The social semiotics of funerary rites in Iran[1]

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Speech acts find occasion in two different contexts: (a) interpersonal, and (b) social. While the aim of speech acts produced in the former context is to create a communicative effect, the speech acts produced in the latter context aim at creating a social effect. Drawing on social semiotics and language philosophy, this paper tackles the social process of meaning making by addressing funerary rites and rituals in the Shiite population of Iran, and by classifying the speech acts produced in such rites into three classes of speech: (a) language addressed to Allah, (b) language addressed to the deceased, and (c) language addressed to the grieved relatives of the deceased. Samples of speech from each of these situations are provided and analyzed within the framework of conventional speech acts and pragmemes. It is concluded that funerary rites function on two planes: (a) the psychological plane that aims at providing solace for the grieved relatives of the deceased, and (b) the social plane that aims at enhancing collective social intentionality; funerary speech aims at soothing the grieved and consolidating social aspects of humanity.

1. Introduction

A university professor who has married a naïve lady at a very young age invites colleagues home for dinner. They have roast beef as the main course, and some colleagues do not eat that much. In an attempt to interest them to eat more, the wife says:

Farsi: *To ro khodaa bekhorin; ?aga bemune majbur mishim bedim sagemun[2].*
Lit: *You for God   eat;   if   remains must   we   give dog our.*
Trans: For God's sake please eat more; if it is left over, we have to give it to our dog.

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[1] The idea of this paper came from my dear friend, Professor Alessandro Capone, to whom I dedicate this work.

[2] Please see the Guide to Persian transcription symbols in Appendix A.

This is a genuine example. One of my professors recalled this from memory and narrated it for me when I was a bachelor student in the late 1980s. This and many other similar examples lend support to the claim that although individuals may have a good command of the linguistic aspects of their language, they may fail to comply with the "conditions on language use derived from the social situation" (Crystal, 1992, p. 271); this is known as sociopragmatics or societal pragmatics.

This paper addresses the sociopragmatics of funerary rites in Iran. Beginning with a brief description of context, the paper gradually moves to a description of speech acts, and then draws on a short account of pragmemes. It then addresses funerary rites in Iran, and claims that the types of speech observed in, and appropriate for, mourning rituals possess qualities that make them fit into the frame of pragmemes, and have a social rather than linguistic function.

2. Early steps towards meaning

The advent of Chomsky's Transformational Generative Grammar (TGG) in the 1950s with its emphasis on the independence of language from social effects (Chomsky, 1957) resulted in the emergence and evolution of an opposition group composed of anthropolinguists and sociolinguists who emphasized the role of such factors as (a) the context of language, (b) the ethnography of communication, and (c) the description of language functions in the correct understanding and interpretation of utterances (Salmani Nodoushan, 1995). For one thing, Firth (1957) shifted towards the incorporation of social factors in language analysis by introducing the concept of contextuality and considered it doubtful whether there is any meaning in language apart from its context. Along the same lines, Prague linguists shifted toward the adoption, according to Dittmar (1976), of a similar stance in the investigation of language. This gave birth to a field of linguistics which later came to be known as sociolinguistics, which is in fact the offspring of the process of transition from structuralism to contextualism (Salmani Nodoushan, 1995).

3. What is context?

Sociolinguistic theory stood in sharp contrast to linguistic theory in that it emphasized the appropriateness of verbal message in context. This theory, according to Gumperz (1982) and Hymes (1974), posited a level of rule-governed verbal behavior—beyond the level of grammar—that related linguistic and social constraints, and led to Hymes's conception of communicative competence which held that communication is a two-step process in which the speaker (a) evaluates the social context of the speech and (b) selects from among the communicative options available for encoding their intent (Hymes, 1974). It postulates linguistic diversity and claims that a

repertoire of linguistic codes exists that can express the same concept. The competent speaker's job is to choose the most appropriate linguistic form, from among the forms available in his/her linguistic repertoire, for a given communicative purpose. In doing so, the competent speaker draws on his/her knowledge of the sociolinguistic context for linguistic utterances, a knowledge of the elements of speech situations signified by the famous acronym SPEAKING (Wolfson, 1989).

In this acronym, S stands for Setting (i.e., the time, place, physical circumstances, and psychological setting or scene), P refers to Participants (i.e., speaker, addressor, hearer, and addressee), E stands for the ends (i.e., purpose, outcomes, and goals), A refers to act sequences (i.e., message content and message form), K refers to keys (i.e., manner/spirit in which something is said), I signifies instrumentalities (i.e., channels and forms), (7) N has to do with norms (i.e., norms of interaction and interpretation), and G refers to genres (i.e., categories of communication) (Wolfson, 1989). Along the same lines, Dittmar (1976) argued that linguistic codes were not the only components of communicative competence, and that it also included a wealth of psychological, social, and pragmatic strategies. It arms competent speakers with what they need "to know to be able to communicate effectively in culturally significant settings" (Rivers, 1981, p. 84).

The emphasis on the role of context and the psychological, social, and pragmatic strategies that affect language use led to the emergence of pragmatics. Compared with other branches of linguistics, pragmatics is much younger. It nevertheless has been a significant area of linguistics since the 1970s. Pragmatics has roughly been defined as:

> the study of language from the point of view of users, especially of the choices they make, the constraints they encounter in using language in social interaction and the effects their use of language has on other participants in the act of communication." (Crystal, 1985, p. 240)

In general, it may be defined as the study of "the use of language in human communication as determined by the conditions of society" (Mey, 2002, p. 6). Such a general definition, due to its emphasis on the social and communicative aspects of language use, intersects with the concept of social semiotics. Kress identified two tendencies to be discerned in social studies of language:

> One is an increasing move away from abstraction and towards a concern with close, fine-grained analysis of what is going on; the second, connected to that, is an increasing tendency to re-integrate the

> linguistic with the social, a move away from the notion of the autonomous linguistic system.'' (Kress, 2001, p. 67, cited in Neuman, Nadav & Bessor, 2006, p. 1370)

Used in a general sense, 'pragmatics' and ''social semiotics' aim at studying language use, not only as an interaction-based activity, but also as an intersubjective context-dependent activity which mediates the human mind (Neuman, Nadav & Bessor, 2006).

Historically, pragmatics was born out of the abstractions of philosophy rather than of the descriptive needs of linguistics. Therefore, its focus has been on an area between semantics, sociolinguistics, and extralinguistic context; moreover, the boundaries between pragmatics and other areas were not determined precisely at the time of its advent (Leech, 1983; Wierzbicka, 2003).

To introduce order and precision to pragmatics and resolve some of its oddities, several derivative terms have been proposed for the classification of the wide range of subject matters involved in pragmatics. For one thing, Leech drew on the term 'pragmalinguistics' to refer to the study of "the more linguistic end of pragmatics—where we consider the particular resources which a given language provides for conveying particular illocutions (namely, the speech act performed by an utterance)" (1983, p. 11). He also used the term 'sociopragmatics' to refer to the "sociological interface of pragmatics" (1983, p. 10). Sociopragmatics is the study of the way in which conditions on language use derive from the social situation.

Closely connected to sociopragmatics is the concept of pragmatic failure where a speaker produces wrong communicative effects through the faulty use of speech acts or any of the rules of speaking (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992). It had earlier been called 'sociolinguistic miscommunication' by Thomas (1983). According to Thomas, pragmatic failure refers to the inability of the individual to understand what is meant by what is said. Thomas argued that there are two kinds of pragmatic failure: (a) pragmalinguistic failure, and (b) sociopragmatic failure (Thomas, 1983). The former has to do with the linguistic side of the utterance where the speaker fails to create the intended pragmatic effect (e.g., mistaking a request for an information question). The latter, on the other hand, has to do with knowing what to say and whom to say it to; It has to do with social and contextual appropriateness. It has to do with intentionality and links utterances to speakers' intentions; it gives prominence to the concept of speech acts.

4. Speech acts

The tem 'speech act' refers to a communicative activity defined with

reference to the intentions of a speaker while speaking, and the effects achieved on a listener (Crystal, 1992). Speech acts find meaning in the light of interpersonal context. They build on the idea that forms of language generally serve specific communicative functions. An example is in order here:

> Farhad, a university professor, is invited to join a party where some of his friends are invited too. He joins the party along with his wife, Tayebeh. Upon arriving at the party venue, friends greet him asking:

> > A FRIEND: *Welcome. How are you? Are you having a good time in life?*
> > FARHAD: *Oh thanks. I feel good. Actually, I feel as if I am in Heaven even when I am in Hell provided that Tayebeh is with me.*

> Upon hearing this response, some of the other ladies present at the party turn to their husbands and say:

> > WOMEN: *Learn from Farhad; look how he is complimenting and praising his wife.*

> At this time, Tayebeh gets furious and complains:

> > TAYEBEH: *You don't know this man; he did not praise me. He insulted me; he means I am much worse than Hell, so much so that when he goes to Hell with me, Hell is like Heaven for him when it is compared to me.*

This example clearly shows how an utterance receives different readings and interpretations based on interpersonal context. While Farhad's utterance looks like a compliment to the women present at the party, it is taken as an insult by Tayebeh. The utterance achieves different effects on different listeners. The example also implies that speech acts can be quite ambiguous in their communicative function. Speech acts are a series of elements with a specific purpose and intent; they combine to create what has traditionally been called communication. They are purposive and functional in that they are designed to have some effect on the environment, on hearers, and on speakers. They make communication possible.

According to Crystal (1992) communication is the transmission and reception of information between a signaler and a receiver. In other words, it is the exchange of ideas, information, etc. between two or more persons. Austin (1962) sees communication as a series of communicative acts or speech acts which are used systematically to accomplish particular communicative purposes. 'Performative utterance' was the term that Austin used to refer to what came to be known as 'speech act' at a later time. As Austin argues, the nature of such utterances is in fact 'performative' rather than 'constative' because their meanings are to be identified with the performance of an action.

They have their own well-recognized syntactic characteristics, and yet they all have a share of the nature of actions in that the same utterance could at the same time constitute three kinds of acts:

a.   a locutionary act (or locution): The semantics of an utterance (i.e., its sense-reference relations or linguistic meaning);
b.   an illocutionary act (or illocution): The act performed in, or by virtue of, the performance of the illocution (i.e., its pragmatic meaning); and
c.   a perlocutionary act (or perlocution): The act performed by means of what is said (i.e., the effect achieved or pragmatic effect).

Austin (1962) gave more weight to the second of these acts. He argued that the locution belongs to the traditional territory of truth-based semantics while the perlocution belongs strictly beyond the investigation of language and meaning since it deals with the results or effects of an utterance. The illocution, however, has performative value due to the fact that it employs performative verbs.

Austin's ideas were developed by Searle (1969) who brought greater systematicity to them. Searle argued that meaning is a kind of doing, and that the study of language is just a sub-part of the theory of action. He crystallized the concepts of illocutionary act and illocutionary force to the extent where one can reasonably speak of Searle's speech act theory as the classical account which functions as a point of departure for subsequent works on speech acts (Searle, 1969). Based on the arguments made by Austin (1962) and Searle (1969), speech act theory is in practice a reference to illocutionary acts.

Searle also identifies four conditions or rules for the effective performance of a given speech act.

a.   Propositional Content Rules: specify the kind of meaning expressed by the propositional part of an utterance (i.e., sense-reference meaning);
b.   Preparatory Rules: delineate the conditions which are pre-requisite to the performance of the speech act;
c.   Sincerity Rules: outline the conditions which must obtain if the speech act is to be performed sincerely;
d.   Essential Rules: specify what the speech act must conventionally count as.

He draws on these rules to distinguish different speech acts. In other words, the rules establish a system for the classification of speech acts; Searle (1979) uses them to propose five classes of speech acts:

1. Assertives: commit S(peaker) to the truth of some proposition;
2. Directives: count as attempts to bring about some effect through the action of H(earer);
3. Expressives: count as the expression of some psychological state;
4. Commissives: commit S to some future action;
5. Declaratives: are speech acts whose "successful" performance brings about the correspondence between the propositional content and reality.

Closely related to the concept of speech acts is the distinction among 'speech situation', 'speech event', and 'speech acts'. Perhaps the best distinction has been proposed by Hymes (1972) who argues that although one may find many situations associated with speech within a community (e.g., meals, parties, etc.), these situations are not in and of themselves governed by consistent rules. Moreover, a simple relabeling of them in terms of speech will not do much. Hymes (1972) suggests that the term 'speech event' be strictly used to refer to activities that are directly governed by rules or norms for the use of speech (e.g., private conversations, class lectures, etc.). A speech event is a "culturally recognized social activity in which language plays a specific, and often rather specialized, role" (Levinson, 1983, p. 279). Seen in this light, a speech act is a functional unit in communication. It is the minimal unit of analysis conditioned by rules of conduct and interpretation (Hymes, 1972).

This idea was further developed by Mey (2001) who formulated and expressed what he called 'pragmemes'. In his 2005 paper, Capone focused on the "societal dimension of utterance interpretation" (Capone, 2005, p. 1356) by relating his discussion to Mey's formulation of pragmemes. He accepted Mey's idea that, to be effective, speech acts need to be situated. Speech acts are seen by Mey (2001) to "both rely on, and actively create, the situation in which they are realized" (cited in Capone, 2005, p. 1356). I will return to the concept of pragmemes in section 5 below.

A critical misconception that may stem from Searle's conception of speech acts is that any given conversation may be taken to consist of one and only one single speech act. This is short-sightedness because most conversations are multifunctional. In my view, Labov and Fanshel (1977, p. 29) rightly argue that "most utterances can be seen as performing several speech acts simultaneously." Conversation is not a chain of utterances, but rather a matrix of utterances and actions "bound together by a web of understanding and reactions" (Labov & Fanshel, 1977, p. 29).

Although the speech act theory gained a lot of popularity among societal linguists and became influential in a number of fields, it has not been without its critics. For one thing, Flowerdew (1990, pp. 81-103) listed the most important flaws and drawbacks of this theory which pertain to the following

domains:

1) the exact number of speech acts;
2) discrete categories versus scale of meaning;
3) indirect speech acts and the concept of literal force;
4) contrast between specific and diffuse acts;
5) size of speech act realization forms;
6) relation between locution, illocution, and interaction; and
7) relation between the whole and the parts in discourse.

In close connection to the speech act theory is the concept of felicity conditions or the criteria which must be satisfied if a speech act is to achieve its purpose (Austin, 1963). That is, for a speech act to be appropriately performed or realized, certain social conventions or felicity conditions must be satisfied. The speakers and the listeners should heed these conditions to guarantee the achievement of the purposes for which any given speech act is performed (Austin, 1963). In fact Austin developed a unique typology of conditions that speech acts must meet if they are to succeed (Levinson, 1983); Austin identified three main classes of felicity conditions:

A. (i) There must be a conventional procedure having a conventional effect
    (ii) The circumstances and persons must be appropriate, as specified in the procedure
B. The procedure must be executed (i) correctly and (ii) completely
C. Often, (i) the persons must have the requisite thoughts, feelings and conditions, as specified in the procedures, and (ii) if consequent conduct is specified, then the relevant parties must do so.

<div align="right">(Cited in Levinson, 1983, p. 229)</div>

Searle (1981) suggested three main types of felicity conditions:

a) Preparatory conditions relate to whether the person performing a speech act has the authority to do so;
b) Sincerity conditions relate to the degree of sincerity with which a speech act is performed; and
c) Essential conditions relate to the way the speaker, having performed a speech act, is committed to a certain kind of belief or behavior.

Nevertheless, speakers of a language may sometimes fail to commit the felicity conditions of a speech act for one purpose or another. According to Lyons (1977, p. 157), the utterance "Will you drive?" is inappropriate as a request if the speaker knows that the hearer has not learnt to drive, and the mutual recognition of such inappropriateness would, in turn, lead to an interpretation of a different order (e.g., joking, sarcasm, etc.). Austin (1962) refers to such utterances as infelicitous.

Descriptions of felicity conditions have a lot to do with the social roles of speech acts. Since their conception, they have paved the way for the emergence of the concept of pragmemes (Mey, 2001). In this connection, Capone (2005), in his discussion of pragmemes, tacitly drew on the concepts of speech events, felicity conditions, and social context.

5. Pragmemes

As stated earlier, context is either interpersonal or social. A speech act was traditionally defined in terms of interpersonal context. If the focus of attention is shifted from interpersonal context to social context, does the term speech act remain valid? In fact, it is in connection to this latter sense of context that the concept of 'pragmeme' finds occasion to emerge. Drawing on the ideas of Mey (2001), Capone defines a pragmeme as:

> . . . a situated speech act in which the rules of language and of society combine in determining meaning, intended as a socially recognized object sensitive to social expectations about the situation in which the utterance to be interpreted is embedded (Capone, 2005, p. 1355).

In my view, this definition is a valuable addition to the repertoire of terms and definitions in pragmatics. It seems that the term 'pragmeme' has in essence been coined through a process of analogy to belong in linguistics along with the terms 'morpheme', 'phoneme', and so forth. If morpheme can be defined as the minimal unit of meaning, and phoneme as the minimal unit of sound or syntax, then I would define 'pragmeme' as the minimal unit of 'intention'. My definition is somewhat different from that of Capone (2005) in that it includes both the interpersonal and social contexts. Capone's definition, on the other hand, pertains only to social context. As such, my definition is an extension of Capone's definition; In other words, I take 'pragmeme' to be 'the minimal unit of intention' in general while Capone (2005) takes it to be 'the minimal unit of *social* intention'.

Anyway, if speech acts are doomed to be situated, it seems logical to assume that the analysis of speech acts should also be situated. The role of context in the realization and analysis of speech acts is so important that Verschueren (1999) argues that "allowing context into linguistic analysis is . . . a prerequisite for precision" (cited in Capone, 2005, p. 1356). As it was stated earlier, context is both social and interpersonal. It is social in the sense that context encompasses the internal organization of a society, its intentions, internal differences, sub-groupings, and so on. Interpersonal context, on the other hand, does not emphasize the linguistic structure of the society. Its focus is rather on the interpersonal relations of the individuals involved in any interaction. Such a context usually includes statements rooted in psychology, such as intentions, beliefs, and rationality. As such, the concept of

pragmeme, as defined by Capone (2005), finds meaning in the former sense of context—the social context. A pragmeme cannot be interpreted on the basis of the linguistic elements that are found in it; rather, the true interpretation of a pragmeme comes from the social situation in which it is embedded. This has been stated by Mey (cited in Capone, 2005, p. 1358):

> The theory of pragmatic acts does not try to explain language use from the inside out, from words having their origin in a sovereign speaker and going out to an equally sovereign hearer (. . .). Rather, its explanatory movement is from the outside in: the focus is on the environment in which both speaker and hearer find their affordances, such that the entire situation is brought to bear on what can be said on the situation, as well as on what is actually being said. (Mey, 2001, p. 219)

Seen in the light of pragmemes, speech acts acquire their interpretation in relation to the social event one is engaged in (Capone, 2010). This implies that meaning is not inherent in utterances; rather, it is injected into them from outside. As Capone (2005) argues, the meaning of a pragmeme draws on (a) semantic rules of language, (b) pragmatic procedures for determining articulated explicatures, and (c) social conventions for linking utterances and contexts of use; therefore, pragmemes are in essence "speech acts in context" (Capone, 2005, p. 1370)—I don't understand if it is ever possible to have 'speech acts out of context'.

According to Capone (2010), pragmemes are part and parcel of societal pragmatics which views conversation as language games that are situated in social contexts which provide rules for the construction and interpretation of meaning. Although speech has a multitude of referential properties, it is the social function of language that must be emphasized if one is determined to fully understand and appreciate pragmemes—an idea that has a clear connection to Malinowski's conception of phatic talk. Drawing on Malinowski's (1923) arguments as well as Wierzbicka's (2006) ideas, Capone (2010) suggests that the principal aim of words in a pragmeme is to fulfill a social function rather than to represent meaning.

A very good example of a speech event where the social function of language gains prominence over any other aspect is the funerary pragmeme. In this connection, Capone argues that:

> Death is a good issue to deal with, in the framework of pragmemes and societal linguistics, because it provides an area of study in which the resources of society and human languages intersect giving way to linguistic actions comprehensible only from an anthropological perspective (2010, p. 4).

In the rest of this paper, I will borrow some of the ideas developed by Capone (2010) to describe funerary rites in Iran. I will use Capone's (2010) paper as a model to describe the social practices and speech that inform funerary rituals in Iran as practiced by the Shiite sect.

6. The funerary pragmeme in Iran

Funerary rituals provide a unique social situation where speech is framed within a very strict and almost frozen form of social context. The formality and frozenness of this context in Iran is so much that it is virtually impossible to place the type of speech acts associated with this context in any of the classes proposed by Searle (1979). Nor can any other competing classifications of speech acts fully accommodate Iranian funerary speech events (For different classifications of speech acts, please see Alston, 2000; Bach and Harnish, 1979; Croft, 1994; Fraser, 1974; Hancher, 1979; McCawley, 1977; Sadock, 1974; Sadock, 1994; Sbisà, 1984; Searle, 1975; Vendler, 1972; Zaefferer, 2001). The reason perhaps lies in the fact that most classifications of speech acts derive their classificatory principles from linguistic boundaries and grammatical lines (e.g., sentence, clause, . . .). Needless to say, attempts have been made to classify speech acts according to certain other non-linguistic theoretical classificatory principles. For one thing, Kissine (in press) suggested three classificatory principles that "have the most important theoretical implications for the study of speech acts *qua* actions: a) speech acts as conventional actions; b) speech acts as expressions of mental states; c) speech acts as linguistic actions" (Kissine, in press, pp. 1-2).

Being conventional in nature, funerary rituals and speech in Iran can be best understood from the perspectives proposed by Austin (1975) and Strawson (1964). Austin (1975) distinguished speech acts or illocutionary acts from other speech action types on the basis of their strictly conventional nature. Strawson (1964), too, used the conventional versus nonconventional (or institutional versus noninstitutional) dichotomy to distinguish between different types of speech acts. It should be noted that noninstitutional illocutionary acts are informed by communicative intentions of the Gricean (1957) type while institutional speech acts derive their spirit from certain nonlinguistic conventions. To be fulfilled, institutional speech acts (a) require a system of rules and conventions that, if correctly performed, will lead to (b) the satisfaction of the speech act (Strawson, 1964). Thus, when a priest utters "I hereby marry you man and wife," the people who were not a couple are transformed into a couple whereby the institutional speech act of 'marrying people' is satisfied.

Following Austin (1975) and Strawson (1964), Bach and Harnish (1979) drew on nonlinguistic conventions to define institutional or conventional speech acts. They argued that a speech act X is conventional if, and only if,

both the (S)peaker and the (H)earer mutually believe that that speech act counts as X in a certain conventional context, and it does so because they both mutually believe that in that kind of context, any utterance of that kind counts as X. As such,

> conventional illocutionary acts succeed if, and only if, they count as such; and they count as such, if, and only if, the words are uttered, in what is mutually believed to be the right place, by a speaker who is mutually believed to be the right person. (Kissine, in press, p. 3).

Bach and Harnish (1979) suggest two general kinds of conventional or institutional speech acts: (a) verdictives, and (b) effectives. In the case of verdictives, a natural fact already exists, and the speech act only maps an institutional status onto that natural fact. As such, verdictives are in a way *a posteriori* in that they are attempts at framing already existing natural facts within the frame of socially established institutions. As Austin (1975) noted, the *a posteriori* nature of verdictives is quite sensitive because they can be true/false or fair/unfair. When Ruhollah Khomeini sentenced Salman Rushdie to death for authoring the *Satanic Verses*, the world reacted to this verdict as a false unfair speech act but only a minority of Muslim fundamentalists believed that Rushdie was guilty and that Khomeini was the right person to perform this verdictive speech act. By way of contrast, effectives are *a priori* in that there is no institutional fact until felicitous effectives are performed and whereby new institutional facts are created (e.g., when someone resigns from his job).

The concept of pragmeme as defined by Capone (2010) is closely related to the concept of conventional speech acts and encompasses both effectives and verdictives. For Capone, a pragmeme

> . . . is a speech act—an utterance associated with a goal. Its intention is to bring about such-and-such effect, to modify a situation and change the roles of participants within that situation or keep the roles the same while bringing about other types of effects (Capone, 2010, p. 5).

Funerary rites and speech in Shiite Iran provide a good example of pragmemes where speech is closely tied to religious and social conventions and institutions. Before I provide examples of speech from funerary rituals, a description of the funerary context is in order. The description that I will present here is based on the information I gathered through Internet search, my own recordings, and interviews.

It is claimed by a majority of Shiite clerics (known as *mullahs*) that Islam decrees that deceased people are not really dead, and that they are worthy of the same respect they had when they were alive. As such, they have certain rights that must be observed by each and every member of the Shiite

population, and the religious rituals of funeral have been suggested to fulfill these rights. When a Shiite individual dies, his/her body should be buried as soon as possible. Family members, friends, relatives, neighbors, and other people arrive, and four people pick up the coffin which contains the body of the deceased and carry it on their shoulders towards the cemetery where it is to be buried; other people present in the procession follow the coffin and repeat religious phrases that are keyed to them by a mullah who recites them with a loud voice. Along its way to the cemetery, the coffin is carried over the shoulders of people who walk at a very slow pace, and who frequently put it down and picked it up again; the social semeiotics of this procession argues that this must be done to reduce the deceased individual's fear of the grave, as if the deceased is still alive. Upon arriving at the cemetery, the body is taken to the washing room where it is bathed by a washer of the same gender as the deceased, and is enshrouded in a white cotton or linen cloth (known as *kafan*); three pieces of cloth are used for dead males, and five pieces for females.

Then it is taken to a place (often near the grave) where people can stand in rows for the funeral prayer; the body is placed on the ground in front of the mullah with people standing in rows at his back; the mullah says the funeral prayer with a loud voice, and the people repeat what he says. This is a collective prayer where language is used for the forgiveness of the dead and of humanity. Collective social intentionality has an important role to play here, and the job of the funeral prayer is to create an institutional fact of the kind described by Searle (1995). Semiotically speaking, there is a subconscious and tacit collective agreement that saying the funeral prayer means forgiveness of the deceased and of the human race. This can be explained in terms of logical formulas of the "X counts as Y in C" or "In C, X counts as Y" type; by its social-semiotic nature, saying the funeral prayer counts as forgiveness of the dead and of mankind in funerary rites. The prayer, said only in correct Arabic, consists of four Takbirs (i.e., paratones followed by the Arabic phrase *Allahu Akbar* (meaning 'Allah is great'). Note that I am using the term 'paratone' as defines by Brown and Yule (1983). Unlike regular Muslim daily prayers, there is no bowing or prostrating in funeral prayers. In this prayer, supplication (or intercession) is recited for mankind in general, and the deceased in particular. The funeral prayer aims at petitioning the God for the forgiveness of the deceased and of the whole humanity. The funeral prayer is so institutional in nature that one can easily relate it to the concept of 'biologically conventionalized speech acts' that has been tacitly suggested by Millikan (1984):

> An entity X can be said to have the function F if, and only if, the capacity to perform F is what explains X's evolutionary history. More precisely, X has the function F, if, and only if, X was reproduced from Y, Y has the

properties resulting in F, and Y was selected because of these properties. (Kissine, in press, p. 8)

Expressed in a nutshell, Millikan's argumentation is that all speech acts are conventional, and that classes of speech acts are determined by (a) biological functions, (b) speakers' purposes and intentions, or (c) extralinguistic conventions. Muslims have been saying funeral prayers in funeral events since Muhammad promulgated Islam in year 610. Around 1400 years of unquestioning belief in, and repetition of, funeral prayers has gradually institutionalized funerary rites and rituals, and now it is widely accepted and believed by the Muslim population of the world that the funeral prayer has the function of attracting Allah's merci for the deceased and the human race. This is intertwined with Islamic faith and no one doubts it, nor does anyone dare to question it[3]. In fact, all Muslims have been—to borrow words from Dawkins—'brought up to have total and unquestioning faith' in what has been decreed in the name of religion ever since Muhammad promulgated Islam; there is a kind of popular phobia binding on all faithful Muslims that funeral prayers should be said the way they have been decreed by mullahs.

Saying the funeral prayer has its own historically established prescribed procedures. The body is then positioned in the grave, so that its head is faced towards Mecca, and then three handfuls of soil are poured into the grave and at the same time the Quranic verse "We created you from it, and return you into it, and from it We will raise you a second time" [Quran, 20:55] is recited (*c.f.*, Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return" [Genesis 3:19]). The graved is then filled with soil; at the same time, more prayers are said whereby people petition the God for the forgiveness of the deceased; the prayers also remind the deceased of his profession of faith. When the graved is completely filled and leveled with the ground, collective funeral prayer is said for a last time.

The burial is then followed by mourning sessions which are held in a mosque. There is usually a 3-day mourning period held in a mosque; the sessions are held both in the morning and in the evening, and may be repeated in the 7th, 30th, and 40th days as well as anniversaries. Dressed in black, the close relatives of the deceased stand in two rows facing each other in the portal of the mosque where mourning sessions are held, and people who attend mourning sessions arrive at the mosque, greet them, and enter the mosque to sit in the sessions where Quranic verses are recited. In each session, mullahs may talk about religious topics that pertain to death and the world after, and

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[3] Questioning any aspect of Islam in Shiite belief results in an automatic recognition of the questioner as an apostate and turns up in an automatic death sentence decreed by clerics and performed by their indoctrinated followers.

may also tell the people attending the session about good qualities of the deceased. When this is done, it does not have the function of praise; rather, it aims at motivating others to live as the deceased did. It has a socio-semiotic function.

The people who attend the sessions do not have to be present throughout the sessions and may leave the sessions after some minutes of attending it (usually after drinking a cup of tea and eating a few dates). When they leave the mosque, they are socially expected to start a short conversation with the relatives of the deceased; the range of utterances that can go into these conversations is very limited, and only phrases are uttered that serve as condolences and aim at strengthening social ties (or even appeasement if the visitor has not been on talking terms with the deceased). Although expression of grief is allowed and weeping for the deceased is quite acceptable, bewailing is not permitted. Praise of the deceased is allowed only if the topic of the praise focuses on the religious virtues and piety of the deceased. Three specific kinds of speech are, however, prohibited in mourning sessions: (a) speech that aims at hurting the grieved relatives of the deceased, (b) speech that may make Muslims lose their faith, and (c) speech that focuses on mundane, earthly and material topics.

Based on the description of funerary rituals presented above, it can be concluded that language used in funerary rites in Shiite Iran falls into three main classes: (a) language addressed to Allah, (b) language addressed to the deceased, and (c) language addressed to the grieved relatives of the deceased. The language that is addressed to Allah has an entreating and petitioning function. It aims at persuading Allah to forgive the sins of the deceased and to bestow the blessing of living in the Paradise on him/her. All the utterances in the language addressed to Allah must be enunciated correctly as if "certain phonemes have particular salience in language, acting as identifying agents" (Leonard, 2012, p. 164).

All the people who attend the collective funeral prayer are the 'right' people who talk to the 'right' addressee (i.e., Allah) in the 'right' place. It can therefore be argued that the first kind of speech in funerary rites (i.e., addressing Allah) is in essence a conventional illocutionary act (see Austin, 1975; Bach and Harnish, 1979; Strawson, 1964). It relies on extralinguistic conventions and is self-verifying. It is defined by nonlinguistic rules, conventions, or institutions—it is semiotically structured; here the speaker aims at producing some conventional effect (Allah's forgiving of the deceased), and presents his/her utterance as conforming to the conditions that are necessary for the intention to succeed, and that are determined by extralinguistic conventions (Alston, 2000). It has a 'world-to-word direction of fit' (Searle, 1992). That is, the prayer causes the extralinguistic world to

change in such a way as to fit the linguistic and propositional content of the prayer; hence, the entreating and petitioning function of the prayer.

The language addressed to the deceased has a 'cheating' function. It is widely believed that, when faced with death, the deceased people's souls are petrified and shocked so much so that they clean forget the details of the religious faith they have been practicing on earth. They, for example, forget what the name of the prophet was, and what the names of the Imams were; they forget that Allah was the only true God, and that Allah had equipped Muhammad with the Quran and sent him to guide people to the right path. It is also believed that the deceased need to remember these pieces of information because they will be interviewed by two angels (named *Nakir* and *Monkar*) who will evaluate their faith by asking for the answers to these and other similar questions. As such, when the body of the deceased is buried in the grave, the mullah talks to him/her and tells him/her who the prophet was, who the Imams were, what the Quran was, and the like. This speech, addressed to the deceased, functions as an act of 'cheating' which helps the deceased to remember the pieces of information forgotten as a result of the shock (s)he experienced when the angel *Israel* came to pull his/her soul out of the body and take it away. The deceased needs to remember these pieces of information to pass the test given to him/her by Nakir and Monkar; otherwise, (s)he won't succeed in finding a comfortable place in the purgatory[4] world that, in Shiite belief, stands between this world and the after world. The addressor in this second type of speech is the mullah, and the addressee is the deceased. Both of them are the 'right' people in the speech event, and the Arabic utterances that are spoken by the mullah here are the right formulaic utterances or clichés which serve this very function. As such, this second type of funerary speech is also a conventional illocutionary act (See Austin, 1975; Strawson, 1964; Bach and Harnish, 1979).

The last kind of speech that is produced in funerary rituals in Shiite Iran is the speech that is directed at the grieved relatives of the deceased. It is this last kind of speech that makes mourning rites in Iran a good candidate for what Capone (2010, p. 6) called the "pragmeme of accommodation." It is important to note that the kind of speech that is traded between the grieved relatives of the deceased and the people who attend mourning sessions does not have a communicative function. Rather, it has a socio-psychological force; on the

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[4] In Shiite belief, a Muslim lives in three worlds: the earthly world, the purgatory world, and the after world. When people die, their bodies remain here, but their souls enter the purgatory world. At a specific point in time after all human beings die and the Sun explodes, the bodies are resurrected and souls return to bodies. The human beings stand in front of Allah and are judged. Then they are sent to either the Paradise or the Hell based on their deeds in their earthly lives.

psychological plane, it aims at "giving solace to the close relatives of the deceased and to ensure that they accommodate to the new state of affairs" (Capone, 2010, p. 6). Here is an example that I collected through the interview I conducted with a friend who has lost a relative a couple of months ago:

Mr Taghavi's father died a few months ago. Mr Taghavi was standing in the portal of the mosque in which mourning sessions were held. Placing the palm of his right hand against his chest as a sign of respect, one of the visitors who was leaving the mosque, said:

Visitor:
Tasliat   migam.   Ishaallaah gham e   ?aakheretun baashe.
Condolences say I.   May   grief of last you   be.
Condolences. May this be your last grief.

Mr Taghavi:
 kheili   mamnun. Ishaallaah khodaa ?amvaat e   shomaa raa ham rahmat koneh.
 much   thank.   May   God   dead   of yours   too forgive make.
Thank you very much. May God forgive your deceased relatives too.

It should be noted that the formality of such a situation results in a shift from *tu* to *vous* in the forms of address even when the interlocutors are sufficiently close to address each other using the *tu* form. Persian uses the *tu/vous* or T/V forms of address to distinguish between familiar and polite contexts (Please see Brown & Gilman, 1960 and Wardhaugh, 1990 for a discussion of the T/V systems). Mourning rites are not a kind of personal or family event; rather, they are social events of a religious nature and involve wide use of religious texts and rituals. The people who attend mourning rites are seen to have attended a religious ritual and are therefore expected to behave as if they are in the presence of Allah. Therefore, polite forms of language are normally expected even when the speech being interacted is of an interpersonal nature that aims at soothing the grieved party. The utterances that are allowed in such conversations are coated with religious overtones and very often express wishes for the health and prosperity of the grieved parties and for the peace of the soul of the deceased. Semiotically speaking, these utterances are said to have a healing effect if they are said in prescribed ways.

The grieved party is normally expected to reply to these utterances by making similar wishes for the health and prosperity of the visitors and for the peace of the souls of all the people they have lost. It should be noted that the utterances appropriate for this kind of conversation are for the most part prefabricated clichés that are well known to the Shiite population in Iran. They are frozen statements that cannot, and should not, be changed, or they will bring about undesirable effects that may create acute embarrassment and cause undesirable feelings and psychological damage.

On the social plane, the small conversations (or small talks) that take place between the participants in mourning sessions and the relatives of the deceased person are in a way tools for the promotion of human warmth (Burgess, 1975); as such, they assume a phatic function (Malinowski, 1923) and seek to establish contact between individuals without aiming at the transmission of any specific precise content; in such small talks, the container itself (i.e., the speech) is much more significant than the propositional 'content' of what is said (Casalegno & McWilliam, 2004). These conversations and small talks function as social lubricants that look void of propositional content but are capable of creating new, or maintaining already existing, strong social ties (Boxer, 2002).

Another social aspect of funerary rites in Iran is informed by the fact that Shiite Islam also emphasizes that virtually every Muslim adult male is supposed to perform the funeral prayer upon the death of any other Muslim; because of practical reasons, however, mullahs agree that when the funeral prayer is performed by a sufficient number of people (i.e., 40-plus people), it alleviates that obligation for all. Even the choice of the number 40-plus has a semiotic nature; tradition has given this number the sacred sense it has. The same number holds true for the minimum number of people who are needed for mourning sessions to have their religious and healing effects. It is therefore possible to claim that funerary rites are social events or episodes that require the participation of individuals who are expected, and know how, to behave in certain pre-determined convention-governed ways so that the functions of the social episodes in question are fulfilled. As such, funerary rites in Iran are in line with what Capone called "social collective intentionality" (2010, p. 6).

The nature of the collective social intentionality inherent in funerary rites is best understood when one realizes that the world, as described by physicists, is composed of physical sub-atomic particles in fields of force (i.e., electrons, protons, quarks, electromagnetic force, and so on), and yet abstract or concrete social constructs (e.g., money, democracy, language, etc.) can also exist in this physical world of particles and forces (Searle, 1995); the physical world is composed of objective brute or fundamental facts (e.g., subatomic particles and force fields) whose truth does not depend on other fundamental facts (Anscombe, 1958) while the social world consists of institutional facts whose truth depends on the existence of brute facts (Searle, 1995). As stated earlier, Searle argues that institutional facts emerge from collective intentionality through logical formulas of the "X counts as Y in C" type. Thus, being present (X) counts as providing solace (Y) in a mourning event (C). Members of a social group seem to know this institutional fact, perhaps subconsciously, and they therefore attend funerary rites to provide solace for the grieved relatives of the deceased. For those who were not on speaking

terms with the deceased, presence in rituals (X) counts as appeasement (Y) in funerary rites (C). This is a transformative property that mourning rites posses (Capone, 2010). Likewise, absence from rituals (X) counts as perpetuating enmity (Y) in funerary rites (C). needless to say, death is

> . . . an occasion for appeasement or for perpetuating enmities, because if, on the one hand, one is encouraged to forgive an old friend or relative, if this chance is not promptly taken, the enmity becomes «consolidated», one of those facts of life which it will be extremely hard to change. So, we usually go to mourn old friends, relatives, colleagues, people who live on the other side of the street because we want our actions to conform to social norms and, directly and indirectly, bring our solace to the relatives of the deceased. (Capone, 2010, p. 7)

7. Conclusion

It was argued in this paper that funerals provide a unique social setting where socially appropriate or inappropriate new institutional facts can be created and already-existing institutional facts can be reemphasized. In brief, funerary rights work as pragmemes in that they employ situated speech of which the structure, meaning, and socio-psychological intentions have been determined by a combination of the rules of language and society. Any utterance in a funerary rite is deeply embedded in the social situation of death (Capone, 2005).

The main argument of this paper was that funerary rites and rituals in Iran are a special kind of speech events with a socio-psychological rather than communicative function. It was argued that funerary speech falls into three classes: (a) speech directed at Allah, (b) speech directed at the deceased, and (c) speech interacted between the grieved people and their visitors. I presented an explanation for the claim that funerary rites fit into the frame of pragmemes and argued that funerary speech aims at (1) entreating Allah for the forgiveness of the deceased and human race, (2) helping the deceased to overcome the test that must be passed before entering the purgatory world, and (3) giving solace to the grieved party. It can be concluded that the participants in the funerary speech situation, by "their acceptance of their own and others' utterances, establish and reaffirm the social situation in which the utterances are uttered and in which they find themselves as utterers" (Mey, 2001, cited in Capone, 2005, p. 1356).

I also provided reasons to support the claim that funerary speech is a kind of conventional speech act. I argued how funerary rites can provide a unique situation for the creation of new institutional facts and consolidation of already-existing ones. I also argued that the nature of funerary rites is such that it precludes the production of speech with certain themes; people are not

allowed to produce (a) speech that aims at vilifying the deceased or hurting his/her grieved relatives, (b) speech that may make Muslims lose their faith, and (c) speech that focuses on mundane, earthly and material topics. As such, the main conclusion of this paper is that elements of funerary rites and rituals can function as frames that shape the structure of speech and help its interpretation. In brief, funerary speech aims at soothing the grieved and consolidating social aspects of humanity.

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Appendix A: Guide to phonetic symbols used for reporting Persian examples.

Symbol	Example	Symbol	Example	Symbol	Example
aa	arm	p	pen	t	tea
o	or	s	so	j	joke
u	too	ch	change	h	house
a	hat	x	xub	d	door
e	ten	z	zoo	r	red
i	sheep	zh	vision	sh	shoe
q	Qom	n	noon	f	foot
k	kill	y	yard	g	good
l	land	?	?al?aan	m	moon
v	voice	b	bad		

NOTES:

1. The /?/ symbol represents glottal stop, and is used at the beginning of Persian syllables followed by a vowel.
2. The /q/ and /x/ symbols represent Persian-specific consonants.
3. The Persian sporadic feature *tashdid* is represented by the repetition of the phoneme that receives it.