic carriers, while implicit compliment strategies are the ones without positive words.

2.2.1 Explicit compliment strategies

Yuan (2002) and Lin et al. (2012) referred to the explicit compliment strategies as the ones marked with positive semantic carriers. Later study by Lin (2020) specified the phrasal term and replaced it with the positive semantic words. Lin (2020) adopted this lexicon because she believed that the presence of this smallest linguistic unit with meaning (i.e., morphology) can perform the speech act of compliments unambiguously. For example, the presence of ‘excellent’ by itself can illustrate an explicit compliment. However, several parts of speech fall under this linguistic unit. The provision of examples in Lin’s (2020) study shows that what she always referred to as the positive semantic words are all adjectives such as “That was possibly the most energetic performance I’ve seen”. The presence of ‘energetic’ as an attributive adjective positively modifies the performance. Needless to say, this is an explicit compliment strategy. Charoenroop (2021) made a few changes and addressed it as positive adjectives. He also discovered, in his study, several strategies to perform spoken explicit compliments, as illustrated in Table 1.

Type	Example
Positive Adjective	That was an amazing audition.
Syntactic Formula (I like/love + NP)	I love your performance.
Performative Verb	I just want to compliment you on what you just did.
Exclamatory (Wow)	Wow, wow, wow , Oh my God! What just happened?

Table 1. Explicit compliment strategies (Charoenroop, 2021, p. 95)

The four explicit compliment strategies are unambiguous because they are marked by at least a positive semantic carrier (Lin et al., 2012; Yuan, 2002), words (Lin, 2020) or other identifiable positive lexicons such as adjectives, verbs, and exclamatory (Charoenroop, 2021).

Results from the previous studies (Charoenroop, 2021 and Lin, 2020) similarly showed that, when judges complimented the auditionees' characteristics on reality television shows, the explicit compliments were used more often than the implicit compliments. Lin (2020), however, did not specify further categories of explicit compliments. According to her, explicit compliments were the ones with positive semantic words (*That was possibly the most energetic performance I've seen.*). Charoenroop (2021, pp. 100–102), sub-divided explicit spoken compliments on characteristics, and found that Simon Cowell when making explicit compliments normally used positive adjectives (i.e., 86.36% and 87.80% in the America's Got Talent and the Britain's Got Talent, respectively).

2.2.2 Implicit compliment strategies

On the other hand, positive comments can be performed without the presence of any positive semantic carriers. Basing on Holmes' (1988) definition, compliments can also be performed indirectly. The coding schemes for implicit spoken compliments have been consistently modified. Lin et al. (2012) classified the implicit compliment strategies into eight sub-strategies: (i) contrast, (ii) explanation, (iii) request, (iv) admiration, (v) assumption, (vi) evaluation, (vii) joke, and (viii) want-statement. These sub-strategies do not carry any positive semantic words; however, they function as compliments. Two subsequent studies (Charoenroop, 2021; Lin, 2020) further extended the coding scheme for implicit compliment sub-strategies, as shown in the following tables.

Type	Definition & Example
Comparison	To praise a hearer by comparing him/her with something else or to indicate a hearer's improvement by comparing his/her past and present performances (<i>There has never been and will never be a substitute for that.</i>)
Double negation	To praise a hearer with a compliment using double negation (<i>I feel I can't see anything impossible for you to achieve.</i>)
Evaluation	To give a complimentary evaluation to recognize a hearer's performance or past effort (<i>You had the audience with you. You had me with you.</i>)
Suggestion	To suggest further action to approve a hearer's quality or performance (<i>So you have to have a word with your mentor and say, 'Turn me into a pop star, not someone who just performs on a talent competition.</i>)
Want Statement	To show a speaker's want, wish, or interest in the complimented topic (<i>I wanna see you one more time in Hollywood!</i>)

Table 2. Coding Scheme of Implicit Compliment Strategies (Lin, 2020, p. 50)

Lin (2020) made several changes in her new modified coding scheme. Three implicit sub-strategies, which are (i) contrast or comparison, (ii) evaluation, and (iii) want statement, remain unchanged. In addition, four implicit sub-strategies were removed. Lin (2020, p. 50) added one implicit sub-strategy in the coding scheme—double negation. Having a closer examination, Charoenroop (2021) found that this newly modified sub-strategy was particularly different from others in that its focus is not on function, but on form or the syntactic feature. Lin (2020, p. 50) provided an example of double negation: “I feel I can't see anything impossible for you to achieve.” Based on her coding scheme, this utterance is a double negation compliment sub-strategy. Alternatively, it can be considered an evaluation which is syntactically realized in double negation. Charoenroop (2021, p. 96), thus, modified a new coding scheme for spoken compliments.

Sub-strategy	Definition & Example
Comparison	compares the contestant with another contestant or someone with professional expertise (<i>It's like Tina Turner has come back!</i>)
Metaphor	says that the contestant is someone or something with an admirable quality (<i>You're a star.</i>)

Evaluation	judges the worth, quality, or importance of the contestant and his or her performance (<i>I think you might be one of the best singers we've ever had.</i>)
Suggestion	praises the contestant by recommending a thing to do that would benefit him or her or someone else (<i>If anyone ever says anything negative, you remember this moment.</i>)
Expressing Want	shows the judge's wish to praise or acknowledge the contestant's success (<i>I just want to compliment you on what you just did.</i>)
Promising	promises the judge will do something positive (<i>I'm gonna remember this moment for the rest of my life.</i>)
Contrast	compares two things in order to underscore a better quality or an improvement (<i>Bloody hell, Courtney! You are like a shy little thing when you first came out, and then you sing and you're like a lion.</i>)
Admiration	praises the contestant and his or her performance (<i>For someone your age to stand on this stage with all the nerves and pressure to absolutely not just nail the song, you made it your song.</i>)
Assumption	assumes that something positive is true for the contestant (<i>I think everyone in this room felt it and I think that.</i>)
Prediction	predicts good things would happen to the contestant (<i>Let me tell you. I think this country's gonna totally fall in love with you.</i>)
Joke	says something funny about the good thing the contestant did (<i>That wasn't you singing, was it? It wasn't someone behind you.</i>)
Surprise	says the contestant did better than the judge had initially expected (<i>Well, I've got to tell you. I shut my eyes and listen to you sing and that was not the same person. That shouldn't have been you.</i>)
Fulfillment	says the contestant did something good to fulfill the judge's expectation (<i>Guys, girls, I don't know who you are, but I literally said if we could find Stormtroopers who could dance, seriously I said that this show is going into a different league.</i>)
Approval	ascertains that the contestant and his or her performance is good enough (<i>Good for you!</i>)
Appreciation	shows the judge's gratefulness for the contestant's choice to be on the show (<i>I'm absolutely honored that you'd come on to our show.</i>)
Expressing	expresses the judge's regret for failing to be part of the contestant's success
Disappointment	(<i>I'm now annoyed that I didn't press the Golden Buzzer.</i>)

Table 3. Implicit Compliment Sub-strategies (Charoenroop, 2021, pp. 96–113)

The sixteen implicit compliment sub-strategies appeared in the analysis of spoken compliments. Each of them was aligned with one another because their focus was on the

functions of compliments or the locutionary act (i.e., the act of saying). Without any positive semantic carriers, utterances can also perform compliments through the use of other speech acts, making them implicit compliments. In other words, these utterances in isolation without a given context may have a different illocutionary force (i.e., the intended meaning), producing a different perlocutionary effect (i.e., effects on the hearer).

Results from Lin (2020) and Charoenroop (2021) were compatible, particularly when they underscored the implicit spoken strategies most frequently used under the context of mass media. Lin (2020, pp. 52–53) found that the evaluation implicit compliments were used the most across three reality television shows—American Idol, the X Factor, and Top Million Star—that is 43.18%, 63.04% and 30.95%, respectively). In a similar fashion, Charoenroop (2021, pp. 104–107) investigated the spoken compliment strategies used by Simon Cowell in the America’s Got Talent and the Britain’s Got Talent, and found that the evaluation compliment strategies were used the most in both shows (25.30%: the AGT, 20.40%: the BGT).

2.3 Online compliments and user-generated content (UGC)

As is well known, the Internet and social media have figuratively reduced the world to a size in which people can connect and engage with each other on countless topics. In this modern era of globalization people throughout the world, who have rapidly absorbed technology, mostly use social media or the Internet to communicate or to search for something interesting and to express themselves through platforms such as on Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and personal blogs. Specifically, through these platforms, people can also communicate via UGC (audio, video, images, text) to express compliments in reviews or respond to comments from influencers, bloggers, and others to create and produce all manner of content. Bowen and Ozuem (2011, p. 197) pointed out that UGCs have already expanded the “unknown limited” to a wider range of general public, switching the focus from traditional media to online social media that creates a more “trustworthy” and “relatable” sense than those created by marketers (p. 200).

Furthermore, the comments of influencers, Youtubers, bloggers, and celebrities can influence audiences’ impressions as well as establish rapport and thus lead to the development

of closer relationships (Yusof & Hoon, 2014). Most people use compliments to express a good feeling, admiration about something or appreciation for those to whom one is referring. Also, UGC, social media, and online networks can operate as a type of methodology to help addressees enter into active exchanges about countless topics that could further their interaction and lead to rapport-building with the readers or listeners who appreciate being part of an ongoing conversation. According to Jha (2021), there are also general factors that impact online compliments such as using language intelligibly between senders and receivers, background information, and personal experiences, all of which can contribute to fruitful communication and enduring interpersonal relationships. It is also a way to promote and advertise with little or no cost which lowers barriers to access it. Thus, the Internet is a platform for the creation and dispensing of UGC that facilitates the dissemination of information at a rapid pace in the wake of an event (Kitsios et al., 2022). A study by Tan and Rungrojsuwan (2022) specifically investigated linguistic realizations of English compliments on social media platforms, focusing on lexical units. They found that “written forms [on social media] are...deviating from the conventional grammatical rules” (p. 23). They contain a lot of slangs and abbreviation. This can be due to the limitation of online space provided by the social media platforms. Therefore, encoding long and descriptive messages can be less possible.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data collection procedure

The researchers began the data collection process by searching for comments and reviews in 13 websites that offered positive comments on ‘Tom Yum Goong’ as food or a movie between 2015 and 2021. This is to ensure that the data taken from the online reviews are up-to-date and sufficient to answer the two research questions. There were 114 compliments pertaining to TYG as food. They came from 10 different websites³ with the top three being www.google.com, www.allrecipe.co.uk and www.youtube.com. The researchers also collected 108 compliments in

³ Compliment data in terms of food: www.google.com, www.allrecipes.co.uk, www.youtube.com, www.cookingwithnart.com, www.eatingthaifood.com, www.aspicyperspective.com, www.thewoksoflife.com, www.foodnetwork.com, www.hot-thai-kitchen.com, www.recipetineats.com.

the film category. They came from three websites⁴, and all compliments used in the film came from *Tom Yum Goong 1* and *Tom Yum Goong 2*. The selections of these websites were to ensure that the written compliments for TYG as food and a movie were sufficient for the analysis and the total number of compliments for the two semantic references should be comparable. These compliment-making users wrote their compliments in English. There were some other languages used along with the presence of English such as French (e.g., *Bon Appétit*) and Portuguese (e.g., *Excelente*). These occurrences, however, were infrequent. The evidence that these individuals were not Thais can be seen from their usernames, display of pictures, and national flags which appeared in their compliments, as shown below.

Figure 1

Example of compliment taken from the website

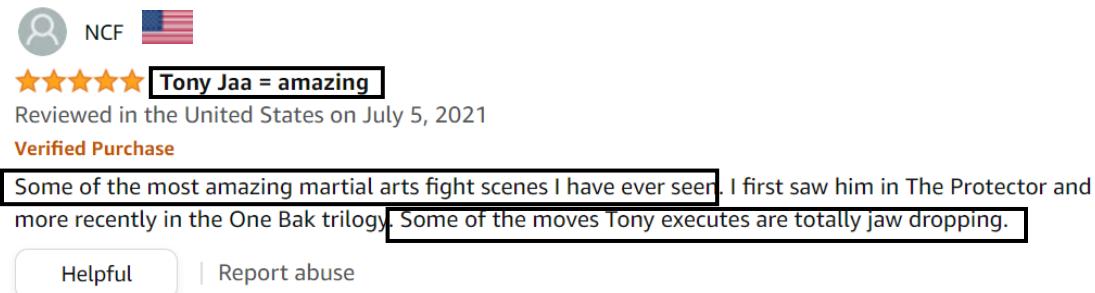


This user-generated compliment was written on February 12, 2017 by a non-Thai person who made a positive evaluation on TYG with the semantic reference of a ‘movie’. In this extract, the username, display of picture, and the national flag are evidence of self-identification. In Figure 1, the compliment is in bold “*still great and full of action!*”. Although there were fifty informants who gave their written compliments to each semantic reference of TYG, the total number of compliments for each compliment object was far greater than fifty because some informants encoded multiple compliments in one post, as can be seen in the following figure.

⁴ Compliment data in terms of films: www.google.com, www.imdb.com, www.amazon.com.

Figure 2

Example of compliments performed by one user



This user-generated compliment was written on July 5, 2021 by a non-Thai person who positively commented on TYG with the semantic reference of a ‘movie’. In this extract, there are three compliments being made by this user: (i) *Tony Jaa = amazing*, (ii) *Some of the most amazing martial arts fight scenes I have ever seen*, (iii) *Some of the moves Tony executes are totally jaw dropping*. They all are explicit compliments with the presence of positive adjectives, which are (i) amazing, (ii) amazing and (iii) jaw dropping, respectively.

3.2 Data analysis

Compliments were analyzed based initially on Holmes’ (1988, p. 446) definition of compliments—“a speech act 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” and also from the subsequent coding systems of Charoenroop (2021), Lin (2020), Lin et al. (2012), and Yuan (2002) that described and classified explicit and implicit compliments (see Section 2.2). Explicit compliment strategies are the ones with positive semantic carriers, which include positive adjectives, syntactic formulas (i.e., I like/love + NP), exclamatory, and the performative verb (see Table 1). Implicit compliment strategies, on the other hand, are the ones without any positive semantic carriers. The strategies are comparison, metaphor, evaluation, suggestion, expressing want, promising, contrast, admiration, assumption, prediction, joke, surprise, fulfillment, approval, appreciation, and expressing disappointment (see Table 3).

4. Results

The preliminary finding about the intelligibility of TYG stayed in contrast with the discussion of Ngampramuan (2016) and Duangsaeng and Chanyoo (2017). The spelling of TYG in English regardless of its semantic references written by the non-Thai users was not at all variant. In their intercultural encounters, the non-Thai users, whose language and cultural backgrounds are diverse, wrote the words with a unified and standard spelling—Tom Yum Goong, as shown in the following table.

Example

When we visited Thailand in 1998, we ate **Tom Yum Goong** nearly every day

I think there is a reason why this soup is called **Tom Yum Goong**. It is just too YUMMY!

Tom Yum Goong, five stars!

Tom Yum Goong's one of the best martial art films to date such a great and action packed movie!

Table 4. Spelling of TYG as ‘food’ and a ‘movie’

This Thai proper noun, TYG, has increasingly gained an international recognition. As mentioned earlier, the rise of Thai restaurants around the world serving a unique and delicious soup together with the success of the dramatic combat and martial arts films have standardized this Thai word, presenting positive images to a wide range of people whose language and cultural backgrounds are diverse. Although TYG has not yet been codified in any standard English dictionary like ‘*Pad Thai*’, which was codified in Oxford Dictionary in 2022, its popularity among non-Thais has grown immensely. As a consequence, the spelling of this compliment object with the two semantic references in English has become consistent no matter who wrote them.

4.1 Spoken compliment strategies in written UGC

Holmes’ (1988, p. 446) classification of explicit and implicit compliments was applicable to the datasets in this study. Further investigation on characteristics of compliment objects revealed that some of the spoken compliment strategies (cf. Charoenroop, 2021; Lin, 2020; Lin et

al., 2012, Yuan, 2002) appeared in the user-generated written compliments. Table 5 summarizes the findings.

(Sub)Strategies	Example
Explicit	
Positive adjective	This recipe is awesome . [f] Some of the most amazing martial arts fight scenes I have ever seen. [m]
I like/love + NP	I LOVE THAI FOOD especially Tom Yum Goong! [f] I love thus guy as well. [m]
Exclamatory	Oh wow [f] Wow! [m]
Implicit	
Admiration	This soup was a real treat. [f] What's not to love it's Tony Jaa [m]
Appreciation	That's not much spicy much but I enjoyed every taste of the soup on the spoon that touched my tongue. [f] It was every emotion wrapped up in one. [m]
Approval	My whole family, my husband, my kids keeps asking for more and more and more. [f] Tony Jaa never disappoint! [m]
Assumption	We just couldn't get enough. [f] N/A [m]
Contrast	I'm not really a fan of prawns but Tom Tum Goong that's a different story. [f] I am amazed it's rated 18 as it's much less violent than other films in that category [m]
Evaluation	They look simply irresistible. [f] I believe was a masterpiece in story, atmosphere, settings, acting and action. [m]
Expressing Want	And I so want that again. [f] Just what I wanted. [m]
Fulfillment	You make my heart go pitter-patter. [f] I'm glad I didn't listen to the haters. [m]
Predication	Make it you'll love it. [f] Once you have seen one, you want to see more. [m]
Promising	Will definitely make this again! [f] You will enjoy this movie as long as you like martial arts action type films. [m]
Suggestion	Good for winter and spring season. [f] If you like martial arts moves then this film is for you. [m]

Surprise	N/A [f]
	How can you not like it? [m]

Table 5. Spoken compliment strategies that are present in written compliment strategies

There were three spoken explicit compliment sub-strategies (cf. Charoenroop, 2021; Lin, 2020; Lin et al., 2012; Yuan, 2002) that appeared in the user-generated written compliments: (i) positive adjective, (ii) I like/love + NP, and (iii) exclamatory. This has illustrated that the compliment strategies were not affected even though the mediums of communication are changed. The spoken compliment strategies could adequately describe the user-generated written compliment strategies appearing in the online platforms that enable the users to write their own content and publish it on social media. However, certain limitations of the social media make a significant contribution to the characteristics of the user-generated written compliments. Obviously, linguistic realizations were concise. The explicit compliments using the positive adjectives, for example, were realized linguistically in a word (e.g., *amazing!!!*), a phrase (e.g., *absolutely mouthwatering*), or a sentence (e.g., *Action and fight scenes are incredible.*). This also holds true for another explicit sub-strategy: I like/love + NP, in that, the noun phrase after the transitive verbs (i.e., like and love) can be realized in three linguistic forms: (i) a word (e.g., *I loved it!*), a phrase (e.g., *I love all Tom Yum soups.*), and a dependent clause (e.g., *I LOVE how you explain everything.*). Although the transitive verbs take the objects in various linguistic forms, they are realized rather concisely. In some cases, furthermore, the subject was omitted (e.g., *loved this movie, love it*), making the linguistic realizations even shorter.

Following Charoenroop (2021), Lin (2020), Lin et al. (2012), and Yuan (2002), twelve spoken implicit compliment sub-strategies on characteristics appeared in these user-generated written compliments. Despite similarities in terms of the strategies, the linguistic realizations were quite concise, in most cases, the subject is omitted (e.g., *good for winter and spring season; make it you'll love it; will definitely make it again!*). These linguistic realizations reflect informal text messages that somehow resemble the informal spoken language, which is one of the observable characteristics of the user-generated content in which people of diverse backgrounds created using informal written English as a medium of intercultural communication to praise the two

semantic references. Following Yusof and Hoon (2004), it is convincing that the user-generated written compliments help establish good relationships between the influencers, Youtubers, bloggers and celebrities, and general users who made their compliments on the characteristics of these compliment objects. Their positive comments, both explicit and implicit, do not only develop good rapport but also present comprehensive and firsthand reviews for those who have no or little experience with TYG. They might be interested in trying to eat TYG, a unique and delicious hot sour soup typically served with shrimp, or trying to watch TYG, the Thai dramatic combat and martial arts films after reading these user-generated written compliments.

4.2 Compliment strategies between the two semantic references

In a comparison between the two semantic references of TYG, there is no difference in terms of the compliment strategies most commonly used in user-generated written compliments. Table 6 demonstrates the comparison.

(Sub)Strategies	Raw (F : M)	Percentage (F : M)
Compliments	114 : 108	100 : 100
<i>Explicit</i>	85 : 69	74.56 : 63.89
Positive adjective	64 : 58	75.29 : 84.05
I like/love+ NP	17 : 10	20.00 : 14.50
Exclamatory	4 : 1	4.71 : 1.45
<i>Implicit</i>	29 : 39	25.44 : 36.11
Admiration	3 : 1	10.35 : 2.56
Appreciation	1 : 1	3.45 : 2.56
Approval	2 : 2	6.89 : 5.13
Assumption	1 : 0	3.45 : 0
Contrast	1 : 1	3.45 : 2.56
Evaluation	7 : 22	24.14 : 56.42
Expressing want	4 : 1	13.79 : 2.56
Fulfillment	3 : 2	10.35 : 5.13
Prediction	1 : 2	3.45 : 5.13
Promising	2 : 1	6.89 : 2.56

Suggestion	4 : 5	13.79 : 12.83
Surprise	0 : 1	0 : 2.56

Table 6. Comparison between the two semantic references

Table 6 illustrates that there is no difference between the strategies most commonly used when the users of various backgrounds make compliments on characteristics of TYG with the two semantic references. Positive adjectives are used the most when the users make explicit compliments on TYG as food (i.e., 75.29%) and a movie (i.e., 84.05%). In line with Charoenroop (2021), the most frequently used explicit compliment strategies were positive adjectives. Obviously, it does not necessarily matter what medium of communication, either spoken or written language, is used, positive adjectives are the most frequently used to express explicit compliments on characteristics. Extracts 1 and 2 show how the users perform explicit compliments by using positive adjectives.

Extract 1: *This is one of my favorite soups. This recipe is awesome.*

The user-generated written compliments in Extract 1 are considered explicit because they contain two identifiable positive semantic words, whose parts of speech are adjective. The presence of ‘favorite’ in the attributive position in front of the first head noun-soups, is clear to see that TYG is one of the soups that the user personally likes. In the following sentence, another positive adjective, awesome, modifies the second head noun, which is recipe, in a predicative position. Both adjectives similarly have positive meanings even when they are out of context, making a direct relationship between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is intended’. Additionally, the two positive adjectives can be used to make positive compliments in a specific context and thus reinforce the recognition of TYG as ‘food’. Another semantic reference of TYG is a ‘movie’. An example of this reference is given in Extract 2.

Extract 2: *Tony Jaa is amazing, his fight scenes are absolutely among the best ever films.*

The user-generated written compliments in Extract 2 are classified into the explicit category because there were two identifiable positive semantic words, whose parts of speech are similarly adjective. The presence of ‘amazing’ in the predicative position modifies the first proper name, which is the lead actor in the film that is remarkable. The second adjective in the superlative degree ‘best’ in the attributive position modifies the second head noun, which is ‘film’. The user also intensifies the degree of this adjective with an adjective-modifying intensifier, which is ‘absolutely’. Both of these adjectives are positive even though they are independent on context. They can be used to make positive comments on TYG in a specific context and thus reinforce the recognition of TYG as a ‘movie’. Clearly seen, a direct relationship between ‘locutionary act’ and ‘illocutionary act’ can be found from the two extracts.

On the other hand, evaluation, an implicit sub-strategy, was the most commonly used to compliment TYG as food (i.e., 24.14%) and a movie (i.e., 56.42%). In line with Charoenroop (2021) and Lin (2020), the evaluation of implicit compliments was also the most frequently used strategy when complimenting on characteristics of an entity or a person. Needless to say, evaluation is an expected role of any judge whose duty is to provide constructive comments—both positive and negative. Similarly, evaluations given by the users on these online social platforms can be considered effective reviews for those who have neither eaten TYG as food nor watched TYG as a movie. Not surprisingly, evaluation thus becomes the most frequently used implicit strategy, that is 24.14% and 56.42% for food and a movie, respectively. Extracts 3 and 4 illustrate how the users make evaluations on TYG and their evaluations serve as compliments.

Extract 3: *It looks simply irresistible.*

The user-generated written compliment in Extract 3 is implicit since there is no identifiable positive semantic word in it. Although there is an adjective appearing in the predicative position after a linking verb, it is not a positive one. The meaning of ‘irresistible’ can be either positive or negative depending on what is being described by this adjective. Considering the meanings between “irresistible temptation” and “irresistible criticism”, they can be either positive or negative. Hence, there is no relationship between ‘what is said’ and ‘what is intended’. In addition, without any given context, this utterance can serve multiple functions. For example, it

can be used to perform a praise or a recommendation. However, after looking at a cooking show on YouTube, the user evaluates that this menu is too attractive and tempting to be resisted. Of course, it looks great. This evaluation then serves as an implicit compliment.

Extract 4: *I would give this 11 if I could.*

The user-generated written compliment in Extract 4 can be considered implicit because it does not have any identifiable positive semantic word or any positive adjective. Under context-independent circumstances, this utterance may carry multiple meanings such as a promise, an offer, an evaluation, an apology or even a recommendation. In other words, the interpretation of the writer's intention can be varied. Under context-dependent circumstance, however, this utterance is an evaluation after the user already watched the film. He made a personal evaluation of the film's quality. Generally speaking, people will typically give a film that they really like on a rating scale of 10, but in this case, the compliment implies that if 11 could be given they would do so. It clearly reflects a higher quality than people normally expect. Of course, it is an implicit evaluation compliment strategy that was used to praise the quality of the movie.

5. Conclusions and discussion

The compliment object 'Tom Yum Goong', according to native speakers of Thai, carry three semantic references. Most associations to 'TYG' related to the spicy hot and sour soup, which can be enjoyed at street food vendors or in restaurants throughout Thailand and much of the world. The second most referenced association is to the movie related to Thai martial arts and Thai boxing. The third and least used association is to the Thai financial crisis that began in Thailand in 1997 which is mostly negative in comments. The researchers, then, focused only on the semantic references related to 'food' and a 'movie' and then examined user-generated written compliments on their characteristics. As per the evidence derived from the survey questionnaire, the opinions, comments, and expressions about 'TYG' of non-Thais were relatively positive. Moreover, the intelligibility of TYG, although has not yet been codified in any English dictionary, is consistent. The users of various backgrounds wrote the two semantic references of

TYG in English with consistent standard. This reflects a high level of ‘intelligibility’ of TYG when referring to the two semantic references among the users of various backgrounds.

UGC is a modern way to use compliments in online platforms that people around the world employ to describe their positive feelings and expression through the written words. The text that appears in the contents of compliments most often use explicit compliment strategies more frequently than implicit ones. The use of explicit compliments is quite popular due to their being concise, straightforward, and unambiguous. Moreover, the use of these compliments does not require the use of long sentences or implied additional context to interpret. Like spoken compliments, the user-generated written compliments are linguistically realized with positive adjectives the most. Furthermore, evaluation implicit compliments are used the most in user-generated written compliments. Subjects in many sentences are omitted. Unlike the observation made by Tan and Rungrojsuwan (2022), users tend to encode fewer words or phrases that do not follow syntactical rules to communicate. Slangs and abbreviations are barely used on these user-generated written compliments. In spite of cultural differences, this can facilitate communication among non-Thais when giving compliments to TYG in intercultural online communication context because they can quickly identify the UGCs as compliments.

In response to Jha (2021) and Kitsios et al. (2022), in addition, English as a lingua franca used between the non-Thai users who generated the compliments and a diverse group of receivers who may speak other first languages serves a dominant role in making these written compliments intelligible to receivers. If, however, there is no common language that facilitates a diverse group of people to understand one another, online platforms that enable the users to generate their personal contents may not become sought-after as it is now. Last but not least, the use of English as a common language to covey positive feedback to the two semantic references of TYG can bring positive images to the eyes of potential customers and travelers worldwide. Possibly, this can be a global localization strategy that helps promote a unified user experience.

The exploration on compliment strategies for TYG, on the one hand, may arouse future researchers’ interests to replicate the design of this study examining other compliment objects in the Thai culture having multiple semantic references. On the other hand, further studies may

investigate the two semantic references of TYG through the use of multimodal analysis since user-generated content does not limit itself to the written language. Audio, video and images can also be user-generated content displayed on social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, and personal blogs. The analysis on these features will certainly add breadth and depth to the existing knowledge about user-generated compliments.

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