A Sociopragmatic Analysis of Death Utterances in Jordanian Bedouin Society

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Abstract—This paper examines the sociopragmatic functions of death formulas used by Bedouins in eastern Jordan. It emphasizes discourse strategies Bedouins use, such as euphemisms and politeness, to refer to the deceased or to announce someone's death. The researchers collected 32 authentic expressions commonly used in death discourse. They examined and categorized them in light of the following sociopragmatic theories: politeness theory, Grice’s maxims of conversation, and Austin’s theory of speech acts. Seven strategies for using euphemisms in Bedouins’ speech were elicited and analyzed in sections. The analysis reveals that death formulas serve contextual functions, such as maintaining social rapport, expressing condolences, and highlighting the predestination of death and life by God. This study adds to our understanding of Bedouin language and cultural practices in eastern Jordan, and it has practical implications for cross-cultural communication. Individuals can enhance mutual understanding and constructive connections with Bedouin communities in Jordan and worldwide by recognizing and respecting these cultural customs.

Index Terms—death, euphemism, dysphemism, Jordanian Bedouin, politeness, speech acts, Gricean maxims, pragmatic functions

I. INTRODUCTION

In all cultures, death involves certain rituals such as funerals, burial, mourning, and consolation, as well as a language used to address the deceased's family or about death in general. However, people tend to avoid discussing or naming death, as many view it as very painful and unnamable in many situations due to fear, according to Ullman (1962). Moreover, many people avoid using the stark yet dignified word and instead use other words, such as "someone has passed away" or "gone to his reward," as explained by Gabriel and Charlotte (2021).

As death has specific language and terminologies, people tend to be more conscious of selecting appropriate expressions. It is assumed that people are more polite based on the circumstances and traditions that force them to be more polite. Farghal (1993) depicts death from a religious perspective, stating that it is the beginning of new life, God's choice, predestination, meeting God, responding to God's call, and burning in hell. Muslims, for instance, avoid harsh words related to death and use euphemisms to comfort and alleviate the grief of death.

Gomaa and Shi (2012) claim that euphemism is a universal phenomenon found in all languages and that it is impossible to communicate without euphemisms. Moreover, they assume that Egyptian and Chinese native speakers employ euphemistic expressions and treat death with caution as they regard it as taboo. Regarding the Jordanian community, Mofarrej and AlHaq (2015) investigated the euphemisms associated with death in Jordanian society. According to the findings, Bedouins used a high level of euphemistic expressions when referring to the reported death. However, they explicitly talk about death, as Jordanians do not consider it a taboo unless addressing the bereaved or during a visit to an ill person. In a study conducted by Al-Azzeh (2010) investigated Jordanians' use of euphemism in everyday communication was influenced by the issue being addressed, such as the terms "maqbara" (cemetery) and 'saratan' (cancer). Furthermore, in his study of the use of euphemism by Jordanian Arabic speakers and British English speakers at Taibah University in Saudi Arabia, Al-Khawaldeh (2014) claimed that there was no relationship between euphemism and gender and that gender did not affect the use of euphemism in four main topics: death, lying, bodily functions, and diseases.

Moreover, a recent study by Olimat's (2020) aimed to investigate the use of euphemism and dysphemism in Jordanian Arabic in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study examined the use of these linguistic strategies in the
media and social media platforms in Jordanian society. The data revealed that euphemisms, such as "the pandemic," "the crisis," or "the disease," were commonly used to point to COVID-19, but dysphemisms were used less frequently. Furthermore, the study discovered that the use of euphemism and dysphemism in Jordanian Arabic was influenced by a variety of elements such as culture, religion, and society.

In summary, the previously stated studies (Hazaymeh et al., 2019) revealed that euphemism was investigated across different contexts, with the majority of studies focusing on the frequency of their usage and the factors that influence their use. However, the current study sheds light on the euphemistic strategies Jordanian Bedouins employ in the discourse of death, as well as their sociopragmatic implications. Moreover, previous studies on the use of euphemism in the Jordanian community have been limited to the level of euphemistic expressions, whereas the current study aims to investigate the euphemistic strategies used by Bedouins in eastern Jordan.

A. Objectives and Research Questions

This study seeks to fill the gap existing due to the lack of study on Bedouin utterances related to death in the Jordanian context. As a result, the study's objectives are as follows:

1. To explore what expressions Jordanian Bedouins use in the discourse of death and their sociopragmatic indications.
2. To identify euphemism strategies used by Bedouins' speech about death.

The research questions of this study are:

1. What are the sociopragmatic indications of death utterances used by Bedouins?
2. What euphemism strategies are used by Bedouins in their speech about death?

B. Significance of the Study

This particular study is unique in its contribution to the existing literature on death expressions, specifically those used by Bedouins in Jordan. Not only does it offer valuable insights into the language used by Bedouins, but it also provides scholars with a pragmatic perspective. Additionally, this study is significant as it examines the socio-pragmatic implications of analyzing death expressions in Bedouins' speech in the eastern region of Jordan, thereby offering new insights into this field of study.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

This study examines the concept of death from a pragmatic perspective, which considers not only linguistic knowledge but also the physical and social context, as explained by Peccei (1999, p. 2). According to Leech (1983, pp. 10-11), the intersection of pragmatics with sociological and linguistic studies is referred to as socio-pragmatics and pragma-linguistics, respectively.

The study of language functions or speech actions is critical for understanding the intended meaning of an utterance, as researchers such as Austin (1962) have investigated. Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle (CP) and Leech's (1983) Politeness Principle (PP) are two theoretical frameworks used to explain the pragmatic aspects of language use.

In pragmatics, referencing people is an important topic, as it sheds light on explicit and implicit reference. Grice (1975) describes items as pragmatic processes through which the hearer infers the speaker's intention. He identifies principles that make language effective in communication, called the Cooperative Principle (CP), which includes conversational maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation, and Manner. Leech (1983) integrates the CP into the Politeness Principle (PP), which includes several politeness maxims. Politeness involves behaviors that show positive awareness of others (Thomas, 1995, p. 150). Negative politeness minimizes impolite illocution, while positive politeness accounts for maximizing polite exchanges, as described by Leech (1983, pp. 83-84). Huang (2006, p. 116) mentions four main theoretical models of politeness: the social norm model, the conversational maxim model, the face-saving model, and the conversational contract model.

The present study focuses on the face-saving model, which defines face as “the public self-image that every member wants to claim himself” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 61). Face is universally considered a mirror of individuals and society, and their impression and behavior towards each other, according to Goffman (1967). Positive and negative faces are two facets of this concept, which emphasize interaction strategies that aim to be accepted and liked or preserve and satisfy the negative face of people, respectively. Mitigating devices and expressions like "please," "possible," "might," "I'm sorry, but," etc. are typically used to achieve negative face, as noted by Al-Ali and Shatat (2022).

Definition of Euphemism and Dysphemism

Euphemisms are frequently used to soften language and avoid taboo or fearful expressions, particularly when discussing sensitive topics such as death, sickness, and killing. This is a common discourse strategy employed to maintain social harmony. According to Allan and Burridge's (2006) analysis, there is a distinction between euphemisms and dysphemisms. Euphemisms are typically used as substitutes for dispreferred expressions in order to avoid offending the speaker or the audience. Dysphemisms, on the other hand, are expressions with connotations that are considered offensive and are therefore avoided in favor of a more neutral or euphemistic phrasing. Alkatib (1995) defines euphemisms as inoffensive words or phrases that are used to replace more hurtful or offensive language in a particular speech community. These types of words are often used when discussing sensitive topics such as sex, death, religion, or...
excreta. Similarly, Almegren (2021) considers death, above all subjects, an intolerable insult to all who live, the reminder of what people prefer to forget.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Data Collection Instrument

This research was carried out in Al-Badyah, which is located in Jordan's eastern area. This region's Bedouin community is made up of several clans that share common values, rituals, traditions, and dialects. The colloquial Bedouin Jordanian Arabic (BJA) language is the primary subject of this research.

To accomplish the objectives of this research, the researcher implemented a questionnaire-based data collection method. The questionnaire was designed in the form of a "Discourse Completion Test" (DCT), which includes brief descriptions of scenarios intended to elicit specific speech acts. Each participant was required to read each scenario and respond in writing. The questionnaire was written and distributed in Arabic to ensure comprehension among the participants. The introductory section of the questionnaire provided a brief overview of the research and its purpose. Additionally, participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary.

The questionnaire sought to gather and identify the most commonly used expressions and terms by Bedouins when discussing death, including references to the deceased. The questionnaire included thirty-two expressions that were sorted, categorized, and analyzed for this study (see Appendix).

B. Participants

A sample of 189 Bedouins covering several areas in Al-Badyah and from different ages, gender, and educational backgrounds was selected randomly (see Figure 1).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this study, the data analysis was conducted using qualitative methods, taking into account the results and insights gained from various theories in the field of pragmatics. Specifically, this analysis utilized concepts and principles from politeness theory (Leech, 1983; Brown & Levinson, 1978, 1987), as well as Gricean pragmatics (Grice, 1975, 1989).

A. The Pragmatic Functions and Linguistic Features of Death Terms

According to Gricean maxims (1986) and the Politeness Principle (PP) (Leech, 1983), the most euphemistic expressions related to death violate one or more of the conversational maxims. These expressions can be analyzed from another perspective in light of the Politeness Principle (PP). Consequently, this study tries to bridge the gap between implicature and language changes about death. In order to address the first question of this study, which involves identifying the sociopragmatic implications of death-related utterances utilized by Bedouins, the most commonly used terms and expressions related to death in various speech acts were examined and then categorized into nine distinct groups. Each category is further discussed in separate sections that follow.

(a). Invocation

When a person passes away, their ultimate destination is God's mercy, which is why it is the only thing they wait for. Consider almarHuum (lit. “the forgiven”) and Allah jerHamoh (lit. “may Allah have mercy on him”); almarHuum is prevalent in Arab countries when used to refer to a dead person. Its literal meaning is false because a dead person does not require mercy from God. Therefore, people must rely on the implied meaning behind the expression to understand what the speaker is trying to convey. The use of this metaphorical expression implies an invocation to the deceased.

Furthermore, this expression can be seen from a politeness point of view, as a way of showing politeness and respect towards the deceased. Farghal (2002, p. 2) points out that social honorifics play an essential role in phatic communication, which helps to smoothen and enhance social relationships. In this case, using the metaphorical
expression "almahrumu" to refer to a deceased person carries honorific functions that indirectly and politely address the deceased, thereby helping to maintain social relationships.

(b) Surviviorship

The expressions "Hajjar X" (X's life) and "rauH X" (X's soul) carry a deep metaphorical meaning that is often lost in translation when roughly translated into English as "the late." This violates Grice's maxim of quality and makes the literal meaning false. These metaphors imply that a person's soul or memory lives on after death. They acquire various illocutionary forces, such as oath, request, and swearing in everyday speech, as Austin (1962) observed. Despite going against Islamic doctrine, people often make oaths on the deceased soul and use "bruuH X nijaHni" to request assistance. These expressions carry respect and help keep the memory of the deceased alive.

(c) Insulting and Degrading

"Almahruug" is a derogatory term rarely used by both males and females to insult wicked people. It reflects the speaker's dislike for such individuals and can be considered a face-threatening act according to the "politeness theory" (Brown & Levinson, 1987). The term violates the maxim of quality and carries a negative illocutionary force, implying that the deceased will go to hell.

Thus, this term serves the function of insulting those with a bad reputation in life, and a miserable reference may be attributed to them. It is important to note that such terms should be avoided in everyday speech as they can be considered highly impolite and disrespectful.

(d) Encouraging and Motivation

"Bud Halak" means "be strong" and is used to encourage people to keep on living beyond death. It provides hope, promise, motivation, and stimulation to alleviate the sadness caused by death. Another expression used during times of death is "raasak baagi" which violates the relational maxim by assuming the speaker's relevance and the maxim of quality by withholding information. The term "raasak" is associated with dignity in Bedouin culture and is used to express sorrow and solidarity with the addressee. The pragmatic function of encouraging is motivation. Therefore, these terms are used to maintain social relations in various situations. Also, the illocutionary force of such utterances is expressive and emphasizes sorrow and solidarity with the addressee (Austin, 1962).

(e) Comforting

Comforting expressions aim to provide hope and ease the grief or burden caused by loss. The expression "kulna "la al Tarig" (lit. "we are all in the path"), emphasizes equality among people and fatalism, this expression is similar to the Arabic proverb "almut kas dajer "la kul alnas" (lit. "death is a glass circulating among all people"), which views death as a path everyone must cross and as a great leveler (Farghal & Shunnaq, 1999). While "weg-lat waragtuh" uses a leaf metaphor to conceptualize death as a natural process. Both expressions flout the quality maxim by using metaphors but can still provide comfort.

"Ma Hada xasað "omer "la "omroh" (lit. "nobody is given a life more than the one given") observes the quality maxim by implicating predestination and can also be a cooperative expression to comfort those who are grieving.

(f) Sarcasm

The phrases X wadda (lit. "farewell to X") and "af al džiilain /ziibt nsoor (lit. "s/he has lived across two generations / s/he lived the long life of an eagle") are used sarcastically in situations where face-threatening acts (FTAs) occur. They are used in close relationships to convey irony and contempt. Using them may cause trouble in social rapport.

Moreover, fajjaz (lit. "he got a visa") / walla (lit. "he went away") can also be used ironically between friends to refer to a deceased individual or to make light of their passing. Moreover, the metaphor of "ziibt nsoor" is used to describe an old person who passed away, and it violates Grice's quality maxim by implying a comparison between an old dead person and an eagle.

(g) Wishing and Reminding

"Tair min Tjuur al džanah" means "a bird in heaven" and is used to refer to a deceased child. Though it violates the Gricean maxim of quality and relation, the metaphor conveys the idea of the child's innocence and entrance into paradise. Similarly, "welld abijad wmat abijad" means "s/he was born white (pure) and died white (pure)," and is a color metaphor that symbolizes the child's innocence. According to Austin's classification, this term is expressive since it conveys the speaker's sympathy towards the child's death.

(h) Heartbreaking

People use xal9an majjatuh as a euphemism for mataa ("died") to console the grieving family by portraying death as a predestined event. It compares life to a journey that ends with death, implying that God has determined the deceased's lifespan. Farghal (1993, p. 21) emphasizes that "Allah keeps complete records for every individual prior to his birth in which all details of his life are registered, including his death." This flouts the quality maxim and implies acceptance and submission to God's will.
Terms such as *ja Hasrah ma thanna* (lit. “alas he has not enjoyed anything”), *ma mahhaluh rabna* (lit. “God gave him no more time”) and *b¿ duh ma akal ¿ umruh* (lit. “s/he has not eaten (lived) his/her life”) express sorrow over the death of a young person. These are considered “expressive” in Austin’s speech act, as the speaker conveys their sadness and heartbreak using words like *mahhaluh*, *Hasrah*, and *thanna*.

*b¿ duh ma akal ¿ umruh* uses a food metaphor to depict life as an unfinished meal for the deceased. This metaphor violates the maxims of quality and relation, yet this metaphor implies that dying young is like being deprived of a satisfying meal, which is a sad experience, a sad experience. The expression serves to express sorrow and remorse over the loss of a young life that did not get to experience its full potential.

(i). Soothing and Consolation

Expressions such as *aalbagjjah bHajjatak* (lit. “may the rest of his life be yours”), *al¿ omr elak* (lit. “life is yours”), *Allah a¿ Tak ¿ omroh* (lit. “Allah has given you his soul”) and *rabna e9Tafah* (lit. “God has chosen him”) are considered more cultural and group-based rather than religious in nature. These expressions are used to show sympathy and solidarity towards the bereaved family members or relatives of the deceased.

The term *aalbagjjah bHajjatak* is a selective expression used when a speaker expresses sincere condolences to the relatives of the deceased. The speaker expresses sympathy and solidarity by using soothing terms, which is an effective means of expressing one’s feelings and emotions to a bereaved person. However, this expression contradicts Islamic principles as it implies that the life of the deceased is added to the lives of others, which is not true based on Islamic fact. Thus, it violates the quality maxim (Grice, 1975).

For example, *alomr elak* and *Allah aTak omroh* serve two purposes. Firstly, they are used when informing a relative of someone’s death, which is considered indirect and less harmful. Secondly, they express condolences to bereaved family members or relatives to lessen their grief. By assigning these terms to speech act theory (Austin, 1962), they show that the illocutionary act of condolence is to express sympathetic feelings about someone’s death.

The terms *bHjjatak* (“yours”), *elak* (“you”), and *aTak* (“give you”) indicate that the speaker wishes the survivor a long life. They are used pragmatically to strengthen and sustain social bonds and solidarity. Furthermore, Bedouins can use these terms as a social honorific for both the addressee and the referent. On the other hand, expression *rabna e9Tafah* is regarded as a soothing device in which the speaker demonstrates that God predestines someone’s death and that they should submit to God’s choice. Interestingly, elderly people use this term to refer to those who die from illness because they regard death in this context as preferable to suffering for the deceased.

B. Euphemism and Dysphemism Manifestations in Death Expressions

In Bedouin culture, there is a tendency to avoid direct mention of death, and this is largely influenced by both religious beliefs and cultural norms. As a result, most expressions used are euphemistic in nature. These linguistic expressions serve as a way to replace the taboo of death in Bedouin speech. In terms of euphemisms, the data can be categorized into two branches: euphemistic expressions and dysphemistic expressions.

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<th>Euphemisms</th>
<th>Dysphemism</th>
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<tr>
<td>AlmarHuun</td>
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<td>Allaqidi</td>
<td>AlmaHruug</td>
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<td>Hajaat X</td>
<td>Allah la jãmhUH / Allah jatolla fiuH/ allah la jarduh</td>
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<td>runH X</td>
<td>Alla rajaHna mennuh</td>
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<td>Tair min Tjuur al dzannah</td>
<td>zaal aldžilam/jilH nsuur</td>
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<td>kulna za alFariig</td>
<td>X waddaq</td>
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<td>Allah axda wadå,tulH/ amantuh</td>
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<td>raaska baaiq</td>
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(a) Euphemism

The use of euphemism is a common linguistic practice across cultures to replace taboo and harsh words, and death is often considered the most euphemized topic in Arabic. According to Farghal (1993, p. 6), people generally avoid directly naming death, and instead use various discourse devices, such as euphemistic and polite speech, to talk or refer to it. This cultural norm is derived from Islamic doctrine and values, which emphasize the importance of respecting the deceased, regardless of their affiliation (Al-Azzam et al., 2022).

Arabs and Bedouins employ various euphemistic strategies, such as metaphor, figurative expressions, and simile, when discussing or referring to death. Referring to the deceased by their first name or using neutral terms like almuhattavafî ("the dead person") is avoided. Instead, they use more expressive, polite, and euphemistic terms like almuhumm ("the late"). This finding suggests that euphemisms are an expected discourse strategy when talking about or referring to the deceased.

In the Jordanian Bedouin dialect, the term X yada ("X passed away") is rarely used to refer to a deceased person, and it violates the manner maxim by failing to observe the sub-maxim of clarity. While the term twafi ("passed away") is more widely accepted and commonly used as a euphemistic and emotive term to avoid the harsh and taboo word maat ("died"). According to Farghal (1995, p. 369), "many native Arabic speakers frequently shun the neutral lexical verb maata ("to die") and instead use a multitude of figurative euphemisms when referring to death.

(b) Dysphemism

The survey conducted indicates that the Bedouins prefer to use euphemistic and polite terms when referring to the deceased, and only a minority may resort to harsh or offensive language. Dysphemistic expressions such as fajjaz and ruuH xbaah are considered negative and face-threatening acts among the Bedouins. These expressions violate the Gricean maxims of conversation and the politeness principle of Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory. The use of dysphemistic terms endangers both the speaker’s positive face and the hearer’s negative face, according to Brown and Levinson’s theory. Al-Haq and Al-Smadi (2020) stated that employing dysphemism in death occasions is considered speaker-based rather than religion-based. Dysphemistic death terms can be categorized as "expressive," wherein the speaker expresses negative feelings towards the deceased. Austin's (1962) perlocutionary and illocutionary forces of dysphemism align with the speaker’s and addressee's psychological and social relationships. For instance, the phrase Allah rayahHu a mnoh is considered an FTA, indicating the speaker's negative attitude towards the deceased, which is usually expressed towards an adversary as stated by Sawalmeh (2018, 2019).

Based on the analyzed data, it has been found that euphemisms are the most commonly used language strategy when referring to death or the deceased, with a few exceptions. The researchers have deduced several euphemistic strategies employed by the Bedouin, which are explained through the following procedures and examples:

1. Directly referring to religion is one way of using euphemisms when talking about death. Some examples include: "Allah ajTaak ẓomruh" / "Allah axad wadaaj tuhl amantu" and "Allah jeryHuah" and "ez3aD Allah".
2. Considering death as a problem-solving event is another way of using euphemisms. For instance, "rabna e9Tafah" can be used to allude to death.
3. Emphasizing sentimental expressions can also be a way of using euphemisms when talking about death. Some examples include: "ja Hsrah ma thnna", "b3doD ma akal ẓomruh" and "maat b3z3 bababuh".
4. Describing death as a transition to eternal life is another way of using euphemisms. For example, "Tair min Tjuur al dzannah".
5. Using polite and indirect references when referring to the deceased person is also a common euphemistic strategy. Some examples include: "alj3id," "almarHuahm," "Hajat X" and "ruuH X".
6. Conceptualizing metaphors from nature, animal, body, and color can also be a way of using euphemisms when talking about death. Examples of this include "welid abjjad wmat abjjad," "weg2at waragtuh" and "Allah axad wadaaj tuhl amantu".
7. Focusing on the importance of the survivor is another way of using euphemisms. For example, "raasak haagi," "t3iib X maat," and "fad Halak" all emphasize the significance of the person who is still alive.

V. CONCLUSION

Although death is considered painful in many cultures, little attention has been paid to studying it. Death events have their own jargon, with different expressions than everyday situations. This study was carried out to fill a gap in the literature on death forms by exploring the sociopragmatic functions and indications of death formulas used by Bedouins in eastern Jordan. For this purpose, a questionnaire was used, and thirty-two authentic expressions used in death discourse were collected from Bedouins, at Al-Badyah in the east of Jordan. The expressions were analyzed and
examined in light of the politeness theory, Grice's maxims of conversation, and Austin's theory of speech acts. These death terms were examined and then categorized into nine categories namely; invocation, survivorship, insulting and degrading, encouraging and motivation, comforting, sarcasm, wishing and reminding, heartbreaking, soothing, and consolation.

According to this study, Bedouins mention death indirectly due to cultural norms. As a result, they mitigate and alleviate the death event's impact through various linguistic strategies such as metaphor, euphemism, and politeness. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that 81.25% of death terms are euphemistic and only 18.75% are dysphemistic; this reinforces the fact that Bedouins have a greater tendency to use euphemism more than dysphemism when referring to the dead person. The researchers elicited seven strategies for using euphemisms in Bedouins' speech, including referring directly to religion, viewing death as a problem to be solved, emphasizing the importance of the survivor, describing death as a transition to eternal life, using polite and indirect references to the deceased, conceptualizing metaphors concerning nature, animals, and the body, and emphasizing sentimental expressions.

APPENDIX

This questionnaire aims to gather information about how death is referred to and how news of someone's passing is conveyed in Eastern Badia. Please read all of the situations and respond in your language or dialect. The information collected will be used solely for scientific research purposes. Thank you for your cooperation.

Gender: ............... Age: ............... Education level: ............... Town: ...............
1. You want to convey the news of someone's death, in general, how do you tell him?
2. How do you convey the news of a person's death to one of the relatives?
3. What would you say about the death of a young child, less than 15 years old?
4. What is the common term for break the death of an old man?
5. Does the terminology for conveying news of death differ according to the age, religion or gender of the deceased?
6. You want to tell someone that someone (who has a bad reputation) has died, what do you say?
7. The second section relates to how to refer to a deceased person while speaking.
8. When talking to a friend about a person who died several years ago, how do you refer to that person?
9. In a dialogue with the elderly (grandparents), how do they refer to deceased people?
10. What is a deceased person, who was known for injustice, usually, described?
11. In conversations, is the age or the gender of the deceased people affected by referring to them after their death? Support with realistic examples?
12. What does a person who died in the prime of life refer to?
13. Do the terms used to refer to the deceased differ according to gender? Support with evidence.
14. Please write any terms you use or hear when talking about the deceased or (death in general) specifically in the desert.

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