

Pre and Post-Islamic Revolution Obituaries in Iran: Did Ideology Change the Move?

Saba Bashiri 

PhD Student of Applied Linguistics, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran

Hiwa Weisi* 

Assistant Professor of Applied Linguistics, Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran

Received: March 13, 2022; **Accepted:** December 11, 2023

Abstract

Obituaries serve as the most viable means to announce a person's death. Regarding the socio-political changes in Iran due to the Islamic Revolution, this descriptive-analytic study reports on a move-based analysis of obituaries belonging before and after the Islamic Revolution driven by Swales' (1990, 2004) genre move analysis. We employed a move-based analysis of 100 obituaries from two distinct periods collected via a library-documentary method. Our primary aim was to disclose the influence of a socio-political phenomenon on this specific genre, i.e., an obituary. After identifying the major moves of the two obituary sets, their similarities and differences were inspected. The results indicated that after the Islamic Revolution, obituaries contained twice as many moves as their counterparts. There were overlaps between the two data sets in four moves, namely (a) identifying the announcer(s), (b) identifying the deceased, (c) identifying family members, and (d) outlining the time and place of the funeral. Four moves were only present in after the Islamic Revolution corpus, which included (a) opening, (b) including the picture of the deceased, (c) showing sorrow for the event, and (d) characterizing the deceased. The moves discussion will be supplemented with explanations instigated from the socio-economic, religious, and political context of both periods.

Keywords: obituaries, Iranian context, the Islamic Revolution, move-based analysis

*Corresponding author's email: hiwaweisi@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Mortality is an inevitable reality of our lives. After a person's death, the survivors try to announce it and inform others of the event. This announcement varies from one culture to another in both form and content (Bloor & Bloor, 2007). As Moses and Marelli (2003) stated, obituaries "are a window that provides a view into a culture. They are one of the elements out of which literate cultures are built" (p.123). Obituaries are referred to as "informing the potential audience about deaths, and in some cases, funeral arrangements and other details" (Nwoye, 1992. P. 15), and the term itself comes from a Latin word, i.e., 'obitus', which means departure (Nagy, 2018). Although the terms death announcement and obituary may sometimes be used interchangeably, the first denotes a death record including a biographical description of the deceased, especially in a newspaper (Afful, 2012), while the latter functions as an informational piece that informs the intended audience about a person's death and its corresponding ceremonies and details (Nwoye, 1992). However, recently Benjamin (2020) referred to these terms and other similar ones, such as funeral posters and funeral announcements, as "class communicative acts which seek to inform the public of the death and funeral arrangements for a loved one" (p. 12).

According to Chang (2018), obituaries are a discourse concerned with death and a powerful site for creating and instantiating cultural meanings of life and death. Although the apparent primary function of obituaries is to announce a person's death (Karimnia & Barbareh, 2017), they can enact many functions as a written discourse (Chang, 2018). According to Starck (2008), obituaries have been paid attention to as research topics since the 1970s. The literature on obituary studies contains numerous investigations revealing how obituaries function as a genre in different cultural and social contexts (Afful, 2012; Cebrat, 2016; Jibril et al., 2015; Ondimu, 2014). Hume (2005, 2000) thinks of obituaries as reflecting cultural values in community newspapers and shaping public memory in American culture. By investigating obituaries in the Israeli daily, Haaretz, Gavriely-Nuri, and Lachover (2012) identified one of the obituaries' functions as reframing the past. Chang (2018) explored obituaries from a cultural perspective in a Chinese context. Several studies have also been conducted in an Iranian context that try to analyze the content of obituaries (Aliakbari & Tarlani-Aliabadi, 2016; Elekaei et al., 2015; Jalilifar et al., 2014; Karimnia & Barbareh, 2017). Following previous

literature on obituary moves, this study attempts to render a genre-based move analysis of Iranian obituaries via a different perspective, i.e., investigating corpora of two different periods. As Biontino (2020) stated, tracking death practice changes that influence altered societal norms is essential in historical investigations.

In discourse, a genre is an event taking place in a communicative context with an overall objective that shapes and impacts the schematic structure of the genre (Swales, 1990). Bhatia (2004) asserted that discourse as a genre goes beyond the text and incorporates the contexts to account for the way of text construction and how it is interpreted, used, or even exploited in specific contexts to play specific disciplinary roles. According to Johnstone (2008), genre description involves describing the text, its context of creation, activities by which the text is created, and dynamic interactions of the text. More specifically, Swales' (1990) definition of the genre is as the following:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale of the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community. (p. 58)

A central term in genre analysis is 'move,' which refers to a group of semantically, syntactically, and pragmatically organized elements that serve a specific genre to achieve its communicative purposes (Bawarshi & Reiff, 2010; Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990, 2004, 2009). The move achieves its communicative purpose via 'steps' that may contain several sentences or paragraphs (Cebelat, 2016).

The Iranian society was strongly influenced by the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which contributed to the adoption of different governmental strategies and milder religious norms for citizens on the part of the authorities. The obituary studies conducted so far in the Iranian context rendered valuable

and rich accounts of obituary texts. However, there is a lack of literature on the influences of government change on obituary moves. The present study aims to fill this gap by comparing obituary texts before and after the Islamic Revolution. Death-related norms and values are believed to change due to changes in the political and social structure (Nagy, 2018). Every human experience is culturally, socially, and historically embedded (Willig, 2001). As the Islamic Revolution resulted in changing socio-cultural, religious, and belief norms, we expect that the obituaries, as a distinct discourse genre, have not been exempted from being impacted by the changed norms since, as Frow (2006) announced, "genres are not fixed and pre-given forms" instead "following Derrida in stressing the importance of edges and margins" he "stressed open-endedness of generic frames" (p.6).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Specific communicative functions in a text are enacted by rhetorical segments called moves (Swales, 2004). As an approach to corpus-based discourse analysis, move analysis, which is the practice of identifying these schematic segments or moves (Nwogu, 1997), starts with a detailed analysis of individual texts within a corpus which is generalizable across other texts within that corpus (Upton & Cohen, 2009). The main distinctive feature of genres is their communicative purpose fulfilled by the moves, the analysis of which is the starting point of genre move analysis. It is followed by analyzing and interpreting the structural and linguistic features that led to achieving the intended communicative purposes (Ötügen et al., 2021). Following a move-identification format (Swales, 1990), this analysis yields a classification of moves that are "made on the basis of linguistic evidence, comprehension of the text and understanding of the expectations that... the particular discourse community have of the text" (Dudley-Evans, 2002, p. 226). Genres drift through temporal and spatial frames either inherently or as a result of intertextual acceptances and rejections; thus, the genre analyst tracks textual regularities and irregularities and explains them in terms of the relevant social conditions and the invoked rhetorical demands (Swales, 2009). Inspired by the pioneering move analysis model of Swales, this investigation renders a classification of Iranian obituaries' moves in terms of their linguistic patterns in two distinct periods, followed by an examination of the contextual factors that gave rise to those patterns. This study analyzes obituaries' moves in light

of the sociocultural changes due to a political revolution; thus, some criteria were used to select the studies for review. These included move-based analysis on obituaries or the influence of different contextual or social factors on their structure and otherwise a combination of both.

In an early study on obituaries, Marks and Piggee (1999) tried to realize how race, gender, age, and economic status would impact obituaries' organization and text. They analyzed a corpus of 2262 obituaries from 1993 published in a leading newspaper in Arkansas (the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette*). Their analysis showed that race did affect the obituaries' content in such a way that Whites' obituaries tended to be longer and more complex than Blacks'. This was also ascribed to the Whites' economic background and status. On the other hand, they found that race and gender did not impact the complexity and length of the obituaries. Almost in the same vein, the impact of the immediate society on obituaries' discursive construction was inspected by Moses and Marelli (2003). The New York Times 1983-2002 obituaries were analyzed to give an account of how the immediate society constructs living and dying discursively. Based on the analyzed obituary samples, they concluded that society's beliefs about life and death were revealed most obviously in causes of death, life expectancy, and gender differences in parts of the death notices.

Cross-cultural studies on obituaries are cases that reveal the hidden layers of the influence a specific society and its norms may have on obituaries as an instance of social discourse. For example, Hubbard et al. (2009) compared obituaries in Canada and UK to find how these two distinct societies reflect their attitudes towards aging and dementia in the obituaries. The 799 obituaries were collected from the British *The Times* and the Canadian *Globe and Mail* national newspapers over 12 days toward the end of 2008. Their findings showed that Canadian obituaries showed more instances of including the deceased's chronological age, cause of death, and donating to dementia charities. The authors related this finding to the Canadians' higher acceptance of age-related diseases. In another cross-cultural study, Al-Khatib and Salem (2011) examined Jordanian and British Obituaries in newspapers to find similarities or differences in structure, language, and function between the two societies. They based their analysis on 300 obituaries (150 per context) retrieved from two Jordanian (*Al-Rai* and *Ad-Dustour*) and two British (*The Times* and *The*

Guardian) newspapers. Based on the retrieved corpora, they recognized clear-cut differences between the death announcements in the two contexts. They attributed these to the different cultural backgrounds of Britain and Jordan, which resulted in different structural and linguistic features in the obituaries. Moreover, the Jordanian obituaries tended to be more communicatively detailed than their British counterparts.

Analyzing moves and schematic structures occupies the most significant portion of the literature on obituaries. Ondimu (2014) is a case in point who investigated 356 death announcements in a Kenyan context retrieved from a leading newspaper in Kenya, i.e., the *Daily Nation* (July 2012). She concluded that the sociocultural aspects of the context directly influenced the obituaries' structure. In addition, these announcements proved to be genres with specific structures of their own. The moves of this genre in the Kenyan context had some obligatory and optional elements. The obligatory elements included the heading, profile of the deceased, preamble, list of family members, funeral arrangements, and end remark. Within these obligatory elements, some sub-elements were optional, comprising the date of birth, death, and cause and place of death. Taking the move analysis, a step further, Jalilifar et al. (2014) tried to realize how society viewed the obituaries and how these viewpoints might impact the interaction between the deceased's family and the society members. The study data comprised 50 funeral announcements, which were analyzed to determine their schematic structure and linguistic features. The results indicated that obituaries did not merely function as death announcements; instead, they mirrored and reflected the societies' perspectives and judgments contingent upon their economic status, religious beliefs, customs, etc. Furthermore, it was revealed that sociocultural norms interplay with some features of the obituaries.

In line with Jalilifar et al. (2014), Aliakbari and Tarlani-Aliabadi (2016) conducted a move identification analysis on 100 obituaries selected from an Iranian national newspaper to indicate how sociocultural norms and social and religious beliefs are reflected via these rhetorical moves. In total, 12 functional moves were identified, including (a) heading, (b) opening, (c) announcing the occasion, (d) situating circumstances of death, (e) identifying the deceased, (f) photo of the deceased, (g) specifying the surviving relatives, (h) outlining funeral and burial arrangements, (i) outlining arrangements for receiving condolences, (j) wanting God to have mercy on the deceased, (k)

exhorting people to participate, and (l) closing. The social factor of solidarity among the society members was reflected in announcing the occasion move. The other social factors were attaching greater importance to titles, the significant social positions of the survivors and the deceased, and the emotional support needed by the survivors that were reflected in identifying the deceased, specifying the close survivors, and closing' moves, respectively. The religious belief that death is not the endpoint of life and is a transition to another eternal life was manifested in the 'opening' and 'asking God to rest his/her soul' moves. Muslims' affection and solidarity was another religious belief reflected in the 'accounting the occasion, outlining arrangements for receiving condolences and outlining funeral and burial arrangements' moves.

Holding separate ceremonies for men and women and not including the photo of women in their obituaries were other religious norms that impacted the construction of obituaries. Karimnia and Barbareh (2017) opted to identify moves along with poetics schemes, poetic types, and the thematic context of the Persian poems from 166 randomly selected obituaries. Ten moves were identified, which included (a) heading, (b) poems, (c) photograph, (d) an expression of great sorrow or loss, (e) name, (f) death announcement, (g) date and place, (h) other ceremonies, (i) special thanks, and (j) names of relatives. Since out of 166 explored samples, 165 included poems, the poetic types were also scrutinized. The most frequent poetic types were classical poems, prefabricated poems, free verse, and name poems. In addition, couplets or quatrain, single stanzas, and free verse were the poetic schemes in the obituaries. Finally, the themes identified in the analyzed obituaries were 'relationship, admonition, and advice, loneliness, the disloyalty of human life, shortness of life, being in suspense, nobility of the departed, youthfulness, magnified good qualities of the departed and wistfulness.'

A recently followed line of research on obituaries is analyzing the obituaries of particular groups of people. For instance, Heynderickx et al. (2017) analyzed the metaphors used in professional athletes' obituaries based on 150 obituaries of sports people published online. Their bottom-up analysis revealed that both traditional and creative metaphors of death were used in the samples. Traditional metaphors of death were 'a journey to another place, death as a call from God, the loss of a fight at the end of a (glorious) life, and comparing death with a sport event'. More creative metaphors to describe death included 'death as a new life, a fading star, and a dark mist.' Those sports

people's obituaries identified with combat sports were a better source of metaphors euphemistically depicting death—a more recent study stepping in the same direction by Kelly et al. (2019). The Neurosurgeon obituaries retrieved from *Neurosurgery*, *Journal of Neurosurgery*, and the *New York Times* were reviewed to reveal the inherent perceptions of neurosurgical legacy both inside the profession and in the general public (i.e., lay press vs. the press devoted to the profession). The results showed that both the professional community of neurosurgery and the general public held shared values regarding the legacy of a neurosurgeon.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As the literature review section indicated, most corpus-based studies in Iran have focused on the identification of and quantitative distribution of moves. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, no single study has analyzed Iranian obituaries to examine the impact of socio-economic, religious, and political changes resulting from The Islamic Revolution as it contributed to many authoritative modifications. More specifically, this study aims to explore Iranian obituaries from a different perspective as societal norms and authority are constituted, reborn, and reformed through death practices (Bloch & Parry, 1982). The following research questions guided this study:

1. What are the commonalities and differences between pre-and post-Islamic-Revolution obituaries moves in Iran?
2. How the obituaries' moves have been impacted by the norms governing and dominating the country?

METHOD

Corpus

Different kinds of obituaries can be found in contemporary Iran, i.e., obituaries published in national newspapers, in local newspapers, in separate A4 pages distributed in the specific city or region, and broadcasted via channels or groups in social media. We decided to investigate only the first group as obituaries of the Royal period were published and available in a national newspaper; therefore, the medium or channel did not impact the study's results. To inspect obituary moves before and after The Islamic

Revolution (BTIR and ATIR), obituaries published in *Ettela'at* newspaper, as extant research data (Charmaz, 2014), were thoroughly explored to identify the moves. To that end, archived volumes of the newspaper available in the central library of Razi University, Kermanshah, Iran, served as the BTIR data source from which 50 obituaries were collected randomly from volumes of four years (1946, 1950, 1955, and 1970). Fifty ATIR data were randomly extracted from *Ettela'at* contemporary volumes (2017-2019). The BTIR corpus comprised five pages, each of which included ten obituaries. The average word count of this set was 40. The ATIR corpus occupied more pages, i.e., 20 pages, each containing four to five obituaries. Likewise, the average word count of this set was 50.

Data analysis

The analytic framework used in this study to identify the schematic move structure of the obituaries genres was the Swalesian genre move analysis approach (1990, 2004). Data analysis was conducted via a two-step process. The first step involved identifying frequent moves underlying each set of the corpus. In the second phase, the researchers reread the moves to come up with the similarities and differences between the moves of each corpus, drawing upon the cultural and political norms of the country in both periods. Aiming at identifying BTIR and ATIR obituaries move, the moves of each corpus set were elaborated on (first research question). Then, they were compared and contrasted to find the source of any possible differences (research question two). In the results section, each move will be accompanied by an instance from the obituaries. Full names, pictures, and postal addresses will not be disclosed for anonymity.

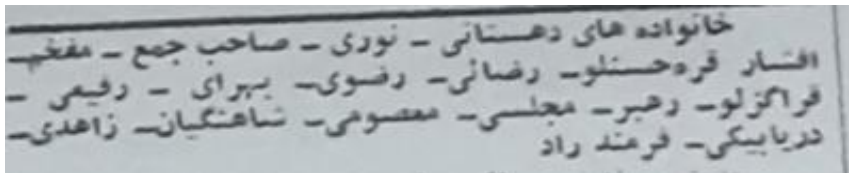
RESULTS

BTIR Obituaries Moves

Analysis of the 50 BTIR obituaries yielded identifying four major moves including (a) identifying the announcer(s), (b) identifying the deceased, (c) identifying family members (if there is an important person in the family), and (d) outlining the time and place of the funeral.

Identifying the announcer(s)

This move was placed either at the beginning or end of the obituaries, which included the announcers' last names.

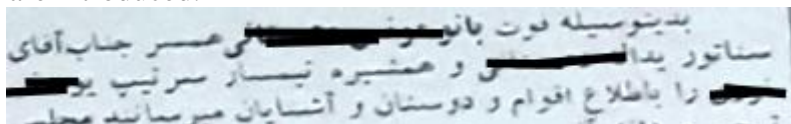


Khaanevadeha-ye Dehestani- Noori- Saheb Jam'e- Mofakham- Afahsr Ghare Hasan lu- Rezaei- Razavi- Bahraee- Rafi'ee- Gharagazlu- Rahbar- Majles- Ma'soomi- Shahangian- Zahedi- Daryabeigi- Farmand Rad

Dehestani, Noori, Saheb Jam'e, Mofakham, Afahsr Ghare Hasan lu, Rezaei, Razavi, Bahraee, Rafi'ee, Gharagazlu, Rahbar, Majlesi, Ma'soomi, Shaahangian, Zahedi, Daryabeigi, [and] Farmand Rad families

Identifying the deceased and family members

These two themes are elaborated on together because immediately after identifying the deceased by giving him/her full name, the family members (in case of having an important person in the family, such as martial or religious persons) are introduced.

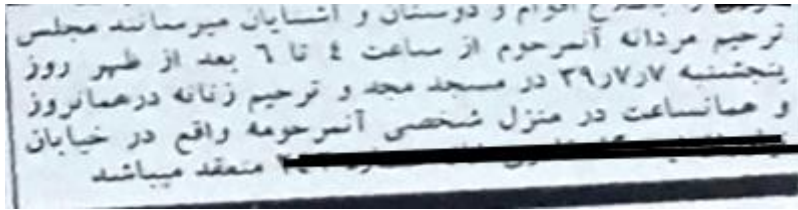


Dedin vasile fawte banoo [Name] hamsare jenabe aghaye senator [Name], hamshaireye timsar sartip [Name] ra be etela'e aghvam va doostan va ashnayan miresanand.

Hereby we announce the death of lady[Name] Senator[Name] 's spouse and Brigadier-General[Name] 's sister to relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

Outlining the time and place of the funeral

The last part of the obituary was devoted to specifying the exact time and place of holding burial/memorial ceremonies.



Majles-e tarhim-e mardane aan marhoom as saa't 4 ta 6 ba'ad az zohr rooz-e panj-shanbe 39/7/7 dar masjed-e Majd, tarhim-e zanane dar haman rooz va haman sa'at dar manzel-e shakhsi aan marhoome vaghe' dar khyaban [Address] mongha'ed mi-bashad.

The funeral ceremony for men will be held from 4 to 6 p.m. on Thursday 7.7.39 [29.9.1960] in Majd mosque and the funeral ceremony for women will be held at the same time at the deceased's home located in [Address]

ATIR Obituary Moves

For the sake of non-redundancy, the common moves will not be elaborated on in this part, albeit an illustration will be given.

Opening (a Quranic/other religious verse or its Persian translation, a poem, or both of them)

The religious verse indicates believing in God and his immortality or the fact that this world is temporary.



Baghaa mokhtase zaat-e oost

Pedaram dide be raahat negaraan ast hanooz

Ghame naadidane to bare geraan ast hanooz

Aanghadar mehero vafa bar hamegan kardi to

Naame nikat hame jaa verde zabaan ast hanooz

Eternity is the exclusive property of his supreme being

Oh father, our eyes still expect you

*The sorrow of not seeing you is still a heavy burden
You devoted so much passion and loyalty to all that
Your honor name is still spoken everywhere.*

Including the picture of the deceased

In most cases, the female obituaries contained no pictures, although some aged ones were exceptions. For the sake of anonymity, this move will contain no illustration.

Showing sorrow for the event

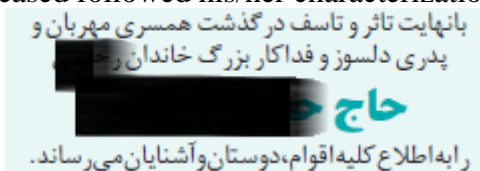
A short opening preceded the deceased name and his/her characterization to express the announcers' sorrow for the person's death and announcing it. Illustrations from the original obituary for this move and the next two moves will be given collectively to contextualize the moves and not separate closely related and -realized moves

Characterizing the deceased (e.g., a kind father)

Deceased characterization mainly was related to family relations or religious, occupational, and academic titles.

Identifying the deceased

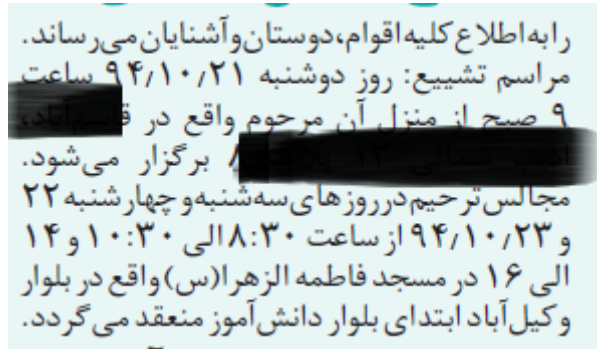
The name of the deceased followed his/her characterization.



Baa nahaayate ta'assor va ta'assof dargozashte hamsari mehrabaan va pedari delsooz va fadaakaar, bozorge khnadan [Name] Haj [Name] ra be etelaa'e kolye-ye aghvaam, doostan, va ashnaayaan miresanad.

With the utmost regret and impression [Showing sorrow for the event] we announce the death of a kind espouse and a compassionate and dedicated father, [Name]'s patriarch Haj[Name] [Characterizing and identifying the deceased] to all relatives, friends, and acquaintances.

Outlining the time and place of burial and /or the funeral



Maraaseme Tashi'ee: Rooze doshanbe 94/10/21 sa'at 9 sobh az manzele aan marhoom vaghe' dar ... bargozaar mishavad. Majalese tarhim dar roozhaaye seshanbe va chaharshanbe 22 va 94/10/23 az sa'at 8:30 elaa 10:30 va 14 elaa 16 dar masjede Faatemeh-al-Zahraa vaghe' dar bolvare Vakilaabaad ebtedaye bolvare Daaneshamooz mongha'ed migardad.

Funeral ceremony: will be held on Monday 94/10/21[11/1/2016] at 9 pm from the deceased home. Funeral meetings will be held on Tuesday 94/10/22 [12/1/2016] and Wednesday 94/10/23[13/1/2016] from 8:30 until 10:30 and from 14 to 16 in Fametehe-al-Zahra (peace be upon her), located in Vakil Abad boulevard at the beginning of Daneshamooz boulevard.

Identifying the announcers



Khaanavadehaye

Families: ...

DISCUSSION

The results regarding the first and second research questions will be discussed concomitantly as we assumed that the norms governing and dominating the country led to commonalities and discrepancies. Data inspection indicated that ATIR obituaries contained nearly twice as many moves as their

counterparts. Regarding the commonalities and discrepancies, single ATIR obituaries did not have an opening. However, each ATIR obituary had an exclusive opening because the opening of the first group was given collectively at the top of the particular column devoted to death notices. Thus, the ATIR obituaries opening occupied more space, supporting the "informational value" principle of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996). This move indicates the religious belief that death is not the end of life but a medium that redirects us to eternal life and our original destination (Aliakbari & Tarlani-Aliabadi, 2015). Despite having different formats in the two corpora, this move conveys people's religiosity in both periods; however, it is more evident in ATIR. Death conceptualization is directly impacted by religious and cultural norms dominant in the society; thus, it is conceptualized as a journey among Muslims (Herat, 2014), who make up most of Iran's population. Another justification for this commonality is that ethical, and religious codes are transmitted across generations (Teodorescu, 2021) regardless of societal changes. As stated earlier, milder religious strategies towards citizens, especially Muslims, led to a kind of liberalization of religious rites (Goncharova, 2021).

Almost all ATIR obituaries contained a picture of males and sometimes of aged females. Jalilifar et al. (2014) stated that newspapers' status as 'a national newspaper' and their 'nationwide readership' necessitates having a formal structure for all obituaries. Due to administrative regulations and the passage of time, the structures have changed, which is why BTIR obituaries contained no pictures. It is also worth mentioning that the number of newspapers has multiplied, so the more space, the longer the obituaries can be.

Showing sorrow for the event and deceased characterization were two major moves among ATIR obituaries, the main functions of which were expressing the survivors' mental suffering and describing and celebrating the deceased in the best possible way using adjectives and nouns, respectively. Behaviors associated with grief expression are culture-sensitive, and cultural and societal beliefs are subject to change over time (Albert et al., 2016); furthermore, the form of these emotional expressions refers to the dominant rules and norms related to mourning (Nagy, 2018). Cultural and societal norms, such as changing ideas about how funeral ceremonies should be held and how the event should be announced, changed in Iran due to revolutionary

ideas and goals; thus, grief is more intensely expressed in ATIR obituaries. Based on digital humanities perspectives, deceased characterization has its roots in the beliefs of those who write the obituaries since they decided on what is relevant about life and death (Sabbatino et al., 2020), in this case, describing them as having some good traits. That is why different facts about the deceased can be extracted from obituaries (Han, 2013), such as family relations, deceased roles/titles/jobs in society.

Obituaries of both corpora contained these titles, in contrast to Nagy (2018), who found that mentioning political titles, positions, and achievements gradually diminished in Hungary following political changes due to the Revolution. The context within which these obituaries are written impacts the purpose of using particular linguistic elements, the recognition of which is essential to find out their function (Johnstone, 2008; Schiffrin, 1994). According to Salahshour (2017), there are some reasons for the appearance of professional (Mohandes [engineer]) and religious (Haji; a person who has visited Kaaba) titles in Iranian obituaries, i.e., enhancing the social position of the deceased and their family, getting the attention of more mourning participants, and Iranian's positive attitudes towards both secular and religious high positions. Likewise, the deceased and survivors' socio-economic status influences how his/her death is announced; moreover, some cultures love to use titles, like professional and academic qualifications, in obituaries (Nwoye, 1992).

The deceased was identified by giving his/her full name in both data corpus, although in BTIR obituaries, some family members were also identified; especially when the member had a high governmental or religious position. Militaries were among the most cited family members since, during the Royal Regime, those who worked for the Royals were of prime importance. Thus, people were somehow forced toward the societal belief that they should respect the deceased's relations (Gorman, 2020), especially the Royals. This shows that in that period, a post-death life was still measured regarding the connections a person had while living as indicators of a person and a family's status (Gorman, 2020). This instantiates Schiffrin's (1994) statement that discourse is contextualized "in particular circumstances of social life, and ...reflects, and adds, meaning and structure in those circumstances" (p. 97). One further explanation is that only socio-economically prestigious people could afford to publish obituaries in

newspapers (Matiki, 2001). However, after the Islamic Revolution, more people could afford it as around 90% percent of BTIR obituaries belonged to religious and political figures or their relatives. Likewise, in post-communist Romania mourning, politics were not confined to royalties and other prominent cultural and political figures (Rusu, 2020).

By skimming both corpora, one can infer that Iranians see funeral and burial arrangements as necessary in both periods since the exact time and place are addressed for holding the funeral ceremonies. Although BTIR ceremonies were held in two places for men and women (in a mosque and at home, respectively), the counterparts were mainly held in a mosque. A justification for not holding ceremonies for women in a mosque before the Revolution may be that no place in mosques was exclusively devoted to women for praying or religious ceremonies. However, as religious rites were nationally recognized and appreciated by authorities and people, women were given more opportunities to participate. One can recognize this fact by knowing that the size of old mosques only accommodates a few people, which implies confining women's mourning and ceremonies to home (Salahshour, 2017), directly impacting funerary arrangement patterns concerning the venue of holding such ceremonies (Park, 2010). In line with Fowler (2007), obituaries structures imply "sociodicy" (justifications of society), not "theodicy" (justifications of God) (p.19).

The last common move in both corpora was identifying the announcer(s) at the toper part of the ATIR obituaries and the toper/lower part of BTIR obituaries. A social significance of naming the survivors is that people in society will show more sympathy if they see familiar names and try to join the ceremonies. Following ancestral traditions reflects a cultural emphasis on social connectedness, interconnectivity, and conformity (Valentine, 2010) among Iranians, irrespective of the country's changes. Similarly, Raeburn (2016) found that the post-Reformation Scottish somehow followed the same death practices as pre-Reformation Scottish for personal/practical reasons and community significance.

LIMITATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This paper discussed the similarities and differences between Iranian obituaries published in a public newspaper during two various periods implementing a genre-based move analysis supplemented by insights from

the socio-economic, religious, and political context of both periods. It showed that despite having some common moves, BTIR and ATIR obituaries also differ in their commonalities. This paradox was inspected to be inspired by returning to religious values and rituals. In conclusion, in the post-royal transition period, obituaries are longer and communicate more elements compared to their counterparts. Specifically, the changing religious attitudes of the country and its socio-economic and political transformations involved paying more attention to obituaries' structural elements, which show a society's perspectives on death and its announcement.

Given that the corpus focused on data from one public newspaper, further studies can investigate whether pre-revolution obituaries or death announcement letters published in local publication centers can reveal the same findings. It will be interesting to compare obituaries of different genders and classes of people in both periods as well. Despite its acknowledged limitations, we hope this study can somehow instantiate how obituaries, as a discourse, can communicate important information about two periods of a country in terms of its social, cultural, and political context. These considerations matter regarding the insights they provide for more sociocultural understanding. Furthermore, analyzing genres' structural design and its embedded elements inspired by a socio-religious revolution might have valuable implications concerning society and its values. This study might have pedagogical implications as well. For instance, for instructing and learning different reading and writing genres, paying attention to society's social and cultural norms is necessary. This implication is justified in the light of the fact that learning a language is concomitant with learning the culture.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

ORCID

Saba Bashiri



<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5282-1666>

Hiwa Weisi



<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1678-2508>

References

- Afful, J. B. (2012). A genre analysis of death announcements in Ghanaian newspapers. *Language, Discourse & Society*, 1(2), 118-136. <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=babd5cb7d2dd5016c98a88b8e65ce3f9dab4a1db>
- Albert, A. O., Anthony, A., & Lateef, A. A. (2016). Understanding the life course through newspaper obituaries. *Indian Journal of Gerontology*, 30(4), 450-460. <http://www.gerontologyindia.com/pdf/Vol-30-4.pdf#page=42>
- Aliakbari, M., & Tarlani-Aliabadi, H. (2016). Communicating sociocultural norms and social and religious practices in Iranian death notices. *Social Semiotics*, 26(2), 185-207. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2015.1088216>
- Al-Khatib, M. A., & Salem, Z. (2011). Obituary announcements in Jordanian and British newspapers: A cross-cultural overview. *Acta Linguistica*, 5(2), 80-96. <https://www.actalinguistica.com/arhiv/index.php/als/article/view/394/515>
- Bawarshi, A. S., & Reiff, M. J. (2010). *Genre: An introduction to history, theory, research, and pedagogy*. Parlor Press.
- Benjamin, A. A. J. (2020). Socio-cultural perspectives on death announcements in Ghanaian newspapers: Some sociolinguistic evidence. *Journal of Philosophy and Culture*, 8(1), 12-21. <https://doi.org/10.5897/JPC2018.0014>
- Bhatia, V. (1993). *Analyzing genre*. Longman.
- Bhatia, V. (2004). *Worlds of written discourse: A genre-based view*. Continuum
- Biontino, J. (2020). Changes in funerary rites and burial practices in Modern Korea (1876–1945), *Contemporary Japan*, 32(1), 6-24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/18692729.2020.1717131>
- Bloch, M., & Parry, J. (Eds.). (1982). *Death and the Regeneration of Life*. Cambridge University Press.
- Bloor, M., & Bloor, T. (2007). *The practice of critical discourse analysis*. Hodder Arnold.
- Cebat, G. (2016). *Death notice as a genre: An analysis of the New York Times online edition*. (Doctoral dissertation, University of Silesia)
- Chang, Y. (2018). A cultural discourse analysis of obituaries in China. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 13(3), 259-282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2018.1453819>
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing grounded theory*. Sage.
- Dudley-Evans, T. (2002). Genre analysis: An approach to text analysis for ESP. In *Advances in written text analysis* (pp. 233-242). Routledge.

- Elekaei, A., Faramarzi, S., & Tabrizi, H. H. (2015). Genre-based discourse analysis of death announcements. *The Iranian EFL Journal* 11(1), 37-52. <https://www.academia.edu/download/38166385/29499800.pdf#page=37>
- Fowler, B. (2007). *The obituary as collective memory*. Routledge.
- Frow, J. (2006). *Genre*. Routledge.
- Gavriely-Nuri, D., & Lachover, E. (2012). Reframing the past as a cosmopolitan memory: Obituaries in the Israeli daily Haaretz. *Communication Theory*, 22(1), 48-65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2011.01397.x>
- Goncharova, G. N. (2021). New dynamics of religious death culture in Bulgaria in the post-socialist transition period. *Mortality*, 26(2), 187-201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2021.1903187>
- Gorman, M. K. (2020). *Famous Last Words: Relationship, Status, Memory, and the Pervasive Power of Obituaries* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Wyoming. Libraries).
- Han, K. S. (2013). Personal information extraction from Korean obituaries. *IEICE TRANSACTIONS on Information and Systems*, 96(12), 2873-2876. https://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/transinf/E96.D/12/E96.D_2873/_pdf
- Herat, M. (2014). Avoiding the reaper: Notions of death in Sri Lankan obituaries. *International Journal of Language Studies*, 8(3), 117-144. <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/46601654.pdf>
- Heynderickx, P. C., Dieltjens, S. M., & Oosterhof, A. (2017). The final fight: An analysis of metaphors in online obituaries of professional athletes. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 79(4), 364-376. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222817715757>
- Hubbard, R. E., Eeles, E. M., Fay, S., & Rockwood, K. (2009). Attitudes to aging: A comparison of obituaries in Canada and the UK. *International psychogeriatrics*, 21(4), 787-792. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S104161020999041X>
- Hume, J. (2000). *Obituaries in American culture*. University Press of Mississippi: Jackson.
- Hume, J. (2005). Life and death in a small town: Cultural values and memory in community newspaper obituaries. *Grassroots editor*, 46(4), 1-8. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/mono/10.4324/9780203942000-7/life-death-small-town-carolyn-kitch-janice-hume>
- Jalilifar, A. R., Varnaseri, M., Saidian, S., & Khazaie, S. (2014). An Investigation into the genre features of funeral announcements: People's view in social communications in focus. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 98, 747-756. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2014.03.477>
- Jibril, T. A., Ali, A. M., Kasim, Z. M., & Chan, M. Y. (2015). Communicating beyond the conventional functions: An assessment of newspaper

- announcements. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 5(2), 41. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ojcm/2504>
- Johnstone, B. (2008). *Discourse Analysis*. Blackwell Publishing
- Karimnia, A., & Barbareh, L. (2017). Moves, poetic types, poetic schemes, and cultural themes in Iranian obituaries. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 12(3), 290-305. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2017.1342650>
- Kelly, P. D., Voce, D. J., Sivaganesan, A., & Wellons III, J. C. (2019). The legacy of a neurosurgeon: A US-based obituary analysis. *World neurosurgery*, 130, e908-e914. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wneu.2019.07.034>
- Kress, G., & Van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. Routledge.
- Marks, A., & Piggee, T. (1999). Obituary analysis and describing a life lived: The impact of race, gender, age, and economic status. *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying*, 38(1), 37-57. <https://doi.org/10.2190/K8V4-693D-EF8L-VBVA>
- Matiki, A. (2001). The pragmatics of obituary notices in Malawian newspapers. *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Southern Africa*, 32(1), 29-52. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228190108566171>
- Moses, R. A., & Marelli, G. D. (2003). Obituaries and the discursive construction of dying and living. *Texas Linguistic Forum* 47, 123-30. <http://salsa.ling.utexas.edu/proceedings/2003/moses&marelli.pdf>
- Nagy, Z. (2018). The changing nature of death and mourning—an analysis of Hungarian obituaries (1961–2000). *Mortality*, 23(2), 151-172. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2017.1322053>
- Nwogu, K. N. (1997). The medical research paper: Structure and functions. *English for specific purposes*, 16(2), 119-138. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906\(97\)85388-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0889-4906(97)85388-4)
- Nwoye, O. G. (1992). Obituary announcements as communicative events in Nigerian English. *World Englishes*, 11(1), 15-27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-971X.1992.tb00044.x>
- Ondimu, J. (2014). A socio-cultural understanding of death: A genre analysis of obituaries in a Kenyan newspaper. *Language Matters: Studies in the Languages of Africa*, 45(1), 3-22, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10228195.2013.805799>
- Ötügen, R., Takkaç, M., & Yagiz, O. (2021). Genre analysis in ESP: A review of move analysis models and metadiscoursal taxonomies. *e-Kafkas Journal of Educational Research*, 8(1), 67-85. <https://doi.org/10.30900/kafkasegt.877595>
- Park, C. W. (2010). Funerary transformations in contemporary South Korea. *Mortality*, 15(1), 18-37. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576270903537559>

- Raeburn, G. D. (2016). Death, superstition, and common society following the Scottish Reformation. *Mortality*, 21(1), 36-51.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2015.1024644>
- Rusu, M. S. (2020). The politics of mourning in post-communist Romania: unravelling the thanatopolitics of grievable deaths. *Mortality*, 25(3), 313-331.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2019.1682983>
- Sabbatino, V., Bostan, L., & Klinger, R. (2020). Automatic section recognition in obituaries. *Preprint* arXiv:2002.12699.
<https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2002.12699>
- Salahshour, F. (2017). A ‘thick description’ genre analysis of death announcement notices. *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 20(3), 63-76.
<http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12323/3643>
- Schiffrin, D. (1994). *Approaches to Discourse*. Cambridge MA & Oxford: Blackwell Publishing
- Starck, N. (2008). Death can make a difference: A comparative study of “quality quartet” obituary practice. *Journalism Studies*, 9(6), 911-924.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700802227886>
- Swales, J. (1990). *Genre analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Swales, J. (2004). *Research genres: Explorations and applications*. Ernst Klett Sprachen.
- Swales, J. M. (2009). Worlds of genre-metaphors of genre. *Genre in a changing world*, 8(1), 3-16. <http://dx.doi.org/10.37514/PER-B.2009.2324.2.01>
- Teodorescu, A. (2021). Attitudes towards death and representations of the afterlife in contemporary Romania. *Mortality*, 26(2), 171-186.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2021.1911072>
- Upton, T. A., & Cohen, M. A. (2009). An approach to corpus-based discourse analysis: The move analysis as example. *Discourse studies*, 11(5), 585-605.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461445609341006>
- Valentine, C. (2010). The role of the ancestral tradition in bereavement in contemporary Japanese society. *Mortality*, 15(4), 275-293.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13576275.2010.513161>
- Willig, C. (2001). *Qualitative research in psychology: A practical guide to theory and method*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.