



A Pragmatic Study of Speech Act of Condolence In English and Urdu

Waheeda Yasin¹
Maryam Sani²

ABSTRACT

The aim of this work was to investigate the speech act of condolence in Urdu. Secondly it aimed to compare the realization pattern of the condolence speech act in English and Urdu. In Urdu, speech act of condolence is a complex phenomenon in Pakistani context. Most condolences are tending to be expressed personally, when people attend a funeral. The digital era has also enabled users to express condolences via email and text messages. The present study adopts comments from Facebook regarding speech act of condolence. It will highlight the difference of semantic formula that the English and Pakistani people use when they express their grief on the demise of a person. The researcher found a significant finding about condolence strategies that are affected by social variables like gender. The current research used qualitative method. Elwood's semantic formula (2004) was used to code the data, which was modified by Yahya (2010), then 3 different types of strategies are used for the realization of speech act of condolence, by English and Urdu speakers. Convenience sampling is used during this research process. This study used a qualitative descriptive research design. Facebook comments are used as data collection method. Edwood's semantic formula (2004) was used to code the data and three types of semantic strategies for the realization of speech act of condolence. Findings showed that condolence strategies were affected by social variables like age and gender.

Keywords: Condolence, Pragmatic, Speech act, Semantic formula

-
1. Lecturer at Rahila Riaz College of Science, Narowal
waheeda1982@yahoo.com
 2. Former Lecturer, GC University Gujranwala
maryamsani388@gmail.com
-

Introduction

We use speech and language as a tool to communicate or share thoughts or ideas and emotions. We produce utterances containing words and grammatical structures. We also perform action through these pronouncements and statements. Speech is actually performing an act through utterances or by making statements. In pragmatic that throws light on the relationship of language and society. Speech acts are one of the most significant part of pragmatic. These include requests, apologies, complains and expression of gratitude.

According to Bataineh and Bataineh (2006), speech acts provide better understanding of human communication. When a family member, friend, or loved one passes away, people often send condolences as a way of expressing their sadness and sorrow (Hamdan, 2022).

Research Question:

- 1-What are the three main methods used by Urdu speakers to produce speech act of condolence?
- 2-What is the significant social variable in the realization of speech act of condolence in Urdu?
- 3-In what way speech act of condolence in Urdu is different from that of in English?

Literature Review

Speech act denotes the condition and state of mind of language user. It is the way how speaker describe and explain his or her emotion and represent the behavior which is actually manifesting their way of speech. It is the combination of what we say in communicative language with the involvement of our nonverbal behavior. People do things by using words rather it be to give someone mental or emotional support as giving emotional support is ranked at one in online communication media or in computer-mediated self-help. (Braithwaite et al., 1999; Coulson & Oakley, 2005; Krumboltz & Winzelberg, 1997). Because people share their emotions and feelings using social media and get the social support from their circle to cope with situation.

Speech acts can be categorized as apology, complain, compliment, invitation, promise etc.

Austin pointed out that all utterances contain both constative and performative elements. According to him, there is three total distinction of speech act;

- Locutions
- Illocutions
- Perlocutions

Language is basically used for communicative function. Austin (1962) claims that we do things by the use of language. When we convey our feelings, we genuinely communicate our emotions. Expressing our emotions vocally can be difficult since there are numerous societal norms about how, why, when, where, and to whom we reveal our feelings because user don't even know how the words are going to effect the reader. Depending on one's country or origin, as well as other cultural identities and qualities like age and gender, there are many acceptable methods to express one's emotions Behnam (2013). Due to their age and increased use of social media, young children are frequently better able to express both positive and negative emotions in public. By talking on social media, people actually carry out social functions.

Thomas (1992) on the other hand regarded metalinguistic features as the brick on which the success of communication relies upon. Using metalinguistic features according to the situation proves that language is being used effectively. It will let the learner use language and its sub parts having core understanding to meaning and context.

In agreement with Austin (1962) emphasized that the locutive act is seen as the core idea of performative speech acts. Additionally, as Searle (1979) noted, the creation of "illocutions" serves as evidence of the creation of word forces that drive speaking acts.

Searle (1969) tried to systemize and formalize Austin's presented work. Searle (1975) introduced the concept of indirect speech acts. Which has its great influence over linguistic act theory. Searle and Austin stated that communicative acts work on the basis of universal pragmatic principle. All results are based primarily on the observation of native English speakers.

Elwood (2004) has provided a comparison of American and Japanese condolence. After that data was analyzed according to semantic formulas given by Olshtain and Cohen (1983). Cohen (2008) pointed out that Due to the uncertain relationship between reference and inference, speech acts are one of the pragmatics topics that is most researchable.

Expressions of condolences vary between cultures. In addition to understanding the grieving person's cultural background, one can express condolences appropriately. For example, in one culture, the common way to send condolences might be to send condolences flowers, but in another culture to use words of condolence. So we should be aware of cultural facts in condolences (Macdonald et al., 1994).

Emotions play an important role in human communication. Nature of relationship has made condolence complicated. Finding the right condolence phrases to say at the right time can be a daunting task. For example: In Iranian culture, saying "*I'm sorry*" to the bereaved does not convey anything important. There is a gap regarding the act of expressing condolences in English and Urdu.

Elwood (2004) has provided a comparison of American and Japanese condolences. He has utilized the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) and applied it to the participants. They were asked to express themselves in two given situations. Data were analyzed according to the given semantic formula by Olshtain and Cohen (1990), they observed that there were five patterns of the speech act of condolence. Acknowledgement of the death with interjections like "*oh*" or "*oh my God*", expression of sympathy like "*I am so sorry for your loss*", offer of assistance like "*Is there anything I can do?*" giving hope for future or practical remark like "*try not to get depressed*". Expression of care includes question like "*How you are doing?*"

In Islamic context according to the researchers, it is customary to pray for God's forgiveness or mercy for the departed soul. Where as in English culture, many prefer to use non-religious formula like they use words to console on the death of someone. They use expression like "I am sorry to hear this."

Methodology

The present study involves multiple samples of data from Facebook comments. Total 500 comments are collected to analyze the speech act of condolence. As Facebook is significant social medium these days. The researcher believes that it is a fascinating tool to gather data as compared to person to person communication.

One of the frequently used function of Facebook is "comments" this feature of Facebook let users to talk or share their thoughts about anything or any topic of their concern publically. Comments are taken from four obituary posts shared on Facebook. 500 comments are collected to analyze speech act of condolence in Urdu. The people involved in reading Facebook comments are mostly friends and some relatives.

The research design of study is descriptive and qualitative. Since the information bought i.e. data collection tools are from Facebook comments, it will be a qualitative study. Convenience sampling is a specific type of non-probability sampling method based on collecting data from members of a population willing to participate in a study. Total 500 Facebook comments are collected to analyze the speech act of condolence. As Facebook is a vital social medium it is fascinating to search information assortment from this setting

Findings and Discussion

Following common comments are found in comments of Facebook posts of Urdu.

1- Quoted lines are from Quran:

The lines in quotation marks are a new semantic formulation found in this study to complement Elwood's (2004) original parsing model for the act of expressing condolences.

These lines of quotes are used as an expression of condolences and represent an appropriate religious statement of condolence and are practically used by Muslims on Facebook posts. There are also idioms quoted in proverbs like "*bht bara nuksan hua*" which literally means "*losing a father is a great loss*".

Another statement is also being used "*lafzon me bayan nahi ho sakta*" which is also literally translated into "*words are not enough*" but some of Urdu speakers use it in another way as "*words cannot heal*"

"*Death always take good people*" a proverb used by Pakistani community. Urdu speakers are more inclined towards the religious discourse because it is part of their faith.

2-Seeking absolution from Allah:

This strategy is the second most commonly found in the comments. This semantic formula contains expressions like "*rest in peace*" or "*RIP*". There are other comments also like "*Allah jannat me jagah dy*" "*may Allah bestow upon him Jannah*"

3-Expression of sympathy:

It is another semantic formula. It has expressions like, "*How are you know?*" "*Ub ap kese hein?*"

"*Are you alright know?*" "*Ub ap thik hen?*" "*I am sorry to hear this*" "*Mujhe ye sun kar Bara afsos hua*"

Miscellaneous:

Interrogative expressions are part of it. Like, how did that happen? Ye kese hua? Kese fout hue? "*What was the cause of his death?*" "*Kia beemarthi?*" "*Was he sick?*"

Classification of speech Acts of condolence in English:

1- Acknowledge of death

Elwood was the person who proposed first the name of this strategy. Such as expressions include: "*oh*", "*oh no*", "*oh my God*"

2- Expression of sympathy

These expressions are like "*It is sympathetic*", "*It is a great sorrow*" and

"Accept my condolences for you in this sad occasion."

3- Offer of assistance

This semantic formula is considered an indirect way to express the act of condolence. It is mostly considered a polite expression. Such expressions are line:

"You are a strong man. If you need any help, I am here for you."

| Major Patterns | Minor Patterns |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Acknowledge of death | Expressing Surprise |
| Expression of sympathy | Making statement of not knowing |
| Offer of assistance | Making related questions and answers |

Table: Modified semantic Formula of condolence by Yahya (2010)

Conclusion

The researcher includes that the most frequent strategy used by the respondents is religious expressions. In other words, findings reveal that Urdu speakers are celestial and collectivist rather than terrestrial and individualistic like English people.

In English community people frequently use expression of sympathy. The strategy commonly used by the participants is "acknowledge of the death". Then old people use ritualize phrases, females use long expressions than males.

It can be concluded based on the observations and result that Urdu has three different types of semantic formulas for the realization of speech act of condolence. English speakers also use three different types of condolence strategies. The collected data showed that Urdu speakers preferred 'religious semantic formula'. Moreover, the respondents are between the ages of 35 and 60. The research also attempt to demonstrate how certain variables like age and gender effect speech act of condolence.

Young people are found to be more direct in expressing their condolence than the older ones. The researcher learnt that the young generation used clear direct terms like "I am sorry to hear the news of your father's death". On the other hand, aged people used religious phrases like "death cannot be falsified". Then it was frequently noted that females were more emotional than males in the expression of their grief on the demise of their loved ones. If the relationship is closer one, then level of emotions will be higher. If the deceased one is quite young, then it will affect the level of emotions.

Although this study has provided an ample information about the research question, yet more research on the speech act of condolence by Urdu speaker is required in connection with commonly used condolence strategies in Pakistan.

References:

- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bataineh, R. F. & Bataineh, R. F. (2006). *Apology Strategies orlonlaniati EFL University Students*. *Journal of Pragmatics*, Vol. 38(11), 1901-1927.
- Behnam, B., Ali Akbari Hamed, L., & Goharkhani Asli, F. (2013). *An investigation of giving Condolences in English and Persian via short messages*. *Procedia- social and behavioral Sciences*, 70(2013), 1679-1685.
- Blum-Kulka, S. (1982). *Learning how to say what you mean in a second language: A study of Speech act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language*. *Applied Linguistics*, 3, 29-59.
- Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1986). *Too many words: Length of utterances and pragmatic Failure*. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 8(2), 165-179. American
- Braithwaite, D. O., Waldron, V. R., & Finn, J. (1999). Communication of social support in computer-mediated groups for people with disabilities. *Health communication*, 11(2), 123-151.
- Broome. B. 5. (2013). *Building cultures of peace: The role of intergroup dialogue*. In J. G. Oetzel & S. Ting-Toomey (Eds.). *Sage handbook of conflict communication: Integrating Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.. pp. 737-762). Los Angeles. CA: Sage
- Cohen. A. (2008). *Teaching and assessing L2 pragmatics: What can we expect from learners?* *Language Teaching*, 41(2), 213-235.
- Coulson, S., & Oakley, T. (2005). Blending and coded meaning: Literal and figurative meaning in cognitive semantics. *Journal of pragmatics*, 37(10), 1510-1536.
- Elwood, K. (2004). *"I am So Sorry": A cross-cultural analysis of expression of condolence*.
- Hamdan, J. (2022). Strategies of Facebook users in offering condolences on a death anniversary: A case study from Jordan. *First Monday*.
- Krumboltz, J. D., & Winzelberg, A. (1997). Technology Applied to Learning and Group Support for Career-Related Concerns. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 13(1), 101-10.
- Macdonald, D., Yule, G., & Powers, M. (1994). Attempts to improve English L2 pronunciation: The variable effects of different types of instruction. *Language Learning*, 44(1), 75-100.
- Olshtain, E., & Cohen, A. (1990). The learning of complex speech act behaviour. *TESL Canada journal*, 45-65.

- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language* (Vol. 626). Cambridge university press.
- Searle, J. R. (1975). The logical status of fictional discourse. *New literary history*, 6(2), 319-332.
- Searle, J. R. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.
- Thomas, J. (1992). Metalinguistic awareness in second-and third-language learning. *Advances in psychology*, 83, 531-545.