

OBITUARY ANNOUNCEMENTS IN JORDANIAN AND BRITISH NEWSPAPERS: A CROSS-CULTURAL OVERVIEW

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Summary: This paper examines the socio-cultural practices surrounding the use of obituary announcements in two different cultures. Specifically, it investigates the structural and linguistic features as well as the euphemistic expressions related to death in obituaries placed in Jordanian and British newspapers. It aims at exploration of the impact of some sociological factors on the form and content of the obituaries as well as finding out the communicative functions conveyed by this particular means of communication. The data comprise three hundred (300) death announcements evenly distributed by the two societies under investigation. The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The paper reveals clear-cut differences between the two sets of obituaries in terms of structure, language and function. It has also been observed that most of these differences are mainly attributable to socio-cultural distinctions between the two societies. This study elicited a number of significant results which are full of insights to sociolinguistic theory and which lead to a better understanding of the interrelated relationship between language and culture.

1. Introduction

The contention of this paper is to offer some empirical data about obituary announcements in two different cultures: British and Jordanian. Specifically, it gives an account of the way people interact by this particular means of communication and how such interaction is colored by their socio-cultural background. In fulfilling the relational and referential functions, an obituary notice is seen as a medium to convey both social and linguistic meanings. The purpose of this paper is to provide some insights into the differences between British and Jordanian obituary notices with detailed reference to the cultural background of the societies under investigation. This paper proposes that the study of obituary notices should be integrated into the theory of sociolinguistics to ensure effective communication between people with different cultural backgrounds.

2. Theoretical background and related work

Death notices can best be analyzed in the general framework of the ethnography of communication. Hymes [1972] calls for a new area of study, a kind of linguistics which not only explores language as a formal system of grammar but also as the one culturally shaped within the contexts of social life. At the same time, he calls for a kind of anthropology which takes speaking in particular and

communication in general as its central subject matter. This new area of study that Hymes founded in 1962 is known as the Ethnography of Communication [Carbaugh 2007: 1]. Hymes [1972] proposes an ethnographic framework which takes into account various factors that come into play in speaking. These factors are summarily encoded in the acronym SPEAKING. The model has sixteen components that can be applied to many sorts of discourse (for more information on this model, see [Hymes 1972]).

Hymes [1974: 5] spoke of the relevance of ethnography to cross-cultural communication research as it studies «communicative form and function in integral relation to each other». In addition, ‘speech community’ is one principal notion among others which Hymes [1974] introduces as a basic unit for the Ethnography of Communication. Similarly, Duranti [2001: 1] points to the importance of ‘speech community’; it «helps us think about language not only simply in terms of a grammatical system but also in terms of the people who use it as a powerful intellectual tool in their daily life». In addition to the term ‘speech community’, Hymes [1972] introduces other chief notions required for the descriptive analysis of individual communities: ‘speech situation’, ‘speech event’, and ‘speech act’.

According to Saville-Troike [1982: 2], «the focus of the ethnography of communication is the “speech community”, the way communication within it is patterned and organized as systems of communicative events, and the ways in which these interact with all other systems of culture». Saville-Troike [1982] argues that patterning happens at all levels of communication: in societies, groups and among individuals. At a societal level, communication usually patterns in terms of its function categories of talk, attitudes and conceptions about language and speakers [Saville-Troike 1982: 13-14]. She also assumes that the physical setting of an event may call for the use of a different type of language, even when the same general purpose is being served, and when the same participants are involved [Saville-Troike 1982: 62-63]. Additionally, she contends that communication patterns according to particular roles and groups within a society, such as, occupation, educational level, social status, sex, and age [Saville-Troike 1982: 14].

To announce is to communicate a particular message in a formal or public way. Specifically, an *announcement* is defined as a statement either in spoken or written form that makes something known publicly [Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English 1995]. All types of announcements have the function of telling the hearers/ readers about something [Nwoye 1992: 15]. Obituaries are no exception, since an obituary is «a published announcement of a death, usually with a short biography for the dead person» [Free Collins Dictionaries Online 2009]. However, Fernandez [2006: 104] believes that obituaries exceed the limits of a mere announcement of demise; rather, they constitute an evidence of mankind’s failure to face mortality. Moses and Marelli [2004] believe that obituaries represent a special text since their content focuses particularly on the qualities of one person and how the end of that person’s life can be best presented. They add that obituaries «are a window that provides a view into a culture» [2006: 104].

Moreover, Fernandez [2006: 9] clarifies that both information and publicity coexist in obituaries which compromise a hybrid genre that represents a type of discourse halfway between truth and exaggerated display of the virtues of the deceased or the grief of the surviving family members. He explains two types of obituaries that are distinguished by Hernando [2001]. The first type is referred to as 'performative', whose primary aim is the transmission of relevant details about the death, the deceased or the place and time of the funeral. The second type is referred to as 'opinative'; their aim is to produce a specific effect on the readers by emphasizing the social status and the virtues of the deceased. While performative obituaries are impersonal, opinative ones are personal. Therefore, one specific communicative function of an obituary, both performative and opinative, is to inform people of a person's death. However, while informative obituaries depend on impersonal language devoted to performing locutionary function, that of transmitting the relevant details of death, opinative obituaries rely on emotive and figurative language devoted to the performance of a perlocutionary function, that is, they are oriented towards causing a favorable impression on the reader by showing the social status or the ideal conduct of the deceased [Fernandez 2006: 105].

Nwoye [1992: 15] sees announcements and remembrances of death in Nigerian newspapers as communicative events. He defines 'communicative event' as a social event that serves some communicative function(s). He adds that a communicative event is different from a speech event to the extent that communicative events can be carried out by various means other than speech. Also, Al-Khatib [1997: 157] elucidates that communicative events and speech events are not the same, rather the notion of communicative event is broader than the notion of speech event.

Obituary notices will be looked at here as communicative events. Hymes' [1974] framework for understanding a communicative event may offer a more comprehensive and more complex characterization of obituary announcements as used in British and Jordanian societies. Communication in this particular type of announcements involves intention, setting, form, gist, norms, tone, instruments, genre, etc. Thus, we shall look at the setting here in terms of place and time, at the participants in terms of the people who are connected with the announcements, and at the ends in terms of the purpose of the announcement. Act sequence refers to the events that culminate into making the announcements and how they have been structured, keying is viewed in terms of the tone and mood of the participants in the act, instrument is the medium of language used and in the case of obituary notices, it is the written words. The norms refer to the socio-cultural norms, habits, values, and conventions attached to death and the practice of placing death notices in newspapers. The genre is a rhetorical eulogy and this captures the main aspects of this communicative event. Some components of the death notice are speech acts. Anything that is written in relation to the death would be considered as an integral part of the whole communicative event.

3. Objectives

This paper seeks to uncover the socio-cultural factors that shape the structure and language of obituaries in Jordanian and British societies. In this paper we try to find out if the religious background of the two societies, issues of death and belief affect the announcements and, if so, in what way. Moreover, the study attempts to see whether the age, sex, and socio-economic status of the deceased correlate with the structural features as well as the linguistic features of the obituaries. The goal of the study is specifically to describe the structural and linguistic features of obituaries in relation to the socio-cultural background of the concerned societies and to demonstrate the differences and similarities between them. It is to assume that each society has developed a separate pattern of communication that belongs to their specific speech community, while distinguishing them from other speech communities. Furthermore, the study is expected to reveal whether religion has a special impact on the obituaries in terms of form and content.

4. Methodology

4.1. Data collection: procedures

The data for this study were retrieved from two Jordanian and two British daily newspapers. On the one hand, the Jordanian newspapers *Al-Rai* and *Ad-Dustour* are the largest and oldest ones in the country. Both of them are national newspapers owned by Jordanian institutions and written for and read by the Jordanians all over the country [Al-Khatib 1997]. All obituaries in Jordanian newspapers are paid for and written by family, friends, and associates of the deceased. In Jordanian newspapers, the obituaries are published on special pages, usually in the inner side of the newspapers. On the other hand, the British newspapers *The Times* and *The Guardian* are generally seen as serious mass media with high standards of journalism. They are chosen for this study because they are the most widely circulating newspapers in the UK and are also known worldwide.

It is worth noting that *Al-Rai* and *Ad-Dustour* are published in Arabic, the native tongue of the country. Therefore, the announcements published in Jordanian newspapers are translated into English. Needless to say that *The Times* and *The Guardian* are published in English.

Jordanian newspapers include two special types of announcements about death, entitled *lament* or *anniversary of death*. Such announcements are most often written by the deceased's family to commemorate an anniversary of a death that happened sometime in the past, at times as long as 20 years ago. This type of announcements about death is similar to *remembrance* and *in memoriam* mentioned in Nwoye's work [1992: 17]. Furthermore, *acknowledgments* which are written by the deceased's family to express thanks for a group of mourners represent another type of announcements about death placed in Jordanian newspapers.

As for the British newspapers, obituary pages include three interrelated sections: *Death notices*, *Acknowledgments*, and *Memoriams*. *Death notices* basi-

cally refer to death announcements. *Memoriams* are similar to *laments* found in Jordanian newspapers as well as to *remembrances* and *in memoriams* mentioned in Nwoye's work [1992: 17]. The *Acknowledgments* section in the newspapers is normally devoted to the acknowledgements written by the deceased's family in order to express their gratitude to people who have been helpful and supportive in the hard time of the demise.

In total, we collected 150 obituaries from the Jordanian newspapers and 150 from the British ones (i.e., from *The Times*' and *The Guardian*'s websites). To see whether the newspapers are consistent in their style of advertising, the chosen obituaries were extracted from newspapers published over a period of six months.

4.2. Data analysis: procedures

The focus in this work was on the elements which form the structure and function of the obituary announcements in terms of the socio-cultural background of the two societies under investigation. Structural features refer to all elements which form the structure of an obituary announcement such as its appearance, size, layout, font type, graphics (see [Al-Khatib 1997: 160]). Obituary announcements belong to what Enkvist [1987] calls the family of «template texts» which are defined by him [Enkvist 1987, quoted in Nwoye 1992: 18] as those texts «whose macro structure is set in advance, and where the text producer, so to say, enters new data into pre-existing gaps, as when filling a hotel registration card or an income-tax return». Nowey [1992] and Al-Khatib [1997] benefited much from the taxonomy of the structural features of the announcements which had been made earlier by Fries [1990]. Similarly, the data of this study could better be analyzed by utilizing the same taxonomy which was used by both researchers. Following in the footsteps of Nowey [1992] and Al-Khatib [1997], we used their work on obituaries and congratulation announcements as a model and discussed the collected notices accounting for two main types of features: obligatory and optional. The obligatory features are those elements that should be written in the announcement, while the optional ones are those that are left to personal preference. We analyzed the data quantitatively and qualitatively and we examined the effect of a number of extralinguistic factors such as age, gender, education, and career of the deceased on the type of language being used as well as on the most prominent features of the announcements. From the outset, we tried to explain and interpret the results of the study relying on the ethnography approach which was advanced by Hymes [1964, 1972] and utilized successfully by others (e.g., [Blom & Gumperz 1972; Saville-Troike 1982, 1983]).

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Structural features of obituaries in Jordanian newspapers

An examination of the data showed that Jordanian obituary announcements have both obligatory and optional features. These can be schematized as shown in Figure 1 below.

Structural features of obituary announcements in Jordanian newspapers

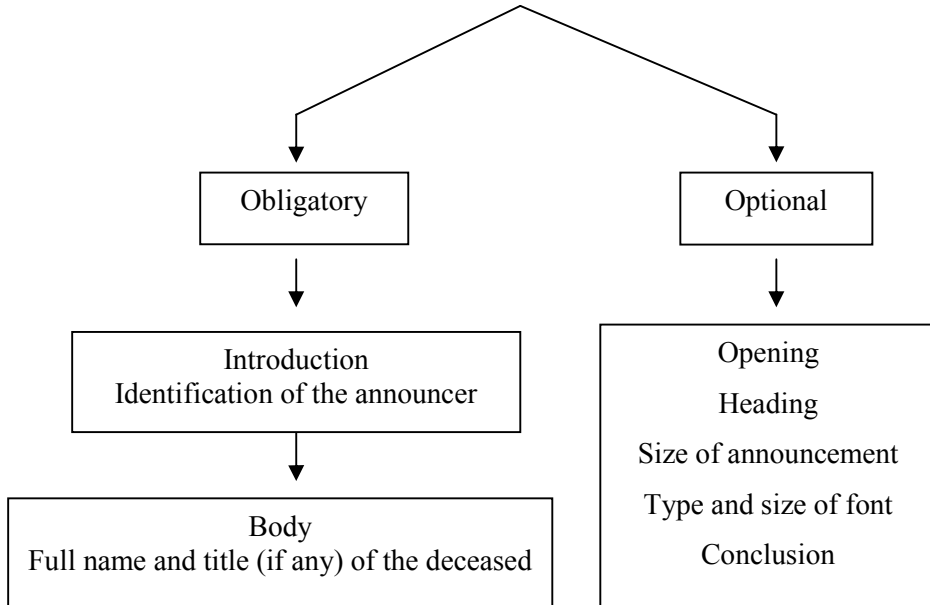


Figure 1: Structural features of obituary announcements in Jordanian newspapers

The obligatory elements were prevalent in 100% of announcements which have been collected. Obituary announcements in both *Al-Rai* and *Ad-Dustour* had the same obligatory as well as optional features. The introduction was usually of the form of «X, with sorrow and grief, mourn his/ her/ their dearest deceased...». Sometimes the introduction was of the form «With resignation to the will of Allah (God), X, with sorrow & grief, mourn his/ her/ their dearest deceased who moved to the mercy of God...». These forms of introduction were followed by the deceased’s name and his/ her title (if any). «X» represents the name of the deceased’s family and/ or clan or the name of the associates of the deceased as well as those of his/ her family such as friends, colleagues, workmates followed by their titles (if any). Consider the distribution of these elements in Example (1) below:

(1) Obituary of a Virtuous Man

X, Y, and Z mourn, with sorrow & grief, «al-marhoum»
 The engineer SSSS – the brother of the Excellency Dr. KKKK
 Our sincere condolences to all family members and relatives
 To God We Belong and To HIM We Return

Whereas «X» in both cases mourn the death of a specific person, the obituary written by the deceased’s family and/ or clan is mainly intended to an-

nounce the death of that person. 58% of the obituaries were written by the deceased's family/ clan and 42% by the deceased's associates.

With regard to the optional components of the structural features of obituaries, we found five ones shared by all types of obituaries, i.e., those written by the deceased's family and/ or tribe(s), and those written by the deceased's associates. These optional features were the opening, the heading, the size of the obituary, the type and size of font, and the conclusion. Both opening and conclusion were usually verses from the Holy Quran or the Bible depending on the announcers' religious background. More specifically, if the obituary was written by the deceased's family, it was common to have a verse from the Holy Book of their faith. If the mourner was a Muslim and the deceased was a Christian, the conclusion was more likely to be a Quranic verse that Christians believe in as well, such as «To God we belong and to Him we shall return».

Also, 20% of the obituaries included an opening, and 66% of them had a conclusion. The heading was a very short phrase of the form 'Obituary of a Virtuous Man' *naḡi faDil* if the deceased was a male and *naḡi faDilah* if the deceased was a female. Sometimes, the announcement indicated not only the gender but also the age of the deceased, i.e., whether the deceased was young or old: *naḡi šaab* 'Obituary of a young male', *naḡi šaabbah* 'Obituary of a young female' and *naḡi šayx* 'Obituary of an old man'. Moreover, the heading was of the form *naḡi haaj* or *naḡi haajjah*. 84% of the obituary announcements were found to have a heading. The size of the obituaries varied according to the socio-economic status of both the deceased and the announcer since obituaries are paid for. We found that 5% of the obituaries took the whole page, 27% were of medium size ranging from 72 to 1092 square cm (half of a page), and 68% of the obituaries were of the small size about 48 square cm. In Jordanian society, it seems that the size of announcement co-varies with the socioeconomic status of the deceased and his/ her family, namely the bigger the size of the obituary, the higher the socioeconomic status of the deceased or the announcer or both. Moreover, it seems that the size of Jordanian obituary is not affected by the deceased's gender or age.

Furthermore, the size and type of font was another optional structural feature of the obituaries in Jordanian newspapers. The name of the announcer, i.e., the deceased's family/ clan and the names of the mourners, i.e., the deceased's associates as well as the deceased's name, his/ her titles (if any), the optional opening and concluding statements were all printed in bold-face with varying font sizes. In all obituaries, the announcer's name was typed in a bigger size than other features, while the deceased's name was written in the biggest font size. Again, the size of an obituary indicates the socioeconomic status of its writer who normally is one of the deceased's family or associates. This is because the bigger ones cost more.

5.2. Structural features of obituaries in British newspapers

The obituaries placed in British newspapers, as seen in Figure (2) below, were not different from those published in Jordanian newspapers in that they had both obligatory and optional features.

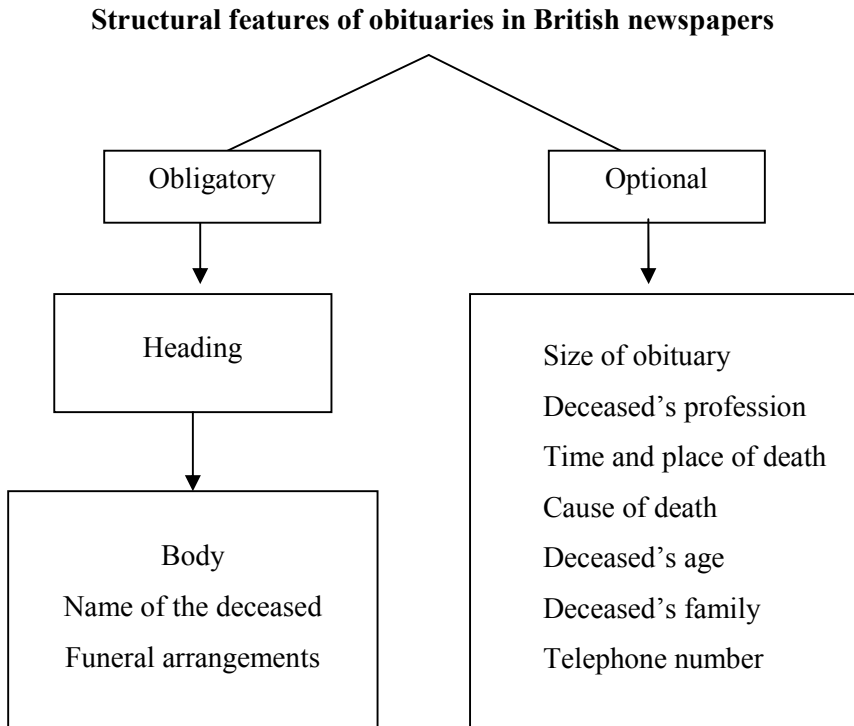


Figure 2. Structural features of obituaries in British newspapers

Obituary announcements in British newspapers were usually headed with the name of the deceased, which was typed in bold-face. In all obituaries, the introduction was usually of the form «XX, on ... (date), aged ... (years), peacefully at ... (place)». This was followed by an identification of the deceased: «Beloved wife of the late ... (name) and much loved mother, grandmother and great grandmother». The funeral arrangements were then stated by saying «Funeral Service to be held at so and so, on ... (date) at ... (time)». In this particular part of the announcement the following information was usually given: time and place of funeral services, thanksgiving services (if any), memorial services (if any), and cremation (if any) as well as the deceased's family recommendations regarding flowers and donations; otherwise, a telephone number was usually included for enquires. Consider Examples (2) and (3) below.

(2) Lesley XXX

Lesley XXX, on 16th March 2009, aged 91, peacefully at Bereweke Court, Winchester. Beloved wife of the late Derek and much loved mother, grandmother and great grandmother. Funeral Service to be held at St. Andrew's Church, Claxton, on Wednesday 25th March at 1.30pm. Family flowers only. If wished, donations to RDA (Norwich and District Branch), c/o Richard Steel & Partners, Alderman House, City Road, Winchester, SO23 8SG.

(3) Charles XXXX

Charles XXX, retired solicitor, law lecturer, passed away peacefully at Chelsea & Westminster Hospital on 13th February 2010. Funeral to be held at The Holy Trinity Church, xxx Street, London, SW1, at 11am on Friday 6th March. Donations in lieu of flowers c/o The Co-Operative Funeral Care, tel. xxx.

As for the optional features, five of the optional features were not constantly presented in the death notices. The size of obituary did not depend on the size and type of font or the space between the lines as in Jordanian obituaries; rather it depended on the amount of information included in the death notice. Therefore, the size of the obituary depended on the other optional elements that the obituary may include, such as time, place and cause of death as well as the deceased's age, profession, and family members. Moreover, some death notices included expressions about the departed and how much s/he was going to be missed by his/ her family and friends.

As for the deceased's profession, only 10% of the death notices included information on the career of the deceased after his/ her name. The time of death was almost always mentioned: 96% of the death notices included the date of death. Also, the place of death was often mentioned: 56% of the obituaries demonstrated whether the death took place at home, hospital, hospice, or a nursing home. With regard to the cause of death, it remained almost always not mentioned. Very few death notices had the expression of «after a short/ long illness».

As for age, 56% of the obituaries contained information on the deceased's age. We noticed that the age did not affect the style of obituary's text. With regard to the deceased's family, 65% of death announcements included names which refer to family members of the late person such as his/ her wife/ husband, sons, daughters, and grandchildren. 44% of the death notices included a telephone number which usually refers to funeral directors.

5.3. A comparison between obituaries in Jordanian and British newspapers in terms of structural features

Just like Jordanian obituaries, all of the obituaries placed in British newspapers had the same obligatory and optional features, though to varying degrees. Unlike British obituaries, Jordanian ones were of two types: those written by the bereaved family and those written by the associates of the deceased.

Table 1: Structural features of obituaries in Jordanian and British newspapers

Structural features	Obituaries in Jordanian newspapers	Obituaries in British newspapers
Opening	20%	0%
Heading	84%	100%
Identification of announcer	100%	0%

Name of the deceased	100%	100%
The concept 'martyr'	2%	0%
Funeral arrangements	90%	98%
Time and place of receiving consolations	100%	98%
Time of death	58%	96%
Place of death	5%	56%
Cause of death	4%	2%
Deceased's age	23%	56%
Deceased's family	64%	65%
Deceased's profession	8%	10%
Telegraph	18%	0%
Telephone No.	4%	44%
Conclusion	66%	0%

It is clearly evident from the Table 1 that both sets of obituaries have many features in common. Among the most common features are: the opening, name of the deceased, funeral arrangements, time and place of receiving consolations, deceased's family, and deceased's profession. However, they seem to be significantly different in terms of the identification of announcer, the time of death, telegraphing the deceased's family, and mentioning the announcer's telephone number. As for the identification of announcer, the Jordanians like to make the announcer's name clear to the public. This orientation can be accounted for in terms of the socio-cultural background of the Jordanian society. Speaking of a similar case, Al-Khatib [1997: 158] states that:

The traditional expectations of Jordanian society are that family members, relatives, friends, and neighbors should support each other, at least, morally in times of adversity and happiness, and be mutually loyal and helpful, throughout life. Hence, it is not unusual, for example, for someone who has got a university degree, or even a high grade in the secondary school exam to receive a lot of verbal and written (i.e., in the printed media) messages of congratulation.

This case is no exception: Jordanian people appreciate to be supported in time of adversary (i.e., the death of, for example, a parent, son, or relative) and find a great deal of moral support in placing a lament of death in a newspaper. This is because, as Al-Khatib [1997: 158] put it, «doing a favor for somebody will be highly appreciated by both the concerned person and society, and there is a debt of gratitude which should be repaid as far as possible».

Another distinction between them can be seen in the size of announcements. While British announcements are almost all of the same size, Jordanian ones are of different sizes depending on the socio-economic background of both the deceased and his/ her family, relatives, and friends. This can be seen as another socio-economic marker. In Jordan, wealthy people tend to brag about having an announcement of a large size, because this is an indication that the deceased, his/ her family, and relatives are of a high socio-economic status. Also, we can see that British obituaries contain telephone numbers much more often than Jordanian ones. In Jordan, like in many other countries in the Arab world,

people do not usually appreciate giving their telephone numbers to strangers, and this is why they do not wish to have their telephone numbers shown to the public in death notices.

Hence, one might claim that the structural features of the announcements appear to be greatly affected by a considerable number of socio-cultural practices and perceptions. Commenting on similar issues, Hymes [1972: 39] claims that «a general theory of the interaction of language and social life must encompass the multiple relations between linguistic means and social meaning».

5.4. Linguistic features of obituaries in Jordanian newspapers

Although obituaries are aimed at announcing the death of people, the type of language used in Jordanian obituary announcements regarding death was often indirect. In other words, Jordanian obituaries resorted to euphemistic expressions related to the taboo of death. The linguistic means employed to substitute the taboo expressions of death and dying in Jordanian obituaries are shown with their frequency of appearance in Table 2 below. The forbidden words and expressions *mawt* or *wafat* ‘death’ and *tuwuffi* ‘he died’ appeared only 3 times and one time respectively. However, we found that 28% of the obituaries included the euphemistic expressions *waafat’hu ?l-maneyyah* ‘death came to him = he passed away’ and *waafat’ha ?l-maneyyah* ‘death came to her = she passed away’ where *?l-maneyyah* means ‘death’ in classical Arabic, and was used here as a euphemism. The euphemistic meaning was derived here from the fact that *mawt* or *wafat* are more common in the spoken Jordanian Arabic than *wafathu almaneyyah*.

Table 2: Frequency of euphemistic expressions in Jordanian obituaries

Euphemistic expressions of death	Frequency
Moved to the mercy of God	62%
Passed away	34%
Moved to the divine glory	2%
Moved to the neighborhood of his Lord	1%
No word or expression of death	1%

More than half of the obituaries (62%) used either the expression *intaqalat ?ila rahmatellah* or *intaqalah ?ila rahmatellah* ‘s/he moved to the mercy of God’. This expression was used by both Muslims and Christians because both groups believe in life after death. Moreover, both of them believe that God is merciful; therefore, they presuppose that the dead person has been given mercy to enter the paradise. Consequently, death in their view is not the end; rather, death is a way of leaving the earthly life and moving to the heavenly one. Also, 2% of the obituaries included the expression *intaqalah ?ila ?l-?mjaad as-samaaweyyah* ‘he moved to the divine glory’. This expression was only used in death announcements of Christians. Furthermore, only 1% of the obituaries included the expression *intaqalah ?ila jewaari rabbihi* ‘he moved to the neighbor-

hood of his Lord'. Also, 1% of the obituaries included words which express death or dying. Announcing the death of a specific person without mentioning death in any way is thought, as Allan & Burrige [2006: 224] put it, to be the ultimate euphemism (for more information on death as a taboo see [Al-Khatib 1995]).

Based on the results above, we may claim that the majority of euphemistic expressions related to death was built by using the conceptual metaphor «death is a journey». Crespo [2006: 106] defines a metaphor as «a set of conceptual correspondences from a source domain (the realm of physical or more concrete reality) to a target domain (the death taboo, in our case)». Crespo [2006: 106] adds that a metaphor is not only a linguistic expression or a figure of speech with an aesthetic value, but also a mode of thought and reason. Speaking of this issue, Lakoff ([1994: 205], cited in [Marin-Arrese 1996: 39]) contends that «as soon as one gets away from concrete physical experience and starts talking about abstractions or emotions, metaphorical understanding is the norm». Crespo [2006: 115] clarifies that using our knowledge about journeys to talk about the taboo of death has various sets of conceptual correspondences; the act of dying corresponds to the act of leaving, the destination of the journey is meeting God in Heaven, and the dead person is the one who embarks on the journey. In this sense, then, the language practices of using «death as a journey» in Jordanian society are often quite similar to those of their Western counterparts. By using such metaphors as «moved to the mercy of God», «moved to the divine glory», and «moved near to God», a Muslim or Christian writer/ reader attempts to hide the unpleasant or disturbing ideas of death. Such use is very likely based on the idea that words have the power to bring new meaning to the notion of death.

In addition, we have noticed that religion appeared to play an extensive role in Jordanian obituaries. Some Quranic and Biblical verses as well as prayers and invocations were used by both Moslems and Christians, though to varying degrees. For example, 20% of Jordanian obituaries began with the expression *yaa ʔayyatuha ʔannaʔsu ʔalmuTma ʔinnah. irjiʕii ʔilaa rabbiki raaDiyatan marDiyah. fadxulii fii ʕibaadii. wadxulii jannatii* 'O (thou) soul, in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back to thy Lord. Well pleased (thyself), and well-pleasing unto HIM. Yea, enter thou My Heaven', and only 2% of those written by Christians had the following Biblical verse as an opening: *ʔana huwa ʔalqiyaamah wal haq wal hayaah man ʔaamana bii wa ʔin maata fa sayahya* 'I am the resurrection, the truth and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live'.

Furthermore, while 65% of the obituaries were rounded off by the Quranic verse *ʔinna lillah wa ʔinna ʔilayhe rajiʕuun* 'To God we belong and to Him we return', only 1% of the obituaries written by Christians was concluded by the Biblical verse: *ʔarrab ʔaʕtaa wa ʔarrab ʔaxð. fal yakun ismu ʔarrabi mubarakan* 'The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord'. Also, 30% of the obituaries had invocations and prayers asking God to reside the deceased in Heaven. Most of these prayers were variants of the basic form: *tayammada Allah ʔl-faqiid biwaasiʕi rahmatihi wa ʔas'kana'hu fasiha*

jinaanihi ‘May God compass the deceased with His mercy and let him/ her enter paradise’.

A number of address terms such as «Abu X» (the father of X) which are a common feature of social interaction in the most forms of spoken discourse, were employed in obituaries. The data show that the use of such titles as «Abu X» (the father of X) and «Um X» (the mother of X), where X refers to the eldest son or daughter in case of having no sons, is a common feature of the language of obituaries. In Jordan, like many other Arab countries, the prefix *abu* means usually ‘the father of’, a man is given the prefix *abu* to identify him as the father of X. After a person gets married and has a child, s/he is called by the name of the eldest son «Abu X» (father of X), or «Um Y» (mother of Y).

A careful examination of the obituaries showed that the use of such terms serves two important functions simultaneously: First, they can be used as a sign of respect and recognition as people in Jordanian society appreciate to be called after the names of their eldest sons. Second, referring to the concerned person by the eldest son’s name in the obituaries may help the newspaper readers identify the deceased accurately.

5.5. Linguistic features of obituaries in British newspapers

Similarly, death was very rarely referred to directly in British obituaries; only 2% of the obituaries included the direct verb form *died*, 3% of them had the verb phrase *died suddenly*, and 23% had the verb phrase *died peacefully*. These last two expressions have connotations that are more or less universal. Moses and Marelli [2004: 129] explain that the adverb *suddenly* points to the importance of time in the conception of death while the adverb *peacefully* reflects an idealized concept of «good death». The rest of obituaries employed euphemisms in order to tone down the heavy news and bitter fact of death. Consider Table 3 below. 40% of the obituaries had the adverb *peacefully* alone without any verb related to death, 2% included *very peacefully* and 4% had the adverb *suddenly*. Also, 18% of the obituaries did not include any word of death, either with a verb or an adverb, but mentioned the time or place right after identifying the deceased, as example (2) above shows. Moreover, 8% of the obituaries mentioned the death event euphemistically using the verb phrase *passed away peacefully*. Speaking of the euphemistic use, Allan and Burridge [2006: 225-226] demonstrate that the stem of the word *obituary* is Latin *obiter* ‘on the journey’. They add that «many people have regarded death as the beginning of the soul’s journey into the afterlife, and buried their dead with all sorts of paraphernalia (including sacrificed humans) to help them in the way. Thus, death is often represented euphemistically as a journey to a better place for the soul of the dead person».

Table 3: Euphemistic expressions in British obituaries

Euphemistic expressions of death	Frequency
Peacefully	40%
Very peacefully	2%
Suddenly	4%
Passed away peacefully	8%
No word or expression of death	18%

Moreover, 20% of the obituaries included expressions revealing feelings of the bereaved towards the deceased such as *she will be sorely missed*, *will sadly be missed by family and friends*, and *dearly missed and will always be in our thoughts*. In addition, outlining the funeral/ thanksgiving service involved existing regular linguistic elements. 46% of the obituaries included *family flowers only*, *donations if desired to X* where X represents a church, a research center, etc. 14% of the obituaries included the expression *no flowers*. Also, 14% of the obituaries had the expression *donations to X*, where X is a specific institution. Such linguistic features represent a speech act whose function is a request.

5.6. A Comparison between linguistic features in Jordanian and British obituaries

Unlike British obituaries, Jordanian ones were extremely affected by religion and the religious background of the deceased. The obituaries in Jordanian society were noted for their deeply religious tone. For example, most of Jordanian obituaries included verses from the Holy Quran and the Bible as well as many prayers for the deceased. The opening and closing parts of the obituaries were verses from either the Holy Quran or the Bible. Invoking God to forgive the deceased and let him/ her enter paradise was a common feature of Jordanian obituaries.

Furthermore, we noticed that both Jordanian and British obituaries employed euphemistic expressions to avoid the direct mention of death. While most Jordanian obituaries used expressions based on religious beliefs and involved expressions referring to movement such as «moved to the mercy of God», most British obituaries used expressions that illustrate the manner of death without the direct mention of death. Also, unlike Jordanian obituaries, 64% of the British obituaries did not refer directly to the tabooed words such as *death*, *dying* or *died*; rather the obituaries either involved the manner of death such as *peacefully* or *suddenly*, or they just mentioned the time or place of death after revealing the name of the deceased with no mention of death. Both groups of obituaries resorted to the metaphor «death is a journey». These results indicate that Jordanians, in general, regard the concept of death as a journey, where the deceased is going to be in a better place than s/he was on earth. However, a few of the British obituaries, as seen in the announcements, reflected the same belief.

In addition, we found that in Jordanian obituaries people were usually invited to attend funerals and/ or offer condolences, whereas in British obituaries people were invited to attend a funeral and/ or thanksgiving in which each speech act has its own function; the first is an invitation to attend the funeral/ thanksgiving service, while the second function represents a request of the mourners clarifying of what they should or should not bring to the funeral.

It has also been noticed that, unlike British obituaries, some of the Jordanian obituaries included the title of the deceased's wife as «Um (the mother of) + the name of the eldest son», or the title of the deceased's husband as «Abu (the father of) + the name of the eldest son». Thus, titles of the form «'he father/ the mother of' followed by the name of the eldest son» represent one of the main differences between Jordanian and British cultures reflected in obituary announcements.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, two sets of obituary announcements collected from two different cultures were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. A detailed analysis of the structural and linguistic features as well as the communicative functions of the announcements was carried out within the general framework of the Ethnography of Communication [Hymes 1972]. Briefly, when structurally considered, obituary announcements showed profound evidence for the effect of the cultural background of each society on both the structural and linguistic features of the announcements. It was observed that the main social functions of the announcements are all based on the shared cultural norms and social values of each society. The study demonstrated that in addition to the main function of the announcements, in both cultures, they convey a considerable amount of information about the deceased, his/ her family, among other issues related to death. Jordanian announcements tend to communicate much more details about the occasion and the deceased than British announcements: his/ her family, socio-economic status, time and place of burial as well as time and place of consolation. Moreover, euphemistic expressions are used in both types of obituaries to make the effect of death on the reader sound better and be socially more acceptable, though to varying degrees.

Summing up, these results appear to be in agreement with those by Al-Ali [2005] and Nwoye [1992] who noticed that obituary announcements in Jordan and Nigeria respectively serve a wide range of communicative functions apart from the announcing of a death. Also, these results show that language and culture are inseparable.

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