

Original Article

A Corpus-Based Probe into Context Type, Social Power, and Speaker Status of Sympathy, Grief, and Condolence Collocational Patterns in American Spoken English Discourse

Reza Bagheri Nevisi^{1,}, Sanaz Inanlou¹*

¹University of Qom, Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Humanities, Qom, Iran

Submission date: 17-04-2023

Acceptance date: 14-08-2023

Abstract

The ability to express thoughts and emotions appropriately on different social occasions is considered an essential prerequisite to maintaining social relationships. This study sought to investigate the most frequent words and expressions pertaining to 'Condolence' and 'Sympathy' and also which words and expressions co-occurred with such expressions in spoken American English discourse in the different contexts to know how and when to use grief-related expressions. To this end, the data was collected from the spoken Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). The findings revealed that the word 'Sympathy' occurred mostly in the equal social status and socio-cultural context whereas the word 'Grief' was observed in the equal social status and transactional context in the same corpus. The study showed that the collocational words did not influence the function of such words and they were substituted based on the intended meaning of the speakers. The teachers and the learners will get insights into the more frequent collocations as well as the likely appropriate ways to apply them in the authentic context. The findings could be beneficial for four groups: First, the researcher can use the findings as a resource for cross-cultural comparison of condolences. Second, the EFL learners might get familiar with the expressions of condolences in the native forms. Besides, teachers may benefit from the results to instruct the learners on how to use condolence expressions properly. Finally, material developers and test designers can use the findings in designing materials and tests.

Keywords: American Spoken English Discourse, Collocational patterns, Condolence, Corpus-based study, Sympathy

*Corresponding Author's Email: re.baghery@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Being able to say the right thing to the right person at the right time would be a great social accomplishment (Yule, 1996). Human beings can distinguish between right and wrong behavior in different circumstances in their daily life by using norms called human morality. This morality encompasses sympathy and condolence, which are the focus of this study. Culture and conventions have a great influence on pragmatics; therefore, to express condolences or sympathy in the right way, what is required is respecting the cultural background and the beliefs of the bereaved family. Thus, one should know the cultural norms and beliefs to avoid misunderstanding concerning condolence in other cultures. Condolence words and expressions have different hidden meanings across cultures (Zunin & Zunin, 2007).

As a speech act, condolence is a condoler's verbal reaction to a bereaved family member. Therefore, the bereaved person realizes this speech act in an extremely sensitive circumstance, which is the death of a loved one. Generally, he/she is shocked and depressed, which can range from deep sorrow, grief, and shock to numbness. Therefore, using the right patterns and expressions in expressing condolence to a bereaved one is of paramount importance. The condoler should have a compassionate, supportive and thoughtful manner and avoid an intrusive and prying manner (Parkers et al 1997).

Nevertheless, condolence patterns and expressions included in the speech acts can vary in different contexts and cultures in different situations. As an integral part of human communication, a speech act is not a word or an expression, but it is the performance of certain kinds of language acts, such as requests and promises. They are speech functions realized through the means of words. Assertives, directives, commissives, expressives and declarations are five different types of speech acts. Psychological states of mind and personal attitudes and feelings are in the realm of expressive speech acts, which include speech acts such as greetings, thanks, congratulations, condolences and apologies. These speech acts are realized by way of politeness and consideration (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969, 1979). The word 'condolence' originates from a meaningful root. Latin roots of condolence are 'com', meaning 'together', and 'dolere', meaning to grieve that contain the "realization of a loss, expression of sympathy, or empathy with someone" (Zunin & Zunin, 2007, p. 4). In reality, emotionality is an undeniable part of human beings' communication in their everyday life, just as the

bereaved feel deep sorrow, shock and depression over the death of a loved one (Parkers et al., 1997).

Broomberg (2000) stated that condolences are all the expressions to be used to express sympathy. They contain formal expressions of regret or sorrow in the case of someone's death (Emad Mohammad, 2013). Condolences include expressions to grieve together with the hearer's sadness which the hearer is not responsible for (Searle & Vanderveken, 1985). Condolences do not just include expressions of sympathy; they can also be active acts and conscious support to reduce the pain of those affected (Muihaki, 2004). The mourners and recipients of condolences usually appreciate any form of condolences and they will be pleased by just a sincere expression of sympathy (Emad Mohammad, 2013). However, a lack of the proper words of condolences will lead to anger or hurt of the bereaved one. What is more, this might even weaken or undermine relationships or friendships (Zunin & Zunin, 2007). Although studies on speech acts in general and condolence-related expressions, in particular, abound in the literature, there seems to be a gap when it comes to exploring the context type, social power, and speaker status of such expressions in American Spoken English Discourse. Familiarity with the above-mentioned contextual factors might contribute to not only a deeper understanding, but also a better, more appropriate, and effective utilization of such expressions in both pedagogic and real-life settings. Accordingly, the study aimed to fill the above-mentioned gap in the literature.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Condolence as an Expressive Speech Act

Condolence is a word meaning 'to suffer together' derived from the Latin stem of condoler (Zunin & Zunin, 2007). This word means acknowledgment of loss, empathy with an affected person and expressing sympathy to a bereaved member. Emotionality is considered an inseparable part of individuals existing in everyday communication. Bereaved experiences emotions such as sadness, grief, depression and shock after the loss of a loved one (Parkers et al., 1997). A condoler states sympathy to a mourner and helps the bereaved to admit a darling's death. Different cultures have different ways of expressing condolence. Pragmatics is considered a crucial importance for the culture and the convention. Expressing condolence can

be performed in the best way when the condoler knows and considers the mourner's culture and beliefs. For instance, people in some cultures offer flowers or mourning cards to a mourner to express their sympathy; however, in some other cultures, they do other actions to express their sympathy to a bereaved one. Therefore, expressing condolence needs enough knowledge about the cultural background and belief system of the bereaved.

Vein et al. (2007) maintained that different cultures have a certain implicit concept of condolence. Happiness and sadness are inseparable parts of humans' lives and expressing feelings is an integral part of their communication. When a person uses meaningful and influential condolence expressions toward a mourner, it is rarely possible to state an inappropriate phrase or sentence. The close friends of the bereaved and the deceased should consider the condolence expressions as an appropriate message because knowing the survivors' culture plays a crucial role in emotional communication. What also needs to be equally considered is pragmatics. Sometimes on extremely emotional occasions, the bereaved language is different from the daily communicational language of the speaker who wants to express sympathy and grief.

Relationship among people is a fundamental factor in conveying meaningful condolence messages, so emotional and meaningful communication pertains to the personal relationship between the bereaved and the speaker. It is somehow difficult to choose an appropriate condolence expression in the right situation. For instance, the expression 'I'm sorry' toward a bereaved in an Iranian context does not contain an important communicational message, so "being sorry" doesn't suffice here. In some situational contexts such as Iran, individuals need to demonstrate their encouragement for support by considering the appropriacy of culture and language between the bereaved and their expressions. Some various expressions can be appreciated in different situations, so the native strategies for sending a meaningful message can be achieved by studying cross-cultural means of expressing condolence. In addition, there are different responses to the condolence expressions in different situations, which are related to the complications of the condolence speech act.

Empathy and sympathy with an individual who has lost a beloved one is the most important goal of condolence expressions. Condolence expressions can be used to perform a convention or respect politeness, too. As an example, it is not polite behavior not to state

condolence to a mourner whether the mourner is a stranger or a friend and some prefabricated expressions can be used to state sympathy toward a bereaved one in such situations. Since the bereaved feel different emotions such as sadness, anger, depression, and grief, it is a crucial to be aware of the appropriate condolence expression and know how to express the condolence message. The following points are important to express sympathy since they affect selecting the appropriate condolence statement and finding the nature of condolence responses: The relation between the bereaved and the deceased, the relation between the bereaved and the interlocutor, the relation between the speaker and the deceased, and the bereaved feelings in this situation (Bernan, 2008).

2.2. Condolence Speech Act Studies

Many research projects (Blum-Kulka, 1982; Blum-Kulka & Olshtain, 1986; Faerch & Kasper, 1989; House & Kasper, 1987; Kasper, 1989; Olshtain & Weinbach, 1987) have been conducted on the condolence speech act and its response types cross-culturally. Considering these studies, it was revealed that most individuals feel sorrow and grief in the usual situations but people should pay attention to other cases when they intend to relieve others. These cases include the speakers' emotions, the bereaved and the deceased relationship, and the relation of the speaker and the bereaved, which highly influence the psychological process. Therefore, the speaker should have enough linguistic knowledge about the proper interaction with the bereaved.

Eslamirasekh (1993) conducted a cross-cultural study on the speech act of condolence by comparing the patterns of Persian and English speakers. The result of his study indicated that Persian speakers applied more sympathetic expressions than American speakers in stating their grief and empathy.

Elwood (2004) performed a cross-cultural study between Americans and Japanese on the differences in condolence expressions. As a result, she classified responses into five kinds of semantic formulas, which Olshtain and Cohen (1983) already offered: Applying interjections to acknowledge death such as Oh or Oh my God, employing sympathy expressions, expressing readiness to assist someone like Is there anything I can do?, encouraging someone with

practical tips such as Try not to get depressed, and displaying concern and caring for the interlocutor's well-being as: How are you doing?

Elwood (2004) also introduced some condolence expressions that are not in the five classifications of the responses. They include 'empathy expressions', 'stating the same event', 'stating lack of knowing', 'lacking words and expressions', 'stating positive words', 'surprise expressions', 'appropriate questions' and 'appropriate comments'.

An investigation was conducted by Fenton-Smith (2007) about expressing the diplomatic condolences that were sent by many people from different countries for the death of Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian president. The results revealed that language has a subtle role and at the same time, it has a fundamental contribution in restructuring the world.

Bernan (2008) performed an empirical study on condolence public books. The results showed that condolence books have been both a register of the different types of social mourning in the current age and a reflection to evaluate the level of people's social engagement with death. He also maintained that condolence statements fluctuate between traditional concept structures and the current emotional structures.

Farnia and Suleiman (2009) investigated the use of condolence expressions by Iranian EFL learners and American native speakers. The researchers concluded that both Iranians and Americans use similar strategies; however, they have different frequencies in using strategies. Iranians used more strategies than Americans did in their condolence expressions because the type of Iranian society is different from that of Americans'.

Yahya (2010) explored the cultural influences of condolence values on condolence expressions in Iraqi society by considering Iraqi ethnography. As a result, he proposed five common and critical response formulas: Acknowledging death, expressing sympathy, showing readiness to offer assistance, stating future-related expressions, and showing concern for others and he also put forward five inferior sub-classifications including stating the same experience, stating lacking utterances, expressing surprise words, stating pertinent questions, and expressing unknown words.

Lotfallahi and Eslami-Rasekch (2011) studied the Iranian condolence expressions based on Elwood's (2004) research. They concluded that Iranians offer different condolence strategies from English people as the Iranian society is composed of Muslim members and

religious culture. These two researchers added more strategies to Elwood and Yahya's classification of condolence strategies: Requesting God's forgiveness and appreciating God for His mercy upon the dead soul and expressing sympathy through uttering religious statements.

Samavarchi & Allami (2012) performed an analysis on the Iranian condolence contexts and divided them into seven subcategories: Direct condolence (I give you my condolences), apologetic condolences (I am so sorry to hear about your loss), religious utterance (God bless him!), offering assistance (You can count on me anytime), expressing comfort (Be calm and don't worry), asking relevant questions (What happened?), and asking to be calm.

Moghaddam (2012) investigated a cross-cultural study between Persian and English speakers on the use of condolence interjections and intensifiers in stating the condolence speech act. He analyzed movies to collect the required data. He concluded that a) different cultures have different intensifiers and interjections; b) interjections and intensifiers can have semantic classifications; and (c) English and Persian intensifiers have different syntactic structures.

The research was conducted by Behnam et al. (2013) based on Elwood's (2004) classification of condolence strategies and investigated sending condolence expressions using short messages between English and Persian speakers. The researchers concluded that English and Persian people use different types of condolence expressions; Persians use more direct and shorter messages; and Iranians apply more religious expressions that manifest Iranians' religious culture as Iranians believe that God dominates the entire world including death. On the contrary, English people use more indirect, more sympathetic and apologetic expressions because native English people show mostly their sympathy and concern toward the bereaved family when stating condolence strategies.

Kuang (2015) studied the way Malaysians send SMS condolences and the types of functional semantic functions in Malaysians' performance. He concluded that there are eight semantic functions in Malaysian performance while sending SMS condolences. He continued that Malaysians use fewer concern strategies that include directives and future-oriented statements, and they mostly admire the deceased and express uncertain expressions.

The main purpose of the present study was to probe the conventional combinations for expressing condolence and sympathy in the spoken area of American contexts. In this

descriptive research, the most frequent words and expressions about condolence and sympathy in the discourse of Spoken American English were explored. In addition, the most frequent collocational patterns occurring with condolence and sympathy were sought. In fact, each collocation was surveyed based on the three categories of context type (intimate, socio-cultural, professional, pedagogical or transactional), speakers (e.g., parent/child, teacher/student, friends) and social power relationship level (high-low, low-high or equal). To this end, the researchers formulated the following research questions:

1. What are the most frequent words and expressions of condolence, grief, and sympathy in the American spoken English discourse?
2. What are the most frequent contextual factors of sympathy, grief, and condolence?
3. What are the most frequent social power factors of sympathy, grief, and condolence?

3. Methodology

3.1. Choosing an Appropriate Corpus

First, two corpora of the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) were considered to collect data. After surveying both corpora and considering the aim of this study, the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) was selected for gathering data. The reason for selecting COCA was that this study aimed to gather the spoken data in the corpus. Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) is the largest corpus of American English. COCA is probably the most widely-used corpus of English, and it is related to many other corpora of English that we have created, which offer unparalleled insight into variation in English. This corpus which focuses on contemporary authentic speech contains more than one billion words of authentic texts (25+ million words each year 1990-2019) from eight genres of spoken, fiction, popular magazines, newspapers, academic texts, TV and Movies subtitles, blogs, and other web pages. This corpus provides data on differences between different styles or types of English such as informal (e.g. spoken) or formal (e.g. academic) English. It also provides you with semantically-based searches which gives you an opportunity to search for collocates which can tell you a lot about words' meanings. The Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) is an online large public corpus which contains only 1.7 million words (nearly 200

hours) with focuses only on academic speech. The Corpus of All words and collocations and their related contexts were saved in Word and PDF files to be easily accessible for analysis.

3.2. Data Collection Procedure

Initially data on the most frequent words and expressions pertaining to 'sympathy' and 'condolence' were collected from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) from 2010 to 2019 for analysis. Then, the data of the collocational patterns for these two expressions and other words and expressions of these words such as 'Grief' were collected from the COCA. Next, the frequency for each collocation was counted. Afterward, a summary of each text related to each frequency was presented to show the relevance of that frequency to the word or the expression. Besides, these texts presented the different contexts in which condolence and sympathy statements were used. The collected data was transferred and saved in a table in Word and Excel files to be easily accessible for analysis. As Evert (2007) mentioned, "It is not uncommon to find more than a million recurrent word pairs ($f > 2$) in a corpus containing several hundred million running words", so the frequency of ($f > 5$) or higher was applied to conduct the study.

Based on the studies which were conducted by Blum-Kulka, (1982), Blum-Kulka and Olshtain, (1986), Faerch and Kasper, (1989), House and Kasper, (1987), Kasper, (1989), Olshtain and Weinbach, (1987), a few studies were conducted on condolence speech act. The people should consider many maxims for expressing condolence on usual occasions. These maxims are some factors including the bereave d's emotions, the relation of the bereaved to the deceased, and the relationship between the speaker and the bereaved. Knowing the appropriate way to express sympathy and comfort the bereaved can influence the relationship between the speaker and the bereaved in the future. Brown and Levinson (1978 & 1987) mentioned that categories of social distance, social power and relationship of interlocutors are the most important linguistic factors influencing speakers' linguistic choices.

In addition, to consider the linguistic factors which were mentioned previously, all the data on the collocational patterns co-occurring with the condolence and sympathy expressions were analyzed based on the theoretical frameworks about the contextual characteristics which include context type (intimate, socio-cultural, professional, pedagogical or transactional),

speakers (e.g., parent/child, teacher/student, friends) and social power relationship level (high-low, low-high or equal) (Blum-Kulka et al., 1989, Adolphs 2008, Curl & Drew, 2008).

A particular column had to be dedicated to each kind of information so that such information could easily be accessible based on that particular characteristic. The first column was dedicated to the collocational words and the second column illustrated the summaries of the retrieved texts for the occurrences from the corpus. The third, fourth and fifth columns were dedicated to the categories of the context type (intimate, socio-cultural, professional, pedagogical, or transactional), speakers (e.g., parent/child, teacher/student, friends) and social power relationship level (high-low, low-high or equal) respectively. By demonstration of each word or expression with the frequency for each collocation in a table, the word with the most collocation was specified. This table made it possible to easily count the number of collocational patterns for each word or expression as well as the frequency for each collocation. These three categories are explained in detail below:

3.2.1. Context Type

Adolphs (2008) explained how the Cambridge and Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English (CANCODE) identified five situational categories roughly corresponding to social distance. These context categories that were used in the current study were intimate, socio-cultural, professional, pedagogic and transactional (Adolphs, 2008). In fact, an intimate context involves speakers who are either part of the same nuclear family or are very, very close friends that approximate nuclear family members, these are relationships in which the speakers are extremely comfortable with one another and in which their guard is completely down.

A socio-cultural context involves speakers who are friends or acquaintances and are interacting on a social rather than familial level; a professional context involves conversations between work colleagues; a transactional context covers most service encounters where typically the participants are strangers or only know each other because there is an exchange of services, goods or information between them; and, finally, a pedagogic context involves participants in a teacher-student relationship.

3.2.2. Speaker Status

By speaker, the researcher means those interlocutors who are interacting and playing roles in the communication, for example, parent-child, child-parent, teacher-student, friends, seller-customer, employer, employee, colleagues, etc.

3.3.3. Social Power Relationship

For each of the occurrences, the social power relationship existed between the participants was identified. For this category, the relationship between the interlocutors tagged either as an asymmetrical social power relationship of “high-low” or “low-high”, or a symmetrical social power relationship of “equal”. For example, a parent/child utterance is coded as high/ low, a child/parent as low/ high, and a friend/friends or husband/wife as neutral. For more clarity, some table demonstration characteristics for expressions of “sympathy”, “condolence”, and “grief” are displayed in Table 1 to Table 3 respectively.

Table 1 presents an excerpt from the corpus for the expression sympathy and determines its context type, social power, and speaker status based on the provided contextual information. For the following example included in Table 1, context type is of an intimate nature, the speaker status is child-parent and apparently from low to high.

Table 1.

A Sample of Table Demonstration for Characteristics of Sympathy Expressions

Collocate	Sympathy	Context type	Speakers	Social power
			(e.g., parent/child, teacher/student, friends)	relationship level (high-low, low-high or equal)
26-28 I	MARK-ADLER, -REID-A# Obviously, whatever pain Reid was in and you know, that just the concern about this picture and the embarrassment and how he had made a mistake to even take that and send it, I wish I would have gone to him and just said what is bothering you? And I didn't do that. (END VIDEO CLIP) PINSKY# Listen, I have deep <i>sympathy for</i> Dad here and the Mom. This is horrible. I mean, it's unthinkable to have a parent go through this.	Intimate	Child-parent	Low-high

Table 2 also presents an example for condolence-related expressions and specifies its contextual constituents accordingly. Based on the provided contextual information within the example, the context type is socio-cultural, the interlocutors' status is interviewer/interviewee and is considered to be equal.

Table 1.

A Sample of Table Demonstration for Characteristics of Condolence Expressions

Collocate	Condolence	Context type	Speakers (e.g., parent/child, teacher/student, friends)	Social power relationship level (high-low, low- high or equal)
3-6 To	We're joined by the Gold Star father who last year gave an impassioned speech at the Democratic National Convention, Khizr Khan. In two words: dignity and restraint. First, I offer my deepest <i>condolence to</i> the families of my four sons, brave hero sons who died protecting us. Without their sacrifice, this nation would be vulnerable. They were serving this nation.	Socio-cultural	Interviewer/ interviewee	Equal

Table 3 displays an example for grief-related expressions and determines the context type, social power and speaker status of such expressions. As it can be easily discerned from the provided contextual information in Table 3, the context type is professional and speakers are colleagues and their social power is considered to be equal.

Table 2

A Sample of Table Demonstration for Characteristics of Grief Expressions

Collocate	Grief	Context type	Speakers (e.g., parent/child, teacher/student , friends)	Social power relationship level (high-low, low-high or equal)
4-9 We	Steve. And Gary Cohn, director of the National Economic Council. Thank you, Gary. Thank you. And Mike Turzai, the speaker of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. We <i>grieve with</i> you, and we will never leave your side. Our hearts are also with the victims of the wildfires in California's Napa and Sonoma Valleys	Professional	Colleague	equal

3.3. Data Analysis

The data from the study was analyzed using descriptive quantitative analysis. In fact, the frequency and percentage analyses were used in collecting data on 'condolence' and 'sympathy' expressions along with their collocations in the spoken corpus of COCA. The quantitative analysis was used to achieve the most frequent words and expressions pertaining to condolence, grief, and sympathy. The frequency of each collocation for the condolence words and expressions was specified. Each text was read and analyzed to determine its contextual features based on context type, speakers and social power relationship level. Then, the frequency and percentage of the contextual features for each word were provided, and categorized the data based on these features. In this classification, the frequency of each data in each group was specified.

4. Results

4.1. The Most Frequent Words and Expressions About Condolence, Grief, and Sympathy in the Discourse of Spoken American English

The first research question dealt with the most frequent words and expressions pertaining to condolence and sympathy in the discourse of Spoken American English. Table 4 displays these words and expressions with their collocational patterns and their frequencies.

Table 4.

Condolence, Sympathy, Grief, My condolences and Sorry for your loss in the Spoken Context

Words and Expressions / spoken	Collocates	Frequencies
Sympathy	47	650
Grief	17	159
Condolence	4	23
My condolences	2	12
Sorry for your loss	1	12

As shown in Table 4, five words and expressions on “Condolence & Sympathy” were investigated. The criteria for selecting them is their number of frequencies in the spoken corpus of COCA, as these five words and expressions have the highest occurrence among others pertaining to 'Condolence & Sympathy'. The frequency of 5 (f = 5) for searching the occurrence of the collocations was considered in the corpus. Therefore, five expressions i.e., 'Sympathy', 'Grief', 'Condolence', 'My condolences', and 'Sorry for your loss' were found to be the most frequent words and expressions about condolence and sympathy in the discourse of Spoken American English with the occurrences of 650, 159, 23, 12, and 12 respectively. The researcher decided to just select the three first most frequently used ones i.e., 'Sympathy', 'Grief', and 'Condolence' since the other two expressions were among the least frequent ones.

4.2. Contextual Factors of Sympathy, Grief, and Condolence Expressions

Table 5 and Figure 1 illustrate the word 'Sympathy' with occurrences in the spoken corpus. This word occurs in the different context types with different frequencies and

percentages. The context types which were considered for the word 'Sympathy' include intimate, sociocultural, pedagogical, professional, and transactional contexts.

Table 5.

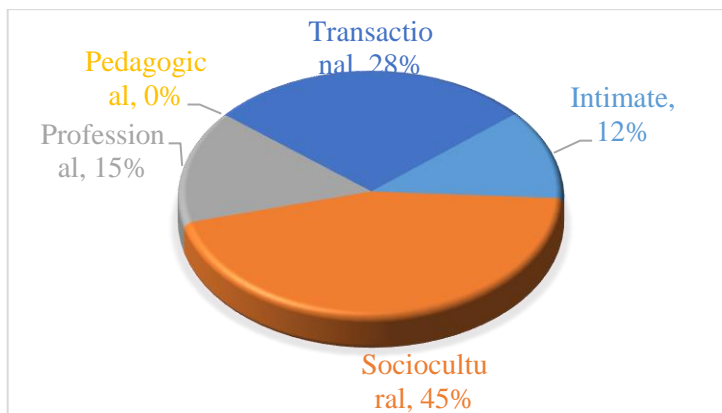
Frequencies and Percentages for the Word 'Sympathy' in Different Context Types of Spoken Corpus

Context Type		Intimate	Sociocultural	Professional	Pedagogical	Transactional	TOTAL
<i>F</i>		80	297	99	2	182	660
<i>%</i>		12%	45%	15%	0%	28%	100%

As seen in Table 5 and Figure 1, the expression 'Sympathy' in the spoken corpus occurred more frequently in the sociocultural context with a total number of 297 occurrences accounting for 45% of all the occurrences. It also occurred in the transactional, professional, intimate, and pedagogical contexts with 28%, 15%, 12%, and 0% occurrences respectively. Most of the expressions ask for a particular action from a listener, where social status is not equal between the two, as it is called transactional which means two individuals are collaborating on a common subject.

Figure 1.

Pie Chart for the Word 'Sympathy' in Different Context Types of Spoken Corpus



Holmes (1992) states that the investigation of how people use language can provide useful information about conventional language and social communication in a society. People use different styles in different contexts for exchanging their intents in their communication, so it is essential to be aware of the different characteristics of the contexts to continue in the string of the speech and be a successful interlocutor. Table 6 and Figure 2 demonstrate the word 'Grief' with occurrences in the spoken corpus. This word occurs in the different context types with different frequencies and percentages. The context types which were considered for the word grief include intimate, sociocultural, pedagogical, professional, and transactional contexts.

Table 6.

Frequencies and Percentages for the Word 'Grief' in Different Context Types of Spoken Corpus

Context Type						
	Intimate	Sociocultural	Professional	Pedagogical	Transactional	TOTAL
<i>F</i>	1	23	34	2	97	157
<i>%</i>	1%	15%	22%	1%	62%	100%

As shown in Table 6 and Figure 2, the expression 'grief' in the spoken corpus occurred more frequently in the transactional context with a total number of 97 occurrences accounting for 62% of all the occurrences. It also occurred in the professional, socio-cultural, pedagogical, and intimate contexts with 22%, 15%, 1%, and 1% occurrences respectively. Most of the expressions ask for a particular action from a listener, where social status is not equal between the two, as it is called transactional which means two individuals are collaborating on a common subject.

Figure 2.

Pie Chart for the Word 'Grief' in Different Context Types of Spoken Corpus

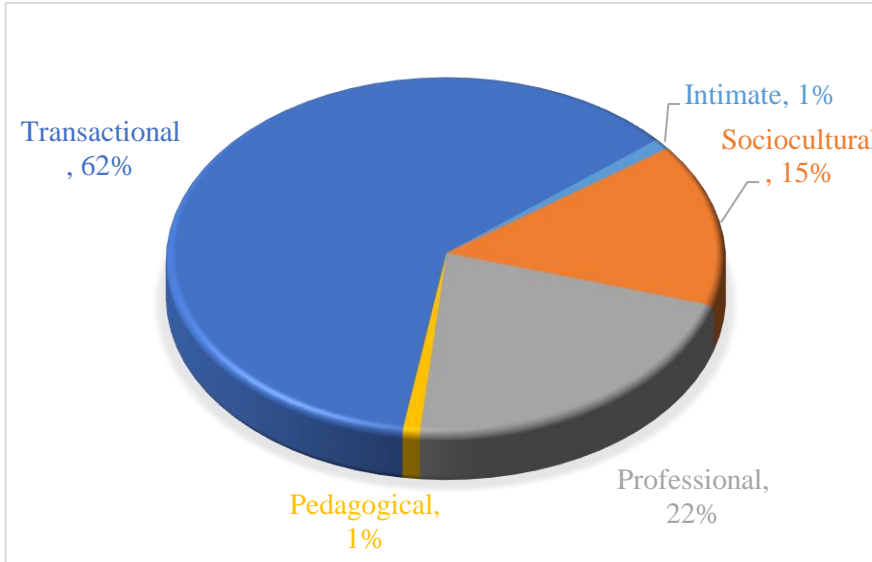


Table 7 and Figure 3 display the word 'Condolence' with occurrences in the spoken corpus. This word occurs in different context types with different frequencies and percentages. The context types which were considered for the word 'Condolence' include intimate, sociocultural, pedagogical, professional, and transactional contexts.

Table 1.

Frequencies and Percentages for the Word 'Condolence' in Different Context Types of Spoken Corpus

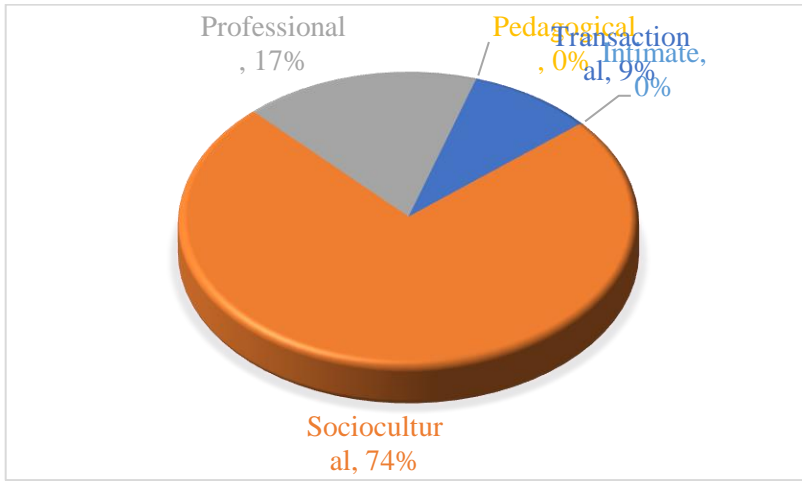
	Context Type					
	Intimate	Sociocultural	Professional	Pedagogical	Transactional	TOTAL
<i>F</i>	0	17	4	0	2	23
<i>%</i>	0%	74%	17%	0%	9%	100%

As evident from Table 7 and Figure 3, the expression 'Condolence' in the spoken corpus occurred more frequently in the sociocultural context with a total number of 17 occurrences accounting for 74% of all the occurrences. It also occurred in the professional, transactional, intimate, and pedagogical contexts with 17%, 9%, 0%, and 0% occurrences respectively. Most

of the expressions ask for a particular action from a listener, where social status is not equal between the two, as it is called transactional which means two individuals are collaborating on a common subject.

Figure 3.

Pie Chart for the Word 'Condolence' in Different Context Types of Spoken Corpus



4.4. Social Power Factors of Sympathy, Grief, and Condolence Expressions

Regarding social power, as shown in Table 8 and Figure 4, there were three stages: high-low, low-high, and equal. The expression 'Sympathy' in the spoken corpus occurred more frequently in the equal context with a total number of 408 occurrences accounting for 62% of all the occurrences.

Table 2.

Frequencies and Percentages for the Word 'Sympathy' in Different Social Powers of Spoken Corpus

	Social Power			TOTAL
	High-low	Low-high	Equal	
Frequency	138	114	408	660
Percentage	21%	17%	62%	100%

It means that 'Sympathy' words in the spoken context occurred more frequently when the status of both the speaker and hearer was the same. It is followed by high-low ($f = 138$, 21%) and low-high ($f = 114$, 17%) statuses. It shows that the word 'Sympathy' occurred more frequently in contexts in which the speakers and listeners are in similar social power.

5. Discussion

This research was a corpus study for investigation of the collocational patterns of “Sympathy and Condolence” expressions as well as the most frequent words and expressions pertaining to 'sympathy, grief, and condolence' in COCA. As a corpus takes advantage of language by a broad range of speakers and in a vast variety of social discussions and contexts, corpus-based investigations will bring scientific proof of structures in the use of language.

The first research question of the present study on the most frequent words and expressions of “condolence and sympathy” was supported in the obtained results. The findings on this research question showed that some words and expressions occurred more frequently such as 'Sympathy', 'Grief', 'Condolence', “Sorry for your loss” and 'My Condolences'.

The second research question of the study deals with the most frequent collocational patterns occurring with the condolence words and expressions. The findings on this question indicated that some words have higher frequency such as 'For, Of, And, Have, I' for the word 'Sympathy'. This data can be used as a reference point for non-native English speakers to be aware of the words which co-occur with 'Condolence and Sympathy' expressions and avoid the inappropriate words that are usually used by non-native English speakers as collocations.

Regarding the second research question about the most frequent collocational patterns for the condolence words and expressions, one justification is that some of the collocations for most words and expressions in spoken contexts are similar, but they have different frequencies, so this finding can indicate that if the speaker chooses a grammatical combination of the words but conflicting with authentic and conventional conversation, it will be defined as a 'dissonance' which hinders the hearer from understanding the speaker's intent. Therefore, it is essential to be familiar with the conventional collocational patterns which follow every word or expression in an authentic context and this is incongruent with Zamborlin (2007) and Bagheri Nevis & Miri (2023).

The first research question is about the words 'sympathy' and 'condolence' expressions. After probing the words and the expressions of 'sympathy' and 'condolence' expressions in the spoken corpus, it was revealed that most words and expressions for expressing 'sympathy' and 'condolence' were not common in the spoken corpus and they occurred only with 1, 2, or 3 occurrences in the corpus. The justification for ignoring these words in this study is that people mostly use highly different expressions for expressing their grief and sadness in different circumstances. It means that there are various choices for expressing grief and sadness. Some people use divine expressions to express their sadness and grief and others offer help to the bereaved with different combinations of words. Therefore, this high possibility for selecting words in expressing 'sympathy' and 'condolence' makes these words and expressions less frequent in the corpus. For example, the expression 'sorry for your loss' co-occurred only with 1 word 'so' with 12 frequencies in the corpus. Accordingly, this study considered only the word 'griefs' as the more frequent word for expressing 'sympathy' and 'condolence' with 159 occurrences in the spoken corpus.

The word 'sorry' was not considered in this study as a word on the 'sympathy' and 'condolence' words, as this word mostly is used for expressing regret and pity instead of sympathy and condolence. The number of occurrences for this word in the spoken corpus was about 27.000 which mostly were used for expressing regret and pity, so to make this study feasible, this word was not investigated in this research.

There are many words and expressions for expressing 'sympathy' and 'condolence'. People use different choices due to different factors such as beliefs, cultures, customs, listeners, etc. While conducting this study, the different expressions were investigated on their collocational patterns and their occurrences in the corpus. It was revealed that these expressions whether do not occur with the frequency of 5 in the corpus at all such as the expression 'stay strong', or they occurred only with a very low frequency such as the expressions 'my condolences' and 'sorry for your loss' both with 12 occurrences in the corpus.

The words 'sympathy' and 'condolence' and 'grief' more frequently occurred in the sociocultural contexts and equal social power status in the American English spoken discourse. The possible explanation for this might arise from the notion proposed by Mwihaque (2004) and Crystal (2003). They found that condolences are not only exchanging ideas and

knowledge but they are mostly applied for cementing social relations among people. They contain a social concept from a semantic point of view, which represents condolence or sympathy in different ways to communicate with different social distances. Languages employ condolences as a social concept for ritualistic function. The most important function of the social concept of condolences is the emotional part of the utterance. Expressions with social use of concepts such as condolences refer to social or phatic communication.

Meanwhile, words 'sympathy' and 'condolence' and 'grief' were observed more frequently in 'equal' power status and followed by 'high-low', and then 'low-high'. The probable justification for this can be because generally, people interact, talk, work, feel, and communicate more frequently with people of the same social power. Therefore, naturally, the sympathy words are employed mostly in equal social power, followed by high-low ones since usually people feel less sympathy for those of higher level of social power and might think that they are richer, happier, superior, and more educated that they don't need sympathetic feelings and emotions when bereaved, resented, or diseased.

6. Conclusion

This study was conducted to investigate the collocational patterns of 'Sympathy and Condolence' expressions in the spoken context of American English. Furthermore, this research was conducted to probe the words and expressions which were mostly of expressing condolence and also to find the most frequent words or expressions pertaining to the condolence situations in the American English spoken discourse. The study revealed that the most frequent word for expressing condolence was 'Sympathy' which co-occurred with 50 different words and had 660 occurrences in COCA. Besides, 'Sympathy' was used mostly in the 'equal' social status and "socio-cultural context" since condolences were used not only for exchanging ideas and information but also for mostly for building social relations among people.

The findings of this study could have some implications. First, learners might be cognizant of the condolence expressions in the native forms and how native speakers use condolence words or expressions in real-life contexts. Moreover, the results might be useful sources for EFL learners to be familiar with phrases or words that are most frequently used.

EFL learners can also be familiarized with conventional structures of condolence expressions and learn how to sympathize with a bereaved with proper structures and appropriate words. Not being aware of these conventional expressions and structures may lead to an inadequate understanding of the language or misinterpretation of language. Furthermore, teachers may benefit from the results of the study by teaching learners how to use condolence expressions properly. Teachers can also familiarize learners with proper combinations of condolence expressions and words that co-occur with them more frequently. In fact, they can teach conventional expressions and structures in order to be uttered in the real-life contexts when they are required to interact with native speakers and comprehend the intended meaning of the interlocutors.

As a speech act, condolence is a condoler's verbal reactions to a bereaved family member. Thus, the bereaved person considers this speech act in an extremely sensitive circumstance, which is the death of a loved one. Mostly, he/she is shocked and depressed, which can range from deep sorrow, grief, or shock. As a result, using the right patterns and expressions in expressing condolence to a bereaved one is of utmost significance. In fact, the condoler should have a compassionate, supportive and thoughtful manner and avoid an intrusive and prying manner (Parkers et al., 1997). According to Emad Mohammad (2013), typically, the mourner and recipients of condolences thank any kind of condolences and they will be satisfied by just a sincere expression of sympathy.

Third, the researchers can use the findings of this study as a resource for cross-cultural comparison of condolences. Moreover, it is used in an investigation of the discourse features of the language. The existing corpora relating condolences as a genre reveals a gap in the literature about condolences in the corpus of American English. Therefore, this study investigated sympathy and condolence used by American English speakers. As a result of this gap in the literature, this study is a beneficial model for the next studies on the condolences on topics such as the influence of gender and age factors, comparing oral and written native corpus, comparing native corpus with current textbooks, etc.

Besides, material developers are another group who can use the corpus of condolence in this study. Learners interact most of their time with their books. Textbooks are also a road map for most teachers and learners. Material developers can use the findings of this study to

classify different situations of social power status (i.e., high-low, low-high, and equal) and social context (i.e., intimate, socio-cultural, professional, pedagogical or transactional) in which condolence and sympathetic words and expressions are used to prepare listening and speaking tasks and exercises.

And finally, test designers and evaluators can take advantage of the results of the current study by focusing on the appropriate pragmatic use of the words and expressions related to condolence in the corpus provided in the present study. In fact, they should consider pragmatic factors such as social power status (i.e., high-low, low-high, and equal) and social context (i.e., intimate, socio-cultural, professional, pedagogical or transactional) in designing exams.

This study has a limitation on finding the collocational patterns of condolence words and expressions in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) as this corpus contains only a limited amount of information on this topic and cannot present the whole data on Sympathy and Condolence collocations. Another limitation of this study is that only three types of contextual features were considered in analyzing the data, while there are different types of features which can be attributed to the collected data. Also, this study was delimited by selecting COCA as the only corpus for finding the needed information, so the limited data in this corpus shed light on the results of this study.

Factors such as the context type, speakers and social power were considered, so future research can be done to find the other linguistic factors for each data collected in this study. Besides the other contextual features which can be investigated in future studies on these data, further study can be done to investigate the different concepts and functions of the word “Sorry” in the different contexts which will be a large corpus-based study, as this word occurred with a high frequent occurrence in the corpus. Other interested researchers in these fields can conduct studies to find the most frequent collocational patterns of “Sympathy and Condolence” expressions in the written English corpora and compare these results with the results of this study that was done in the spoken English context. Further researchers may set another study to explore the misuse of the expressions “Sympathy”, “Grief”, and “Condolence” in the oral discourse of Iranian EFL learners and other non-native speakers, investigate the root of these errors, and suggest solutions to solve these problems. Gender factor can be another important factor to be probed to compare the expressions and structures

of the speech act of sympathy between the utterances transmitted between female-female, male-male, female-male, and male-female interlocutors COCA as well as non-native speakers' corpora, and then compare the results.

References

- Adolphs, S. (2008). *Corpus and context: Investigating pragmatic functions in spoken discourse*. John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to do things with words*. Oxford University Press.
- Behnam, B., Hamed, A. A. L., & Asli, F. G. (2013). An investigation of giving condolences in English and Persian via short messages. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 70, 1679-1685. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.01.240>
- Bagheri Nevisi, R., & Miri, F. (2023). A corpus-based investigation of "would you like" and "would you mind" request expressions' collocational patterns in American Spoken English Discourse. *Language Related Research*, 14(1), 167-191.
- Bernan, M. (2008). Condolence books: Language and meaning in the mourning for Hillsborough and Diana. *Death Studies*, 32(2), 326-351. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481180801974729>
- Blum-Kulka, S. (1982). Learning how to say what you mean in a second language: A study of speech act performance of learners of Hebrew as a second language. *Applied Linguistics*, 3(1), 29-59. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/III.1.29>
- Blum-Kulka, S., & Olshtain, E. (1986). Too many words: Length of utterances and pragmatic failure. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 8(2), 165-179. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ356847>
- Blum-Kulka, S. & House, J. (1989). Cross-cultural and situational variation in requestive behavior in five languages. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics: Requests and Apologies*. (pp. 123-154). Ablex.
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1978). Universals in language usage: Politeness phenomena. In Goody, E. N. (ed.), *Questions and politeness: Strategies in social interaction*. (pp. 56-311). Cambridge University Press. <http://hdl.handle.net/11858/00-001M-0000-0013-2BAD-6>
- Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics*. Blackwell Publishing Ltd.
- Curl, T. S., & Drew, P. (2008). Contingency and action: A comparison of two forms of requesting. *Research on Language and Social Interaction*, 41(2), 129-153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08351810802028613>

Research in English Language Pedagogy (2023)11(4): 611-637

- Elwood, K. (2004). "I'm so sorry": A cross-cultural analysis of expressions of condolence. *The Cultural Review, Waseda Commerical Studies Association (Bulletin of Universities and Institutes)*, 24, 101-126. <http://dspace.wul.waseda.ac.jp>.
- Emad Muhammed, S. (2013). Condolences in English. *Journal of Kerbala University*, 11(4). <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/pdf/a8532fffea414ce8>
- Eslamirasekh, Z. (1993). A cross-cultural comparison of the requestives speech act realization patterns in Persian and American English. In L. Bouton & Y. Kachru (Eds.), *Pragmatics and language learning* (pp. 85-103). Division of English as an international language. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED396552>
- Evert, S. (2007). Corpora and collocations (extended manuscript). In A. Ludeling and M. Kytö (Eds.), *Corpus Linguistics. An International Handbook*. (pp. 1212-1248). Mouton de Gruyter.
- Faerch, C., & Kasper, G. (1989). Internal and external modification in interlanguage request realization. In S. Blum-Kulka, J. House, & G. Kasper (Eds.), *Cross-cultural pragmatics* (pp. 221-247). Ablex.
- Farnia, M., & Suleiman, R. R. R. (2009). An interlanguage pragmatic study of expressions of gratitude by Iranian EFL learners: A pilot study. *Malaysian Journal of ELT Research*, 5(1), 108-140. <http://www.melta.org.my/>
- Fenton-Smith, B. (2007). Diplomatic condolences: Ideological positioning in the death of Yasser Arafat. *Discourse & Society*, 18(6), 697-718. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926507082192>
- Holmes, J. (1992). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Longman.
- House, J., & Kasper, G. (1987). Interlanguage pragmatics: Requesting in foreign language. In W. Loersch & R. Schulze (Eds.), *Perspectives on language in performance: Festschrift for Werner Huellen* (pp. 1250-1288).
- Kasper, G. (1989). Variation in interlanguage speech act realization. In S. Gass, C. Madden, D. Preston, & L. Selinker (Eds.), *Variation in second language acquisition: Discourse and pragmatics* (pp. 37-58). Multilingual Matters.
- Kuang, C. (2015). Functions of Malaysian condolences written in text messages. *Pertanika Journal Social Sciences & Humanities*, 23(2), 479-493.
- Moghaddam, M. (2012). Discourse structures of condolence speech act. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Learning*, 4(10), 105-125. https://journals.tabrizu.ac.ir/article_609_aa66a136212714975ddd0e14df67171e.pdf
- Muihaki, A. (2004). Meaning as use: A functional view of semantics and pragmatics. http://www.qucosa.de/fileadmin/data/qucosa/documents/9102/11_10_Mwihaki.pdf.
- Olshtain, E., & Weinbach, L. (1987). Complaints: A study of speech act behavior among native and non-native speakers of Hebrew. In J. Verschueren & M. Bertucelli-Papi (Eds.), *The pragmatic perspective* (pp. 195-208). Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/pbcs.5.15ols>

Research in English Language Pedagogy (2023)11(4): 611-637

- Parkers, C. M., Laungani, P., & Young, B. (1997). *Death and bereavement across cultures*. Routledge.
- Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2010). *Longman dictionary of language teaching & applied linguistics*. Pearson.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315833835>
- Samavarchi, L., & Allami, H. (2012). Giving condolences by Persian learners: A contrastive sociopragmatic study. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 2(1), 71-78. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v2n1p71>
- Searle, J. R. (1969). *Speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.
- Searle, J. R. (1979). *Expression and meaning: Studies in the theory of speech acts*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511609213>
- Searle, J. R., & Vanderveken, D. (1985). *Foundations of illocutionary logic*. Cambridge University Press.
<https://philpapers.org/rec/SEAFOI-2>
- Yahya, E. M. (2010). A study of condolences in Iraqi Arabic with reference to English. *Adab Al-Rafidayn*, 40(57), 47-70.
- Yule, G. (1996). *Pragmatics*. Oxford University Press.
- Zunin, L. M., & Zunin, H. S. (2007). *The art of condolence*. Harper Collins Publishers.