Zur kulturellen Bedingtheit von Textmustern.
Todesanzeigen im interkulturellen Vergleich

Cultural Determination of Textual Patterns.
An Intercultural Perspective on *Death Notices*

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Hermannstadt/Sibiu 2020

SUMMARY

Key words: text linguistics, contrastive analysis, text genres, death notice, textual pattern, qualitative analysis, interculturality, virtual grief

The current doctoral thesis aims at analysing a text genre, *death notices*, from the perspective of two distinct cultural backgrounds, relying on a generous corpus collected from texts in the German and respectively Romanian printed media (cca. 200 death notices pro language) published between 2012-2018. Several death notices published prior to this time window were included, however, as well, when the elaboration or originality degree of the said death notices required it. This genre of texts, so far neglected by the Romanian „mainstream linguistics" and contrastive analyses, is analyzed through the prism of an all-round linguistic product, with a well-defined structure and a high formality degree, which allows for the defining, in both cultural area, of a prototype outlined by the samples gathered in the research corpus. Moroever, the „death notices" are a text genre of narrow dimensions, being very accessible and reflecting a language usage segment and an every-day text well stored in the collective mentality.

The thesis' main focus lies on highlighting of the textual patterns, both in order to illustrate their peculiarities, as well as in order to point out similarities and differences on formal level as well as on content level or in what pertains to its adequate, matter-of-fact linguistical tranposition, that is to say, mainly the peculiar lexical inventory, rounding up the image of this type of texts, seen from an intercultural perspective. The analysis of the empiric data on a communicative-pragmatical level is a qualitative analysis, rather than a quantitative one. Its aim is outlining a profile of the texte genre, in order to highlight the specifics of the respective two cultural areas.

The empiric data was selected relying on the criteria of authenticity, relevance and representativity. The analysed death notices are authentic texts, published in the mentioned media, with precise references to the sources. The notices inserted in the current work are relevant and representative for the research aim, given their conformity to the textual or content standards, or respectively the recommendations of specialized literature, of previous studies which consider the gathering of a corpus large enough to be conclusive. The choice of the daily newspapers with tradition and a wide national/regional distribution, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (Frankfurt/Main) and *România liberă* (Bucharest) and the newspapers *Siebenbürgische Zeitung* (München) and *Tribuna* (Sibiu) relied on the constant publishing, in a large number, of death notices in the aforementioned sources of information, as well as on the fact that these newspapers are very influent, address a numerically representative readership in the researched cultural area; they have an international ring to their name and are available both in print as well as in online format. A peculiar place in the corpus is granted the *Siebenbürgische Zeitung*, the newspaper of the Association of the Transylvanian Saxons, read both by the community of the Transylvanian Saxons settled in Germany, as well as by their former fellow citizens who remained behind in Romania or who settled in other German speaking countries, or in America and Canada.

Thematically, the current work is based on the assumption that the text in itself is a product that can be interpreted from the point of view of a „cultureme", that is to say a sum of phenomena, forms, structures typical for a culture, elements that are indispensable for the understanding of the written or oral message, and that the cultural area determines textual

patterns. Therefore the work outlines, relying on the gathered empiric data, a prototype of the text genre for each of the analyzed cultural areas, the death notices being analyzed relying on their common basic traits on the formal and content level. The novelty element of the research lies in the comparison of these prototypes of the text genres from the perspective of „culturemes", which are considered to be vehicles for the conveying of cultural notions, concepts and values, rather than a set of consecrated textual principles, conventions or linguistic structures that meet specific communicative tasks in emotionally loaded situatuations brought about by the death of an individual.

The work is structured into nine chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, presents the framework of the research: the aim of the research, the empirical research material and the principles followed in the gathering of the corpus, the research method and the structure of the word. The doctoral thesis is structured into three parts. The first part (chapters 1-3), the theoretical part, aims at positioning the thesis in relation to the previous research, to be followed by the second part (chapters 4 and 5) which outlinea, in harmony with the set objectives, the functions of the text genre, backing them up with ample explanations regarding the way in thich the text pattern of *death notices* is being set up in the two cultural spaces. Thus, the second chapter makes a brief summary of the interdisciplinary or contrastive research and of the history of the text genre, highlighting the first publishing of a death notice in the German cultural area. After defining the text genre, the concepts' limits and after presenting peculiarities of the genre, the notions of „cultureme" are brought up and discussed in harmony with the current trends in the text linguistics. The possibility of ascribing to death notices the character of „rituals" peculiar to each cultural area is being discussed, as well as their conventional character reflected in strict composition norms or aspects pertaining to their evolution on a conceptual and textual level. The next chapter is dedicated to the intercultural relevance of formalized texts. Previous contrastive contributions are being highlighted, which revolve around the peculiar cultural character of like text genres; also, several desiderata of the text linguistics which consider textual patterns as indicators of the texts' belonging to a specific culture.

Chapter 4 analyzes the structure of death notives and their mandatory/optional components, the specific conventional textual patterns being amply exemplified by corpus data. The death notice prototype for each of the two analyzed cultural spaces is being presented, including formal or content variations or deviations from the pattern. The chapter ends with a classification of the death notices from a communicative point of view.

Chapter 5 adresses the functions of death notices, tracking their evolution from the mere informative function to the nowadays very often employed self-characterizing function of the notices, used by family members, to the grief outlet or the compassion drawing function, the function of behaviour steering, used to guide end elicit from the mourning community the desired mourning behaviour, and the more often in the German cultural area appearing self-justification function, represented in the *Selbstanzeige*, the death notices composed by the „protagonists" themselves ahead of their death (especially in the case of suicidal persons, dying patients or people with serious health conditions), as well as also more rare, exceptional functions like warning/cautioning the readers for instance in awareness rising campaigns meant to bring home to readers the necessity of prudent driving, or like expressing irony (announcing one's liberation from married life's hardships by informing about the death of the life partner).

The analysis, from an intercultural perspective, of the rich empirical data gathered from national/local media with a large number of published newspapers or from online available items–online editions of the newspapers or specifically for this aimed designed web pages is being undertaken in chapters 6 and 7. The similarities and contrasts in the composition of German and Romanian death notices are being presented, as they can be identified in the constitutive elements of this text genre: the publication of a death notice, the representation of

the deceased person and his character (professional, familial, social, confessional), the representation of the psychical/emotional make-up of the mourning family or the friends, relatives and acquaintances, the way concepts about death and/afterlife are being worded, informations about the funeral or the burial. Based on the way information is organized in a death notice, characteristics of the lexical inventory of a death notice or nonverbal characteristics of the genre are being presented and analyzed, along with the cultural differences in the approach to the expectations regarding text content or the social expectations from this text genre. Strategies of text function alienation and mechanisms of text pattern realization round up this chapter.

Chapter 7 analyzes the influence of the media in which the death notices is published on the content of the death notice. After the specifics of the death notices in the printed press are being presented, including standards and implementing norms that the publishers of the analyzes media have towards the death notices, virtual public grief norms and peculiarities are being introduced. Publisher textual patterns are being discussed in connection to the text genre and editorial prescriptions.

The final part of the work lists several options for further topic-continuing or topic-zooming research are being presented like a diachronic analysis, a linguistics variety oriented research, or a digital humanities oriented approach (chapter 8), respectively the main conclusions of the undertaken analysis (chapter 9) oriented towards highlighting the similarities and differences in which the textual patterns are being used in the two cultural areas.

(Strict) Observance of the conventional character and the textual standards can be noticed in both cultural areas, although on different levels. Whereas German death notices are characterized by a high level of emotional balance, at the same time being more generous with the insertion of non-verbal elements (illustration) and with individualization, Romanian death noticed strictly respect the conventional text structure, including the order in which information is presented, showing minimum variability of the graphical representation means. From the point of view of the categories of death notices published, the German media contains fewer comemorative notices, and a higher number of death notices written by the deceased themselves prior to their death. This „last (public) word" of the deceased displays surprising, almost ostentatious lucidity. In the case of suicidal persons, the death notices written by these persons try to convince the readers of the honesty of the reasons behind their gesture, of their acceptance of their destiny, of their love and appreciation for their surviving dependants, life partners or fellow citizens. Such death notices are not yet known in the Romanian cultural space.

The majority of German death notices end on mentioning organisational information regarding the burial or last wished of the departing (regarding funeral program, flowers and wreaths, species of flower the deceased would have wanted, dress code for the mourning, and, most often, wishes regarding money donations to be made in lieu of flowers—on demand of the deceased—to palliative nursing units or causes that the deceased has supported during their lifetime).

Romanian death noticed seldom include biografical data like birth date or place, or address of the deceased, whereas such information is paid much attention to in German death notices, geographical data being a means of characterization and social identification, particularly so in the case of the newspaper *Siebenbürgische Zeitung*. Geographical information can be found in Romanian death notices in the national media only when special achievements of a regionally or nationally remarcable person are being introduced, in the case of public figures, or when the geographical informations refer to exotic places, this being—by the association of the deceased or the mourning family with those places—an additional means of eliciting appreciation or social recognition, equalling to a distinction.

The expression of sadness and pain in the German death notices is rather dry, unpretentious, simple, whereas Romanian death notices abound in adjectives mainly used in the superlative form or the comparative of superiority, with frequent use of metaphors or poetical expressions. The tendency to dramatizing is also obvious, the funeral frame of the text being often bold. The closing formulas in the Romanian cultural area often resort to religious terms, the religious community trying thereby to commit the deceased to the divine care or protection. Death notices in the German cultural area display a particular creativity at the level of linguistic use, being oftentimes personalized. The strategies of modificating the conventional text patterns are mainly oriented towards the bold adaptation of a textual pattern to a different content. German death notices have a more discreet, oftentimes double, frame. They make more use of symbols, suggestive illustrations or background pictures, whereas the Romanian death notices use oftentimes ID-card or passport photos of the deceased or photos of them showing them in national costumes, if the deceased come from rural areas.

The results of the research indicate the fact that the death notices in the German media are more reserved when it comes to expressing emotions. The tone is unprotesting, the authors of the death notices regard death as part of human existence, and they seem more at peace with their lot; the degree to which the deceased is idealized is reduced compared to that of Romanian death notices, where the grief for the death of an individual if oftentimes dramatized, and the textual conventions are rarely ignored. Surprisingly, though they keep the dignified and acquiescent tone before death, characteristic to German death notices, the death notices in the *Siebenbürgische Zeitung* have a stronger emotional component, and they reflect the values of a community for which honesty, duty, professionalism and the sense of accountability and responsibility hold a prominent place.

In the German cultural space, grief expressions and condolences are mainly exchanged amongst relatives or the professional environment, whereas Romanian death notices often convey condolences from neighbours, former or current teachers, former class mates, or work colleagues of the deceased. It is not often the case that the grief expressions seem „pre-made", „ostentatious grief". While dramatizing the suffering of the deceased and of the mourning, the death cause is only hinted at, the explicit mentioning of the disease being considered a proof of weakness; meanwhile the psychical suffering caused to the mourning by the mentioned death is amply described, the suffering being carried on even after several years have passed since the death of the beloved. Proof to it are the comemorative notives published many years after the death. The pain, the feeling of loss or emptiness are more discreetly and more briefly expressed in the German cultural space, and the quest of the mourning party for their friends' compassion and pity is held in check. On the other hand, there are many similarities in the representation of the deceased in what pertains to information regarding their familiar and their professional environment. Whereas company-published death notices sketch the personality of the deceases, their competences and abilities in the professional context, in death notices published by the family, social clichees regarding positive family/professional relationships are noticeable, this being a mere transposition of the fundamental rule *De mortuis nil nisi bene*, principle which, though accepted by society, is mostly suspiciously looked upon by readers, the qualities of the deceased being in many cases overrated.

German death notices make frequent use of quotes (oftentimes biblical), aphorisms, mottos or sayings which immortalize the attitude before death or the physical and/or emotional makeup of the authors of the death notice or of the deceased himself, unlike Romanian death notices, where lyrical compositions of the deceased's family in the form of four-verses stanzas immitating folk poetry try to express the sorrow. German death notices do not make use of this means of expressing grief. German newspapers' publishing departments issue comprehensive guidelines for the composition of death notices, featuring both samples of death notices and

quotes, while Romanian newspapers' publishing departments offer mainly very brief suggestions for the writing of the death notices. The German cultural space manifests an increased interest for the online display of grief (by means of virtual cemeteries and comemorative websites), the Romanian cultural space knows a larger number of death notices on social media (Facebook).

The doctoral thesis presents tendencies emerging in the management of pain and grief— direct address to the deceas (in death notices of print media) or individualization in the virtual media by means of audio/video messages, postings of photos, letters to the deceased or the development of chatbots—offering sufficient topics for research regarding the dynamics of the text genre and the factors that influence its evolution. The work can serve as a starting point for subsequent contrastive-diachronical researches, for intra- or intercultural studies on tanatology or death culture, including new forms of online grief on various social platforms.

Concluding, one can say that death notices bring to light precious cultural information, textual patterns that serve to the overcoming of communicative difficulties, being at the same time „rituals" specific for a culturally determined funeral context. The novelty element resides in the extraction of the text genre prototype of *death notices* and the comparison of two such prototypes belonging to two cultural spaces, as this kind of formalized text is an index for cultural and social norms.

The work contains also a rich bibliographical list and annexes which include several death notices that diverge from social or textual norms. The consulted bibliography is structured in specialized literature, webography and newspapers that make up the corpus.

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