A Study on Condolence Strategies by Jordanian Students at Irbid University College

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the strategies of condolence speech act as expressed by Jordanian students at Irbid University College and identified the respective role of social power and social distance in offering these strategies. It employed qualitative and quantitative research methods, and the study participants included 100 university students ranging from 19 to 23 years old. The data were collected using an adapted version of the discourse completion test and coded based on the coding schema. The results of the study demonstrated that praying for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased was the most frequent strategy used by the participants, and expressing sympathy was the least frequently used strategy. When the power and distance aspects of the relationship between the speakers are concerned, the results showed that some of the strategies such as 'praying for God's mercy and forgiveness to be with the deceased' and 'offering condolences' are low-risk strategies to threaten the face needs of the bereaved people. Moreover, the results showed that the use of these strategies was mainly attributed to the participants' culture, religious orientation, social power, and social distance between the interlocutors. Finally, some pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research are briefly discussed in this article.

Keywords: Condolences, Jordanian students, speech acts, social distance, social power.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Death is recognized as a normal part of life, so it is considered the normal cycle of nature for all living things on this earth (Williams, 2006). Death is perceived as a very painful phenomenon, regardless of the form it takes. Hence, losing people we love causes a deep feeling of loss, and speech communities deal with this sorrowful phenomenon in different ways, based on these communities' traditions. Commonly, individuals express their feelings when hearing the news of someone's death. In most cultures, an individual is seen as unsympathetic if he/she does not express sympathy, pay respect to the deceased, and does not show any reaction to those left behind. Expressing condolence takes different forms of words or actions that will help the deceased person's family feel closure and strength to this loss. Moghaddam (2012) believes that uttering an emotional expression such as offering condolences depends on the relationship between the individual and the bereaved person.

Moreover, Williams (2006) argues that people think choosing appropriate words to comfort the bereaved is a difficult task, and the bereaved family believes that people do not understand their situation. Hence, people must choose appropriate words and express them politely to show sympathy and help the bereaved family return to their former lives (Al-Shboul & Maros, 2013). In the Muslim speech community, in general, and in the Jordan speech community, in particular, Muslims must carry the deceased person to the burial ground and attend the funeral. Moreover, offering condolences to individuals affected by the death is highly recommended in Islam within three days of the death. Only then may people refrain from giving condolences to the deceased's family and relatives.

The current research problem is seen in terms of the complexity of offering a suitable condolence expression at the appropriate time and how this is perceived as a challenging task. Fernández (2007) states that people tend to be hesitant in dealing with death other than the traditional way of casual conversation. This is attributed to the different social barriers of superstition, fear, and religious rules associated with different restrictions of a social nature. Moreover, Pishghadam and Mostafa (2012) explain that the nature of the language used in offering condolences involves highly emotional situations that would differ from casual conversation. They add that many factors, such as the relations among individuals and cultural norms, complicate condolence routines.

The present study is significant because of the following reasons. First, the researcher fills the literature gap by investigating condolence strategies among Jordanian native speakers of Arabic in the northern region of Jordan (Irbid Governorate) as no studies, to the researcher's best knowledge, focus on these aspects in the same context. Second, the present study examined offering condolences by university students ranging in age from 19 to 23 years old. Third, it also aims to investigate how the type of condolence strategies vary in terms of social power and social distance between the interlocutors. Fourth, the data of the present study are collected using a Discourse Completion Test (DCT). Previous research in the Jordan context examined responses made on the obituary of a Facebook status update by Jordanians in general regardless of their geographic, social background, and the contextual factors of social power and social distance between the interlocutors (Al-Shboul & Maros, 2013). DCT is the most widely used data collection instrument in cross-cultural interlanguage pragmatics that examines different speech acts in different

languages. Thus, it is mainly used to elicit the occurrences of different speech act as presented in different situations, therefore yielding written data and recording an extensive range of semantic formulae by which a given speech act can be realized (Barron, 2003; Johnston et al., 1998; Kasper, 2008). DCT situations can also be translated into any language and given to a large number of participants in a short time. As a result, it is recognized as the typical data collection instrument for speech act studies (Aston, 1995; Barron, 2003). Finally, examining the speech act of condolences would help teachers recognize how to teach this speech act to students following the appropriate strategies and how to express such strategies at the right time. This would increase the students' communication ability and avoid communication breakdowns.

In other words, the researcher is interested in exploring the strategies of the condolence speech act due to the lack of research on this speech act compared to other speech acts such as apology, requests, refusal, and compliments (Elwood, 2004). Furthermore, this interest in investigating the condolences speech act developed due to the increasing number of deaths during the COVID-19 pandemic to help utilize the appropriate condolences strategies. Thus, it would be beneficial to examine how condolences are expressed based on the speech act theory and pragmatic approach by Jordanian students at Irbid University College (henceforth, IUC). The present study aimed to answer the following two research questions:

1) What are the most frequent condolences strategies used by Jordanian students at IUC?
2) How do the contextual factors of social power and social distance between interlocutors influence the Jordanian students' choice of condolences strategies?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section provides the theoretical background of the study focusing on the speech act theory, the definition and classification of the condolence speech act, and a review of previous research conducted on the speech act of condolences.

2.1 Theoretical Background

This study is based on the speech act theory first proposed by the British philosopher Austin (1962). According to Austin (1975), the main concern of speech act theory is based on the assumption that humans' interaction is not only based on lexical and linguistic knowledge but rather on some types of acts like apologizing, complaining, complimenting, etc. (Alfghe & Mohammadzadeh, 2021; Austin, 1975; Putri et al., 2020). Therefore, we are performing something by saying something (Austin, 1975; Yule, 1996). In addition, the communication process is seen as a sequence of communicative acts or speech acts performed by speakers to achieve specific goals. Finally, they believed that all utterances and meanings performed specific actions through definite forces.

2.2 The Speech Act of Condolences

This subsection addresses the condolence speech act paying particular attention to its definition and classification as proposed by different scholars such as Austin

(1975), Searle (1979), and Yahya (2010). Austin (1975) classifies condolences as one of the 'behabitives' speech acts in which they deal with the social behaviors and attitudes towards someone. Based on Searle's (1979) classification, the condolence speech act fits under the 'expressive' category that deals with the speakers' reaction to situations of sorrow and condoling. Finally, Yahya (2010) states that expressing condolences aimed to share sympathy and encouragement with those who have experienced the death of a loved one.

Even though the speech act of condolences is universal and expressing it is almost found in all languages and cultures, it is most likely to vary based on the communities' cultural backgrounds. Compared to other speech acts such as request, apology, compliment, and refusal, the speech act of condolences has not been studied widely except in a few studies (Al-Shboul & Maros, 2013; Behnam et al., 2013; Elwood, 2004; Hidaya, 2016; Nurlianingsih & Imperiani, 2019). To the researcher's best knowledge, only one study on condolences has been conducted in the Jordanian context (Al-Shboul & Maros, 2013). The following subsection presents a brief discussion of previous condolences studies.

2.3   Related Studies on Condolences

One major study on condolences was carried out by Elwood (2004), who examined offering condolences from a cross-cultural perspective. Three participating groups of American English and Japanese participated in the study. The first group was the target group comprising 25 Japanese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students responding in English. The other two groups were reference groups, consisting of 25 American students responding in English and 25 native Japanese students responding in Japanese. Seven different scenarios of DCT were designed to collect data from the three participating groups. Three of these scenarios required the participants to respond to good news; three were designed to react to an unhappy circumstance, and only one scene showed a reaction to a close friend's status 'I have got to lose weight!' Though, the analysis has only focused on two 'unhappy situations' (i.e., the death of a pet dog and a grandmother). Olshtain and Cohen's (1990) classification of semantic formulas was used in analyzing the data. Accordingly, the analysis resulted in five common strategies: 1) acknowledgment of death, 2) offer of assistance, 3) expression of sympathy, 4) expression of concern, and 5) future-oriented remark. The findings showed the use of different semantic formulas. Besides, the findings revealed a significant difference when responding to a pet dog's death compared to a grandmother's death. Consequently, the researcher argued that results related to one type of condolence scenario could not be generalized to all scenarios of the same type.

In a comparative study, Behnam et al. (2013) investigated how English and Persian expressed their condolences via short messages. For the data collection method, the researchers collected 60 short messages. These 60 short messages were equally gathered in 30 Persian and 30 English messages. The data were analyzed based on a modified version of Elwood's (2004) classification of condolence strategies. The results indicated differences in offering condolences in English and Persian. For example, the messages produced by Persian tended to be short and more direct. Moreover, the Persians' religious and cultural backgrounds influenced the nature of

their messages. By contrast, the messages produced by English speakers were almost indirect, apologetic, and sympathetic.

In the Indonesian context, Nurlianingsih and Imperiani (2019) investigate not only the speech act of condolences by Indonesian adolescents but also the influence of social power and social distance on the participants' choice of condolences strategies. Twenty Indonesian adolescents aged 11 to 19 years old participated in the study. The data were gathered using a DCT. The questionnaire consisted of six scenarios that required responses with condolence expressions. Then, Elwood's (2004) coding schema of condolence strategies and Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory were used to analyze the data. The results of their study illustrated that the participants tended to use 'seeking absolution from God' (27.3%) and 'expression of sympathy' (26.9%) as the most frequently used strategies. Additionally, the results revealed that the participants' use of different condolence strategies was affected by many factors, such as the relationship between the speakers. Hence, the participants used lower-risk strategies in more distant relationships. In contrast, they tended to express condolences with higher-risk strategies in a closer relationship. Finally, the results from the study highlighted the influence of the participants' collectivistic cultural norms and their religious orientations on the choices of appropriate condolence strategies.

In the Arabic context, Hidaya (2016) examines the commiseration and condolence strategies expressed by Algerian native speakers of Arabic compared to those offered by English speakers. The researcher used Facebook to gather the condolence data. Additional data were used based on the researcher's knowledge of her speech community, Algeria. Then, English and Algerian Arabic (Darja) condolences data were analyzed and compared based on the use of emotional language and word choice, and structure. The findings revealed that cultural background, as well as religious orientation, influenced the people's perception of death and life and the use of condolence expressions. Finally, while English speakers tended to express their sympathy with self-referring expressions such as 'I was shocked' and 'I am sorry for your loss', Algerians tended to be less direct when expressing their feelings and avoided using emotional language.

In the Jordanian context, Al-Shboul and Maros (2013) investigate Jordanian Arabic's speech act of condolences. The researchers gathered the data by observing comments posted on the obituary of a Facebook status update. More specifically, comments were made on the death of a famous Jordanian actor in 2011. Then, the researchers identified seven condolence strategies based on 678 posted comments. These strategies were: praying for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased, reciting Quranic verses, enumerating the virtues of the deceased, expressing shock and grief, offering condolences, realizing death is a natural part of life and using proverbs and sayings. The findings showed that the use of these strategies in Jordanian Arabic was mainly influenced by the respondents' religious orientation of being Muslims. Furthermore, the respondents' faith and religious beliefs appeared clearly in the posted comments.

To conclude this section, the researcher reviewed some speech act studies expressing condolences in several cultures and linguistic groups. These studies used different data collection instruments to gather condolence data, such as DCT, SMS messages, and comments posted on the obituary of a Facebook status update. However, few studies were conducted in the Arabic context in general (Hidaya, 2016) and the Jordan context in particular (Al-Shboul & Maros, 2013). Hence, the present

study attempted to fill the literature gap by investigating condolence strategies among Jordanian native speakers of Arabic in the north region of Jordan (Irbid Governorate). More specifically, it aimed at examining the speech act of condolences expressed by Jordanian students at IUC and the role of social power and social distance in offering these strategies.

3.   METHODS

3.1   Research Design

This study adopted a mixed-method design using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Creswell (2014) explains that using a mixed-method design is a method for an investigation concerning collecting both quantitative and qualitative data and integrating them using a different design that may include philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. Similarly, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003) indicate that integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches in research provides the researchers with a better understanding of the research area and an opportunity to examine the phenomenon in-depth. Consequently, a mixed method was appropriate for this study because it aimed to identify the strategies of condolence speech act as expressed by Jordanian students at IUC and the respective role of social power and social distance in offering these strategies.

3.2   Participants

The participants of the present study included 100 university students at IUC. Their ages ranged from 19 to 23 years old. They were all Jordanian native speakers of Arabic from the north region of Jordan (Irbid Governorate). The researcher selected IUC because it is a university college under the umbrella of Al-Balqa Applied University, where the researcher is an instructor on its main campus. This facilitated the process of data collection. Moreover, IUC is established in Irbid (situated in northern Jordan), the context in which the researcher aimed to investigate.

3.3   Instrument

Kone (2020) insists that speech act theory in pragmatics focuses on analyzing language use where the influence of written or spoken words/expressions in both verbal and non-verbal contexts is the main concern. Hence, the researcher of the present study was more interested in collecting naturally occurring data on the speech act of condolence. However, the critical and severe situations at the time of data collection made this impossible to observe actual examples of daily life. This is mainly attributed to the fact that by the beginning of the COVID-19 outbreak, the government of Jordan has implemented several preventive and control strategies to limit the spread of COVID-19 in Jordan. In other words, the government has banned many social events and activities, such as attending wedding ceremonies, funerals, and social visits to prisons and hospitals, sports facilities, cinemas, and youth centers (Al-Tammemi, 2020). Accordingly, collecting ethnographic data seemed to be an impossible option

at the time of data collection. As a result, the data are collected using a modified version of DCT.

3.3.1 The instrument to answer research question one

To answer research question number one, the researcher has adopted a modified version of DCT by Nurlianingsih and Imperiani (2019). The questionnaire consists of two main sections: (1) demographic information about the participants, such as gender, age, major, and hometown in Jordan, and (2) six situations that require the participants to offer condolences to the bereaved people. Next, the researcher, a native speaker of Arabic, translates the questionnaire into Arabic to ensure the participants' understanding of the situation.

3.3.2 The instrument to answer research question two

As shown in Table 1, each DCT situation involves two variables representing the relationship between the speaker and the hearer: social power (higher, lower, equal) and social distance (close, distance). A professor and a family member, who are older, represent a person of high (+P) social power. For equal (=P) power, this would be a close friend and an acquaintance (same age). Meanwhile, for lower (-P) social power, this would be a close friend and a neighbor (younger age). Regarding social distance, close (+D) was represented by a close friend and a family member, and distance (-D) was represented by a professor, an acquaintance, and a neighbor.

Table 1. Description of the six situations.

Situation	Description
Situation 1: [=P, +D]	A close friend (same age). A close friend told you that his/her family member passed away a week ago. You then say: …
Situation 2: [=P, -D]	An acquaintance (same age). You heard that one of your acquaintances was not coming to the private course class because his/her family member passed away. You then say: …
Situation 3: [+P, +D]	A family member (older age). Your relative's child has passed away, and you go to their house to condole them on hearing that. You then say: …
Situation 4: [+P, -D]	A professor (older age). You heard that your school teacher's parent has passed away, and you see your teacher the next day. You then say:
Situation 5: [-P, +D]	A close friend (younger age). A younger close friend tells you that his/her family member passed away. You then say: …
Situation 6: [-P, -D]	A neighbor (younger age). Your young neighbor's parent has passed away. You come to their house to condole them. You then say: …

3.4 Data Collection

The data collection procedures were also influenced by the COVID-19 outbreak in which Jordan universities have applied different technology applications such as Zoom, Big Blue Button, and Microsoft Teams to support different online learning models. Thus, Microsoft Teams was used to collect data from the participants.

3.4.1 The procedure of collecting data to answer research question one

The researcher uploaded the questionnaire to three virtual classes of English 101 and English 102 on Microsoft Teams, in which the participants were all enrolled in the summer semester of 2020. A brief description of the instructions and the situations was provided to the participants to gain more reliable data. The participants were asked to read the six DCT situations carefully and respond by offering condolences on these situations.

3.4.2 The procedure of collecting data to answer research question two

During the explanation of DCT situations, the participants were informed about considering the status of the speaker and the hearer involved in each DCT situation. Hence, they were informed that each DCT situation involves two different variables representing the relationship between the speaker and the hearer: social power (higher, lower, equal) and social distance (close, distance). To emphasize the participants' research ethic in gathering the data, the researcher ensures the anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. Finally, they were informed that the information in this study would be used only for research purposes and in ways that would not reveal who they were.

3.5 Data Analysis

Upon the first 100 participants returning the questionnaire to the researcher, the corpus was closed and submitted for analysis. Next, the analysis of the collected data was done by the researcher. Then, two more well-trained professors majoring in English linguistics were invited to help in the classification of data and to ensure the reliability of coding data.

The data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitatively, the researcher read the participants' responses for all DCT situations to identify the type of condolence strategies used by them by taking into account the two different variables (social power and social distance) that represent the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. Hence, in the situation where the participants had to offer condolences to a relative whose child passed away, a condolence response such as (e.g., عظم الله اجركم و انا لله انا اليه راجعون; 'May God multiply your reward and verily we belong to Allah and verily to Him do we return'), was analyzed as comprising of two units, each of which fits into a corresponding condolence strategy (as shown in the brackets):

(عظم الله اجركم; 'May God multiply your reward') {offer condolences}.
(انا لله و انا اليه راجعون; 'Verily we belong to Allah and verily to Him do we return') {reciting Quranic verses}.

Quantitatively, a descriptive statistical analysis was run to count the frequency and percentage of the strategies used. Following Al-Shboul and Maros (2013) and Nurlianingsih and Imperiani (2019), the researcher listed the types of condolence strategies used and counted the frequency and percentage of these strategies across situations. In other words, the researcher calculated the percentage by counting how

many times each type of condolence strategy was made by the participants in all DCT situations, dividing it by the total number of all the condolence strategies in all DCT situations, and then multiplying it by 100. For example, offering condolences was used 371 times across situations. The percentage of responses consisting of offering condolences strategy is 25.99%. Thus, 25.99% of all responses given by the participants across situations involved the condolence strategy of offering condolences.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Condolences Strategies Used by Jordanian Students at IUC

This section presents a quantitative descriptive analysis of the frequency and percentage of the strategies used. The participants used a total number of 1427 written condolence strategies. Table 2 illustrates the condolence strategies expressed by the participants as the focus of the first research question.

Table 2. The frequency and percentage of the condolence strategies used.

Condolence strategy	Frequency	Percentage
Praying for God's mercy and forgiveness to be with the deceased	659	46.20
Offering condolences	371	25.99
Recitation of Quranic verses	173	12.12
*Define relation	87	6.09
Offer of assistance	72	5.05
*Assuming that the deceased child is like a bird from amongst the birds of paradise	39	2.73
Expressing sympathy	26	1.82
Total	1427	100%

*Indicate additional strategies found in the corpus of the present study

The results revealed that 'praying for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased' (e.g., رحمه الله; 'May Allah be merciful to him') was the most mentioned strategy used by the participants in almost 46.20 % of the strategies (n=659). As the second most frequently strategy, the participants tended to 'offer condolences' (e.g., عظم الله اجركم; 'May God multiply your reward') in approximately 25.99 % of the responses (n=371). The participants preferred 'reciting Quranic verses' (e.g., انا لله و انا اليه راجعون; 'Verily we belong to Allah and verily to Him do we return') as the third strategy mentioned by the participants in around 12.12% of the responses (n=173). Moreover, 'defining relationship' (e.g., دكتوري العزيز; 'My dear professor') was the fourth most frequently strategy used by the participants in approximately 6.09 % of the responses (n=87). As the fifth most frequently used strategy, the participants tended to 'offer assistance' (e.g., اذا بدك اي مساعدة لا تتردد.; 'Do not hesitate to ask for help') in approximately 5.05 % of the responses (n=72). 'Assuming that the deceased child is a bird from amongst the birds of Paradise' (e.g., طير من طيور الجنة; 'A bird from amongst the birds of paradise') occupied the sixth rank among others in approximately 2.73 % of the responses (n=39). The results showed that the participants used 'expressing sympathy' (e.g., للأسف وفاته صدمتني; 'Unfortunately, his death shocked me') as the least frequently strategy used by them in around 1.82 % of the responses (n=26).

4.2 The Role of Social Power and Social Distance Between Individuals on the Condolences Strategies Used by Jordanian Students At IUC

The influence of social power and social distance between individuals, as the main concern of the second research question, was also measured, and the three power statuses of individuals (i.e., =P, +P, and -P), and the two distance statuses (i.e., +D and -D) were compared. The results are displayed in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

Table 3. The use of condolence strategies for equal status: (speaker=hearer; =power).

Condolence strategy	Situation 1: [=p, +d]		Situation 2: [=p, -d]	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Praying for God's mercy and forgiveness to be with the deceased	112	7.85	94	6.58
Offering condolences	54	3.78	63	4.41
Recitation of Quranic verses	33	2.31	25	1.75
*Define relation	18	1.26	0	0
Offer of assistance	19	1.33	5	0.35
*Assuming that the deceased child is like a bird from amongst the birds of paradise	0	0	0	0
Expressing sympathy	5	0.35	1	.07
Total	241	16.88	188	13.16

Table 3 shows the findings of condolence strategies used by the participants in which the hearer and the speaker were of equal status (=p). Table 4 represents the strategies they used when the hearer was of higher status (+p). Table 5 lists the condolences strategies used by the participants when the hearer was of lower status (-p). When social distance is concerned, situation one, three, and five shows the frequency and percentage of the strategies used by a close person. In contrast, situations two, four, and six show the frequency and percentage of the strategies used by a distant person.

Table 4. The use of condolence strategies for unequal status: (speaker < hearer; +power).

Condolence strategy	Situation 3: [+p, +d]		Situation 4: [+p, -d]	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Praying for God's mercy and forgiveness to be with the deceased	143	10.02	87	6.10
Offering condolences	46	3.22	95	6.66
Recitation of Quranic verses	47	3.30	21	1.47
*Define relation	0	0	38	2.66
Offer of assistance	26	1.82	0	0
*Assuming that the deceased child is like a bird from amongst the birds of paradise	39	2.73	0	0
Expressing sympathy	11	0.77	2	0.14
Total	312	21.86	243	17.03

Regardless of the power and distance relationship between the participants, praying for God's mercy and offering condolence strategies were the two most frequently used strategies by the participants in all DCT situations except for situation three, in which they tended to use recitation of Quranic verses as the second most

frequently used strategy. However, the remaining condolence strategies varied based on the role of social power and social distance between individuals. For example, assuming that the deceased child is like a bird from amongst the birds of paradise strategy was used only in situation three (+P, +D). Moreover, the participants tended to opt out of offering assistance in situation four (+P, -D).

Table 5. The use of condolence strategies for unequal status: (speaker > hearer; -power)

Condolence strategy	Situation 5: [-P, +D]		Situation 6: [-P, -D]	
	Frequency	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Praying for God's mercy and forgiveness to be with the deceased	116	8.12	107	7.50
Offering condolences	41	2.87	72	5.05
Recitation of Quranic verses	17	1.19	30	2.10
*Define relation	5	0.35	26	1.82
Offer of assistance	8	0.56	14	1.0
*Assuming that the deceased child is like a bird from amongst the birds of paradise	0	0	0	0
Expressing sympathy	3	0.21	4	0.28
Total	190	13.3	253	17.75

In the following section, the condolences strategies used by the participants are discussed based on the effect of social power and social distance on the production of these condolences strategies.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 The Most Frequently Condolences Strategies Used by Jordanian Students at IUC

Research question number one asked about the frequently used condolences strategies by Jordanian students at IUC. Overall, the participants prefer praying for God's forgiveness as the most frequent strategy found (46.20%), followed by offering condolences (25.99%), recitation of Quranic verses (12.125), defining relation (6.09%), offering of assistance (5.05%), assuming that the deceased child is like a bird from amongst the birds of paradise (2.73%), and expressing sympathy as the least frequent strategy found (1.82%). From these strategies, defining relation and assuming that the deceased child is like a bird from amongst the birds of paradise are additional strategies found in the corpus of the present study.

Consequently, the justification for using such strategies was explained based on previous research and the participants' religious orientation and cultural background. Hence, the content of semantic formulas showed that the main reason for expressing condolences in this way is mainly referring to the participants' religious orientations (i.e., Islam). Thus, the major condolence strategies included responses that referred to God (Allah), religious-oriented praying and reciting Quranic verses. This would be normal in a speech community such as Jordan, where Islam makes up most of the Jordanian population. According to a report published recently by the official site of the Jordan Tourism Board (n.d.), the majority of the population of Jordan is Arab

(98%), mostly Sunni Muslim (92%), Christians, mostly Greek Orthodox (6%), Circassians (1%) and Armenians (1%). So, it is common in people's daily lives to frequently use religious-oriented expressions from simple greetings to thanking others, such as السلام عليكم which means 'Peace be upon you', a way of greetings used more widely and is equivalent to hello, good morning/afternoon/evening, etc. Other Islamic expressions include الحمد لله, which translates as 'Praise to Allah', which is usually used to express satisfaction, or after having finished eating, جزاك الله خيرا which means 'May God reward you with all good', and used when someone does something good to you.

Similarly, the participants' frequent use of the condolence expression 'praying for God's forgiveness or mercy on the deceased' seems widely practiced in Muslim society (Al-Shboul & Maros, 2013). Muslims use such expressions because they believe that everybody makes mistakes that require seeking God's forgiveness. In the present study, this particular strategy (praying for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased) was the most frequently used strategy by the participants in almost 46.20% of the responses. Likewise, Al-Shboul and Maros (2013) found that this strategy was the most mentioned in the comments posted by the respondents (33%). In addition, Nurlianingsih and Imperiani (2019) found that the respondents tended to use "'seeking absolution from God' as the most frequently used strategy in around 27.3% of the responses. The researchers justified that in terms of religious-oriented values in Muslim societies, this requires asking God to forgive his or her sins so that his or her soul can rest in peace. However, this is not common in other studies, such as Elwood (2004), where the strategies of 'acknowledgment of death' and 'expression of sympathy' were more frequently used by the participants of her study.

Furthermore, the participants' reciting some Quranic verses as the third most frequently used strategy is also attributed to their religious orientation of being Muslims. Thus, Al-Shboul and Maros (2013) state that it is common for Muslims to refer to the two primary sources of Islamic law: The Quran and the Sunnah. For example, they tended to frequently recite some relevant Quranic verses on the news of hearing someone's death, such as 'Who, when a misfortune overtakes them, say: Surely we belong to God and to Him shall we return'. Accordingly, their study found respondents using it as the second most mentioned strategy in around 23% of the responses.

The participants 'offering of assistance' to the bereaved family as the fifth most frequently used strategy in this study is mainly seen as an Arab cultural norm and religious-oriented value. It is one of the most important values in Islam to help our fellow human beings. In this matter, prophet Mohammad, the messenger of God, insists on the significance of cooperation, helping others, and offering them a hand. He also considered one's faith incomplete until he/she loves for his brother what he loves for himself. The results also showed that in collectivistic cultures, as in Jordan, the relationship between people is based on solid solidarity. Offering assistance to the bereaved family is common to help them return to everyday lives. Similarly, Nurlianingsih and Imperiani (2019) found that 'offering of assistance' was the fourth mentioned strategy. The researchers believe this is a deeply rooted cultural value in a collectivistic culture like Indonesia, where offering help to others is typically used to relieve bereaved sorrow.

It is also important to indicate that the nature of DCT scenarios has resulted in new categories (i.e., defining the relationship and assuming that the deceased child is like a bird from amongst the birds of paradise) found in the corpus of the present study.

Hence, the participants' use of 'define relationship' is explained in terms of the Arab cultural norm. In his study on refusal, Al-Issa (2003) stated that it is common in Arabic culture to define the type of relationship between interlocutors, especially when talking to a person of higher social status. Hence, hearing a student greeting his teacher by saying 'Good morning, Teacher' is widespread in Arabic. The other strategy found only in the corpus of the present study is 'assuming that the deceased child is as a bird from amongst the birds of paradise'. Interestingly, this semantic formula was used in only one DCT situation (situation three), where the participants had to offer condolences to their family member whose child had passed away. Hence, the use of this strategy is a religious-oriented value in which Muslims believe that if a little child dies, he/she will unquestionably enter heaven.

Unlike previous research by Elwood (2004), Al-Shboul and Maros (2013), and Nurlianingsih and Imperiani (2019), 'expressing sympathy' was the least used strategy in almost 1.82 % of the responses. In Elwood's (2004) study, this strategy was the most common. It seems that the participants of the present study preferred to make prayer*s* about the death of someone and offer condolences to the bereaved people more than showing the feeling of sympathy. Expression of emotions is more culturally inhibited in which people in collectivistic cultures, like Jordanians, are supposed to express their feeling indirectly. This is in line with Hidaya (2016), who found that Algerians preferred not to use emotional language and tended to express their feelings indirectly when they had to offer condolences. The researcher compared that with English speakers who frequently use self-referring expressions such as 'I was shocked' and 'I am sorry for your loss'.

5.2 The Contextual Factors of Social Power and Social Distance between Interlocutors that Influence the Jordanian Students' Choice of Condolences Strategies

The second research question examined how the patterns of condolence strategies varied about contextual factors (social power and social distance) used by the Jordanian students at IUC. Hence, the present study's results showed that some strategies, such as 'praying for God's mercy and forgiveness to be with the deceased' and 'offering condolences' are low-risk strategies to threaten the face needs of the bereaved people. Consequently, these strategies can be expressed to the bereaved people regardless of the type of power and distance relationship between the speakers. Thus, 'praying for God's mercy and forgiveness to be with the deceased' is commonly and extensively expressed when the relationship between the interlocutors is close and regardless of the social power relationship (higher, equal, lower). More specifically, it was widely used in situations one (equal power, close distance), three (higher power, close distance), and five (lower power, close distance). Similar results were found in previous research, such as by Nurlianingsih and Imperiani (2019), who found that people in close relationships commonly use the 'seeking absolution from God' strategy.

'Offering condolences' was used as the second most frequent strategy. Even though the participants tended to use it in all situations, it was widely used when the relationship between the speakers was distant and regardless of the social power relationship (higher, equal, lower). Hence, the participants tended to widely use the formal expression عظم الله اجركم of, which means in English 'May God multiplies your

reward' in situations two (equal power, distant relationship), four (higher power, distant relationship), and six (lower power, distant relationship).

Unlike previous research by Al-Shboul and Maros (2013) and Nurlianingsih and Imperiani (2019), the participants of the present study tended to use this particular strategy (offer condolences) as the second most mentioned strategy in around 25.99% of the responses. By contrast, this strategy *(*offer condolences*)* was the fifth most ranked strategy in almost 10% of the responses in Al-Shboul and Maros' (2013) study. The researcher believes that this difference in the frequent use of offering condolences among Jordanians could be attributed to the different data collection instruments used in both studies. In the present study, the participants responded to DCT situations where two variables representing the relationship between the speaker and the hearer were manipulated: social status (higher, lower, equal) and social distance (close, distance). In other words, the DCT involved scenarios intended for a close friend, an acquaintance, a professor, a family member, and a neighbor where they had to offer condolences to the bereaved family more than other strategies. In Al-Shboul and Maros' (2013) study, the respondents posted comments on an obituary status update on Facebook on the death of a famous Jordanian actor where they were unfamiliar with the family of the deceased person. Moreover, Elwood (2004) argued that results related to one kind of condolence scenario could not be generalized to all scenarios of the same kind.

Furthermore, the strategy of 'define the relationship' was commonly used by the participants when they had to offer condolences to their close friend (situation one), professor (situation four), and neighbor (situation six). However, it was used more frequently when offering condolences to their professor (higher status) in situation four than their close friend (equal status) and neighbor (lower status). This can be explained by the Arabs' classification of being more rank-conscious than Western cultures and their attempts to emphasize and even overstress their recognition of the higher social rank of their interlocutors (Hamady, 1960). Moreover, this strategy was commonly used when the relationship between the speakers is distant (situations four and six) compared to a close relationship in situation one.

The 'offering of assistance' strategy was used in all situations except situation four (offering condolences to a professor). Though, this strategy was widely used when the relationship between the speakers is close and regardless of the social power relationship (higher, equal). More specifically, it was widely used in situations one (equal power, close distance) and three (higher power, close distance). This strategy was also commonly used when the participants had to express condolences to a neighbor in situation six (lower power, distant relationship). This is a religious-oriented value in a Muslim context where Islam asks all neighbors to be loving and cooperative and share their sorrows and happiness. It is highly recommended that they have to establish social relations in which one can rely upon the other and regard his life, honor, and property as safe among his neighbors.

Nevertheless, this particular strategy was not found in the corpus of Al-Shboul and Maros' (2013) study. This can be explained in terms of social power and the social distance between the interlocutors. The DCT situations of the present study involved scenarios intended for a close friend, an acquaintance, a professor, a family member, and a neighbor. This semantic formula was used by the participants when they had to offer condolences to their close friend (situations one and five), an acquaintance (situation two), a family member (situation three), and a neighbor (situation six).

However, the participants used it more frequently when offering condolences to their family members (situation three) than in the remaining situations. On the other hand, Al-Shboul and Maros' (2013) study involved offering condolences to someone people unfamiliar with his family. So, it is customary to help and give a hand to close friends and relatives than strangers.

6. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to knowledge of offering condolence strategies in Jordanian Arabic. Therefore, this work enriches our understanding of how the speech act of condolence is influenced by many social variables, including the cultural background of the participants, religious-oriented values and social power, and the social distance of the speakers. These variables resulted in different condolence strategies that resemble Islamic cultures. Thus, the significant amount of condolence strategies included responses that referred to God (Allah), religious-oriented praying, and recitation of Quranic verses.

Regardless of the significance offered in this study, it has some limitations that need to be considered by future researchers. For instance, although the DCT has been widely used in speech act research, it yields written data that cannot be expected to represent naturally occurring talk precisely. Hence, future researchers are encouraged to conduct research using different data collection methods, such as data collected from natural contexts, analyzing discourse, videotaping, and role-plays. In addition, using one data collection method is not enough to highlight every aspect of the respondents' condolence responses. Furthermore, although the data were collected from male and female students, gender was not examined in the present study. Accordingly, future researchers are strongly recommended to study how the condolence speech act is expressed by different age and gender groups. Lastly, further research examining the occurrence of pragmatic transfer by Jordanian EFL learners when expressing condolences in English is required.

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