

GENERIC AND SOCIO-CULTURAL PATTERNS OF DEATH ANNOUNCEMENTS IN IRAQI NEWSPAPERS

Nassier A.G. Al-Zubaidi

University of Baghdad, Baghdad, Iraq

Summary: The present paper examines the genre of death notices in Iraqi newspapers in terms of its schematic and socio-cultural structure. Adopting Swales' [1990] rhetorical approach to genre analysis, the study has examined a corpus of 150 death texts taken from three local Iraqi newspapers. The genre analysis has identified eleven component moves, four of which are obligatory and seven are optional. In addition, the generic structure together with the lexico-grammatical features reflect the socio-cultural norms and assumptions that Iraqi Arabic speakers live by.

1. Theoretical Background

The life of humans is noted to revolve around birth, marriage and death. Death, in particular, receives much attention in most societies [Moses, Morelli 2004: 125]. Death is feared in every social, cultural and religious circle. Although an unpleasant but common human phenomenon, death is publicly announced in a language that does not only create grief in the bereaved but also presents the deceased in a way that evokes appreciation for him or her [Afful 2012: 118]. Among the major communicative events related to death are *epitaphs*, *tributes*, *dirges*, and *obituaries/ death announcements*. Death announcements (henceforth, *DAs*) or obituary notices (henceforth, *ONs*) refer to a record of announcement of death, especially in a newspaper, usually comprising a brief biographical sketch of the deceased person. The major purpose of obituary notices is to communicate with potential readers about the death of someone they know.

Etymologically speaking, the term *obituary* comes from the Latin word *obitus* 'departure' [Fernandez 2006: 120]. Afful [2012: 119] distinguishes between an obituary and a death announcement. Obituaries refer to a record of announcement of death or deaths, especially in a newspaper, usually comprising minimal information of the deceased's name, date of birth, place of residence, date of death and, sometimes, cause of death. For Fernandez, there are two main types of obituaries: informative and opinative. The informative obituaries, on the one hand, give relevant details about the death: the deceased, place and time of funeral and next of kin. This can be achieved through an impersonal language and concise expression. The language is presented in an objective and standardized manner. They do not involve hyperbolic language to heighten emotions or praise the deceased and it is often written by an editorial staff in charge of writing such a genre. The opinative obituaries, on the other hand, give a more emotive and intimate account of the deceased by means of consolatory and laudatory tactics to satisfy and assuage the feelings of surviving family members. They are rather subjective and perform a peculiar function of impressing readers about the social status or the exemplary conduct of the deceased. They are written by a relative, friend or the funeral home staff [Fernandez 2006: 119].

Death announcements, on the other hand, are paid for advertisement of a person's death. They are normally written by a family member or a close friend, both of whom might not necessarily be experts. They are much more elaborate than obituaries and do necessarily aim at inviting people who will want to pay their respects to the deceased. For Campbell [1971], the two terms of obituaries and death announcements are alike. Similarly, these two terms are used interchangeably in the present paper seen regardless to the theoretical differences between them.

It is noteworthy that in Iraqi context, DAs are not only published in newspapers, they are posted on walls and in strategic public places so as to capture greater attention of the public and to increase participation of the public in the funeral/ burial services of the deceased. The same tendency is also found in Ghanaian setting [cf. Afful 2012].

Nwoye [1992: 23] states that DAs are generally a category of genre texts that forms an important part of the day's news. Newspaper readers, within a country and throughout the world read obituary announcements mostly every day. They have a specific communicative function of informing the potential audience about deaths and in some cases funeral arrangements and other details. DAs are considered as homely discourses [cf. Hoberg 1983]. For Hoberg, the term *homely* discourse subsumes, among others, various kinds of ceremony announcements, particularly *birth announcements*, *obituaries*, *wedding invitations* and *congratulations*. These are easily recognizable socially constructed text genres of everyday life.

Moses and Marelli [2004: 104] believe that DAs represent a special text since their content focuses particularly on the qualities of one person and how the end of that person's life can be best presented, and they are a window that provides a view into a culture. Moreover, Fernandez [2006: 109] clarifies that both information and publicity coexist in DAs which compromise a hybrid genre that represents a type of discourse halfway between truth and exaggerated display of the virtues of the deceased or the grief of the surviving family members. DAs are regarded as communicative events that are governed by some of the same rules that govern other speech events [cf. Hymes 1972]. It has been observed that this genre has received little scholarly attention compared to other academic and professional genres [cf. Al-Ali 2005]. As a new hybrid genre, there is a need of more research on how DAs are linguistically constructed and organized in systematic ways. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the present study is the first of its type that solely addresses itself to the investigation of the generic structure of DAs in daily Iraqi newspapers.

2. Previous Research

There has been an increasing interest in the study of obituarial discourse in recent years. The main focus of such research has generally been on attempts to characterize DAs as a distinct form of text, and to gain insights into a system of cultural beliefs underlying the content of DAs. The genre of DAs has recently received some considerable attention within linguistics and anthropology domains [cf. Fries 1990, Nwoye 1992, Al-Ali 2005, among many]. These studies

have established that DAs form a distinct kind of genre that has a specific schematic and rhetorical structure.

In his contrastive study of obituary notices in English and German newspapers, Fries [1990: 539] remarks that DAs belong to a traditional text-type which includes various kinds of announcements, particularly those of births and weddings, but also those of various ceremonies such as doctoral degrees and the like. Fries further mentions that DAs occur in printed form, particularly in newspapers and journals, and are comparatively short; they usually consist of only a few lines. He finds that the name of the deceased person is the only obligatory move, whereas optional moves include: (i) announcing the death; (ii) time and place of death; (iii) age of the deceased; and (iv) the announcer.

In his study of Nigerian DAs written in English, Nwoye [1992: 17] remarks that these written texts usually serve the purpose of communicating the death of and/ or information about the funeral arrangements for a particular person to a designated audience. In such texts, the name of the deceased is the only compulsory feature if the intended communication is to be effective, but other features are present as well like: (i) date, place and manner of death; (ii) burial arrangement; (iii) survivors; and (iv) identification of the announcer/ sender. He further observes that Nigerian DAs deal with the issue of death via utilizing strategic linguistic devices of metaphors and euphemisms. Nwoye further notices that Nigerian DAs go beyond a simple announcement of death to include information about the socio-economic status of the deceased and/ or his survivors. This information is encoded in both the linguistic and structural aspects of the DAs.

Al-Ali [2005] examines the generic structure of DAs in Jordanian newspapers. He identifies nine recurrent component moves in DAs written in Arabic, reflecting the sociocultural norms, practices and beliefs of the Jordanian society. He further indicates that, in addition to the primary function of publicizing the occasion, these announcements communicate a lot of information about the sociocultural norms and practices encoded in the rhetorical and organizational components of these types of genre.

In their contrastive study of DAs in Jordanian and British newspapers, Al-Khatib and Salem [2011] examine the socio-cultural practices surrounding the use of obituary announcements in these two different languages and cultures. Specifically, it investigates the structural and linguistic features as well as the euphemistic expressions related to death in obituaries placed in Jordanian and British newspapers. They have found clear-cut differences between the two sets of obituaries in terms of structure, language and function. It has also been observed that most of these differences are mainly attributable to sociocultural distinctions between the two societies.

Summing up, most studies on the schematic structure of DAs genre have concluded that there are overlapping results with reference to the number of moves, and such contradictory results can be due to the differences in the socio-cultural practices encoded in the construction of these texts. In other words, these notable differences presumably may be accounted for on the basis of their socio-cultural differences. As far as the researcher's best knowledge of the Iraqi setting is concerned, no previous study has ever investigated the DAs genre in

terms of its component moves and socio-cultural practices encoded. Thus, the present study dedicates itself to the examination of the rhetorical and cultural features of DAs written in Iraqi newspapers.

3. Research Questions

To start with, Aremu [2011: 132] asserts that several works have been carried out on obituary announcements in sociological, religious and literary research, but there is relatively scanty linguistic research done on the subject. Following this belief, the present study is specifically designed to investigate the structural and linguistic features of DAs in Iraqi newspapers with reference to their socio-cultural background. To achieve the objectives of the present study, the following questions are formulated accordingly:

1. What are the generic component moves of DAs in Iraqi newspapers?
2. What are the lexico-grammatical features of DAs in Iraqi newspapers?
3. What are the socio-cultural practices and perceptions encoded in DAs of Iraqi newspapers?

4. Methodology

This section is intended to describe the sources of the study corpus and the collection procedures adopted. Also, the analytical framework used in analyzing the corpus is spelt out.

4.1. Corpus Sampling

To collect a corpus for a given study, the following question may arise how large the corpus should be and how to make sure the representativeness of the corpus. The answer to this question, according to Meyer [2002], rests on the phenomenon one is investigating. For the greater the variation in the corpus text under study, the more samples and the larger corpus are required to ensure representativeness and the validity of the data. Conversely, one could argue that the more common the feature one wants to investigate, the smaller the size of the corpus is required. The discourse structure of a genre, for instance, is one such feature since all texts from a genre tend to share similar pattern of discourse organization [Biber et al. 2007: 19]. Hence, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the size of the corpus may not be such a crucial issue for the present study, especially when considering the formulaic text nature of DAs.

Due to scarcity or dearth of DAs, as no specific page exists for these texts in Iraqi newspapers, the present study is based on a corpus sample of DAs taken equally from three Iraqi newspapers written between January 2012 and June 2013. All DAs in Iraqi newspapers are paid for and written by family, friends, or associates of the deceased. The Iraqi newspapers selected are *Al-Mashriq*, *As-Sabah* and *Az-Zamaan*. More specifically, the study corpus comprises 150 DA texts selected from the aforementioned dailies (50 DAs from each). The sample size of selected DAs does not vary significantly in length.

These dailies have been selected upon recommendations from academics and experts in Iraqi press and media sectors. The selection is based on their popularity, that is, they are among the widest-circulated dailies in Iraq. These are national newspapers owned by Iraqi institutions and written for and read by the Iraqis all over the country. It is worth mentioning that these newspapers are

published in Modern Standard Arabic, the native tongue of the country. For ethical reasons, the names of the deceased, the announcers, and anything that reveals the identity of the people concerned are not presented.

4.2. Procedures

The main objective of this study was to identify the underlying genre components of DAs in Iraqi newspapers. To achieve this objective, Swales' [1990] schematic genre model has been adopted for corpus analysis. This model can serve as the main analytical framework within which the schematic structure of the DAs genre can be analyzed. For Swales, a genre is a class of communicative events, the members of which share some sets of communicative purposes. Genre is a social action, goal-oriented and cultural activity consisting of a sequence of moves. Each move has a minor function in the global communicative goal embedded in the genre. These moves are merely the realization of a particular social interaction [1990: 58]. According to Al-Ali [2005: 11], the term *move* means a functional segment of a text that has one or more minor rhetorical functions in relation to the overall communicative purpose of the genre text. And moves can vary in size: a move may be realized by one sentence or more, or by a unit of analysis below the level of sentence such as a clause, a phrase, or a word, but a move normally contains at least one proposition. Therefore, the functional elements of a genre tend to display lexico-grammatical and textual features that facilitate the identification of genres [cf. Connor, Mauranen 1999].

Al-Ali [2005: 13] further asserts that the genre move approach can be profitably extended to a study of the schematic structure of different types of communicative events which emerge as people communicate with each other. The adoption of genre move structure analysis is motivated by the fact that it is more powerful in interpreting the move structures of texts, and in illustrating how the logical sequence of ideas is bound up by a set of writing conventions, and how these ideas are linguistically signaled. This theoretical framework also provides a foundation for the investigation and identification of how communicative functions interact to form the genre system of a class of discourses that have the same primary function [Kong 1998: 104].

For the present study, the identification of rhetorical moves has been assigned on the basis of their propositional content and linguistic means. That is, the semantic-functional criterion has been utilized. It is recognized that this criterion is not full proof; therefore, a second criterion regarding the determination of moves primarily has been sought from a university professor of English linguistics. The inter-rater reliability between the researcher and the co-researcher regarding the identification of the moves was 90%. This inter-rater reliability can be considered acceptable.

5. Results and Discussion

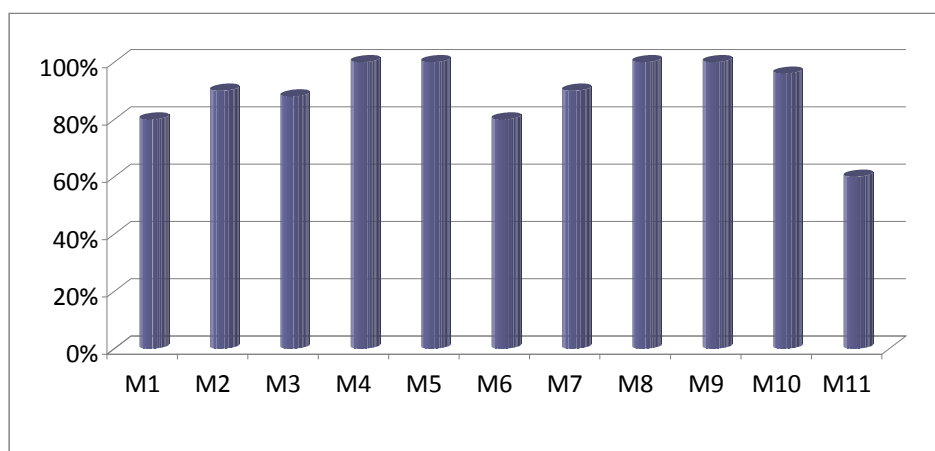
An overall examination of the entire corpus showed that the DAs of Iraqi newspapers comprise eleven component moves. Al-Ali [2005: 11] states that «a component move is a functional segment of a text that has one or more minor rhetorical functions in relation to the overall communicative purpose of the genre text». As for the present corpus, the moves appear regularly in the texts, and the order of appearance varies to a certain extent, so that the order in which

the moves are presented here is the most common. Eleven moves were identified in the present corpus, and these moves, in turn, are either optional or obligatory. Obligatory moves are those that are prevalent in 100% of DAs corpus of Iraqi newspapers. Precisely speaking, there are four obligatory moves in the present corpus, viz., *announcing the death move*, *identifying the deceased move*, *identifying arrangements for receiving condolences move* and *God invoking move*. The other seven moves, on the other hand, are optional. The next subsections will detail the analysis of the present corpus.

5.1. Generic Structure of DAs

Table 1 and Figure 1 below summarize the distribution of the component moves of DAs in the present corpus.

Figure 1: Distribution of recurrent moves in DAs of Iraqi newspapers.



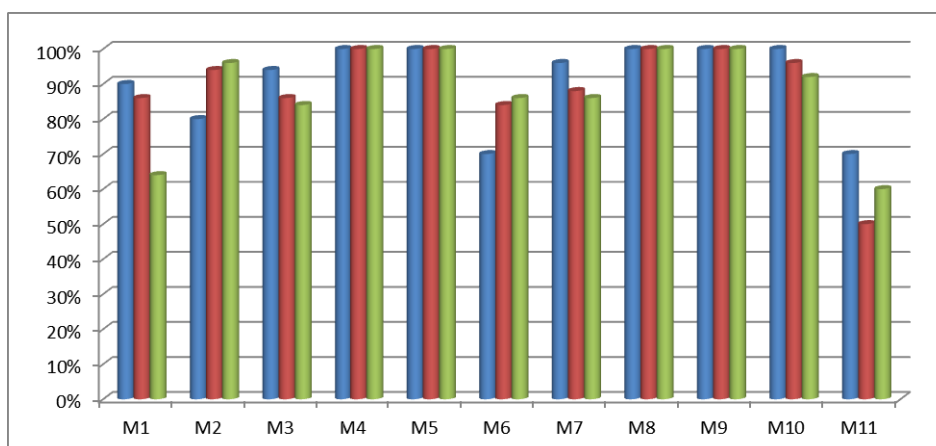
*M + No. stands for move type and number.

Table 1: Recurrent moves in DAs of Iraqi newspapers.

Component Moves	Frequency	Percentage
1. Opening	120	80%
2. Heading	135	90%
3. Identifying the announcer	132	88%
4. Announcing the death	150	100%
5. Identifying the deceased	150	100%
6. Identifying surviving relatives	120	80%
7. Identifying circumstances of death	135	90%
8. Identifying arrangements for receiving condolences	150	100%
9. God invoking	150	100%
10. Closing	144	96%
11. Signing out	90	60%

As to the distribution of recurrent component moves in each of the three Iraqi newspapers, Table 2 and Figure 2 below sum up the distribution of those moves in each of those newspapers. It has been noticed that DAs in *Al-Mashriq*, *As-Sabah* and *Az-Zamaan* newspapers have the same obligatory as well as optional moves. The distribution and description of each move will be explained in some detail below.

Figure 2: Distribution of recurrent moves in DAs of each Iraqi newspaper.



*Blue, red and green stand for *Al-Mashriq*, *As-Sabah* and *Az-Zamaan* newspapers respectively.

Table 2: Recurrent moves in DAs of each Iraqi newspaper.

Component Moves	<i>Al-Mashriq</i> No. & %	<i>As-Sabah</i> No. & %	<i>Az-Zamaan</i> No. & %
1. Opening	45 (90%)	43 (86%)	32 (64%)
2. Heading	40 (80%)	47 (94%)	48 (96%)
3. Identifying the announcer	47 (94%)	43 (86%)	42 (84%)
4. Announcing the death	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	50 (100%)
5. Identifying the deceased	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	50 (100%)
6. Identifying surviving relatives	35 (70%)	42 (84%)	43 (86%)
7. Identifying circumstances of death	48 (96%)	44 (88%)	43 (86%)
8. Identifying arrangements for receiving condolences	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	50 (100%)
9. God invoking	50 (100%)	50 (100%)	50 (100%)
10. Closing	50 (100%)	48 (96%)	46 (92%)
11. Signing out	35 (70%)	25 (50%)	30 (60%)

First, the opening move typically occurs as the first move in the present corpus. It can be found in 80% of DAs in the entire corpus. This move regularly opens with direct verses from the Holy Qur'an. In particular, it contains a number of Qur'anic verses which vary according to the manner of death, that is,

whether the death is normal or sacred. The causes of normal death usually include sickness, car accident etc. Accordingly, the following Qur'anic verses are typically used in the realization of this move:

1. (يَا أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي)
'But uh! Thou soul at peace! Return unto thy Lord, content in His good pleasure! Enter thou among My bondmen! Enter thou my Heaven'
2. (ويشّر الصّابرين الذين إذا أصابتهم مصيبة قالوا إنا لله وإنا إليه راجعون)
'But give glad tidings to the steadfast, who say, when a misfortune striketh them: Lo! We are Allah's and Lo! Unto Him we are returning'

On the other hand, as peculiar for the Iraqi situation after 2003, the causes of sacred death include people killed as a result of assassinations, car bombardments, blasts etc. Those people are considered martyrs as they have been killed for sake of Allah. Accordingly, the following Qur'anic verses were used in the present corpus:

3. (وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْواتًا بَلْ أحياءٌ عند ربّهم يُرزقون)
'Think not of those who are slain in the way of Allah, as dead. Nay, they are living, finding their sustenance in the presence of their Lord; they rejoice in the Bounty provided by Allah'
4. (ولا تقولوا لمن يقتل في سبيل الله أَمْوات بل أحياء ولكن لا تشعرون)
'And say not of those who are slain in the way of Allah: 'They are dead.'
Nay, they are living. Though ye perceive (it) not'

Al-Ali [2005: 13] states that the use of these two verses appears to embody implicit promotional and motivational functions for both the deceased martyr and the survivors. They convey the promise of a great reward in the afterlife for Muslims who lose their lives in the cause of Allah. Thus, Muslims believe that the effort made by the martyr is not wasted and the sacrifice is not in vain. The occurrence of this move has been reported in previous research on Arabic DAs [cf. Al-Ali 2005, Al-Khatib, Salem 2011]. The opening move is generally printed in a recognizable font type and size.

Second, the heading move was identified in 90% of DAs of the present corpus. It is usually realized as a nominal lexical item which takes either the word *نعبي* 'obituary' or *تعزیه* 'condolence'. It is collateral to the genre's main communicative purpose, and by no means negligible. The heading is normally stressed by being printed as a separate line, in a different bold font size. In the same vein, Fries [1990: 543] states that DAs of British newspapers are usually part of the advertisement section and are marked off from other information on the same page by a headline indicating the subject matter. The British heading takes a variety of expressions including *death*, *death notices*, *obituaries* and *funerals* and *funeral notices*. The same tendency was also found in American and Canadian DAs. As for the present study, the heading move is an optional move, which contradicts Al-Ali's [2005] findings on Jordanian DAs.

Third, the move of identifying the announcer was found in 88% of DAs in the present corpus. It introduces the person who places the DAs, usually a member of the deceased's family, relative, tribe, or some official body or an

institution. This move is generally realized by a frequent use of nominal lexical items as it basically includes a stock of people's names. It is an optional move in the present corpus compared to Al-Khatib and Salem's [2011] finding of the obligatory status of this component move in Jordanian DAs. The following are some illustrative examples from the present corpus:

5. بمزيد من الحزن والأسى يعزي السيد - ----- وفاة الزميل
'With profound grief and sorrow, Mr. X condoles the passing away of X'
6. تنعى عشيرة ----- فقيدهم المرحوم الشيخ
'The tribe X mourns the late sheik X'

As far as the present corpus is concerned, it has been observed that the name of the announcer is usually attached with a variety of social, academic, or professional titles. The titles employed include among many the following: *sheik, hajj, Mr., the father of X, the brother of X, the uncle of X, the cousin of X, doctor, professor, engineer, colonel, lawyer, judge* etc. Sometimes the name of the announcer is written in a different font size and type to highlight the socio-economic status of the announcer.

Fourth, the move of announcing the death can be found in 100% of DAs in the present corpus. This obligatory move, which is the main purpose of this genre, is employed in the present corpus to publicize the occasion. There are differences in the realization of this move in that a number of euphemistic expressions used are of verbal forms including *انتقل الى* 'passed away', *وافته المنية* 'moved to the Mercy of God', *انتقل الى جوار ربه* 'moved to the neighbourhood of his Lord', *الفقيد* 'the lost' and *المرحوم* 'the late'. It can be noted that this move is generally realized by a simple past or a past participle verb, or an adjective in the present corpus. No direct mentioning of the direct verb *مات* 'to die' was found in the corpus. It can be inferred that although DAs are utilized for announcing the death of people, the type of language used in Iraqi newspapers is often indirect. According to Yusuf [2004], euphemism refers to words or phrases designed to avoid harsh or distasteful reality. Euphemisms mask reality by giving it a better face. Thus, Iraqi DAs resort to the frequent use of euphemistic expressions that are related to the taboo of death to mask the rough nature of losing someone. Likewise, Al-Khatib and Salem [2011: 91] assert the idea that by using such euphemistic expressions of death, Muslims assume that death is journey, and attempt to hide the unpleasant or disturbing ideas of death. Such use is very likely based on the idea that words have the power to bring new meaning to the notion of death.

Fifth, the move of identifying the deceased was identified in 100% of DAs in the present corpus. It is an obligatory component move that informs the reading public about the deceased. The obligatory status of this move has been reported in previous research [cf. Al-Ali 2005, Al-Khatib, Salem 2011, Afful 2012, among many]. Here, this move typically makes use of proper names for its realization. Generally, the full names of the deceased and their titles are printed within the whole text, and sometimes in a separate line with a bold font. It is found that the names of the deceased are usually attached with titles of three different types, namely, social, academic and professional. The frequent

use of titles with names is an inherent property of everyday interaction in most Arabic-speaking countries, and Iraq is not an exception. The same finding has been reported in Al-Ali's [2005] study of Jordanian DAs. Nwoye [1992: 18] points out that Nigerians love to use titles in their DAs, and it is not unusual to see a plethora of academic and professional qualifications and other titles after the name of the deceased. These titles serve to communicate the social status of the deceased.

What is surprising in the present corpus is the total absence of given names when the deceased were females. Instead, address terms such as *the mother of someone*, *the sister of someone* etc. were used. This finding seems to be specific to the Iraqi context as no previous research has reported this tendency as far as the researcher's best knowledge is concerned. And this, in turn, can reflect some peculiarities of Iraqi Arabic culture as will be shown below.

Sixth, as to the move of identifying surviving relatives, it was found in 80% of DAs in the present corpus. This optional move identifies those who have survived the deceased giving their full names with social, academic or professional titles. In general, it lists not only the family members of the deceased but also other relatives, tribe, or bodies who are associated with the deceased or the bereaved family. It is a list of nominal lexical items identifying the surviving relatives. This move does not include virtually everyone who forms a part of the deceased's family. Rather, it comprises key members like heads of tribes and family elders, family members of high socio-economic status, religious and political leaders, and some key members of associations or organizations to which the deceased or any relative of his/ hers might have belonged. Also, the names of family members precede those who are not related to the deceased through blood ties but who have some other forms of relationship with the deceased or his/ her family. This seems to confirm the assumption that the Iraqi society is still collectivistic and tends to keep strong family ties. Blood relations of the deceased are considered to matter more in the deceased's life than any organizations they belonged to [Afful 2012: 127]. It should be noted that this move is generally realized in a declarative sentence type. The following examples are from the present corpus:

7. *اخو الدكتور والدكتور*
 'The brother of doctor X and doctor Y'
 8. *والد المهندس*
 'The father of the engineer X'

Seventh, the move of identifying the circumstances of death was found in 90% of DAs in the present corpus. It informs the reading public about the circumstances of death in terms of date, place and death causes. Not all these specifiers occur together within the same move. This move is typically realized by adverbials such as adverbs of place, adverbs of time, and purpose phrases. Consider the following example from the present corpus:

9. *الذي وافته المنية مساء السبت الماضي أثر سكتة قلبية*
 '...who passed away from a heart attack last Saturday'

There is no specific order for these specifiers of date, place and death causes in the present corpus. The death causes variable appears to be less frequent than the other two variables. Its frequency constitutes 45% of DAs in the entire corpus compared to 91% and 94% for date and place variables respectively. The information on causes of death depends on whether the death is normal or martyrdom. Unlike Nigerian DAs in which this move is an obligatory feature, this move is optional in Iraqi DAs [cf. Matiki 2001].

Eighth, as far as the move of identifying arrangements for receiving condolences is concerned, it was found in 100% of DAs in the present corpus. The function of this move is to identify the time and place for receiving condolences so that relatives, friends and people are able to participate. Here, the reading public is informed about the date and place of the house of the deceased or the name of the mosque where the funeral ceremonies will be offered. Al-Ali [2005: 18] remarks that this move gives explicit information about the date, the length of time during which condolences will be received, and the home address of the deceased's close survivors so that friends of both the deceased and his/her family can participate in the occasion. The obligatory status of this move has also been reported in Al-Ali's [2005] and Al-Khatib and Salem's [2011] studies. As for the present corpus, it has been observed that this move is typically initiated by the Arabic present verb form 'ستقام' 'will be held' in its passive voice. Consider the following example from the present corpus:

وستقام الفاتحة على روحه الطاهرة في داره الكائنة في شارع فلسطين اعتباراً من 13-1-2013.

'Funeral ceremonies will be held at his home located at Palestine Neighborhood starting from Jan 13th 2013'

Ninth, the move of God invoking was identified in 100% of DAs in the present corpus. This is a call to Allah to bless the deceased and to bestow His mercy on him/ her, and/ or an appeal for the family of the departed to pass the calamity. The formulaic exchange of blessings on appropriate occasions is a well-known phenomenon in Arabic language in which an appeal or invocation of God is frequently asked for in daily interaction. God-blessings constitute a major form type of politeness formulas used in Arabic [Ferguson 1997: 208]. It can be argued that the component move of God invoking is culture specific of Iraqi context as no mention of this move is made in previous research. This move is typically realized by a verbal sentence in the subjunctive mood. Consider the following example from the present corpus:

11. تغمدھا الله بواسع رحمته والھم اھلھا وذویھا الصبر والسلوان

'May God bless her soul and bestow her family patience and forgetting'

Tenth, the closing move was found in 96% of DAs in the present corpus. Although it is employed frequently in the present corpus, it is still an optional move. Iraqi DAs are normally closed with a direct quotation from the Holy Qur'an, namely, the following verse:

12. (انا لله وانا اليه لراجعون)

'We are from God and to Him we shall return'

Al-Ali [2005: 19] asserts that the frequent employment of this Qur'anic verse can be due to the fact that death is considered a great loss and is usually announced with a deep sense of sorrow. To mitigate the extent of the sorrow felt by the bereaved, the death announcers tend to finish with this particular Qur'anic verse which is usually said whenever some misfortune strikes a person. Like the Iraqi corpus of DAs, Al-Ali reports the frequent use of this component move in Jordanian DAs.

Finally, the move of signing out was found in 60% of DAs in the present corpus. Here, the announcer ends his/ her DA with a signature written in his/ her full name, besides social, academic or professional titles. For example,

.....المهندس¹³
'The engineer X'

The optional move of signing out is unique of Iraqi DAs as no previous research has reported the occurrence of this move. Its manipulation in the present corpus can lead to the conclusion that the announcer attempts to emphasize his active participation in such a social occasion as part of his familial and social obligations. And this can reflect the collectivistic nature of Iraqi society. This move is generally realized by the frequent use of nouns, namely, proper names and titles.

5.2. Socio-Cultural Structure of DAs

The present sub-section is going to examine how socio-cultural practices are encoded in the language of Iraqi DAs. In order to determine the way in which a particular text is constructed and interpreted, it is helpful to refer to the cultural background from which the text derives its meaning [Halliday, Hasan 1989]. The written texts of DAs are a window that provides a view into a culture. Culture presupposes the way of life of certain people. Our culture refers to our thought processes and world view. Language influences our culture and our thought processes. Culture shapes not only our world perception but also our language. Also, the culture of certain people, through language, often guides their actions, beliefs, norms and behaviour. As our environment changes, our culture and language respond [Aremu 2011: 135]. There are many instances in the present corpus that show how Iraqi socio-cultural beliefs affect the genre of Iraqi DAs.

It has been noted that religion plays a significant role in the present corpus of Iraqi newspapers. As a matter of fact, Iraqi society consists predominantly of Muslims, hence the Islamic ideology is very evasive and prevalent in the different moves of the present corpus, namely, opening, God invoking and closing moves. This is very true in the frequent citation of Qur'anic verses and religious prayers and supplication in the present corpus. In the Qur'anic verses cited, one can lucidly figure out Muslims' belief in the existence of a life after death. Muslims believe that the deceased is going to be in a better place than on earth. Most Iraqi DAs employ expressions based on this religious belief and involve expressions referring to movement such as 'moved to the mercy of God'. Also, invoking God to forgive the deceased and let him/ her enter God's Heaven is a common feature of Iraqi DAs. Likewise, Al-Khatib and Salem [2011: 93] report

that Jordanian DAs employ a variety of Qur'anic verses and prayers that reflect the religious background of Jordanian society, unlike British DAs. It is clear that these written texts have the religious tone of Islam that reflects the religious background of the deceased. Thus, the language of DAs is deemed to be highly religious.

In addition, Iraqi DAs are noted for their frequent use of address terms. This is clearly realized in the various moves of identifying the announcer, the deceased, the surviving relatives and signing out. Address terms employed in the present corpus are of social, academic and professional types. That is, the present corpus shows that Iraqi Arabic speakers prefer to use different titles in their articulation of DAs. As a pertinent feature of Iraqi Arabic in which social status is highly valued, it is supposed to use a wide variety of titles in any communicative interaction [Al-Zubaidi 2012: 118]. In this connection, Al-Ali [2005: 21] states that Arab culture evaluates highly the social status of the individual, even the dead. By contrast, the British and German newspaper DAs very rarely give the title of the deceased [cf. Fries 1990]. Likewise, Nydell [2006: 85] argues that most Arabic-speaking countries are vertically organized in that social status is prominently embracing those countries. A case in point are the widely used terms like *sheik*, *hajj*, *Mr.*, *the father of someone*, *doctor*, *professor*, *engineer*, *colonel*, *lawyer*, *judge* etc. in the present corpus. Thus one can conclude that the frequent use of social and occupational titles can demonstrate the social status of the deceased and/ or his/ her survivors.

Besides, it is observed that collectivism plays an extensive role in Iraqi DAs. As to Iraqis, nuclear family members, relatives, friends and tribes are expected to participate in any social occasion. This is realized in the two moves of identifying the announcer and identifying surviving relatives. This confirms that, although the nuclear family is an important building block in Arabic society, individuals tend to submit to larger kinship groups like the tribe, at least on social occasions. The concept of a tribal system, as accepted and inherent in Iraqi society, goes counter to individualism in the West, particularly in the British, German, US-American and Canadian newspapers [cf. Fries 1990], where DAs are usually formulated by a close relative of the deceased, although the announcer is never mentioned [Al-Ali 2005: 21]. In the same vein, Al-Khatib [1997: 158] states that the traditional expectations of most Arabic-speaking societies are that family members, relatives, friends and neighbors should support each other morally in times of adversity and happiness, and be mutually loyal and helpful throughout life. Arab people find a great deal of moral support in placing a lament of death in a newspaper. This is because, as Al-Khatib puts it, doing a favour for somebody will be highly appreciated by both the concerned person and society, and there is a debt of gratitude which should be repaid as far as possible. In this respect, Afful [2012: 127] finds out that in Ghanaian society not only the nuclear family but also the extended family system can take part in death occasion to foster solidarity and a sense of belongingness to one's family, clan and other organizations. And non-participating in such an occasion can spark conflict and non-cooperation among family members in the funeral rites and burial services.

Another social pertinent feature of Iraqi DAs is the frequent use of covered or euphemistic names when the deceased is female. That is, there is no use of the given name when the dead person is a woman. This is clearly realized in the move of identifying the deceased. Instead of given names, social address terms are used including, for example, *the mother of X*, *the sister of X*, *the wife of X* etc. The use of such social terms is an inherent part of everyday Iraqi communication. This finding suggests that Iraqis are gender sensitive and that they tend to be conservative in identifying the names of deceased females in public. And this, in turn, can indicate that Iraq, like other Arabic-speaking countries, is a masculine-based society. A society is called masculine or patriarchal when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men, in short, are supposed to be assertive, competitive, and tough. Women, on the other hand, are supposed to be more concerned with taking care of the home, of the children, and of people in general, that is, to take the tender roles [Hofstede et al. 2010: 138].

Likewise, Nydell [2006: 68] confirms that in the Arab peninsula, gender roles have traditionally been governed by a patriarchal kinship system that has already existed in the regions to which Islam spread. Many of the variations in the status of women are due to local traditions and social customs. Men are expected to provide for their families; women to bear and raise children; children to honor and respect their parents and grow up to fulfill their adult roles. Thus, it is important for an outsider to keep these points of view in mind when analyzing or discussing the status of Arab women.

Iraqi DAs are also noted for the common employment of relatively larger size texts for important people compared to relatively smaller size texts for ordinary people. A careful look at the present corpus shows that if the deceased or his/ her relatives occupy high-ranking positions, they are expected to receive more condolences and publicity in terms of text size, and sometimes DAs are published many times in several newspapers and often run for more than one day [Al-Ali 2005: 21]. Nwoye [1992: 17] argues that the more publicity the obituary announcement is given, the more it reflects the social standing of the deceased or the people s/he left behind. This finding can lead to the conclusion that Arabs in general, and Iraqis in particular, are aware of the social status (i.e., power) in their communication unlike Western societies in which social distance (i.e., familiarity) is highly valued [Hofstede et al. 2010: 60].

Al-Khatib and Salem [2011: 94] found out in the study of DAs in Jordanian and British newspapers that the size of Jordanian obituaries varies according to the socio-economic status of both the deceased and the announcer, namely, the bigger the size of the obituary, the higher the socio-economic status of the deceased or the announcer or both. British announcements, on the other hand, are almost of the same size. In Jordan, and the same is true for the Iraqi context, wealthy people tend to brag about having an announcement of a large size, since this is an indication that the deceased, his/ her family and relatives are of a high socio-economic status.

6. Conclusions

The main objectives of this research paper were to examine the schematic structure and the socio-cultural norms and assumptions of the genre of death an-

nouncement in Iraqi newspapers. It revealed possible regularities in the construction of Iraqi DAs. As to the linguistic structure, DAs in Iraqi newspapers have eleven component moves; four of which are obligatory and the other seven are optional.

Iraqi DAs show solid evidence for the extensive influence of the cultural background of Iraqi society on both the structural and linguistic features of this genre. It is observed that the main social function of the announcements, in addition to the primary function of publicizing the occasion, is to communicate a lot of information about the sociocultural norms and practices encoded in the rhetorical and organizational components of this type of genre. This finding suggests that the schematic move structure together with the lexico-grammatical features indicate a definitive set of socio-cultural norms and values of Iraqi society [Al-Ali 2005: 28].

The present study has some implications which relate to practice and future research. Practically speaking, the present study has some implications for not only professional and unprofessional writers of DAs, but also for the general public who read DAs in different newspapers. The writing of DAs requires some relevant knowledge of the linguistic choices, schematic structure, and social and cultural expectations. Due to the limitation of the present study corpus, further research is needed to analyze a larger corpus of DAs in Iraqi newspapers and to compare it with that of American or British ones to highlight some linguistic and cultural differences.

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