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دراسة لغوية لمنشورات الإنتحار عبر الإنترنت في الإنكليزية والعربية A Linguistic Investigation of Online Suicide Posts in English and Arabic

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= Abstract

Ever since social media become an outlet for many individuals to share their agonizing thoughts like suicidal ideation, People used to encounter suicide posts of others on different platforms. A suicide post is a piece of writing shared electronically by a poster who decides or desires to end his \ her life for some reason.

The principal problem to be handled in this study is the need to point out if these posts in particular have a common framework or not. Moreover, till the time of conducting this investigation, there is no contrastive study about the Arabic suicide posts linguistically as opposed to the English ones.

Therefore, this study is a qualitative one intends to investigate the most conspicuous linguistic features of suicide posts in English and Arabic. In order to examine the extent to which these types of posts are different or similar, a comparative approach is adopted. Data are obtained from three diverse online platforms, namely Facebook, Instagram and Wattpad. Based on the work of Prokofyeva (2013), the researcher will read, classify, and describe the data. At the end, the result of this study can provide more information in research concerning suicide posts in linguistics as well as an application of Discourse Analysis to online texts.

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الملخص

ان الدراسة الحالية ترمي إلى تقصي الخصائص اللغوية الاكثر بروزاً في منشورات الانتحار الانكليزية والعربية.

ولقد تم اعتماد اسلوب المقارنة والتحليل النوعي من اجل الوقوف على مدى التشابه والاختلاف الموجودين في هذين النوعين من النصوص.

استناداً الى الدراسة التي قامت بها بروكوفيفا (2013)، قام الباحث بقراءة وتصنيف ومن ثم وصف المعلومات موضع البحث. ومن المؤمل ان هذه الدراسة ستوفر المزيد من المعلومات حول المنشورات الخاصة بالانتحار لغويا بالإضافة الى انها ستكون تطبيقاً لمنهج تحليل الخطاب لتلك المنشورات.

المقدمة

1. Introduction

According to the World Health Organization, 720000 persons commit suicide yearly and many more this number tries to commit it (www.who.int, August, 29/2024). This indicates the fact that suicide is a worldwide phenomenon which poses a constant threat. Therefore, lots of researches concerning this field have been conducted all over the years for psychological, criminological, linguistic and other purposes. Some of these are (Lester and A.A. Leenaars.1988, Pompili, M. et al. (2008), Shapero (2011), Fata, I.A., Yusuf, Y.Q., & Kamal, R., Namaziandost, E. (2021)) and many others.

The concern of present study is the online suicide posts. A suicide post is a piece of writing shared electronically by a poster who decides or desires to end his \ her life for some reason. Ever since social media become an outlet for many individuals to share their agonizing thoughts like suicidal ideation, People used to encounter suicide posts of others on different platforms. This fact has been stated by Annika and Dethlefs (128, 2016) "Recent statistics in suicide prevention show that young people are increasingly posting their last words online" as well as by Desmet and Hoste (2, 2013) "Online platforms are increasingly used for expressing suicidal thoughts ..."

The linguistic content of these posts have increasingly been the target of recent interest among researchers. Pollock, C. (2021) studied the suicidal ideation and behaviors of 117 young people on Reddit platform. Based on a thematic analysis of their posts, she found that there are two major themes, namely, feeling disconnected from others and sending a warning to others. These in turn can be classified into two subthemes, namely need for communication and need for expression respectively. Another study is that of Gunn and Lester (2012) who analyzed the content of 145 suicidal posts on twitter platform. These posts belong to an 18year



old girl who committed suicide over 24 hours after posting them on twitter platform. The researchers used the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count (LIWC) program set by Pennebaker, Francis, and Booth (2001).

The researchers' analysis comprises three levels. The first one studied all the 145 posts individually and showed that the nearest the posts became to the girl death, the more they are in length and words. The second level, in its turn, handled only 75 posts, which were the posts shared within the same minute merged together. This analysis revealed that although the number of words was still high, but there was a significant reduction of those words per sentences.

At the same time, there was a reduction of using anger words as opposed to growth of referring to friends. At the last level, the posts that were shared at the same hour merged together, their total was only 6.

This level provided that a noteworthy decline of using the first person pronoun I as well as referring to self as opposite to progressive utilizing of positive sentiment expressions. The outcomes of this study showed that suicides tend to express a positive mood or sentiments just near their suicide action.

This - as stated by Gunn and Lester -coincides to a large extent with the earlier works of (Clements, Bonacci, Yerevanian, Privitera & Kiehne, 1985; Keith-Spiegel & Spiegel, 1967) (ibid: 28) and the recent works of Lester (2004, 2009, 2010; Stone (2004) (ibid: 30).

One further substantial study is that of Prokofyeva (2013). By the use of discourse analysis, she inspected twenty genuine suicide notes as opposed to twenty online posts to see to what extent they are similar or different. Comparing these two types of texts, she proved that there was always *clear reasoning* for committing suicide within the genuine notes as opposed to the suicide posts that their reasoning was constantly unclear.

One important realization she had made was the fact that even these two kinds of suicidal texts may express same emotions but these emotions would connote differently. Both types of suicidal texts under investigation represent a feeling of fear. However genuine notes imply fear of life accompanying with absence of doubt, hope and desire. On the other hand, the online posts entail fear of death which demonstrated clearly by uncertain, hesitated and doubtful expressions. Moreover, the structure and punctuation of the two kinds is remarkably different. While the genuine notes seemed well-organized, the online suicide posts were exactly the opposite –i.e. they are unsystematic. One additional distinct feature concerning their structure, the former can exhibit some qualities of other types of texts like love, apology and business letters while the later rarely did that. At the grammatical level, Prokofyeva has



attested that the present tense has been utilized heavily in both textual kinds. Yet, the present that is used to refer to the future and the past that is used to refer to the present are applied more in the genuine notes than the online posts revealing the genuine note suicides' certain decision of committing suicide. Lastly, a unique characteristic of online suicide posts that has been proved by this investigation was the reference to prior suicidal attempts which has been never unemployed in the genuine notes.

Utilizing from the aforementioned study of Prokofyeva —specifically the part relating the online posts —the researcher applies the discourse analysis to two kinds of online texts, namely English and Arabic. The essential problem to be handled in this study is the requisite to point out if these posts in particular have a common framework or not. Likewise, till the time of conducting this investigation, there is no contrastive linguistic study about the Arabic suicide posts as opposed to the English ones.

Aims of the Study

This study

aims at:

- **a.** exploring the linguistic indicators that perform in online suicide posts in English and Arabic by applying the discourse analysis to these texts.
- **b.** drawing a comparison between English and Arabic online suicide posts to see if these texts of both languages are different or similar.

1.1 The Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

- **a.** online suicide posts as an act of communication have their own characteristic features that play an important role in communicating their massages to the audience addressed.
- **b.** online suicide posts would display some similarities at some points in both English and Arabic languages because the key purpose of these posts in the main is to convey the decision of or the desire to committing suicide.

Research Methodology

This study is a qualitative one which implies that it will describe the datasets under investigation. It involves conducting a discourse analysis to the sampled data of English and Arabic depending on the adopted modal and then comparing the findings of these two languages to examine their similarities and differences. All of these processes done manually.

Corpora



It was mostly so difficult to reach the online suicidal posts in their original Facebook Instagram, and Wattpad pages because they have been either deleted or shared in private with specific audience. Therefore, the researcher compelled to retrieve them from the online public websites on Google engine. For each language under investigation, ten suicide posts have been collected. This sample is distributed to involve 5 posts from Facebook, 3 from Instagram, and 2 from Wattpad. For privacy terms, all the names and the other personal information have been written anonymously.

2.2 Features

The dataset is analyzed and annotated on the basis of Prokofyeva's work (2013), who claimed that five distinctive features could be traced in the online suicides posts, namely unclear reasoning, expressing emotions, allusion to previous suicide attempts, structure, and punctuation.

Results

2.1 The English posts

For the ten English posts, it has been noticed that:

Unclear reasoning

In accordance with Prokofyeva's work, eight posts have no clear, more accurate, direct reasons for suicide (80%) where the suicides still accuse the depression over and over without stating the real causes that activate it. Only two of these posts clearly indicate the reason behind their suicide. Where (3) and (10) point to their mental illness and bad treatment of parents respectively as the trigger for their death.

Emotions

Prokofyeva designates three types of emotions in online suicide posts namely; fear of death, expression of desire and expression of doubt (35-37 ibid). Followed her model, these three have been traced. What has been noticed is that all of the suicidal posts (expect number (6) which has none) comprise *fear of death* either explicitly or implicitly. The analysis reveals that only three posts of ten (3%) contain an explicit mention to *fear of death* namely – (1) ... *forgive me ooh Lord!!*

- (3) Where do atheists go to when they die? lol
- (8) Christ forgive me! God pardon me!

While the suicides constant attempts to fix their lives and do their best to improve themselves imply their fear of death. Consequently, they expressed *an unconcealed desire* to live a normal life or at least overcome what they were suffering from in all the tenth posts.

Some examples are the following:

(2) ... I'm sorry but I can't keep battling depression.



- (5) that I have tried to deal with this.
- (7) I gave this life all the fight I had. I'm done fighting.
 - (9) Try as I must, my life just won't to change.
 - (10) I tried to be pretty and perfect just like you wanted me to be.

Lastly, it has been noticed the absence of doubt in all the online suicide English posts except number (2). By the contrary to Prokofyeva results, these posts contain a very strong feeling of certainty concerning the suicides' fate, i.e. death. This can be seen obviously in their talking about themselves as dead people. Some examples to illustrate:

- (1) Don't come to my grave crying asking God questions,
- (4) Only got few hours to live wish i can make thing right again but NO...it is over....
- (6) RIP Ajmal Shereef 1995-2023
- (8) I am glad by midnight which is the zero hour I would be the talk of the town my death would bring pains
- (10) if you the ones that find me lying lifeless in the pale floor...

Allusion to previous suicide attempts

Prokofyeva's work proved that four of twenty of the online suicide posts (20%) have mentions to preceding attempts of death. Half of them come with a reference to the suicides' age. In contrast to her findings, the English online posts investigated have no mentions to earlier tries of suicide at all or to age excepting number (6) who adds his birth and committing suicide year (1995-2023). What has been found is that in posts (7) and (9) the suicide committers refer to their writing of suicide notes without mention the act of suicide and the second note contain an unspecific date as follow:

- (7) I have written so many suicide notes but finally, I reached my end.
- (9) On the wash wall I wrote "Goodbye 11/16/9x 11/16/13" Structure

Concerning the structure of the online English posts, it has been found that in 70% of data the structure is chaotic and as Prokofyeva stated "monolithic" (39, ibid). This is clearly apparent in the partial absence of the structure elements, i.e. Addressee, introduction, body, and conclusion. Where some of them appear against the disappear of other. On the other hand, the length of these posts varies from long to short. Some of them are just fragments as in:

- (4) Only got few hours to live..... feeling depressed but not scared of death......
- (6) RIP Ajmal Shereef

1995-2023



(8) Christ forgive me! God pardon me! Death calls Suicide is the only option 17/05/2021

However, three of the online English posts (30%) seem to have a very regular structure with all its components. All of them begin with a specific addressee in contrast to the others which have none, i.e. the addressee is either unspecified or there is no addressee at all. These posts are:

- (5) WELL... Hey every one
 - (9) To anyone who know me. I am sorry
 - (10) Dear Parents,

Finally, it has also been noticed that seven of the online data (70%) involve features of apology letter while three (30%) contain features of love letters. That is once again contrasting Prokofyeva's generalization "As it is impossible to locate a clear line of thought in the suicide posts examined, it is a rarity to find elements of other text types there. However, the most frequently met are the 'apology' and 'love letter" (39: ibid). Some examples are below:

- (1) ... forgive me ooh Lord!!
- (2), I'm sorry...... I love y'all.
- (3) I am really sorry.
- (7) IM SORRY IM SO SO SORRY. ... To everyone I love, (9) I love him and he is my everything.

Punctuation

The last feature to be sought is the punctuation marks. It has been found that the suicides have a great tendency to use these marks along their posts. In accordance with Prokofyeva's work- a large number of ellipses, commas, dots, quotation marks and hyphens has been discovered. Some examples are below:

- (4) Only get few hours to live..... feeling depressed but not scared of death
- (5) WELL ... Hey everyone –

I have some good news- I will no longer be sending out $BERNIE\ SI-(10)$ "When I grow up I want to be like the girls in the books... beautiful"

However, unlike Prokofyeva findings, it has been found that the question and exclamation marks utilized few but not many. The question mark appeared in post number (3) only and the exclamation mark appeared three times in three posts.

- (3) Where do atheists go to they when die?
- (1), forgive me ooh Lord!!



(6) I blame no one for this!

Concerning the use of capitalization and the symbols, once again the finding dissimilar to those of Prokofyeva. While Prokofyeva stated that the lower case letters after dots are utilized more in these posts due to their computational nature, this study has proved the opposite in all the data examined. The same thing can be said about the symbols, Prokofyeva found that the sad faces \square used mostly while this study stated the only use of heart symbol \P in four posts (40%) as in :

- (1) ... please make sure my kids are ok please ♥
 - (7) ... I pray everyone finds peace in that Ψ

May this use of heart symbols indicate the need to love and being loved as if they seek what they have lost.

Finally, only four abbreviated forms of words that used online has been traced, namely in posts number 1, 3 and 7:

- (1), but ever wished u don't want to exist anymore, coz trust me, when u have everything, u have everyone by ur side But ts too late for that (3) lol. Amen
- (7) I thank everyone for all they've done & IM SORRY...

3.2 The Arabic posts

For the ten Arabic posts, it has been noticed that:

Unclear reasoning

Once again in agreement with Prokofyeva's study, nine of the Arabic online posts (90%) showed that there are no clear causes to commit suicide. Different explanations have been introduced but no one of them reveals the real reason. It is only the suicide in post)3(declared that his father is the reason behind his death. Unlike the English posts, the depression has been referred to less in the Arabic ones. Only two of the Arabic suicide posts referred to, namely numbers (1) and (10):

Emotions

The three types of emotions –that Prokofyeva stated in her research –have been traced for a second time but in the Arabic data. *Fear of death* appeared in four posts only (40%), explicitly in numbers (1) and (3) and implicitly in numbers (5) and (10) as follows:

(أغلب المنتحرين لا يريدون الموت .. كانوا فقط يريدون ان ينتهي الألم .. 1)

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(الحمد لله اجه اليوم الى هموت فيه بس للاسف منتحر. 3)

(لقد كتبت هذه 10 (كان بودي ان اعيش حياة جميلة، لكن للاسف هذه الحياة ظلت تعاكسني ...)5) الرسالة عدة مرات في مخيلتي ، لكن واخيرا اشعر انه الوقت المناسب. لن اعيد التفكير ، ادركت ان الرسالة عدة مرات في مخيلتي ، لكن واخيرا اشعر الله الوقت المناسب. لن اعيد التفكير ، ادركت ان الرسالة عدة مرات في مخيلتي ، لكن واخيرا اشعر الا خيبة امل متأخرة، لقد تعبت من كوني متعبه. expression of desire except in the above mentioned posts, i.e. their attempts to live a normal life by overwhelming their sufferings.

Lastly, *expression of doubt* has never been observed in all the suicidal Arabic posts.

Once the suicides decided to commit suicide, they all took it completely for granted.

This can be obviously seen in the posts below:

```
( لا اريد أن تلوموني على فعلتي ولا تيأسوا ولا 2) تحزنوا على موتي...... ( ودعم لبابا ربنا يهديه هو 3) السبب في موتي ( سمحوني واجد لني الحياه مش حنكمل فيه واليوم حيقعد 6) اخر يوم ليا فل حياه ... ( السما احلى من الارض! وانا عاوزه 7) السما مش الارض . ( لا تدعون لي ، الله يعرفني 9) وسيتفهم موقفي جيداً.
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Allusion to previous suicide attempts

In contrast to Prokofyeva's findings, there was no mention of previous suicide attempts or age totally in all the Arabic data. It is only post number (10) refers to rewriting it several time just in mind before lastly deciding to transfer it to a real words and act:

Structure

Regarding the structure of the online Arabic posts, it has been stated that (80%) of data are once again chaotic and monolithic. As noticed in the English data, there were an absence of some structure constituents as opposed to the presence of others and the length of posts varies from short to long. Some of them are merely one sentence as in:

Two of the posts have a very regular structure that comprises all its constituents, i.e. the addressee, introduction, body and conclusion, namely number (2 and 6). Where the addressee has been addressed overtly at the beginning:



6

(6) While the other posts have either no addressee at all –which are the majority –or have addresses but at the end as in number (10) or all over the post as in number (3).

It has also indicated that half of the Arabic data contains features of other letters (50%). Where three ones contain love expressions and four with apology expressions. These are:

)3(لجبيبتي اسف اسف اسف مكنتش اد وعودي

)5(#أحب-الجميع

)6(سمحوني واجد لني الحياه مش حنكمل فيه امي-لي كنت نحبه-ر فيقي-وانا هضيمه ناس لي نعزهم اكتر من اي حاجة

)10(انا اسفه ماما Finally, it has also noticed that seven of the Arabic suicide posts written in the formal Arabic language as opposed to three ones which written in the suicides' colloquial accent, namely numbers (3 and 7) with Egyptian accent and number (6) with Libyan accent.

Punctuation

Concerning the use of the punctuation marks, – if we put aside post number (8) which has none – it has once again discovered that a large number of ellipses, commas, dots and hyphens are used.

What have been missed are the quotation marks and question marks which are not used totally.

Below are some examples:

)2(- الانتحار هو الحل الوحيد لراحتي

وداع-

ر. 5(أعلن أنا صاحب الحساب الان أنني في اخر لحظاتي في هذا العالم ،وأنني

تَناولت كأسا من مادة السم، وبضع جرعات من مواد أخرى ...

)9(إن الأمور قد وصلت الى حد لم تعد تجدى في حله إلا رصاصة في رأسي، لا

تدعون لي، الله يعرفني وسيتفهم موقفي جيداً .

-رسالة انتحار مجهول Unlike Prokofyeva's results, The Arabic online posts showed that the exclamation marks used twice only, in posts numbers (5 and 7)

>)5(كان سيكون هذا العالم مُكانُ حيداً لو لا الحروب!

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! السما احلى من الارض)7(Regarding the use of symbols and abbreviated forms, both are used only once in posts number (6 and 3) respectively:

(والحفره هذي فيه انا اليوم... 6)

.... الالك عبيت اقول)3(Lastly, it should say that in 70% of the Arabic online suicide posts, the suicides enormously used the diacritics, i.e. the Arabic harakat, as well as the Hamza /٠/ with its various types alongside their writings. This tendency contradicting with the computational nature of these posts, which in general tends to be simple and written in a hurry without paying attention to the accurate forms of words. It is only the three posts that are written in the colloquial accents have missed this feature.

4. Discussion

Based on the results obtained above, it could be said that:

- 1. Both English and Arabic online suicide posts seem to have unclear reasoning where there were no obvious explanations of ending life just in two posts for English and one for Arabic. The difference is that the reference to depression generally was much less in Arabic than in English. This coincided with Prokofyeva results.
- 2. The fear of death and expression of desire have been confirmed in both languages but with different distributions as shown in table number (1) below. Where the rations show that they are much more evident in English than in Arabic. Expression of doubt on the other hand has disappeared totally in Arabic posts and appeared one in English ones.

1 1			
Emotions		Expression of desire	Expression of doubt
English Posts	90%	90%	1%
Arabic Posts	40%	40%	0%

Table (1)

- **3.** The research approved that there was no allusion to previous suicidal attempts completely in both languages.
- 4. Despite the difference of the two language structures, the study showed that in both of them the structure is chaotic, namely 80% in English and 70% in Arabic. The two types of online posts revealed the much use of other letter features, specifically apology and love. Yet, they are used more in English than in Arabic as the table below illustrates:



Other letters	kinds	of	Apology	Love
English	Posts		70%	30%
Arabic	Posts		40%	30%

Table (2)

5. Moreover, the study indicated that the ellipses, comas, dots, and hyphens have been utilized largely in both kinds of data under investigation. As apposed to the little use of exclamation and question marks in those data. Where the exclamation mark used three in English and twice in Arabic and the question marks used once in English and none in Arabic.

In addition, these two types of suicide posts showed the suicides' carefulness of their writing despite its computational nature.

Lastly, the symbols and the abbreviated forms exploited less in both languages but they are much more less in Arabic than in English as table (3) below shows. It is important to say that the same kind of symbols used in English and Arabic languages, hearts and broken heart respectively.

Punctuation	Symbols	Abbreviated Forms
English Posts	40%	30%
Arabic Posts	1%	1%

Table (3)

5.Conclusion

The study came up with the fact that these two kinds of suicide posts proved to be matched to some of the distinctive features of the model adopted in the current survey and unmatched to the other features.

But then again, it has surprisingly found that even in their dissimilarity to the adopted modal features, they both tend to be similar to each other with a very slight different distribution. This may add a lot to the idea that these kind of texts can constitute a genre since they introduce the same massages. Yet, this attitude need to be tested more and more in different languages to be confirmed.

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The English Online Posts

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The Arabic Online Posts

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- **1.** https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=2583355485034802&set=pcb.258335557170 1460
- 2. https://www.akhbarona.com/society/254922.html
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- %D8%B9%D8%B2%D9%85%D9%87 a48018.html
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 - **6.** https://m.facebook.com/photo.php/?photo_id=3100858946794019
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 - **8.** https://almarsd.com/article/55086/%D8%A2%D8%AE%D8%B1%20%D8%A7%D9%84%
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- <u>%D9%84%D8%A7%D8%BA</u>%D8%AA%D8%B5%D8%A7%D8%A8%D9%87%D8%A 7
 - **9.** https://www.wattpad.com/amp/533153497