



## **A Socio –Textual Analysis of Written Wedding Invitations in Jordanian Society**

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### **Abstract**

The present study examined the generic structure of wedding invitations in Jordanian society in order to find out what components people employ to articulate the communicative purpose of these invitations. It also investigated the effect of socio-cultural aspects on the generic structure of wedding invitations through focusing on the relationship between language and cultural representations within the discourse of this genre. The sample consisted of 55 invitation cards from a collection of 150 cards covering the periods from 1979 until 2006. These cards have been subjected to the model of analysis proposed by Holmes (1997) and a modified version of the model outlined by Clynes and Henry (2004). The results showed that this genre was built around six obligatory and two optional moves. These moves communicate a lot of information about the prevailing socio-cultural values in Jordanian society that are encoded in the rhetorical and organizational components of this genre.

### **1 Introduction**

A Wedding invitation is an important part of wedding because it is the first thing in the ceremony that guests will see before the wedding starts. It announces good news to family and friends and lets them know when the wedding will take place. So it needs to include some basic information that will help the guests understand where they need to be and what time the ceremony will begin. It should include the date and time of the wedding, the location, and the names of the hosts at a minimum. All of this information will help inviters to clear up any confusion and prevent people from showing up too early, too late, or at the wrong location in such a special day. Choosing the appropriate invitation card and style is not an easy decision. All brides and grooms would like to make their wedding invitations perfect and special and thus tend to be very careful when they choose their wedding invitation cards. Different types and styles and modes of invitation are used. The most common mode in Jordanian society is the written invitation.



To understand the special characteristics of written wedding invitations in Jordan, and to make it more obvious, we should consider it in its native context in terms of the social norms and conventions that give rise to such occasions. In Jordan, as in most Arab societies, socio-cultural practices influence most aspects of one's life. Understanding these practices is very important in interpreting the constructions of invitations. Jordan belongs to the Arab World and Islam is the religion in the country. Jordanian people speak a variety of spoken Arabic known as Jordanian Arabic. Like other countries in the Middle East Jordan is considered to be a developing country. Although in the last ten years it has witnessed a rapid development and actual progress in all sectors of life, it keeps observing its norms and traditions in all aspects of people's life. Wedding in Jordan has specific customs, norms and traditions. It starts with a well-known tradition called *Jaha* (proposing the hand of the bride from her curator). This involves two groups of people: the groom's curator, relatives and friends who go to the bride's house to propose; and the bride's curator, relatives and friends who welcome the first group who satisfies their request. Then there is what is called *Aked Karan* when the couple exchanges vows at the bride's house before a religious official (ma'thoun). Later there is *Zafaf* ceremony, when the couple sits in state (usually on a stage) to be viewed by the invitees while the wedding reception proceeds<sup>1</sup>. It is for the *Zafaf* that wedding invitations are usually issued not only to the extended families but to the wider community as well.

The present study is interested in the analysis of a corpus of Jordanian wedding invitations to determine what the generic components have in common. In particular, it aims at examining the affects of some socio-cultural factors that may determine the content and structure of Jordanian wedding invitation.

## **2 Literature review**

Language analysis has received a lot of attention for a long time, but the last three decades, have witnessed an increasing interest in the study of genre analysis that significantly developed out of discourse analysis.

### **2.1 Discourse and genre**

Discourse analysis started with register analysis (analyzing the surface level of linguistic description), followed by grammatical rhetorical analysis (functional language description), then the analysis extended to interactional analysis (language description as discourse), getting to genre analysis (language description as explanation). By considering the above discourse analysis approaches, we can easily detect a move from the surface level of description to a deeper description of language (Bhatia 1993).

Discourse has been defined by Kress (1989:19) as "the institutionalized modes of speaking and writing which give expression to particular attitudes toward areas of socio-cultural activity". These modes enable the speaker/writer to know whether to say, do or write something or not. He says that there are a number of discourses that operate within any one's social group and which the members of that group understand, use and follow according to the ideology they adopt. In short, discourse for Kress is a motivation of text. Bhatia (2004:20), however, views discourse as genre and argues that this extends the analysis beyond the textual product to incorporate context in a broader sense in order to find the way text is

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<sup>1</sup> Commonly the bride and bridegroom have a seat on a higher place (like a stage) in the wedding hall where they sit beside each other while people are singing and dancing in front of them. The bride and the groom participate in the dancing usually for a short time after the cake show and then go back to their places.



constructed, the way it is often interpreted, used and exploited in specific institutional or professional contexts to achieve specific disciplinary goals. He attributes the popularity of analyzing discourse as genre to the fact that through genre analysis one may understand members of a specific discourse community who use genre to achieve their community goals:

Investigation of conventionalized or institutionalized genres in the context of specific institutional and disciplinary practices, procedures and cultures, is a means for understanding how members of specific discourse communities construct, interpret and use these genres to achieve their community goals and why they write them the way they do. (Ibid:10).

In other words 'genre analysis explores discourse features in the broad context of the communicative event, and attempts to provide the rationale of the discourse features in terms of authors' publicly retrievable intentions and institutional conventions.' (Allison 2004:265). Hence, texts become 'typical' because people who produce these texts follow 'certain rules, prescriptions, traditions, ingrained habits, role models, etc. that have effects on three 'typical characteristics' of genres: content, form and function (Leeuwen 2005:121). Thus genre is a model or schema, because its regularity in this specific discourse community serves as an example for constructing new issues in the same field, which share the same purpose.

Many scholars (i.e. Miller 1984; Bhatia 1989, 1993, 1997, 2004; Swales 1990; Dudley-Evans 1994) view genre as a social and cultural activity - a communicative event. The idea of social aspects of genre has been emphasized by a number of other scholars. Connor (2000:25) states that 'genre leads ultimately to the understanding of culture. That is, out of what kinds of processes are various cultures made'. Similarly Bazerman (1994:79-101) sees genre as a 'socio-psychological category defined by a structural arrangement of textual features'. For Kress (1989:36) 'genre is the term which describes that aspect of the form of texts which is due to the effect of their production, in particular social occasion'. This means that genre helps to understand how texts interact and how they shape meaning in relation to complex social system. Swales (1990) provides a similar view and argues that the schematic structure through which the communicative purpose is articulated is the result of social practices and conventions. A view that is supported by Connor (2000) who contends that genre does not exist in isolation but as part of a structural system of interacting genres each performing complementary social action.

## **2.2 'Homely' Discourse**

Homely discourse, to which wedding invitations belong, is a term which refers to a genre of socially constructed text of discourse, such as 'thank-you notes', 'congratulations', 'obituaries', and 'invitations'. This kind of discourse received little attention compared to research on a variety of socially constructed academic and professional genres such as 'abstracts', 'introductions'...etc. This term was first introduced by Miller (1984). It simply refers to 'everyday language'. Johns (1997:6) defines them as 'Recognizable socially constructed text genres of everyday life'. This kind of discourse is simply defined by its name (e.g. wedding invitations, death announcement...etc). As it is convenient and efficient for people to share names of texts in academic and professional settings, it is also convenient to share these names outside academic and professional settings in everyday language. This naming enables readers or writers to begin their reading or writing of a text with considerable confidence, and it evokes in readers and writers certain expectations about the content and the form of a specific text. In addition, it evokes an understanding of the central purpose that texts serve



within communities of readers and writers. It gives us a full and complete summary of the content. So, we know, expect, and conclude the purpose of the text from its title. For example in newspapers, when readers read the title 'obituary announcements' they know from the title what will be said about the death and funeral arrangements and other details. Another easily recognizable 'homely' genre is the 'wedding invitation'. It is immediately identified by name and the audience or readers will immediately expect to find the names of a bride and a groom, the time and the place of the ceremony.

### **2.3 Socio-Cultural Aspects**

Culture is another important aspect which affects language and plays a significant role in homely discourse, because, as mentioned above, homely discourse refers to everyday language which differs according to different cultures. Although there are usually repeated elements that are carried from text to text in 'homely' discourse and other genres, still every situated text is modified by the social forces in its particular context. Various frameworks in sociolinguistics have linked language use to context and culture. Halliday and Hassan (1989) point out that, in order to determine the way in which a particular text is constructed and interpreted, it is useful to refer to the cultural background from which the text derives its meaning. Moreover, Bloor (1995), and Holmes (1992) share the same view believing that when people use language to express meaning, the form of the language they use is influenced by the complex elements of that situation. These elements are the participants, the setting or social context, the topic and the function of the linguistic choices which generally reflect the influence of one or more of these components. Holmes (1992) contends that the choice of one linguistic form rather than another is a useful clue to non-linguistic information; this means that linguistic variation can provide social information. A view reflected by Badger (2003) who points out that the most important aspect of the way in which texts are embedded in situation is that they carry out some communicative purpose - which is the key concept in genre. This communicative purpose is derived from the situation in which it is used. This goes with defining genre as a recognizable communicative event, characterized by a set of communicative purpose(s) shared by its members. From this perspective, many scholars view genre as a social and cultural activity that depends on social factors. Miller (1984: 165) suggests that learning a genre is not just or simply learning linguistic forms and conventions. It is also learning how to 'participate in the actions of a community'. Even the schematic structure of a particular genre is, according to Swales (1990), the result of the conventions of a specific discourse community. Bhatia (1993:69) confirms this idea stating that 'in some contexts, dominant socio-cultural factors do influence certain types of professional genres. He describes generic forms as 'socially constructed and are even more intimately controlled by social practices' (Ibid:360). These generic forms are selected and developed over centuries by participants in a particular community to codify their repeated social practices as these are closely related to their culture. This lead Devitt (cited in Badger 2003:257) to assert that genre and situation are so linked as to be inseparable; genre determines situation in the same way as situation determines genre.

### **2.4 Genre as a sociolinguistic practice**

Nowadays, the term genre is thought to be referring to a sociolinguistic activity in which the participants are able to achieve particular goals (Henry and Roseberry 2001). Al-Ali (2003) contends that in order to understand a complete purposive text which represents a social activity, one must consider two perspectives: one perspective identifies the text's generic structure based on its genre category membership, which involves reference to the context of culture, and the other describes the immediate contextual minor functions based on its



register, which is brought into existence by the lexical and syntactic linguistic structures. Vergaro (2004:187-188) says that from a social perspective, what defines genre is the communicative purpose. She explains that understanding genre as a social action requires genre to be recognized as such by their users. She confirms that meaning does not reside in the signs each text consists of. It is constructed by people through cognitive acts. There are thus cognitive reasons that lead users of a language to recognize communicative events as instances of particular genres and to assign particular terms, or labels, to these events.

To understand how the invitation genre organizes and articulates the communicative purpose of the social occasion, a genre analyst needs to take into account the social practices and constraints that give rise to each individual genre. Miller (1984) and Kress (1989) emphasize the significance of understanding the social occasion in which the text emerges for the interpretation of the construction. Miller (1984:151) argues that a social understanding of genre can help account for the ways we encounter, interpret, react to, and create particular texts. The purposes of the participants and their goals have their effects on the form of texts which are constructed in those situations. Bhatia (1997) defines genre as a class of texts characterized by a specific function that tends to produce distinctive structural patterns. However, he stresses the idea that there is no universal form of discourse for structuring knowledge and, therefore, most institutionalized forms of discourse, are socially constructed, interpreted and used. The general goal of a genre analyst is to explore the construction of a genre in order to identify the *moves* and strategies of a genre, the allowable order of the move, and the key linguistic features.

The next step is to explain why these features were chosen by expert users of the genre to achieve their communicative purpose (Bhatia 1993). But what does *move* mean? And how does it assign to stretches of language? This is what the discussion below tries to answer.

In this study the researcher uses the term *move* to refer to each meaningful unit/ component which conveys a rhetorical function. This is inspired by the Swalesian approach of genre move analysis (Swales 1990) which was developed by Bhatia (1993) and applied to different professional and academic settings: a move is any meaningful unit presented by lexical or grammatical forms (linguistic aspects), conveying a specific goal. Each move combines with other moves - in some way - to give the overall communicative purpose of the activity in which the members of the community are engaged. So, analyzing the move structure of a text means assigning a pragmatic function to a stretch of language and building the schematic structure through which its communicative purpose is achieved (Vergaro 2004:184). In most cases, the unit of analyzing moves is the sentence, but it may be below the level of sentence as a clause or even a word. However, we have to keep in mind that the boundaries between each move and the other are not clear cut. In many cases it is very hard to identify each move separately, because it is sometimes syntactically possible that one is embedded within another. In this study the moves in the genre of wedding invitation in Jordan will be analyzed and their social connotations will be highlighted

### **3 Corpus and Method**

The sample for the present study was collected randomly from different sources. Some were sent to the researchers' family, relatives and friends; others were collected from famous printing presses in the researchers' local area. A total of 150 Jordanian wedding invitations were selected covering the period between (1979 – 2006). After collecting the data, the researchers checked the different types of Jordanian wedding invitations for similarities and



differences in generic components. From this preliminary check it was noticed that there were no big differences in their generic components. Therefore, a sample of only 55 Jordanian wedding invitations was analyzed. All the invitations were written by Jordanian people. All names and any other information that may identify the inviters or invitees were removed. Since the focus in this study is on the generic components, Arabic transcription was given without any phonological or morphological details. In the translation of the extracts, an attempt has been made to preserve relevant elements of Arabic discourse without obscuring the meaning of the text.

#### **4 Procedure of Analysis**

The data were analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitatively they were analyzed by taking into account the rhetorical purposes of the text when assigning a pragmatic function to a stretch of language. This would enable us to tag a stretch of language as a particular move. So the primary communicative purpose and the related sub-purposes were central for the analysis. There were cases where a unit of text had multiple functions in the context. The common practice was to analyze it according to the most salient function - following Holmes (1997). The analysis was based on a modified version of the model outlined by Clynes and Henry (2004) (derived from Nwogue 1991) on Brunei and Malay wedding invitations. However, some modifications have been made due to the differences between Jordanian culture and Brunei Malay culture and to the fact that a wedding invitation in Jordan is not as complex as that in Brunei Malay. It was necessary to omit some moves and add others, and sometimes it was necessary to change the name of a move only in order to make it more expressive.

Quantitatively, the occurrence of the various moves in the corpus was counted and their sequence established in order to find out the obligatory and optional moves that govern Jordanian wedding invitations. People's opinion about the function of some moves was also surveyed through a questionnaire and interviews with several Jordanian people to give the analysis more credibility and validity.

#### **5 Analysis and discussion**

The analysis of the data in this study has focused on three main aspects: the common moves that organize the Jordanian wedding invitation; the common schematic order for the identified moves and variation in their order; and the non-linguistic features that may be found in Jordanian invitation cards.

##### **5.1 Identification of moves**

The common moves that have been identified in the analysis include: opening, identifying the celebrating families, stating the names of people issuing the invitation, inviting the guests, identifying the bride and groom, arranging the ceremony (location, date, time) closing, notification.

###### **5.1.1 Opening**

This is the introductory move which consists of one or more specific quotations taken literally from the Holy Qurân, or a prayer or a few poetry lines. All of them express either people's wishes of God blessing to protect the couple getting married or the importance of marriage in people's life. Almost in all the examined cases, these quotations among other quotations are written in bold, and italics, with beautiful Arabic handwriting usually at the top of the card making a beautiful decoration. Figure 1 is just an example.



/O, God bless them and bring your blessing upon them and bring them together with good/

**Figure 1:** An opening expression

Although the main communicative function of the opening move is to introduce the invitation, each quotation has its own sub-communicative functions. In Islam any verse from the holy Qurân must be preceded by the formulaic phrase */bismillah alrahman alraheem/* (in the name of Allah. Most Gracious Most Merciful) and followed by the formulaic phrase */sadaqa allah alazeem/* (Amen). Clynes and Henry (2004) and Al-Ali (2004) have observed this as well in their studies. Using Qurânic verses can be seen as a sign of adherence to Islamic teachings and achieving solidarity among the members of the Muslim community (i.e. they all believe in God and His book). According to Islamic rules introducing anything by God's saying brings luck and safety to it. So it is a blessing to start marriage with God's words. The following quotations clarify this:

#### *Opening Quotations*

##### 1. Prayers:

"اللهم بارك لهما وبارك عليهما واجمع بينهما بالخير"

*Allahumma barik lahuma wa barik alyhumma wajma' beynahumma bilkhair*

(O, God bless them and bring your blessing upon them and bring them together with good)

##### 2. Qurânic verse:

"ومن آياته ان خلق لكم من انفسكم ازواجا لتسكنوا اليها وجعل بينكم مودة ورحمة"  
(الروم ايه 21)

*Wa min ayatihi an khalaqa lakum min anfusikum azwajan letaskuno elayha wa ja'al baynakum mawaddatan a rahmah*

("And among His signs is that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect." The Romans: Verses 21(31).)

Poetry can also be used in the opening move for different purposes. Besides its aesthetic use it is also used for religious purposes. Some people are so careful about preserving Qurânic verses that they do not wish to use them in invitation cards which are likely to be thrown away after the event. The following quotation is an example of a poetic opening



### 3. Poetic verses:

هيا طيور الخير زغردي      فوق الجباه المؤمنات وغردي  
افراحنا طابت وفاح عبيرها      فجنورها تروى بسنة احمد

*Haya toyoor alkhair zaghridi      fawq al jibah almo'minati waghrridi*  
*Afrahuna tabet wa fah abeeruha      fajuthuruha turwa bisunnati Ahmadi*

(Come on birds of good utter trilling cries of joy, and warble upon the forehead of women believers)

(Our wedding has a pleasant fragrance, with roots watered from the *Sunna* of Ahmad<sup>2</sup>).

These quotations are restricted to wedding invitation occasions. Poems or prayers are used to express happiness and rejoice the occasion. Sometimes people create their own poetry and not just quote it in order to signify the importance of the occasion.

#### 5.2.2 Identifying the celebrating families

The second move is identifying the celebrating families. It acts as a heading for the invitation. This move is recognized by using the expression: *Afrah Aal...* (Wedding reception of ... [names of the two families]). There are two strategies for producing this move. First, if the groom and the bride are from two different families, a phrase for each family is written either on each side of the card or in the middle, and if they are from the same family (relatives, cousins...etc) only one phrase in the middle of the page is found. The following examples show the two different ways. (Italics are names of Jordanian families)

1.

/Afraah aal / -hmouri /w aal /-zubi  
(*Al-Hamori* and *Al-zubi* wedding ceremonies)

2.

/afraah aal /-shraireh  
(*Al-Sharayrih* wedding invitation)

The main communicative purpose of using this move is introducing the families who are celebrating the occasion.

#### 5.2.3 Stating the names of people issuing the invitation

In Jordanian culture, the fathers of both the groom and the bride are, typically, stated each on either side of the invitation card. So, two different names are mentioned in this move, unlike some other cultures (e.g. Britain) in which the person(s) paying for the event or hosting it issue the invitation and thus their names are stated. This move includes: Titles such as *haj* (the person who has performed pilgrimage), (doctor), (pharmacist) which are usually written above the name. Using such titles - professional, academic or social - relates to Jordanian culture or even to Arabic culture, in which people solicitude a lot in social positions. It also includes the inviter's full name; and other expressions-such as */wa aqilatuh/* (and his wife) to assure that women are involved.

<sup>2</sup> *Sunna* refers to the prophet's traditions and sayings. *Ahmad* is another name for Prophet Mohammad





In the case that the groom/bride's father is dead, the brother (if any) usually takes the responsibility of issuing the cards, usually, in the name of the father using the phrase */Abnaa' al marhoom/* (sons of deceased...), followed by the father's name. This is a confirmation of solidarity among the family members. Sometimes the eldest uncle may issue the card (i.e. X invites you to attend his nephew's wedding), also as a confirmation of solidarity among the extended family members and as a sign of showing respect to older people (see tables 1, 2)

**Table 1:** Different strategies for naming inviters in case of dead father.

Strategy	Frequency	Percentages
Father's name with expression 'son of blessed'	11	≈58%
Eldest brother's name	4	≈21%
Eldest uncle's name	4	≈21%
Total	19	100%

**Table 2:** People's opinion about the reasons for using different strategies for the inviter's name in the case of dead father: *Why do you think the invitation cards are sometimes issued in the name of either the eldest brother or the eldest uncle not the groom himself in case of dead father?*

Reason	In Numbers	Percentages
Old traditions	16	≈38%
Moral Support	23	≈55%
No-reason or unrelated answer	3	≈7%
Total	42	100%

#### 5.2.4 Inviting the guests

This is a single formulaic sentence using some formal vocabulary items. All of the collected samples used the same phrase: *yatashrafoon beda'watikum lehodhur haflat zafaf ...* (are honored to invite you to attend the wedding party). Although there are two invitations in the sample that do not have a specific phrase of inviting the guest, this move is implied by sending the invitation to the invitees. This is because the communicative purpose of any invitation is to request the attendance of a particular person to attend something.

### 5.2.5 Identifying the bride and groom

This move states the names of the couple getting married, usually the first names. It consists of three parts.

#### (a) Specifying the relation between inviters and bride/groom

If the inviters are the bride and groom's fathers, this move can be recognized either as a part of the "inviting guest" phrase *yatashrafoon beda'waticum lehoduur haflat zafaf* (are honored to invite you to attend the wedding reception of their /*waladeihum* (children), referring to son and daughter), or it can be written in a separate line above each name with words like *waladihi* (his son), and / *ibnatihi/kareematihi* / (his daughter/his honorable daughter). Figure 2 is a translation of a typical invitation card with these moves

In the Name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful  
“And among His signs is that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect.” (Qurân: The Romans, verse 21)<sup>3</sup>

Al – (name of family)’s weddings ceremony

(Name of groom's father)	(Name of bride’s father)
Are honored to invite you to attend the wedding reception of His son	His honorable daughter
(groom’s first name)	(bride’s first name)

This will be with God’s willing from ten o’clock to twelve o’clock on Friday 8/8/2003 evening at Arabella Hall, in Irbid - South of Amman New Bus Station.  
May happiness stay in your flourishing homes  
Groom's evening party starts on Wednesday  
In (family name) divan

**Figure 2:** A translation of a sample text of Jordanian wedding invitation with obligatory and optional moves.

#### (b) Titles: Identifying the groom and bride's social position

Titles indicating the academic qualification achieved by one or both the groom and the bride such as doctor, lawyer...etc, are usually mentioned above their names (i.e. *engineer*). This makes invitations more appealing in the sense that the party will be different. Mentioning titles of specific jobs rather than others relates to the Jordanian culture in which titles like doctor and engineer, in particular, indicate richness and prestige. People who hold such jobs are highly respected; other jobs, although important, do not connote such esteem. In spite of the fact that most invitation cards reflect these titles if the inviters have them, the majority of the people involved in the questionnaire (76%) criticized the use of titles on invitation cards arguing that it is an unjustified practice because other jobs are also important. Table 3 shows people's opinion about using titles in wedding invitation cards.

<sup>3</sup> Translations of Qurânic verses are taken from Al-Hilali 1995 the rest is the researchers' own translation



**Table 3:** People's opinion of giving titles in the card: *Do you think that mentioning titles of some jobs in invitation cards is a justified practice?*

Reason	In Numbers	Percentages
Justified	4	≈10%
Unjustified	32	≈76%
No answer	6	≈14%
Total	42	100%

(c) Stating the first name for both the groom and the bride

Most of the wedding invitation cards today state the first name of both the groom and the bride. However, some people state the groom's name only and instead of the bride's name the word */kareematuḥ/* (his honorable daughter) or (their/his sister) is used. This was very common in the past when mentioning the name of the female relative was considered taboo. It was considered more honorable to keep the name of the bride hidden. Some people still believe so and they replace the bride's name with an expression that reflects more respect */kareematuḥ/* (his honorable daughter). Because it is derived from the word */karamah/* (honor or revere or venerate) which means the girl is an honored and precious being. However, recently it has been very common to mention the bride's name (see Tables 4, 5) 69% of the informants involved in the study believe that this relates to recent developments in women's awareness of their equal rights in Islam.

**Table 4:** Frequency of using the bride's name in the corpus.

Procedure	Frequency	Percentages
Stating the bride's name	44	80%
Stating only the grooms name	11	20%
Total	55	100%

**Table 5:** People's responses on the question" *Do you think that mentioning the bride's name is a kind of development in preserving women's rights?*

Opinion	In Numbers	Percentages
Yes	29	≈69%
No	11	≈26%
Maybe	2	≈5%
Total	42	100%



### 5.2.6 Arranging the Ceremony

Names of the bride and the groom are usually followed by ceremonial arrangements including: time, date and location. The information must be very obvious and all important details about the reception must be given in this move. Sometimes this move is introduced by a well-known expression in Islam /*bimashi'at Allah* / (with God's willing), which is used by almost all Muslims because it is derived from their beliefs that nothing may happen in this life without God's willing.

### 5.2.7 Closing

This is the seventh move in Jordanian wedding invitations. This move pragmatically functions as a 'plea' for the invitee usually in a prayer form to close the invitation card politely, so we call it the closing move. Certain culture-based expressions coined especially for this occasion<sup>4</sup> are usually used as a closure. The following quotations reflect the most common ones:

#### Closing Quotations

1.:

دامت الافراح حليفة دياركم العامرة

Damat al'afraah haleefat diyarikum al'amirah

(May happiness last in your flourishing homes)

2.:

بحضوركم تتم سعادتنا وتكمل فرحتنا

*Behuduurikum tatimmu sa'adatuna wa tactamilu farhatuna*

(With your presence our joy and happiness will be completed)

3.:

طاب اللقاء وزاده تشريفكم

Tab alliq'a wa zadahu tasriefa

(The meeting will be nice and your attendance boosts it more)

4.:

دمتم مشعلا تستضاء بكم محافل الافراح

Dumtum mish'allan tustadha'u bekum al'afraah

(May you always be torch lightening up weddings)

### 5.2.8 Notification

Useful supplementary information is mentioned in this move, this information is usually written in small font on the left or right side of the bottom of the card. It could be a note about additional parties that will be held before the wedding such as: the groom's evening party /*ta'lileh*/ or the bride's farewell party - *Henna* party. These parties are limited to relatives and close friends. It could also provide specific details concerning the wedding reception organization. These include: the number of guests that can attend the reception, or a note on prevention of children's attendance. Most Jordanian Muslim families tend to have a lot of children and so most wedding invitations include notes asking for not bringing children to the party. In some cards we may find this directly written as: *please do not bring children*. In some other invitations, it is expressed in an indirect way to save the inviter's face as: *the hotel administration prevents children's attendance at all*.

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<sup>4</sup> In the Arabic culture there are fixed expressions for every occasion. These expressions are difficult to translate into another language as they are culture based. The translations provided are the researchers' own.

### 5.3 Moves order

Most of the invitation cards analyzed manifested the following order of moves:

Opening  
Identifying the Celebrating Families  
Stating the name of people issuing the invitations  
Inviting the guest  
Identifying the Groom and Bride  
Arranging the Ceremony  
Closing  
Notification

However, some invitations in the corpus reflected a different order where the genre was completely manipulated. The following is a translation of an invitation card that manifests this practice.



**Figure 3:** Invitation Card

Every girl says the dearest one I am thinking about is getting married  
The engineer  
(groom's name)  
and he has chosen from all the girls in the world  
(bride's name)  
Most beautiful moon in the high sky, Thursday 5/6/2004 we will be rejoicing in a loud voice in  
(auditorium name) the most beautiful night will be, at half past ten, reunion for all relatives and  
beloved will be.  
(names of both inviters)

**Figure 4:** Translation of the Card in Figure 3

This invitation has the same information and the same communicative purpose, but the whole structure is different. The way it is presented is more prosodic. Using the poetic genre to replace the normal invitation genre is an obvious example of how people can manipulate different genres for different purposes. It seems that people sometimes tend to change the ordinary way of writing wedding invitations in order to be different making the unusual usual and the usual unusual, a practice which may seem more attractive (Momani 2001).



Figure 5: Invitation Card

#### 5.4 Non – Linguistic Features

Invitation genre in general includes common non-linguistic clues that differentiate the invitation genre from other genres. These include decorative borders, different size of font for different moves, different styles of writing, different colors, and centered alignment of some moves or even all moves. But there are specific non-linguistic features that differentiate wedding invitation genre from other invitations, such as using images like wedding rings, hearts, and bouquets of mixed flowers, bunches of roses and individual roses. Figure 6 shows some of the common images used in Jordanian wedding invitations.



Figure 6: Non – Linguistic Features



## 6 Summary of Findings

It has been found that six of the identified moves mentioned above are obligatory. These include: the opening move; stating the name of people issuing the invitation; inviting the guest; identifying the groom and bride; arranging the ceremony; and the closing move. The other two moves, identifying the celebrating families, and notification, are optional. (For statistics of the recurrence of both moves see Table 6).

**Table 6:** Common Generic Moves that Govern the Jordanian wedding invitation

Move	Definition (No. of invitations in which the move was present in corpus of 55)
1. Opening	Introduce the occasion by using direct quotations from holy Qurân or different forms of prayers (52)
2. Identifying the celebrating families	Naming the genre and celebrating families (17)
3. Stating the name of people issuing the invitations	Inviter's names (full names) (55)
4. Inviting the guest	A single formulaic sentence using Arabic polite vocabularies (53)
5. Identifying the groom and bride	First name of the couple getting married (55)
6. Ceremonial arrangements	Details about the occasion (55)
7. Closing	Polite ending (55)
8. Notification	Further necessary information about the ceremony (44)

### 6.1 The effects of the socio-cultural aspects on the generic structure of wedding invitations in Jordan.

In Jordanian wedding invitations, prototypical features of Jordanian culture are clearly displayed. The following factors are the main features.

#### 6.1.1 Religious factors

Religion is a very important aspect in Jordanian society and we can obviously say that religious factors influence all aspects of Jordanian life. It is not surprising, thus, to find out that Jordanian wedding invitations reflect this influence very clearly. Although there are several minorities in Jordanian society, who live in harmony with Muslims and share a lot of common traditions that do not contradict with religious background, Islam remains the dominant religion. It plays a crucial role in the Jordanian way of life, including birth, marriage and death. Marriage is an important part of the life of all Muslims who follow prophet Mohamed's teachings. They have to get married in order to complete their religion. Thus, the language of Jordanian wedding invitations is, generally speaking, characterized by religious features. This is evident in most of the generic components adopted and the number of religious phrases used in Jordanian wedding invitations (see Table 7).

**Table 7:** Frequency of each introductory quotation in the corpus

Quotation	Frequency	Percentages
Quotation 1. (prayer)	21	≈38%
Quotation 2. (Qurânic verse)	20	≈36%
Quotation 4 (poetic)	3	≈5.5%
Other quotations	8	≈15%
No quotation	3	≈5.5%
Total	55	100%

The data reveal an extensive use of invocations in Jordanian wedding invitations. Many cases of invitations start and close by invocations for Allah. Sometimes to bless the couple getting married, the marriage itself, or even to bless the invitees. As it has been found in the analysis, wedding invitation in Jordan begins in many cases with a Qurânic verse, which is preceded and followed by two formulaic verses derived from Islam. Although there are cases where invitations start with different forms of prayers, these prayers are also a type of invocations to Allah (God) and all of them are derived from Islam. The opening verses embody a persuasive message directed to potential unmarried audience to follow them and get married. Also the ‘closing’ move is an invocation to Allah to protect the invitees and the ceremony. Another important evidence of religious influence in Jordanian wedding invitation is manifested in the sixth move ‘arranging the ceremony’ which is commonly introduced by the religious phrase */bimashi’at Allah/* ‘with God’s willing’. Titles sometimes reflect a religious influence as well. “*Al-haj*” title which introduces many inviters’ names is considered as one of the prestigious and important titles that all Muslims long to have. It is given to a person who has performed pilgrimage and it connotes commitment, reverence, wisdom, and integrity.

From the above discussion we can say that the examined data revealed a high frequency of religious phrases that reflect the religious influence on Jordanian wedding invitation.

### **6.1.2 Gender**

Although Islam is a religion that protects women’s rights, it is widely known that Arab countries are lagging countries which exercise suppression against women. Jordan is a developing country but it is like other Arab countries where men are more involved in social, political and economic life than women. Women are usually involved in activities such as running the household, shopping...etc. The examined data did not exactly reveal the same results, but in jobs where titles were used (i.e. prestigious jobs), the difference between women and men can be observed easily, there are only 8 out of 55 brides with prestigious titles (doctor, engineer, lawyer...etc). On the other hand 17 grooms have such titles. These





results do not mean that other brides or grooms are uneducated or even unemployed; they may have jobs but not prestigious ones.

However, these findings confirm that the situation, concerning the attitude towards women in society, is changing to the better. For example, nowadays women in Jordan are involved in all aspect of life and all types of jobs, there are women who are doctors, lawyers, engineers...etc. and these jobs are no longer restricted to men. Furthermore, the variation of using the bride's name instead of the phrase /*kareematuhu*/ (his honorable daughter) in many Jordanian wedding invitations also reflects that women's position in Jordan has changed. The old traditions which consider announcing the bride's name in public as taboo have changed over time and the results illustrate this. However, the word / *kareematuhu* / (his honored daughter) is still used to reflect respect for women because the word connotes an honorable meaning, as it is derived from the Arabic word *karamah* (dignity and respect).

### **6.1.3 Family**

The data analysis revealed the importance of the nuclear family and in some sense that of the extended family in the person's life. In Jordan the extended family is a very basic cultural unit supplemented by the tribal system (Al-Ali 2004:21). The analyzed data reflected the influence of the family in the two moves of: 'announcing the occasion' and 'stating the name of people issuing the invitation', in which the family names of inviters are mentioned. Mentioning the family name in two moves reflects the significance of the tribe in Jordan and it means that inviters are very proud to be part of these tribes. Names of inviters can also be evidence of the importance of the tribal system in Jordan. In almost all cases the inviter's names have been written in three parts (first name, father's name and the extended family name) sometimes the grandfather's name is also written as a sign of honoring ancestors.

### **6.1.4 Titles**

Another social feature manifested in 'stating the name of the people issuing the invitation' and 'naming the bride and groom' moves is the high frequency of prestigious titles such as doctor, lawyer, *haj*, Mr...etc. This emphasizes the importance of titles in the Jordanian society as is the case in many other Arab countries, because Arabic culture evaluates the social status of the individual highly (Al-Ali 2004). Al-khatib (1997) finds that Jordanian people are fond of using titles, as a sign of prestige in Jordanian congratulation and thank you announcements. However, this contradicts with other views in different societies. For example Clynes and Henry (2004) in their study about wedding invitations in Brunei and Malay found that titles are not used at all in spite of the fact that these titles receive much more concern than they do in the Jordanian society. The following is an example of the wording of a typical wedding invitation in Jordan:

Opening.....

Mr., Dr, lawyer, engineer, haj (Bride's father ) and his wife (*haramahu* (no name) and Mr., Dr, lawyer, engineer, haj...etc (Bridegroom's father) and his (wife) (no name) have the honor to invite you to attend the wedding ceremony of their *Kareematuhu* (daughter) (bride's name) and Mr., doctor, engineer, lawyer...etc. (groom's name) on (date) at (time) in (location)

Closing.....



## **6.2 Non-linguistic features that characterize Jordanian wedding invitations**

Optional non-linguistic features are those related to the wedding card appearance, size, type and size of font, layout, and graphics. Jordanian wedding invitations have common characteristics that differentiate wedding invitations from other types of invitations. Hearts, marriage rings, bouquets of flowers are images that are restricted to wedding invitations. Specific decorations used either in the inside sheet or on the card itself are also restricted to wedding invitation cards. The font in almost all cases is larger for 'stating the name of people issuing the invitation' and 'naming the bride and the groom' in contrast with other moves. But we can say that the font for the whole invitation is large not small. The size of the card is different and it relates to the inviter's taste and financial situation as bigger card cost more. Choosing a certain size, color, and decoration in addition to the shape of the card depends largely on the financial situation of the groom. Recently new shapes of wedding invitation cards have been used in Jordan, such as cards made of wood as a gift for invitees or velvet cards, jute cards...etc. Also using images of the groom and the bride as a background is a recent fashion in Jordan. More recently electronic invitations have been introduced to the Jordanian people and it will be worth investigating the practices in these invitations in future research.

## **7 Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study was an attempt to investigate the main components of written wedding invitations in Jordan. The aim was to provide guidelines about how these invitations are made. Two main components have been identified: linguistic and nonlinguistic components. The nonlinguistic components concern the shape, size, type and size of font, layout, graphics, color and design of the card. The linguistic components involve the wording of the invitation which provides the guests with an idea of what to expect at the ceremony. There are different acceptable ways to express the desire for the guest to attend the event that fit with this occasion. In Jordan wedding invitations start with an opening which usually consists of religious or poetic verses. This is usually followed by a few details that must be included. Informing the invitee who is getting married, where the ceremony is being held and when the ceremony takes place is essential to the wording of the wedding invitation. Forgetting any of these important details can leave the guest confused about important details.

The specific wording of wedding invitation depends on who is sending the invitation. If the ceremony is being hosted by the bride's parents, then the wording of the invitation will indicate that they are the ones who request the guest's presence at the ceremony. When the parents are divorced, or one parent is deceased or when the bride and groom are issuing their own invitation, other common scenarios are appropriate. Typical wedding invitations in Jordan are issued by the parents of both the bride and the bridegroom

In case the groom's father is deceased, his sons issue the invitation on his behalf (i.e. sons of blessed/deceased... [name of father] invite you to attend their brother's wedding..).

Certain expressions used in the invitation cards are culture-based expressions. They are taken from the cultural and religious discourses. Translating them literally may not convey their connotations. Other occasions such as obituaries, graduations and birth have their own fixed expressions.

From the analysis the researchers have established the following recommendations in order to shed light on 'homely' discourse and genre studies.



1. Studies of generic structures of 'homely' discourse in Arabic and in Jordanian Arabic in particular are very few in contrast with generic structures of academic and professional settings. So it is significant for future researchers to deal with other Arabic 'homely' discourses in order to fill in the gap, such studies may include advertisements, greetings, apologies, ...etc.
2. This study is limited to only one type of Jordanian written invitations. Further studies of types of Jordanian written invitations may include invitations for national occasions, conferences, meetings, dinner parties, birthday parties, peace making between tribes...etc.
3. Studies of developments in written wedding invitations and manipulations of their structure require further research. It is also recommended that research on oral and electronic invitations be conducted in order to find out similarities and differences in their generic components.
4. It is also recommended that further research be conducted to study the language of invitations in general and wedding invitations in particular in the practice of different ethnic or religious minorities living in Jordan to see if the overall patterns are the same or different.
5. This study may have implications for researchers in sociolinguistics where cross-cultural studies of different strategies used in wedding invitations can be conducted to confirm the similarities and differences between any two cultures. It would be interesting for example to compare Jordanian wedding invitations with Syrian or Egyptian or British wedding invitations.
6. This study may also have implications for both text linguistics and teachers of ESP (English for specific purposes). It is suggested that ESP teachers start teaching language using genres that are familiar to students such as the language of 'invitation' in order to make the process of teaching easier and more flexible and interesting.

Finally this study does not make the claim that the different moves in the analysis are a particularity of Jordanian wedding invitations. It may not be much different from wedding invitations in many other Arab countries, although this is an issue that requires further research.

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