

A Semantic Study of Qur'anic Expressions of Condolences

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Abstract

Language is the essential signaling system used as communicative acts to achieve goals or purposes. Condolences are one of the communicative speech acts that are used on occasions of affliction and bereavement for three purposes: sharing the sorrow of the bereaved by expressing sympathy and regret, giving support and encouragement, and assuring the temporality of life. Accordingly, the bereaved feels comfortable to hear these verbal expressions from others. One of the factors that determine the appropriate selection of condolences is religion. Certain religions such as Islam provide classic stock of condolences which are respectively observed by Muslims .

The present study is an attempt to make a semantic investigation and analysis of selected Qur'anic verses concerning condolences. To achieve this aim, the study presents a brief theoretical framework of condolences. Practically, selected Qur'anic verses having condoling messages are analyzed according to Elwood's(2004) model of semantic formula. The results show that the main semantic core of these condolences are the acknowledgement of inevitability of death and transitory of life. Positive future-oriented remarks of what is after death are stated such as the return to Allah and meeting lost beloveds in His presence in hereafter. Accordingly, the sane people should accept gratefully Allah's fate and wait patiently that pre-appointed time.

Keywords: Condolences, Glorious Qur'an , Elwood's Semantic formulas(2004)

1. Introduction

1.1 On Defining Condolences

The origin of the word 'condolence' is Latin. It consists of 'con-', meaning with or together, and 'dolore' which means sorrow or to grieve (Zunin and Zunin, 2007: 4). The use of the word "condolences", in plural, is more common than "condolence". Condolences are formal expressions of sympathy, regret or sorrow to someone who is experiencing pain arising from death, deep mental anguish, or misfortune (Broomberg, 2000: 337 and Smith, 2003: 1). Also, they are acts of active, conscious support and encouragement in the face of adversity. They reduce the pain of those affected (Muihaki, 2004: 3). The emotion behind these expressions is often more important than the wording itself. Condolences may be manipulated for sarcasm as if one considers the complaining person to be exaggerating their suffering, especially when they appear to consider as tragic something that is relatively insignificant. Condolences can also be used to acknowledge a fellow feeling or even a common opinion (Yahya, 2009: 52).

In addition to verbal condolences there are the non-verbal condolences such as the donation of money, preparation of meals and taking care of the bereaved person or family in different ways. Non-verbal condolences are considered as financial and moral support to the bereaved in this difficult time (ibid).

Hayajneh (2009: 6) and Yahya (2009: 53) state that in certain communicative areas such as condolences, language and culture cannot be separated. For example, in constructing condolences, the religious, conventional, and traditional beliefs of the bereaved should be taken into account in certain societies. This conscious consideration is to avoid faults and embarrassment. Sincere condolences are highly appreciated by the bereaved and any mistaking in choosing appropriate expressions of condolences may psychologically hurt her/him and lead to weakening or even ending social relationships between the condoler and the condolee (Smith, 2003: 1 and Zunin and Zunin, 2007: 13).

1.2 Categories of Condolences

Smith (2003 : 1) proposes the following categories of condolences:

- A. Classical stock condolences** are neutral expressions which are appropriate for almost everyone and every bad occasion such as My thoughts are with you, Please accept my / our deepest sympathy, Sorry for your loss, Sorry , My condolences, etc.
- B. Condolences considering someone's religious beliefs** are constructed in regard to people religious beliefs. Believing in a concept of heaven and hell requires condolence expressions that express invocations for the deceased to be comfortable in heaven , such as May God comfort you, May his / her soul find peace.
- C. Condolences as quotes** are extracts from poetry or literary works which are vivid condolences representations because of their artistic, effective and deep meaningful language. They are wonderful manifestations of comfort and sympathy. People use popular quotes concerning death and mourning, such as: "May the blessings of love be upon you , may its peace abide with you , may its essence illuminate your heart , now and forever more. "
- D. Condolences containing the condition of the deceased** are used as a kind of comfort for the bereaved. For example, a person who was suffering from serious disease before death, it is appropriate to refer to the end of the suffering , such as : I was sorry to learn of your mother's death , but I am glad to hear that her suffering has come to an end (ibid).

1.3 Semantic Viewpoint of Condolences

One of the main functions of language is the social function. Condolences are communicative expressions that have this social meaning. This type of meaning refers to the use of language to establish and maintain social relationships rather than to exchange information or ideas. Semantically, condolences are used to preserves, regulates and even reinforce social contact between the condoler and condoled. The ritualistic use of language implying the social meaning is expressed through condolences. At the same time, the emotive-expressive meaning

can be clearly distinguished in condolence expressions since they are used to express sympathy and emotive involvement with the other persons. Crystal (2003 : 346) and (Muihaki, 2004: 133) identify this mixture of meanings in the use condolences as phatic communication which is elicited through sharing of experiences or at least showing empathy (Muihaki , 2004 : 134) .

Elwood (2004:253-4) proposes the following prevalent semantic formula of condolence expressions based on Olshtain and Cohen's (1983) :

1. Acknowledgement of death category includes certain interjections such as: 'Oh, Ah, Oh/ Ah my God'. Wierzbicka (1986) (cited in Yahya, 2009: 57) notes these interjections encode information such as : I realize something bad is happening.
2. Expression of sympathy is the base of the speech act, such as : No, that is very unfortunate, or simply I am sorry (Yahya, 2009: 57).
3. Offer of assistance refers to any attempts to lessen speaker's burden , such as : Is there anything I can do.
- 4 . Future – Oriented Remarks usually take the form of words of encouragement or practical advice in imperative forms , such as: Do something for a change.
5. Expression of concern relates to "showing care for the well-being of the speaker" or the family, such as: Take care of yourself and your mother.

Elwood (2004:261) gives reference to other peripheral formula such as: expression of empathy, sharing a similar experience, statements of not knowing, statement of lacking words, positive statements , expressions of surprise, related questions, and related comments.

1.4 Types of Condolences

Packer (1946:9), Austin (1962 : 159) and Bach and Harnish (1979: 52) classify condolences expressions into two types: explicit and implicit according to the explicitness of the condoling expressions. First, explicit condolences are utterances containing either performative verbs such as 'condole , grieve and commiserate' as in: 'I hereby condole /grieve/commiserate with you and your family.' or nouns such as 'condolence, grievances, commiseration' that are derived from these performative verbs, as in: "My condolences' or 'We send our commiseration to you and to your family ". Searle and Vanderveken (1985 : 212) prefer the use of the utterance 'my condolences' instead of ' I condole you ...' because they consider the verb "condole " out of

date. As shown above, the first person singular , simple present , indicative active are the syntactic characteristics of condolences. Moreover, the adverb-performative marker 'hereby' can be used in these utterances (Cruse , 2006: 126)

The second type is implicit condolences that are utterances having no expressions that name their actions (Austin,1962 : 159) .Therefore, they do not contain any one of the condoling verbs or nouns used in the explicit condolences. Examples of implicit condolences are: Oh , I am so sorry, May you find comfort in loving memories ("Quick Condolence" , 2013 : 1), You have my sincere sympathy (Jadhav , 2013 : 1).

1.5 The Syntactic Constructions of Condolences

Syntactically different constructions can realize condolences. These constructions are the following (Condolence Phrases , 2013 : 1 and Ropchan, 2013:1) :

1. Declarative sentences, as in: You have our deepest sympathy.
2. Imperative sentences, as in: Please accept my / our condolences .
3. Irregular sentences (or fragmentary sentences), as in: Sorry about your father.
4. Archaic formulaic sentences introduced by 'May', as in: May the love of God embrace you in these tough moments.

2. Methodology and Procedures

This study is concerned with semantic analysis of condolences that are taken from the classic stock condolences. These condolences are provided by the Glorious Qur'an which is Allah's great miracle in Islamic religion and here lies the importance of the study. The Qur'an including the data of this study is Allah's words revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Accordingly, Allah's condolences to His prophet and believers are the truest, most effective and sincere ones. Muslims have observed these precious condoling expressions and used them in all afflictions (Behnam et al. 2013:1680). Six Qur'anic verses concerning condolences are identified and interpreted briefly according to Tafsir Ibn 'Abbas translated by Guezzou (2017) and then they are analyzed according to Elwood's semantic formula of condolences. Each verse or datum will be studied separately and the results are discussed to arrive at conclusions.

3. Analysis and Discussion of the Results

Datum 1: Surah 2, Verse:156

قال الله تعالى: (إِنَّا لِلَّهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ). [سورة البقرة ، آية 156]

"To Allah We belong, and to Him is our return"(Yusuf Ali, 2001 :63)

In the Surah Al-Baqarah (The Cow) verse 156, there is the most popular, brief, comprehensive and effective condolence utterance. It entails that all human beings with no exception are Allahs' belongings or slaves. Only the Possessor is free and has the right to give or take life which is only a trust and must be rendered back to Its Owner. A sane person must accept patiently and gratefully the fact losing beloveds since the eventual meeting of all will be in Hereafter with Allah. Patiently waiting the meeting and being satisfied with Allah's will and fate are the only condolences and comfort to the believers (Tafsîr Ibn 'Abbâs, 2017,np). This verse consoles and comfort the bereaved concluding that death is the fate of all living creatures.

Here the condolences express support and encouragement not regret or sorrow. Based on Elwood's (2004:253) semantic formula, the condolences in Datum (1) show an explicit declaration of the fact of death, offer a spiritual assistance through provoking the bereaved to be patient in this affliction and give future-oriented remark that both the bereaved and deceased will meet in Hereafter in Allah's presence. According to Elwood's (ibid: 261) peripheral formula, the condolence include a reference of sharing of similar experience of death through the use of the pronouns 'we' and 'our'. Also, a positive statement of inevitable future meeting with Allah to Him all human beings will come back.

Datum 2: Surah 3, Verse: 145

قال الله تعالى: (وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تَمُوتَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ كِتَابًا مُّوَجَّلًا وَمَنْ يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ الدُّنْيَا نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَمَنْ يُرِدْ ثَوَابَ الْآخِرَةِ نُؤْتِهِ مِنْهَا وَسَنَجْزِي الشَّاكِرِينَ). [ال عمران 145]

"Nor can a soul die except by Allah's leave, the term being fixed as by writing. If any do desire a reward in this life, We shall give it to him; and if any do desire a reward in the Hereafter, We shall give it to him. And swiftly shall We reward those that (serve us with) gratitude." (Yusuf Ali, 2001:164).

In Surah Al-Imran (The Family Of 'Imran) verse 145, Allah declares and assures that death and its appointment is fated by Him. Accordingly, a man's lifespan is determined at an appointed term by His will. Here, there is implicit message to sane people that they must not reject death and know that it is predestinated and being alive is a matter of postponement of date. Those who do according to this fact, they will be rewarded paradise which will be the true life. Again the idea of condoling and comforting is obvious here therefore people must accept gratefully Allah's will (Tafsîr Ibn 'Abbâs, 2017,np)

The condolences in this verse express sympathy, support and encouragement to the bereaved. No reference to regret is there because it is Allah's will. According to Elwood's (2004:253) semantic formula of condolences, in this verse, there is an explicit indication of the inevitability of death stated by Allah Alone. The verse shows positive future-oriented remarks of rewarding those afflicted people who thank Allah for His fate and show no objection to His judgment.

Datum 3: Surah 3, Verse:185

قال الله تعالى: "كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّقُونَ أُجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَمَنْ زُحْزِحَ عَنِ النَّارِ وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ" (سورة ال عمران ، آية 185)

"Every soul shall have a taste of death: And only on the Day of Judgment shall you be paid your full recompense. Only he who is saved far from the Fire and admitted to the Garden will have attained the object (of Life): For the life of this world is but goods and chattels of deception."(Yusuf Ali, 2001: 177)

In Surah The Family Of 'Imran verse 185, Allah declares explicitly two things: First, death is a fated matter experienced by every living creature – not only human beings. Secondly, Hereafter is the real life, while the worldly life is only comfort of illusion. What happens after death is based on what happened before it. In the Resurrection Day the wages will be paid to the workers in their short limited working(living) time. Declaring Allah's divine Oneness, doing good deeds, and accepting His destinies with gratitude are rewarded after death with Paradise which is great condolences (Tafsîr Ibn 'Abbâs, 2017,np).

This verse shows some semantic formula stated by Elwood (2004:253). The indication of the inevitability of death is stated. Also, triviality of this world is indicated as a kind of encouragement and spiritual assistance to accept the death of beloveds. Future-oriented remarks to the triumph in entering the Paradise after death is a great condoling message. This indicates that worldly life is just as a journey of working and no need to be sorrow of leaving it. The peripheral semantic formula sharing a similar experience is indicated by the expression "every soul shall have a taste of death". This shows the equality in experiencing death and there is no escape of it.

Datum 4: Surah 21, Verse:35

قال الله تعالى: (كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَنَبْلُوكُم بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ). [سورة الانبياء، آية 35]

"Every soul shall have a taste of death: and We test you by evil and by good by way of trial. to Us must ye return." (Yusuf, 2001: 802)

In Surah Al-Anbiya (The Prophets) verse 35, Allah assures that the death is an inevitable matter and every soul must experience it. The return will be to Allah the Creator of everything. There are no exceptions in this fate. This worldly life is compared to a test period in which people are tested with adversity and prosperity in order to determine those who are righteous and those who are wrong. The true life is after death which is considered as the gate to immortality in Paradises or in Hell. Accordingly, this verse is a message of comforting and consoling the bereaved that the test will be limited in time and the meeting will be Hereafter. The bereaved or afflicted person must accept this predetermined fate and be patient otherwise s/he will be a true loser in both worlds (Tafsîr Ibn ‘Abbâs).

According to Elwood's (2004: 253), this verse shows the use of the most prevalent semantic formula which is future-oriented remarks. This formula indicates the inevitability of the return to The Merciful Creator and accompanying the lost beloved after an appointed time of a test. Consequently, this offers a spiritual assistance which comfort and lessen the bereaved burden. Again the sharing of a similar experience of death appears clearly through the repeated use of 'Every soul shall have a taste of death'.

Datum 5: Surah 29 , Verse :57

قال الله تعالى: (كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ ثُمَّ إِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ). [العنكبوت 57]

"Every soul shall have a taste of death in the end to Us shall ye be brought back." (Tusuf Ali,2001:1002).

In Chapter Al-Ankabut (The Spider), verse 57 in its two parts is compact of the four verses above. It includes the explicit use of sharing a similar experience formula expressed in "Every soul shall have a taste of death" which is repeated for three times in the sample indicating the inevitable fact that every creature will die. The verse ends with the future-oriented remark of the return to Allah which is repeated previously in Datum(1) and (3) (Tafsîr Ibn 'Abbâs, 2017,np). The wonderful briefness of this verse explains simply human beings' fate in life and death. Death is the separation of soul from the body when the latter perishes. We should not be sad or afraid of death , for it only the gate from which all back to Allah. This return offers a spiritual assistance to the bereaved who loses good and close beloveds.

Datum 6: Chapter 55, Verses:26-27

قال الله تعالى: "كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ (٢٦) وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ (الرحمن 26-27)

"All that is on earth will perish: 27. But will abide (for ever) the Face of thy Lord,- full of Majesty, Bounty and Honour."(Yusuf, 2001:1400)

In these two verses from Chapter Al-Rahman (The Beneficent) there is the perfect and brief idea of all that has been stated in the previous five data. It exposes an explicit declaration of Allah's eternal existence in comparison to the inevitability of death of Jinn, mankind and angels. This verse comforts all creation, since every soul has his equal share of death and it is illogical to hope the deceased has to be still alive. Therefore, the bereave should not be sad and impatient since s/he will die later and rejoin those who died before. Accordingly, life is mortal so regretting it is something illogical and nonvaluable (Tafsîr Ibn 'Abbâs, 2017,np).

An obvious and strong declarations of death and eternity of Allah are revealed in this verse. The linguistic expression ' bounty' is the positive statement of condoling and comforting

which offers spiritual assistance to urge the bereaved waiting patiently for the final meeting. The use of 'All' indicates to the semantic formula of sharing a similar experience of death among all the creatures.

4. Conclusions

Depending on the theoretical and practical part of this study, the following conclusions are set up:

1. Condolences are expressive utterances that play an important communicative role in bereavement context in which people are weak and vulnerable. They express sympathy, comfort, support, and encouragement.
2. Theoretically, condolences are of two types: explicit and implicit according to the presence of condoling linguistic expressions. Also, they are categorized according to their sources and contents into classic stock condolences, those regarding the person's religious beliefs, condolences as quotes, and those reflecting the deceased's condition.
3. The classical and stock condolences are neutral for every religion or culture. Some religions have traditional condolence phrases. For Muslims, Qur'an verses reflecting Allah's condoling words are most frequently used. Therefore this study is conducted on six data extracted from Glorious Qur'an.
4. According to Elwood's (2004) semantic formula of condolences, the data under study are analyzed. All the verses show an explicit declaration of death and its inevitability stated by Allah Who is Eternal. The future-oriented remarks of returning all to Allah is the great condoling to Muslims.
5. The transitory and triviality of the worldly life expressed in these verses offer spiritual assistance which in turn urges the afflicted and bereaved persons to gratefully accept death and patiently wait the day of meeting lost beloved in the presence of Allah.
6. The peripheral semantic formula sharing a similar experience is indicated in all the data showing the equality in experiencing death and there is no escape of it.

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