

# A Study on Iranian Funeral Posters: Speech Acts Analysis

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**Abstract**—Different speech acts such as apologies, refusals, invitation, etc., have studied and differences between English and Persian have shown. But there are several speech acts which have not been investigated as extensively as others. One of them is speech act of condolence. The word condolence originates from the Latin word *condolor* means "to suffer together" (Zunin & Zunin, 2007). It also means informing a loss, expressing sympathy or empathy with someone. As a matter of fact humans are emotional beings and in everyday communication individuals can see this emotionality (Morady Moghadam, 2012). Thus this study investigated and analyzed types of speech acts of 50 authentic texts of funeral posters in Iran then showed the frequency and percentage of them. Out of five kinds of speech acts, only four types of them are used in the texts. Based on the results, the order of most frequent to the least frequent used is declarative, directive, expressive and representative.

**Index Terms**—condolence, Iranian text of funeral posters, speech acts analysis

## I. INTRODUCTION

Like many other costumes which are different from culture to culture and country to country informing people from death of someone also occurred in different ways. In Iran e.g.; in some areas by SMS and invitation cards but the most usual way that is used in many parts of this country is use of funeral posters. In Iran when a person died his/her family hold a funeral services for his/ her funeral procession, another one after passage of seventh, and fortieth days and the next one after passage of one year. For each of these funeral services the family of dead person in order to inform and invite their relative and/or other friends to take apart in funeral services, they use of funeral posters which contain a texts that invite and inform people, give the name of dead person, time and place of funeral service. The place of it is holy places most of the time e.g.; is mosque. Therefore; in the present research the researcher intended to focus on the analysis of text of these funeral posters based on speech acts theory. Farina (2011) defined speech acts as actions performed through expressions in a real context of language use bringing the roles the speaker intends the listener(s) to take or to interpret. According to Farnia (2011), speech act research has mostly paid attentions on those aspects which happened in some ones daily life (like requests, apologies, complaints, expressing gratitude, refusal, etc.). Different kinds of cross cultural studies on different aspects of speech acts and condolence such as speech act and condolence in Persian and English by (Eslami-Rasekh and Lotfollahi, 2011), investigating condolence responses in English and Persian (Moradi Moghadam and Pishghadam, 2012) have done so far but on the text of Persian funeral posters and categorizing types of utterances have neglected.

## II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to analyze the texts of funeral posters in Iran according to different kinds of speech acts. Another objective of the present research is to detect the type and frequency of speech acts.

## III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the objective, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- 1) Which kinds of speech acts in the texts of Iranian funeral posters are used more?
- 2) Which types of speech acts in the text of Persian funeral posters are used less?
- 3) Which types of speech acts in the texts of funeral posters aren't used at all?

## IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Theoretical framework

Theory of speech act

Pragmatics is "the study of linguistics phenomenon from the perspective of their usage properties and process" (Verschueren, 1999, P.1). According to Delen and Tavit (2010), pragmatic has been both controversial and a favorite subject in language investigation since 1960s. Therefore, speech act is one of the fundamental themes in pragmatics. The theory of speech act is basically evolved by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969, 1979). According to Morady

Moghadam (2012), the underlying assumption in the speech act theory is that the minimal unit of communication is not a sentences or other expressions rather it is language act. In other words, human language can be considered as actions. People do things by expressing various types of language acts like refusals, requests, promises, etc. Austin (1962, p.67) investigated speech acts from the following point of view: "to consider from the ground p how many senses there are in which to say something is to do something, or in saying something we do something and even by saying something we do something."

#### Speech acts and functions of speech

According to Kuang (2015), the notion of speech act was originated from Austin's (1962) work which looks at how utterances produced by the speaker can be applied to do special functions. Austin's (1962 as cited in Kuang 2015) states that speakers produce special utterances within a particular context because they expect the hearer to do a specific task e.g., "Go" the hearer is expected to do the act of vacating the space where the hearer is. Austin's (1962) work, in the same vein with the discipline of pragmatics, mentions that these speech acts can be analyzed on three levels:

1. locutionary act: the actual words the speaker is saying.
2. Illocutionary act: the purpose of the speaker.
3. perlocutionary act: the effect of utterance on the hearer.

Based on Kuang (2015) most of works on speech acts usually focus on the second level of Austin's theory for analysis in other words illocutionary acts. Although, Searle (1969) maintains that the fundamental unit of language carries no meaning in itself unless it is produced within a context and includes a speaker and hearer. Thus, when an expression like "open the door" is produced in a context where a snake is crawling into a room the hearer who is in the same room, expected to do the act of "opening the door" in order to the snake can crawl out of the room. Searle (1975) claims that locutionary act refers to the words, while illocutionary act refers to the performance and perlocutionary refers to the effect of the acts. Moreover, he states that expressions operate on two kinds of speech acts: 1) utterance acts that include something said or when a sound is made and may not have any meaning, 2) propositional acts where a special reference is made. He suggests that acts can sometimes serve as expressions. Consequently, a perlocutionary act is similar to a perlocutionary expression. Wittgenstein (1953), a philosopher, believes that the meaning of language relay on its actual application rather than its inherent meaning. From this point of view, a message that is conveyed may be interpreted by the receiver based on the situation. Therefore, interpretation not only relays on the context and participants included but also on the psychological mood of the participants concerned.

Yule (2000) declares that "actions performed via utterances are generally called speech acts, in English, are commonly given more specific labels, such as apologies, complaints, compliments, invitations, promises, or requests" (p.47).

#### Different categorization of speech acts

The focus of this study is on the five types of general functions performed via speech acts. It is worth pointing here to different categorization of speech acts by different persons. Yule (1996) in his book "pragmatics" classified and defined them as:

1. **Declaration:** refers to those kinds of speech that change the world by their utterance.
2. **Representatives:** those kinds that state what the speaker believes to the case or not, like conclusion and description.
3. **Expressive:** those kinds of speech acts that state what are the speaker feeling such as pain and pleasure.
4. **Directives:** when the speaker use those type of speech act intends to get someone else to do something e.g. order and request.
5. **Commissive:** speakers use this kind of speech act in order to commit themselves to some future actions. They state intends of speaker, like promises, refusals.

Searle (1976) in 'classification of illocutionary act' expanded the taxonomy of actions that can be carried out by speaking; he categorizes five classes of speech acts:

1. **Representatives:** the description of states or events, e.g. reports, assertion, and claims.
2. **Directives:** means that asking the hearer to carry out something in the future like requests, orders, suggestions etc.,
3. **Commissives:** means that committing his/herself to perform something in the future such as promises, threats, and offers.
4. **Expressives:** means that expressing someone psychological states of minds for instance apologies, expressing gratitude, and congratulating.
5. **Declaratives:** means that bringing about change such as, decelerating, and appointing (p. 1-16).

While Austin (1962) classified speech acts into five categories. He believes that performative utterances categorized into the following classes:

- 1) **Behabitives:** they make person to utter their impression and attitude like thank, apologize, condole and congratulate.
- 2) **Commissives:** they make person to force his/herself to carry out things such as promise and vow.
- 3) **Expositives:** they make person causes changes via their expressions like resign and fire.
- 4) **Exercitives:** they effort to get people to perform things like invite, order and permit.
- 5) **Verdictives:** they say people how things are such as swear, insist and suggest.

A search of related literature revealed that such investigation has been quiet recent and limited and there was not any research that use of the funeral posters. Because funeral posters are subcategory of condolence the researcher had to use of other investigations such as different studies on condolences that were not directly related to the topic.

According to Searle (1969 cited in Mitaib Murad, 2013), speech act of condolence is classified as 'expressive'. Eslami – Rasekh and Lotfollahi (2011) declared that this type of speech act is applied to express to the sorrow of speaker at the news of some ones death. On the other hand, Yahia (2010) demanded that condolences formulas have not been fully discovered, fortunately, many speakers are not called up on to express sympathy at some ones death. As a matter of fact, it is not possible to study language meaningfully in isolation from context and culture. In line with this idea Johnston (2008 cited in Mitaib Murad, 2013) also believed "knowing a language means not just knowing its grammar and vocabulary but also knowing how to structure paragraphs and arguments and participate in conversation the way the speakers of the language do" (p.7). As a result pragmatics was defined by Richard and Schmidt as "the study of the use of language in communication, particularly between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used" (2002, p. 412).

Mitaib Murad (2013) believes that the connection between language and its users is pragmatic. Thus, it plays a significant role in interlocution between participants. Bach and Harnish (1969) believe that to communicate is to express an especial attitude and those kinds of speech act being performed and those kinds of attitudes being expressed are corresponded with each others. For instance, a sentence may be states a belief, a request express a desire, and an apology expresses regret.

According to Yahia (2010), condolence phrases are planned for the sake of expressing sympathy for the bereft person. Generally, the emotion at the behind of the phrase is more important than the wording itself. He also mentioned that condolences are formal expressions of sympathy extend to other person after a death of a loved one. Many people know that giving condolence phrase without sounding a bit of cliché is very hard. Therefore; condolences expressions contain expressions like 'sorry for your loss', 'deepest sympathy' etc. These kinds of condolences are cliché that can be offered to any person regardless their religious beliefs. While Mwihaqi (2004) claims that semantically social meaning of condolences refer to the application of language, it is provides social relations and roles. Thus condolences are not only expressions of sympathy, but also expressions of empathy.

#### Empirical framework

Kuang (2015) studied functions of Malaysian condolences written in text messages. Results of the study indicated that Malaysian SMS condolences are consisted of eight semantic functions. The least preferred ones were those that expressed concerns through directives and wishful thinking and the most preferred ones were those that eulogized the deceased and expressed uncertainty. Findings also revealed that the art of writing a condolence can be a vital skill that needs to be honed as even good ambitions may be misunderstood.

Kongo and Gyasi (2015) conducted a study on expressing grief through messages of condolence using a genre analysis. Nine moves were identified by the researcher that out of these nine moves six of them were obligatory and the rest of them were optional. Besides, every move has distinctive lexico-grammatical characteristics. Moreover, the semantic structure in addition to the lexico-grammatical characteristic highlights the social functions of condolence messages in the world generally since the letters of condolences applied in the present study were written by people all over the world.

Mitaib Murad (2013) conducted a study on condolence strategies used by lecturers who are native speakers of Arabic L1 that live in Israel and work in Arab college for teacher educations toward their colleague who is native speaker of Hebrew in Hebrew L2 and works in the same college. The result of this study indicated that "the religious expression" is the most frequent strategy which was used by respondents and the Arab who live in Israel are not terrestrial and individualistic but also are celestial and collectivists and also the age and level of education of respondents have an effect on the frequency of this strategy and the least frequent strategies used by the participants were "appreciation of the dead" and "direct condolence". The gender is another important finding does play an important role in the frequency of the condolence strategies.

Allami and Smavarchi (2012) have done a contrastive sociopragmatic study on giving condolence by Persian EFL learners. A comparative analysis of given condolences across English and Persian was an attempt of this study. Findings of the study revealed that while condoling someone on the death of their beloved or their acquaintances the Persian speakers and EFL learners are more direct than the English natives. Another finding of the study indicated the necessities of explicit teaching of speech acts in educational settings and also learners can successfully acquire the speech acts without resorting to sociocultural transfer if appropriate strategies are employed.

Morady Moghadam and Pishghadam (2012) explored the condolence responses in Persian and English. The movies were their data collection instrument. At the end the study findings provided the evidence that in condolence response types Persian and English speakers are significantly different except for token of appreciation and topic avoidance and also the actual factors are affected on performance of speech acts such as condolence e.g; the emphasis of Persian speakers is on the collectivism and traditional of behaving but in Western societies their tendencies is toward secularism and individualism.

Morady Moghadam (2012) investigated the discourse structure of condolence speech act. Interjections and intensifiers among Persian and English people while they are expressing condolence speech act. Results of the study

proved that: a) the difference among intensifiers and interjections in two cultures was significant; b) both interjections and intensifiers can be classifying semantically; and c) English and Persian intensifiers are syntactically different in nature.

Behnam, Ali Akbari Hamed, and Goharkhani Asli (2012) attempted to investigate giving condolences in English and Persian via short messages and to understand that is there any difference in the way that people express their feelings and sorrows about someone death. As the findings proved there is a difference in the way people express their condolences and also evidence proved that Persian people express their condolences more directly and shortly with the sign of religious culture while native English people messages are mostly indicates sympathetic and apologetic.

Eslami-Rasekh and Lotfollahi (2011), have investigated a cross – cultural study on speech act of condolence in Persian and English. The findings revealed that in the way of expression of condolence there are subtle differences in an Eastern societies in comparison of Western societies and the most frequent used semantic formula in all of four situations was expression of sympathy and commonest response in all of these situations was the “accept my condolence”.

Farnia (2011) believes that studies have only focused on those speech acts that are regularly performed in ones daily life such as requesting, apologies etc. Thus, she conducted a study to determine the strategies which were used whom responding to an obituary note by Iranian native speakers of Farnia. The result suggested that the three most frequent used strategies among the respondents were expression of regret and grief, praying for God’s mercy and forgiveness, and expression of positive feeling and compliments about the deceased.

Aremu (2011) was in attempted to determine the sociopragmatic usage of language in obituaries in English in Nigeria. Results of the study showed that this social use of language is a normal representation of the hybrid of Nigerian English.

V. METHODOLOGY

Data collection, Procedure, and Instrument

Data of this study were collected through the speech acts analysis of texts of 50 authentic funeral posters in Iran. At first the researcher collected 50 authentic funeral posters. Afterward, the funeral posters were studied carefully. Then they were categorized and analyzed based on the five general types of speech acts which were proposed by Yule (1996). Subsequently their frequencies and percentages were calculated to test the hypothesis below:

There are not significant differences in the frequency use of various types of speech acts in the texts of Iranian funeral posters.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the statistical results related to the variables in each research question. The results are then interpreted to provide answers to all research questions of this study.

As mentioned earlier, this study aimed at analyzing the speech acts of 50 texts involved in the funeral posters in Iran.

After a careful inspection of all texts, the data were analyzed. The frequency and percentage of the speech acts used in the texts are presented in the following table (Table 4.1).

The first question of this study dealt with the most frequently used type of speech act in the text of Persian funeral posters.

Analysis of the data revealed that there is a noticeable difference between the most and the least frequently used of speech acts in the texts of Persian funeral posters. Therefore, the most frequently used types of speech acts are declarative and directive. The frequency and percentage of declarative is 50 and 29.6 and directive is 49 and 29.0.

The least frequently used ones are expressive and representative. Their frequencies and percentages of both of them are 35 and 20.7.

Regarding the other type of speech act which is commissive, there was not used in the text of funeral posters at all.

TABLE 4.1  
FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE OF THE TEXTS OF THE FUNERAL POSTERS

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Expressive	35	20.7	20.7
Representative	35	20.7	41.4
Valid Declarative	50	29.6	71.0
Directive	49	29.0	100.0
Total	169	100.0	

Based on the results presented in Table 4.1, the percentage of the speech acts show that 20.7% refers to expressive, 20.7% to representative, 29.6% to declarative, 29% to directive.

According to the findings, declarative is the most used speech act in the texts of funeral posters. These percentages are illustrated by a pie graph in Figure 1 below.

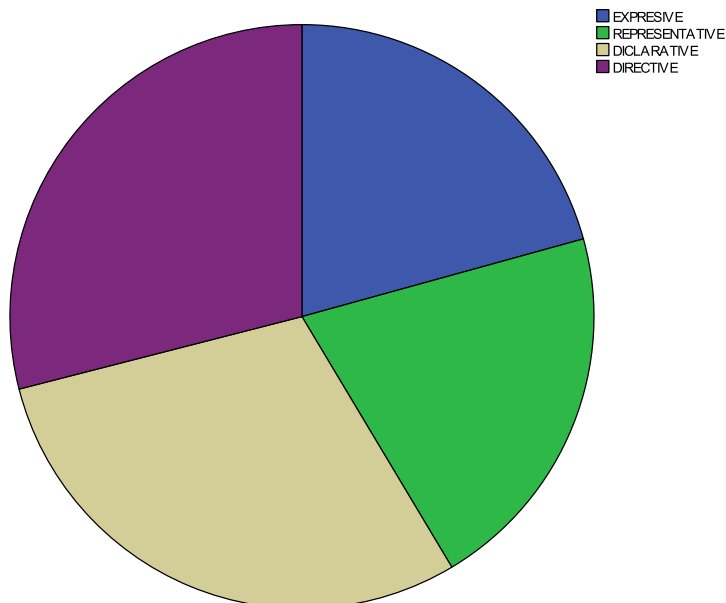


Figure1. Pie graph of speech acts

As this figure shows the most frequently used type of speech act in the texts of posters was declarative which is repeated in all of posters. It was a sentence like these:

We appreciate your attendance in burial and funeral of our honorable and deserving's mother /father / sister/ brother we are going to inform you that the third/ seventh/ first anniversary of that late is held on Monday 28/01/91 from 3 to 5 in mosque.

ضمن تشکر و قدردانی از سروران گرامی که در تشییع و تدفین پدر / مادر/ برادر/ خواهر... بزرگوار و گرانقدرمان (نام مرحوم/ مرحومه) شرکت فرموده اید به اطلاع می رسا ند مراسم سومین / هفتمین / یکمین سالگرد .... ان عزیز زنده یاد روز دوشنبه 91/01/28 از سا عت 3 الی 5 بعد از ظهر در مسجد وحسینیه ی (نام و آدرس مکان) برگزار می گردد.

This sentence also is declarative because it gives information:

Meanwhile the feminine commemoration meeting will be held in the same place at the same time  
ضمناً مجلس زنانه همزمان در همان مکان برگزار میشود.

Another one which was repeated 49 from total of 50 texts is directive.

حضور شما سروران عزیز در این مجلس وقرائت فاتحه موجب شادی روح آن زنده یاد وتسلی خاطر بازماندگان خواهد بود.

Your attendance in commemoration meeting and reciting prayers for the deceased will bring about happiness to the soul of the late and consolation of kindred.

This sentence is directive because according to definition of it is a request or suggestion.

Another kind of speech act which was used in the 35 texts is expressive type of speech act that was state of feeling. Sentences like below which were a piece of poems:

بگذار تا بگریم چون ابردر بهاران کز سنگ ناله خیزد روز وداع یاران

ای کاروان آهسته ران که آرام جانم می رود وان دل که باخود داشتم با دل ستانم می رود

پدرم دیده به سویت نگران است هنوز غم نادیدن تو بار گران است هنوز

The last one is representative again it was repeated in 35 texts.

اوست پایدار He is everlasting انا لله و انا الیه راجعون We are Allah's and to him we shall return

هو الباقی He is everlasting

## VII. CONCLUSION

Based on speech act theory, speech is a type of action. People by uttering words do things. For instance, a person who says his condolence, he expresses something. S/he does some (locutionary) acts such as expressing or writing some sentences. Although, there is something more than s/he does; that is to say, by expressing or writing some sentences in the tailor situation, s/he says condolences (Farnia, 2011). As a result like other types of speech acts, expressions of condolence rely on factors such as age, gender, level of education, social distance, religious beliefs etc., . Therefore, this study tried out to investigate the analysis of speech acts in the texts of funeral posters in Iran. The findings of present study revealed the most and the least frequent types of speech act. According to the analysis of data the most frequent one was declarative like (Meanwhile the feminine commemoration meeting will be held in the same place at the same time (ضمناً مجلس زنانه همزمان در همان مکان برگزار میشود) that was a sentences which were repeated in all of the posters 50 from total of 50 afterward 49 which was directive (Your attendance in commemoration meeting and reciting prayers for the deceased will bring about happiness to the soul of the late and consolation of kindred. حضور شما سروران عزیز در این (بگذار تا بگریم چون ابردر بهاران Expressive ( مجلس وقرائت فاتحه موجب شادی روح آن زنده یاد وتسلی خاطر بازماندگان خواهد بود.)

and representative (He is everlasting: هو الباقي) which were repeated in 35 texts out of 50. While the texts didn't include any commissive type of speech acts because there was no utterances that express commitment for doing future actions. Thus at the end evidence proved that Iranian funeral posters consist of 4 part and only use of 4 kinds of speech acts.

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APPENDIX



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