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**A Contrastive Genre Analysis of Persian
and English Death Notices**

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Abstract: Genre-based approaches to language learning and teaching has recently come to the fore as an illuminating window to the pedagogical practices in education and a reminder of socially-based function of language and also as a lending tenet to interactional competence. Contrastive genre analysis is a new developing apparatus of investigation into cross-cultural norms and conventions of discourse. This paper sought to probe into the generic structures of Persian and English death notices published in the Press. For this purpose, 30 samples of death notices in Persian and English gleaned from online newspapers were paralleled against each other. It was found out that in some general and specific domains, there are discrepancies and similarities between Persian and English death announcements while the English obituaries are entirely different. This study contributes to distinctive socio-cultural features of both languages and consolidates culture as a cinderella term in language learning skills.

Keywords: genre, move, death notice/announcement, genre analysis



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1. Introduction

Studies over genre are believed to emerge as an important and eye-catching field of research in the 1990s (Carter and Nunan). The concept of genre comes back to the nature of the text and its association with the social reality of events and occurrences of life. As Carter and Nunan (2001) state genre studies are marked by ongoing debates, which have addressed similarities and differences in ways of theorizing genre and also differences in pedagogical practices associated with genre in various educational contexts.

Studies on genre have paid heed on a multifarious aspect of socially constructed academic and professional genres. A lot of important genres, especially those in social situations, have been dismissed or turned a blind eye to. Miller (1984) calls this as 'homely' discourses. They are everyday life easily recognizable socially constructed text genres. The term 'homely' discourse subsumes, among others, various kinds of ceremony announcements, particularly birth announcements (cf. Hoberg, 1983), obituaries, wedding invitations and congratulations.

Bhatia (1993) recites Swales (1981b, 1985, 1990) for a germane definition for genre as: a recognizable communicative event characterized by set of communicative purposes identified and mutually understood by the members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs (p. 13). Linguist John M. Swales defines genre as a social or communicative event. He states: 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 the parent discourse community and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the

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discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style (Swales 1990: 58). In the field of English for Specific Purposes, genre is discussed within the context of discourse communities and is conceptualized as a type of communicative event and regulated by members. shared communicative purposes in a discourse community (Swales, 1990).

Genre is consisted of Moves and Steps. According to Nwogu (1997: 122), the term move means "a text segment made up of a bundle of linguistic features which give the segment a uniform orientation and signal the content of discourse in it".

2. Review of related Literature

Moses and Marelli (2003) state that Swales established genre as an independent concept in applied linguistics, especially in English for specific purposes (ESP). According to Swales (1990), a genre can be briefly defined as a class of texts characterized by a sequence of segments or .moves. with each move accomplishing some part of the overall communicative purpose of the text, which tends to produce distinctive structural patterns. Genre analysis is the study of the structural and linguistic regularities of particular text types and the role they play within a discourse community. Nwogu (1991) further specified the definition of .move. as "a text segment made up of a bundle of linguistic features (e.g. lexical meaning and



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illocutionary forces etc.), which [gives] the segment a uniform orientation and signals the content of discourse in it. (p. 114). Each move is taken to embody a number of constituent elements, which combine to constitute information in the move.

Drawing on Swales (1981, 1990), Bhatia (1993) describes genre as having the following characteristics: (1) it represents a recognizable communicative event characterized by a set of communicative purposes; (2) it is identified and mutually understood by members of the professional or academic community in which it regularly occurs; (3) it is usually a highly structured and conventionalized communicative event; and (4) it is bound by constraints (e.g., structural, linguistic) that are readily noticed when broken. In short, Bhatia argues that “each genre is an instance of a successful achievement of a specific communicative purpose using conventionalized knowledge of linguistic and discoursal resources” (p. 16).

There has been a growing interest in genre as a powerful means of analyzing and understanding texts in disciplinary and cross-disciplinary areas. The concept of genre evolves with a new perspective on the nature of language, which views language as a functional tool for achieving particular purposes.

Research on genre concerns itself with the analysis of language use in routine settings. The concept of genre has been described differently by various scholars. It has been viewed as a staged, goal-oriented, social process (Martin, 1992), and as a “sociopsychological category defined by a structural arrangement of textual features” (Bazerman, 1988). For Kress (1987), “Genre is the term which describes that aspect of the form of texts which is due to the effect of their production in particular social occasions” (p. 36). However, most approaches to genre analysis identify two areas of knowledge (cf. Swales, 1990) that provide clues to text genres: knowledge of formal schema (i.e. the rhetorical structure of a text type) and content schema (what content is appropriate to a particular purpose in a particular situation at a particular time.; Berkenkotter and Huckin, 1995: 13).

Studies on genre have focused on a variety of socially constructed academic researchers, however, are what Miller (1984) calls *homely* discourses. These are easily recognizable socially constructed text genres of everyday life. The term *homely* discourse subsumes, among others, various kinds of ceremony announcements, particularly birth announcements (cf. Hoberg, 1983), obituaries, wedding invitations and congratulations.

Discourse analysts, such as Bhatia (1993), note that discourse analysis, the study of language use beyond sentence boundaries, can be conducted using at least four levels of description. The first is by focusing on surface-level linguistic description, noting for example the frequency of certain syntactic features of different varieties of English. The second is the use of functional language description. Here the aim is to investigate the relationship between grammatical choice and rhetorical function. The third approach is using interactional analysis, which highlights the interactive nature of discourse between the text and the reader.

Bhatia (1993) finds these first three approaches inadequate on two fronts. First, they lack “adequate information about the rationale underlying various discourse-types,” including “insufficient explanation of socio-cultural, institutional, and organizational constraints and expectations that influence the nature of a particular discourse-genre” (p. 10). Second, they



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pay “little attention to the conventionalized regularities in the organization of various communicative events” (p. 10). Instead, Bhatia argues that when analyzing text discourse, a fourth approach-- genre analysis--is most fruitful. In his words, “it is necessary to combine sociocultural...and...psycholinguistic... aspects of text construction and interpretation with linguistic insights in order to answer the question, ‘Why are specific discourse-genres written and used by the specialist communities the way they are?’” (p. 11).

Genre analysis argues first of all that attention to writing for specific purposes is crucial since particular tasks require additional strategies beyond general writing ability. Furthermore, knowing the situation, context, and stimulus is important since these may elicit different types of language based on the purpose and genre.

Genre analysis in this context takes the forms of the development of a taxonomic description of the generic structures for the realization of certain communicative purposes in academic and workplace genres. Swales (1990), the forerunner in this field, finds evidence that expert writers deploy a series of structure rhetorical moves to achieve their communicative goals in the Introduction of a research article. These moves are known as the CARS (Creating-A-Research-Space) rhetorical pattern and are captured in a three-move structure including *establishing a territory*, *establishing a niche*, and *occupying the niche* (Swales 1990, pg 141).

The moves are regarded as rhetorical tactics writers deploy to achieve communicative purposes (e.g. promoting one's candidature in a job application letter).

The potential of genre analysis as a pedagogical tool has provided impetus for researcher working in the ESP area. Subsequent work in genre analysis examine an identify the generic structures of other sections (such as the Discussion) of a text or other text types (e.g. Bhatia 2002; Brett 1994; Dudley-Evans 1994, Kay & Dudley- Evans 1998; Swales 1990).

However, it is necessary to consider what has been found in other languages one of the most relevant studies compared English and German death notices in daily newspapers (Fries, 1990a). Fries found that English and German death notices contain information about the name of the deceased, which is the only ‘obligatory’ element, as Fries called it, and ‘optional’ elements including ‘announcing the death’, ‘time and place of death’, ‘age of the deceased’ and ‘the announcer’. Another study investigated the history of English death notices from 1785 to 1985 (cf. Fries, 1990b). Nwoye (1992) also in a study analyzed obituary announcements in Nigerian newspapers written in English and compared them with similar announcements in English and German analyzed by Fries (1990a). Obituary notices in Nigeria were found to have what Nwoye (1992) referred to as ‘obligatory features’ including ‘an introduction’, ‘the name of the deceased’, ‘date, place, and manner of death., .burial arrangement., .survivors. and .some identification of the announcer/sender..

This article attempts to clarify the nature and various manifestations, and generic representations of Death notices in Persian and English daily newspapers to see what generic structures are common in a variety of death notices, and what sociocultural communicative functions are articulated by these generic patterns. This research is the first



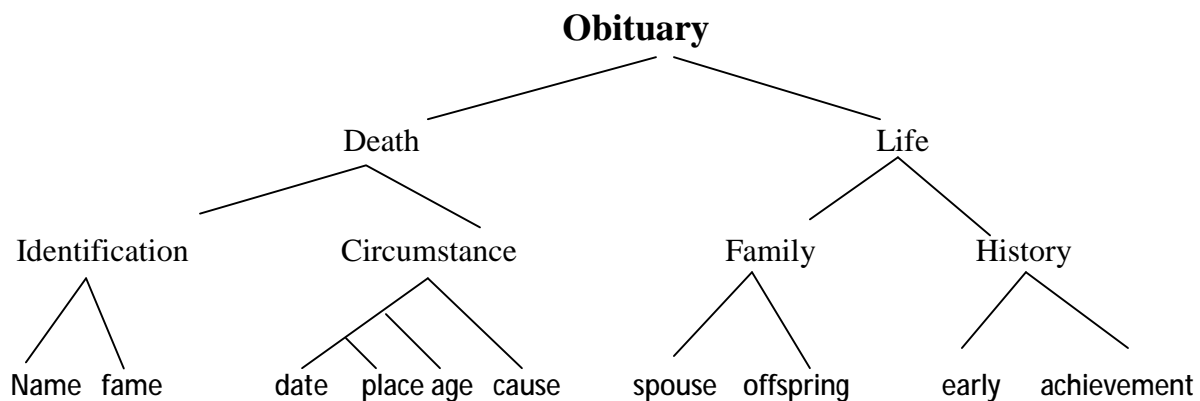
of its type to examine the linguistic, rhetorical and organizational structure of NDNs, as a recently established communicative event.

3. Obituaries and Death Notices

The obituary is a well-known type of contemporary written in media text that exists in a wide range of cultures and languages. According to *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language*, an obituary is "a notice of the death of a person, often with a biographical sketch, as in a newspaper".

The obituary, or obit as it is generally called in the newsroom, is 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. They have the specific communicative function of 'informing the potential audience about deaths, and in some cases, funeral arrangements and other details. (Nwoye, 1992: 15).

According to Rae A. Moses and Giana D. Marelli (2004) the structure of English obituaries includes these terms: Death, Identification, Obituary, Life, Circumstances, History, Family, Date, Fame, Name, Place, Age, Cause, Achievement, Early, Spouse, Offspring. Structure 1, sheds light on the interface among these terms:



Death notices are, in some countries, the same as obituaries in a simpler format. They are announcing a death resulting from an automobile accident, illness, stroke, etc. Because genre consists of a sequence of moves representing the overall purpose of socio-cultural activity (Martin and Christie, 1984; Ventola, 1989), the death announcements are analyzed in terms of the move structure that constituted the texts.

4. Analysis of English and Persian death announcements

It seems that Persian death announcements are mainly categorized according to the ceremonies after the death of the deceased. There are different occasions and ceremonies after the death of the deceased which are as follows:

- Immediately-after death ceremony
- A-day later ceremony



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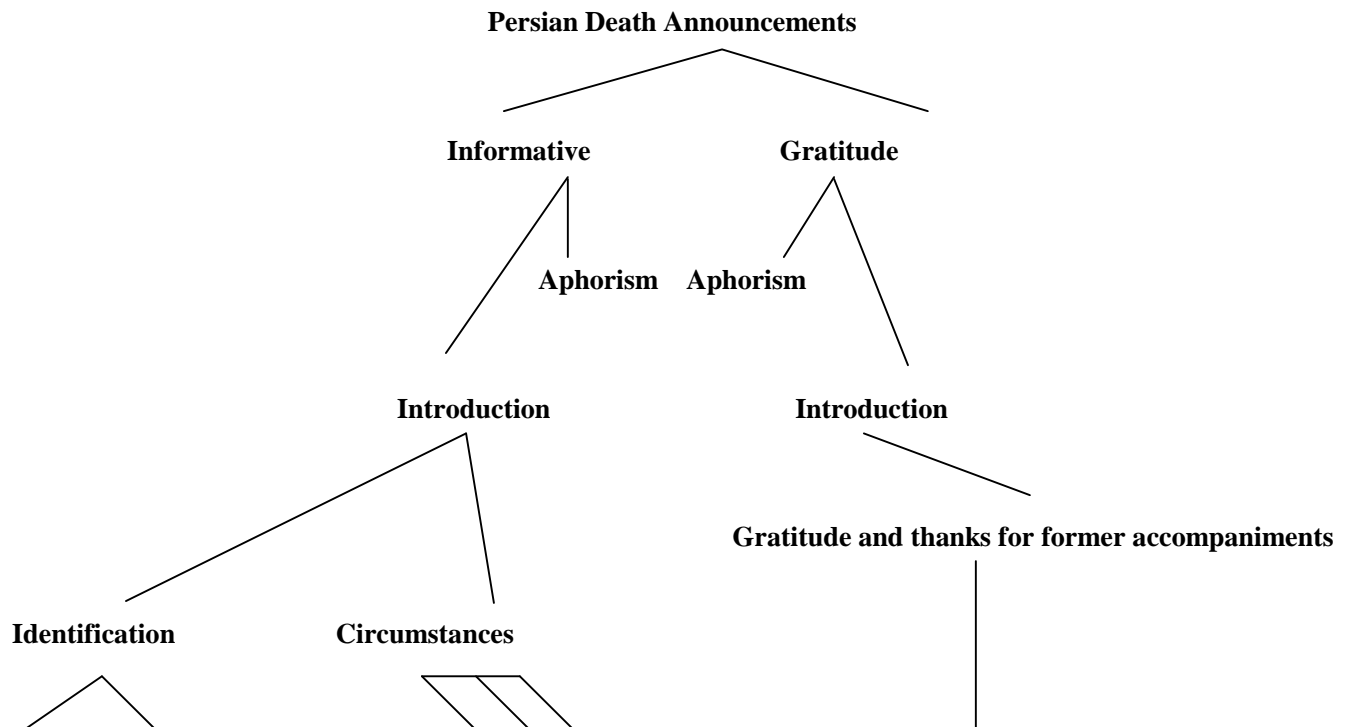


- A seven-days later ceremony
- A forty-days later ceremony
- A-year later ceremony

These ceremonies are not recurrent but the last one. In other words, the first four steps are held just after the death of the deceased and for the first year while the fifth step is recurred for several years annually. According to these categories there will be two kinds of death announcements for each step. One will be a condolence death announcement (CDA) and the other will be a gratitude death announcement (GDA). So the possible number of death announcements for a deceased person will be ten CDAs and GDAs in Persian language and culture.

The analysis, close observation and investigation of the thirty two Persian death announcements, all retrieved from web pages, revealed that there are two main categories for the Persian death notices. According to this trend, Persian death announcements are generally divided to two subcategories: 1) informative and 2) gratitude. Informative subcategory includes an aphorism and an introduction. The introduction is mostly about the deceased's identification (name, fame) and circumstances (date, place, cause) of the death and ceremonies. Gratitude subcategory includes an aphorism and an introduction, while the introduction mentions the gratitude and thanks for the former camaraderie and accompaniments and the name of the appreciators. Structure 2, illustrates these sentences clearly.

Structure 2





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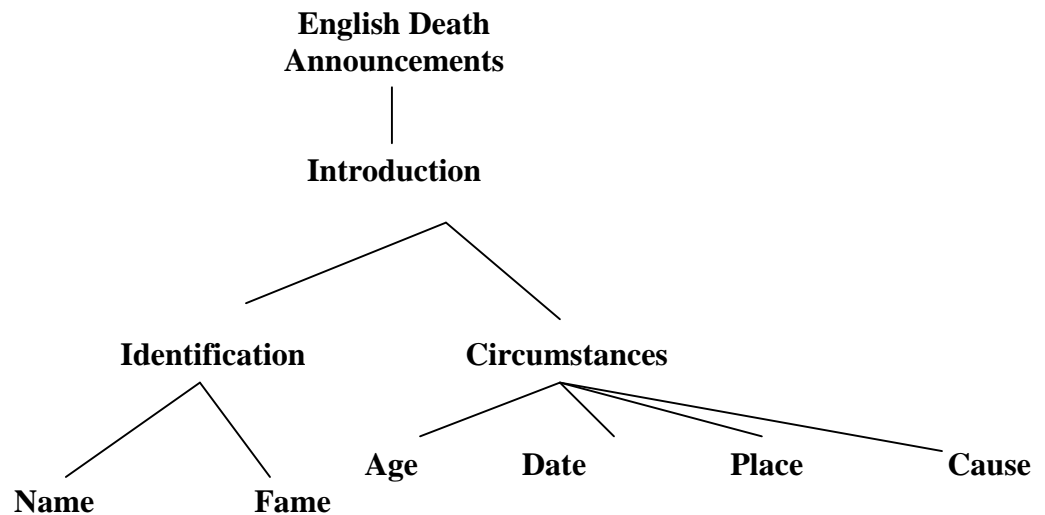
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Name	Fame	Date	Place	Cause	Names of the appreciators
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The analysis of four English death notices, all retrieved from web pages, disclosed that there is just a comprehensive introduction for these death announcements. The introduction covers identification (name, fame) and circumstances (age, date, place, cause) with nuances with the Persian ones. Structure 3, shows the illustration:

Structure 3



The analysis evinces that the main differences are for the fame and age. Though in the Persian death announces the cause of the death is merely announced, it is not a significant difference. English death notices are more specified and elaborate in 'fame' domain. In other words, the deceased's fame is deeply defined in English death announcements while Persian death notices are not rotated around the deceased's fame very much. The other major difference is about the age. The age of the deceased is not mentioned in the Persian death notices while the age is announced in all of the English death notices. Aphorisms are sentences or two-word expression which are mostly religious Qu'ranic verses or poetry lines and they convey meaning related to death and life and the day of doom. All of the Persian death notices enjoy having these aphoristic expressions whether they are for gratitude or as an informative announcement.

5. Conclusion

Genre and genre analysis are generally dealing with discourse. It is believe that the discourse for death announcements is not deeply investigated and paid heed to. In this study the analysis of about thirty Persian and English death notices was regarded and it



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was found that there are nuances in Persian and English death notices in some aspects especially in aphoristic expressions and circumstances. There are, of course, similarities between the two. There are discrepancies between obituaries and death notices and it is assumed that the design is completely different from Persian death announcements and partially different from English ones. It is also believed that English is more inundated with obituaries than death notices while Persian is otherwise.

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