

Condolences Strategies by Jordanians to an Obituary Status Update on Facebook

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ABSTRACT

Unlike other speech acts such as refusals, apologies, requests and advices, the speech act of giving condolences has not yet been explored adequately. This study intends to investigate the speech act of condolences in Jordanian Arabic that are conveyed via a social network site, i.e. Facebook. The data focused on the condolences made as a response to an obituary status update on a deceased contemporary Jordanian actor in 2011. Based on 678 posted comments, the researchers were able to identify seven major strategies in the commentary; which 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. To ensure consistency in the comments, the data was first analysed by the researchers of the present study before three independent raters were invited to analyse the same data sample (condolences). The raters' analysis in the commentary reflect the seven major strategies identified by the researchers. The results revealed that the strategies were attributed to the respondents' religious orientation (i.e. Islam). Moreover, the findings also indicate that the majority of condolences in Jordanian comments are affiliated to faith and religious beliefs. The results obtained provide useful information to cross-cultural comparison studies and other related studies.

Keywords: speech act; condolence; obituary status update; Facebook; pragmatics

INTRODUCTION

Losing a loved one can cause a profound feeling of loss and societies have their traditions on dealing with this type of bereavement. In general, as death involves an adjacency of psychological and social prohibitions such as fear, superstition and religious taboos which coexist with different restrictions of a social nature, people feel hesitant to deal with death other than the traditional way (Fernández, 2007). News on a person's demise is usually met with gestures of tactfulness and respect towards the surviving family members. It is common that individuals and community members resort to a wide variety of linguistic devices as a means to pay homage to the departed and to show respect to those left behind while conforming to religious and social norms under such events. To the Muslim community, such norms would be referred to the teaching of the religion where it is stated that one of the rights of a Muslim towards other Muslims is to give condolences to the family of the deceased. This should take the forms of words or actions that will bring them consolation, closure and strength to endure the loss. In other words, people should choose their words carefully and phrase them in a tactful manner in order to convey sympathy and to help the family and the relatives of the deceased to return to their normal lives. In Jordanian culture, as is often the case with some Muslim countries, it is compulsory for Muslims to carry the deceased to the

burial ground and attend the funeral. It is also highly recommended in Islam to offer condolences to everyone who is affected by the loss of the deceased. Nonetheless, condolences should be offered to the family and to the relatives of the deceased within three days of the demise, after which, one should refrain from giving condolences. The exception would be if the news did not get to the giver of condolences after some time due to some culturally acceptable reason such as he/she has been absent from the vicinity, etc.

The researchers were first interested to explore the patterns of condolences because of the lack of studies in this speech act (Elwood, 2004). The interest later developed to a specific case of condolences which was the written obituaries. This is because the practice of writing obituaries in public domain has been a new phenomenon among the Jordanians. The advent of technology especially has given rise to this new practice, where societal events and news spread out very quickly via the social media, in particular, the Facebook. Hence, where condolences were once personal and religious in nature, the speech act now becomes a public affair with the advent and popularity of the social media. The initial interest of studying the speech act due to its limited documentation in the field of pragmatics and the new phenomena of Facebook have set the aim of this study; which is to investigate the speech act of offering condolences from the point of view of the speech act theory and analysed via a pragmatic approach. Based on the current literature, no study till the time this research was done, has examined the strategies used by native Jordanian Arabic speakers when responding to an obituary status update on Facebook. Hence the investigation set forth for this study investigated the types of strategies used to express condolences. The data was collected from postings on Facebook made on the death of a public figure who was a famous contemporary Jordanian actor.

Although offering condolence is universal and can be found in almost all languages and cultures, its usage varies based on the culture of the speech community. With this respect, it would be useful to examine the speech act of offering condolences in specific cultures; such as those practised in the Jordanian culture. Previous speech act studies have focused on various utterances that typically occur in our daily lives such as refusals (Beebe, Takahashi, & Uliss-Weltz, 1990; Al-Shboul, Maros, & Yasin, 2012), apologies (Blum-Kulka, House, & Kasper, 1989; Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006), requests (Blum-Kulka & House, 1989; Al-Momani, 2009), and compliments (Farghal, 2006; Qanbar, 2012). Those studies have contributed to a better understanding of the use of appropriate linguistic forms in different languages and cultures, therefore avoiding communication breakdowns. However, not many studies have been conducted on the speech act of condolences (Elwood, 2004; Fernández, 2007; Farnia, 2011; Pishghadam & Morady, 2012), and especially so in the Jordanian context. In fact, to the researchers' best knowledge, there has yet to be a study on condolences in Jordanian Arabic which would significantly contribute to cross-cultural implications. At the same time, to the field of second language learning and acquisition, learners or second language speakers of Jordanian Arabic would have a more in depth understanding of the Jordanian linguistic and cultural nuances.

The studies on condolences, reviewed below, used different instruments to collect data such as the Discourse Completion Tasks or DCT, obituary notes (general notes and those excerpted from the funeral sections of newspapers), and movies. However, comments posted on obituary status updates on Facebook, as yet has not been a method of investigation for condolence speech act studies. As Facebook is an important social medium nowadays, the researchers thought that it would be interesting to collect, collate and analyse data from this social networking site to gain a more current view and understanding of the trends and patterns used to express condolences. Hence, this venture into exploring speech acts via a new and popular social medium has set the purpose of the study, that is, to investigate condolences trends by Jordanians to an obituary status update on Facebook.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the second half of the last century, the theory of speech acts was proposed by British philosopher John Austin. The basic insights of this theory are based on the assumption that the minimal units of human interaction are not linguistic expressions, but rather, certain kinds of acts, such as refusing, advising, requesting, and so on. In his series of lectures, later published as *How to do Things with Words*, Austin (1962) proposed that in saying something, one is doing something. He added that communication is a series of communicative acts or speech acts that are used systematically to accomplish particular purposes. According to him, all utterances in addition to meaning, perform specific actions (or do things) through specific forces. In addition, Searle (1979) stated that the speech act of offering condolence belongs to *expressives* which refers to how speakers deal with situations of grief and condoling. The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of studies conducted on the speech act of condolences in different cultural and linguistic speech communities.

In a comparative study, Elwood (2004) investigated cross-cultural analysis of expressions of condolences. The participants of this study were equally divided into three groups as: 25 American students writing in English, 25 Japanese students writing in English and 25 Japanese students writing in Japanese. Data were collected using a written discourse completion test (DCT). The DCT consisted of seven situations: three required a response to an unhappy circumstance; three were related to reacting to good news and one situation required a response to a close friend's statement "I have got to lose weight!" However, the study examined only two situations which related to unhappy circumstances (i.e. the two situations related to the death of grandmother and a pet dog). Data were analysed based on semantic formulas similar to those found in Olshtain and Cohen (1983) in their study of apology. Thus, the analysis revealed five common patterns of responses: 1) acknowledgment of death; 2) expression of sympathy; 3) offer of assistance; 4) future-oriented remark; and 5) expression of concern. The results revealed a diversity of differences in the use of semantic formulas. There was also a significant difference between the response of the first situation which was related to the death of a grandmother; and to the second situation which was related to the death of a pet dog. Accordingly, the researcher concluded that findings for one kind of condolence situation cannot be generalized to all situations of the same kind.

In another study, Fernández (2007) gave an overview of the main linguistic devices used in a sample of Irish Victorian death notices and analysed the extent to which different praising and consolatory strategies help the obituarist fulfil a social function in early Irish Victorian obituaries. In this respect, the researcher considered the obituary notices that served as a socially oriented practice utilizing a broad range of praising and consolatory devices, such as metaphors, metonymies, hyperboles or mitigating apology expressions. In order to draw attention to the consolatory tactics employed in the face of death, Fernández (2007) explored a sample of 257 obituaries from early Victorian Ireland excerpted from the funeral sections of the newspapers *The Connaught Journal*, *The Cork Examiner* and *The Clare Journal*. Results from the study revealed that obituaries represent the social attitude and conventions towards mortality rather than going beyond the limits of only announcement of a death. Fernández (2007) concluded that death notices of the nineteenth-century mainly served as a social purpose, performing as a medium by which families could demonstrate their place in society, and showing the degree of linguistic explanation parallel to the social status of the deceased.

In Iranian context, Farnia (2011) investigated the strategies used by Iranian native speakers of Farsi when responding to an obituary note from the point of view of the speech act theory. Data were collected from the comments posted to an obituary for the late Khosro Shakibaei, a famous actor in Iran who passed away in 2008. A total of two hundred

comments were analyzed in order to describe the strategies used in expressing condolences. Five major strategies were identified: 1) expressions of condolences; 2) expressions of regret and grief; 3) praying for God's mercy and forgiveness; 4) expressions of positive feelings and compliments about the deceased; and 5) using poems, sayings, proverbs. Results revealed that expressions of regret and grief were the most frequently used strategy used by the respondents. The second frequently used strategy was expressions of positive feelings and compliments about the deceased. In addition, results revealed that respondents prayed for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased. The researcher described that such usage of strategies referred to the fact that in an Islamic context (as is the case with Iran which has a Muslim population of 98%), the prayer for God's forgiveness or mercy on the deceased is a common practice.

Recently, Pishghadam and Morady (2012) investigated cross-cultural differences between native English speakers (NS) and native Persian speakers of the speech act of condolence responses. Movies were used as an instrument in this study and data were collected from these movies to describe responses native speakers of Persian and English used when someone offered condolences to them. Seven strategies of responses were identified: 1) token of appreciation; 2) expressing sorrow; 3) sharing feeling; 4) comment on the deceased; 5) topic avoidance; 6) self-blame statement; and 7) divine comment. In order to find out whether there were any significant differences between the observed frequencies, the Chi-square formula was conducted. Generally, results revealed that Persian and English speakers showed significant differences in their condolence responses, apart from their responses which expressed a token of appreciation and topic avoidance. More specifically, it was found that English condolence responses were more terrestrial and individualistic while Persian responses were more celestial and collectivist in nature. Hence, the researchers elaborated that in Eastern speech communities, an emphasis on collectivism is a culturally conventional way of behaving. In contrast, there is a tendency toward secularism and individualism in the Western culture.

As noted above, the studies included in this review investigated the speech acts of condolences and condolence responses in different cultural and linguistic speech communities such as Japanese, Irish Victorian and Iranian. However, according to the researchers' best knowledge, there has been no dedicated investigation towards understanding the trends of speech acts which emphasises on the act of offering condolences in Arabic culture. As such, this study has significant potential value as it would familiarise the Arabic EFL learners with the way native Jordanian Arabic speakers respond to condolences. Thus, this will be the major contribution this study will provide. Another contribution would be on the basis of methodology. The studies reviewed above used conventional instruments to collect the obituary data which include DCT, obituary notes (in general and those excerpted from the funeral sections of the newspapers), and movies. Nevertheless, investigating comments posted on obituary status updates on Facebook has been virtually absent in condolence speech act studies at the time of this research. As Facebook is an important social medium, it would be interesting to venture data collection from this setting. This contribution will enrich the amount of information made available concerning speech acts derived from this new and popular medium of interaction.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE DECEASED PERSON

The deceased whose comments to his obituary are investigated is Mahmoud Abu Saymeh. He was a well-known Jordanian comedian; greatly known for his character "Hamdi" in the comedy drama titled "Al Ilim Nour" (Learning is Enlightening). This was Mahmoud's first attempt at comedy on television. However, he has also been credited with a number of

television and film productions throughout his career. Mahmoud passed away after a long battle with kidney failure on September 20, 2011 at Istiqlal hospital in the Jordanian capital Amman. He was 50 years old when he died. This person's obituary was chosen because he was a famous contemporary Jordanian actor and well-known to all Jordanian people.

OBJECTIVES AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

According to Farnia (2011), it would be easy for someone to find information on how to write an obituary - but not how people in different cultures write and express their condolences in response to an obituary. So, this study aims to investigate the strategies native Jordanian Arabic speakers use when responding to an obituary status update on Facebook. The significance of this study is evident based on the many positive outcomes. First, the findings from the study would help Arabic EFL learners to establish a better understanding of the speech act of offering condolences and promote socio-pragmatic awareness in the use of Arabic language in response to an obituary status update on Facebook. Because it is assumed that when learning L2, most learners rely on their L1 in order to deal with different speech acts. As a result, communication breakdown is most likely to occur (Kasper, 1992). Second, the classification presented in this study can be used by scholars to compare condolence responses in other cultures. Third, this study is unique as it serves to understand a less researched topic (the speech act of giving condolences), applied in the Jordanian community. The speech act of condolences has not been explored adequately in past research studies. Most studies were focussed on other speech acts such as requesting (Al-Momani, 2009), apologizing (Bataineh & Bataineh, 2006), and refusing (Al-Shboul et al., 2012). Additionally, to the researchers' best knowledge, this issue has not been investigated in Jordanian context.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study was set to answer the following two questions:

- 1) What are the frequently used strategies by Jordanians when responding to an obituary status update on Facebook?
- 2) Why do they use such strategies when responding to an obituary status update on Facebook?

METHODOLOGY

INSTRUMENT AND PROCEDURE

This study is an investigation of the strategies used by native Jordanian Arabic speakers when responding in Arabic to an obituary status update on Facebook. Data for the work were collected from the comments posted to an obituary status update on Facebook for the late Mahmoud Abu Saymeh, a well-known Jordanian comedian actor. Facebook, one of the most prominent social-networking websites, was chosen as an instrument in the present study because it has rapidly become one of the favoured modes of communication on the internet that allows users to connect with other people, share information and communicate online (Waifong, 2011). Moreover, Facebook is a more common social networking platform in present day Jordan; it would make a stronger case to gather and analyse data from this social network due to the amount of data available. Jordanians make up 5 per cent of all Facebook users in the Arab world. There were 2.244 million Facebook users in Jordan alone by the end of June 2012. In addition, there were about 217,000 new accounts that were created between January and June 2012. With 34.1 per cent of the population using Facebook, Jordan is

classified as a high-penetration country, along with Kuwait. Seventy-five per cent of Facebook users in Jordan are aged between 15 and 29; 56 per cent have been classified as male, with the remainder 44 per cent as female. Another interesting fact would be that 58 per cent prefer to use the site in Arabic (The Jordan Times, 2012). The data presented further emphasises the significance of Facebook within the Jordanian society. The attraction of using this social networking site can be attributed to its many innovative and engaging functions, which allow its users to communicate seamlessly. One of the widely used functions is the ‘comments’ feature, which allows users to publicly communicate with others regarding any topic of interest. Among the topics shared would be an obituary for a deceased, should an unfortunate event occur.

The obituary status update used in the present study was chosen following extensive search using relevant keywords of condolences in Arabic. After a comprehensive search, the researchers considered a non-governmental page on Facebook to be used for the purpose of the present study. This page was chosen as it had the largest number of comments posted on the death of the late Mahmoud Abu Saymeh. A total of 678 comments were accumulated within a period of about five months. Of this number, 865 condolence utterances that matched the seven major strategies were examined and analyzed in order to describe the strategies used in writing to an obituary status update on Facebook in Arabic. This means that some comments posted by the respondents included more than condolence utterances that were classified under two or more of the seven major strategies. For example, one of the respondent’s comment included two condolence utterances (“Enna lellah wa ena elihi raji’un.”; “Surely we belong to God and to Him shall we return.”) and (“Almaut haqiqa la yumkinunah almfrw minha.”; “Death is a fact we cannot escape.”). These two condolence utterances were classified under *Recitation of Quranic verses* and *Realizing that death is a natural part of life* respectively.

CODING SCHEME

The classification scheme that was used for coding the data in the present study was created based on the data and covered the entire data. To ensure reliability of the coding scheme, it is valuable to have another's perspective. Hence, coding schemes used in some condolence studies (Elwood, 2004; Farnia, 2011; Pishghadam & Morady, 2012; Samavarchi & Allami, 2012) were also carefully taken into consideration when the coding scheme was developed. For example, the strategy of “offering condolences” was also included in Farnia’s (2011) coding scheme which she called “Expressions of condolences.” The speaker used this strategy to express condolences and convey sympathy of the death. In the present study, the respondents’ addressee in offering condolences were either general (e.g. Jordanian people and art lovers), or specific (e.g. his family). Based on the comments posted on the obituary status update on Facebook, the researchers were able to identify seven major strategies (See Table 1). The following is an operational definition of each strategy:

TABLE 1. The Numbers and Percentages of the Strategies Used

Strategy	%	N
Praying for God’s mercy and forgiveness to be with the deceased	33%	289
Recitation of Quranic verses	23%	196
Enumerating the virtues of the deceased	15%	127
Expressing shock and grief	11%	99
Offering condolences	10%	84
Realizing that death is a natural part of life	5%	41
Using proverbs and saying	3%	29
Total	100%	865

- 1) Praying for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased
Using expressions to pray for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased
- 2) Reciting Quranic verses
Reciting some Quranic verses for the deceased person
- 3) Enumerating the virtues of the deceased
Using positive words to express the deceased's good deeds, virtues, personality and works
- 4) Expressing shock and grief
Using expressions showing grief or regret over the loss of the deceased
- 5) Offering condolences
Using words to express condolences or expressions of sympathy
- 6) Realizing that death is a natural part of life
Using expressions showing that death is a natural part of the human life cycle
- 7) Using proverbs and sayings
Using Arabic proverbs and sayings to express condolences

DATA ANALYSIS

The initial analysis of the data was first run by the researchers of this study. In order to achieve the consistency with the data analysis, the researchers invited three independent raters in order to affirm that the condolence utterances suited the data in light of the classification provided by the researchers of this study. The independent raters were Jordanian Arabic graduate students majoring in applied linguistics and have an experience in the analysis of speech acts coding scheme. They all have worked as research assistances on the analysis of speech acts coding scheme. The researchers provided the raters with the classifications of condolence responses used in other condolence studies such as Elwood (2004), Farnia (2011), Pishghadam and Morady, (2012), Samavarchi and Allami (2012). The raters were then informed that the coding schemes used in these studies were carefully taken into consideration when the researchers identified the strategies (i.e., seven major strategies) for the present study. The raters first worked independently then as a group to match the condolence utterances data used in the present study in light of the major strategies identified by the researchers. There were some differences found in the coding schema between the raters, therefore a discussion was held and further adjustments were made, based on consensus. Based on the coding scheme explained above, the data was analysed with selected examples presented as follows:

- 1) Praying for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased
 - a. Allah yrhmuh wisamhuh
"May God have mercy and forgive him"
 - b. Allah yrhmuh wiskinuh fasih jenaneh
"May God have mercy on him and grant him Paradise"
- 2) Reciting Quranic verses
 - a. Althina etha aşabathum musiba qalw enna lellah wa ena elihi raji'un
"Who, when a misfortune overtakes them, say: 'Surely we belong to God and to Him shall we return'."
 - b. Enna lellah wa ena elihi raji'un
"Surely we belong to God and to Him shall we return"
- 3) Enumerating the virtues of the deceased
 - a. Wajhuh muđi' kal malak
"His face is shining like an angel's"

- b. Salta alḍau' fi a'maleh alfniya ala mu'anat alsh'b alfelastīni almustamirah fi zelal al ehtilal al esra'li almustamir minthu oqud
“He highlighted in his works the continued suffering of the Palestinian people under the decades-long Israeli”
- 4) Expressing shock and grief
 - a. Ana masdum wa hazin le khabr wafateh
“I'm deeply shocked and saddened by the news of his death”
 - b. Ana masdum jeda lesma'i khabr wafateh
“I'm very shocked to hear about his death”
 - 5) Offering condolences
 - a. Awad an auriba an ahar alt'azi fi wfaat hatha alfnan alkabir
“I would like to express my deepest condolences on the death of this great actor”
 - b. Awad an auriba an ahar alt'azi alqlbīah l'ailteh
“I wish to express my heartfelt condolences to his family”
 - 6) Realizing that death is a natural part of life
 - a. Kul almakhluqat satamut
“All creatures will die”
 - b. Almut haqīqa la yumkinunah almfrw minha
“Death is a fact we cannot escape”
 - 7) Using proverbs and saying
 - a. Almut kas wa kul al nasi sharibuh
“Death is a cup of which all must taste”
 - b. Almut elaj le jmi' al amrad
“Death is a remedy for all ills”

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study is an investigation of the strategies taken by Jordanian native Arabic speakers when responding to an obituary status update on Facebook. Unlike most speech act studies, this study used Facebook as the main source of compiling the corpus. Facebook provided researchers with a good amount of authentic data.

The first research question was formulated in order to find out the frequently used strategies by Jordanians when responding to an obituary status update on Facebook. The findings show that *praying for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased* (e.g., “Allah yrhmuh wisamhuh.”; “May God have mercy and forgiveness on him.”) was the most frequent strategy used by the respondents in approximately 33% of the responses (n=289). *Reciting Quranic verses* (e.g., “Enna lellah wa ena elihi raji'un.”; “Surely we belong to God and to Him shall we return.”) was the second most frequent strategy used by the respondents in approximately 23% of the responses (n=196). In addition, *enumerating the virtues of the deceased* (e.g., “Wajhuh muḍi' kal malak.”; “His face is shining like an angel's.”) was the third most frequent strategy mentioned by the respondents in approximately 15% of the responses (n=127). As the fourth most frequently used strategy, the respondents used *expressing shock and grief* strategy (e.g., “Ana masdum jeda lesma'i khabr wafateh.”; “I'm very shocked to hear about his death.”) in approximately 11% of the responses (n=99).

Offering condolences (e.g., “Awad an auriba an ahar alt'azi fi wfaat hatha alfnan alkabir.”; “I would like to express my deepest condolences on the death of this great actor.”)

was the fifth most frequent strategy used by the respondents in approximately 10% of the responses (n=84). The findings show that the respondents used *realizing that death is a natural part of life* (e.g., “Almaut haqiqa la yumkinunah almfrw minha.”; “Death is a fact we cannot escape.”) as the sixth most frequent strategy in approximately 5% of the responses (n=41). *Using proverbs and saying* (e.g., “Almaut kas wa kul al nasi sharibuh.”; “Death is a cup of which all must taste.”) was seen as the least frequent strategy among others, at 3% of the responses (n=29). Thus, results of this study revealed that the respondents use extensive utterances referring to God (e.g., “Enna lellah wa ena elihi raji'un.”; “Surely we belong to God and to Him shall we return.”). This is in accordance with Pishghadam and Morady (2012) where the major amount of condolence responses in Persian corpus was related to utterances that included the receivers or referred to God.

The second research question was formulated to describe the reasons for using such strategies by Jordanians when responding to an obituary status update on Facebook. The explanation for the reasons was based on the literature review on condolences, the Jordanian culture, and religious orientation. The reason for using such strategies is attributed to respondents' religious orientations (i.e. Islam). Islam is a religion with the largest number of followers in Jordan, with 92% of the population being Muslim and around 8% of the population is Christian. For example, saying “Bismillah” which translates as “*In the name of God*”, before starting almost any activity is a common practice among Jordanian people. This can be said before eating and drinking, doing work, or just about anything at all. Other Islamic expressions include that when referring to future plans, Muslims will usually say “Insha Allah” which means “God willing.” In place of a phrase like “Thank God,” it is a Muslim custom to say “Alhamdulillah” meaning “All praise to God.” Similarly, expressing condolence in an Islamic context, the use of expressions which denote a prayer for God's forgiveness or mercy on the deceased is also common practice (Farnia, 2011). Muslims, just as for many in other faith traditions, believe that all human beings make mistakes, and are required to rectify and seek forgiveness for it because God has commanded us to ask for his forgiveness and to repent to him. Hence, the respondents' major use of a prayer for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased is attributed to their beliefs that God is merciful and forgiving, and that only God can forgive sins. Thus, those who believe in God should not despair of his forgiveness because his mercy embraces everything as well as his mercy is greater than his wrath.

Moreover, the respondents' reciting Quranic verses as the second most frequent strategy is referred to their beliefs that the Quran is the first and most important source of Islamic law, believed to be the direct word of God as revealed to Prophet Muhammad. Specifically, the respondents frequently recited the Quranic verse “Who, when a misfortune overtakes them, say: 'Surely we belong to God and to Him shall we return'.” This is the phrase that is usually recited upon hearing the news of someone's death and it can also be recited in any situation involving calamity in life. In addition, the respondents' enumerating the virtues of the deceased is attributed to the Islamic beliefs and prophet's saying of mentioning the good acts and deeds of the deceased and abstaining from the offensive ones. Expressing grief and shock as one of the major strategies in this study are a natural and normal response to the loss of someone close to us or someone we care about (e.g. Mahmoud Abu Saymeh who is a well-known Jordanian comedian actor). The respondents also expressed their deepest condolences to the deceased's family, Jordanian people and all art lovers. This would be attributed to their belief of a Muslim's duty to offer condolences and sympathy to the family and relatives of the deceased as it strengthens the relationships within the Muslim community.

However, unlike the results of speech act of condolences in which data is collected through DCT (Elwood, 2004; Samavarchi & Allami, 2012) or other research instruments

such as movies (Pishghadam & Morady, 2012), and revealed that expressions of condolences was the most frequently used strategy, the results of this study show the use of these expressions as the fifth frequently used strategy. The respondents' addressee in expressing condolences were either general (e.g. Jordanian people and art lovers), or specific (e.g. his family). This is in accordance with Farnia (2011) who found that expressions of condolences were the least frequently used approach by Persian speakers when they had to respond to an obituary note. Acknowledging that death is a natural part of life is one of the strategies used by the respondents in this study. Such strategies reflect on their acceptance of death as a natural part of life, which we will all surely have to face sooner or later, and this belief is firmly rooted in our conscience. As idioms and proverbs often capture a point of view vividly, respondents used them to convey the idea of death because they contain folk wisdom gathered through time and life experiences and characterized a society or speech community.

Studies into speech acts such as request, refusal, and advice have contributed to revealing the differences between speakers from different languages and cultures. They also have contributed to a better understanding of the use of appropriate linguistic forms in these languages and cultures and further to avoid communication breakdowns. Specifically, the results of this study have contributed to revealing useful insights for second language teaching and learning as to be familiar with the sociolinguistics rules of expressing condolences within the Jordanian context. These findings can provide materials developed for teaching particularly in teaching and learning pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Hence, textbook designers can incorporate the findings and conclusions of this study into ESL/EFL curricula. They can provide examples of frequently used strategies by Jordanians when responding to obituary notes (e.g., Facebook). Moreover, teachers should provide socio-pragmatic information to learners and let them choose how to express themselves in the target language (Thomas, 1983). Results have also shown that speech acts reflect the cultural norms and values that are possessed by speakers of different cultural backgrounds, as different cultures are very likely to realise speech acts quite differently. Finally, the researchers would like to re-emphasise that school curricula should focus not only on structures and vocabulary but also on the socio-pragmatic aspects of the language. Thus, more attempts have to be made to incorporate teaching and learning of speech acts in classroom procedures.

CONCLUSION

It would be easy for someone to find information on how to write an obituary but not on how people in different cultures write and express their condolences in response to an obituary. Thus, this study is an investigation of the strategies Jordanian native speakers of Arabic used when responding in Arabic to an obituary status update on Facebook. The general findings clearly indicate that the cultural norms and religious background deeply ingrained in all respondents can strongly affect their linguistic choices in their native language. With regard to the first research question of the most frequently used strategies by Jordanians when responding to an obituary status update on Facebook, the researchers were able to identify seven major strategies; which are: 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 that death is a natural part of life; and using proverbs and sayings. The findings revealed that using such strategies is attributed to respondents' strong adherence to their religious beliefs (i.e. Islam).

Similarly, for the second research question that seeks the reasons for strategies used, the answer also relates to the respondents' strong religious beliefs (i.e., Islam). Austin (1962) proposed that in saying something, one is doing something. He added that communication is a series of communicative acts or speech acts that are used systematically to accomplish

particular purposes. In the present study, when respondents expressed their condolence, they were saying something. Also, by writing some sentences, they performed some (locutionary) acts. Nevertheless, these respondents do something more by writing some sentences in the appropriate context. Specifically, they express condolences. Following Richards and Schmidt (2002) definition of pragmatics as “the study of the use of language in communication, particularly the relationships between sentences and the contexts and situations in which they are used” (p. 412); the respondents in this study expressed condolences in the appropriate context that adhered to their cultural norms and religious background (i.e., Islam).

Although the researchers believe that this study has generally answered the proposed research questions, there need to be more extensive research on the speech act of condolences by Jordanian respondents in order to provide a more detailed picture of the frequently used strategies for expressing condolences in the Jordanian context. The general findings may be constrained by the following considerations. First, the researchers believe that this study should be conducted in other settings to further generalise the findings. Second, more studies with different contextual factors (e.g. age, gender) and a different method of data collection (e.g. discourse completion tasks, role plays) are recommended in order to gain more vital knowledge of the possible strategies used for expressing condolences in the Jordanian context. Third, the speech act of condolences can be also examined among Jordanian EFL learners. Regardless of these limitations, the findings of the study provide some useful insights. For example, from the whole of the 865 sample utterance analyses, seven major strategies of responding to an obituary status update on Facebook by Jordanian native speakers of Arabic were elicited. The findings revealed that praying for God’s mercy and forgiveness for the deceased; reciting Quranic verses and enumerating the virtues of the deceased were the three most frequently used strategies among the respondents. Such findings would be useful in studies in intercultural comparisons and other related areas.

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