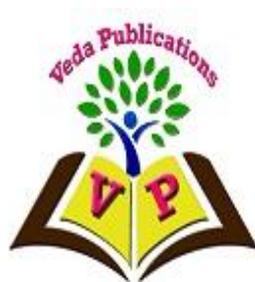




RESEARCH ARTICLE

**LEXICA-THANATOLOGY**

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*(Assistant Professor, Dept. of English, Majmaah University- College of Science & Humanities, Hautat, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.)*DOI : <http://dx.doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2022.9204>**ABSTRACT**

This article attempts to study the linguistic and non-linguistic factors under which many words are rarely used or dead, as well as the reasons for the resurrection of dead words. Dead word samples were taken from different languages and described within their linguistic contexts, e.g. political and cultural, to explain any gaps. The results show that the gaps between words and their contexts lead to word death, concluding that; first, surviving words are due to polysemy, conversion, borrowing words, expressing multiple speakers' intended meaning, and literature – all these linguistic factors make words more frequently used. Second, long words and abbreviations are reasons for rare usage. Third, dead words are resurrected and used to express technical terms. Finally, the loss of semantic content and the context of a word are the most common causes of word death. The originality of this topic motivates me to propose a new sub-discipline in lexicology – 'lexica-thanatology' – to study what causes word death and survival. For further studies, lexica-thanatology may study the causes of the death of grammatical units affixations and other words that express pragmatic meaning. The results of this study will assist linguists who work in the fields of lexicology, linguistic documentary and historical and comparative linguistics. The nature of lexica-thanatology can serve sociology, politics and anthropology as sub-disciplines socio-thanatology, politico-thanatology and cultural-thanatology. They study the death causes of social, cultural values and why humans amend some polices and abandoned others.

Keywords: *Lexicology, Dead Words, Lexica-Thanatology, Linguistics, Culture, Politics*



Different aspects of the environment shape human life and linguistic styles. Language facilitates the way we communicate, live, work, study and socialise, and these activities are expressed by different linguistic collections and prove the strong relationship between human activity and language. All human activities are expressed in terms of the environment. Therefore, human lifestyles are expressed through language and the environment in which activities are practiced; therefore, the environment determines the style of language that humans utilise.

The different components of the human linguistic world are humans, activity, environment, age and the style of language. These components are considered variables that happen in certain circumstances, which are defined in terms of humans: emotions, attitudes, trends, jobs, culture, knowledge and fashion. Therefore, every change in these variables under these circumstances leads to changes in the style of language that humans speak. For example, we hear different discourses when someone is happy versus when they are angry.

The loss of any component of the human linguistic world leads to the loss of lexical items that represent the semantic or metaphoric content of a discourse. This paper will focus on the causes that lead words to death or survive, considering the components of the human linguistic world. A sample of dead words from different contexts (culture, sociology, ideology, politics and technology) will be considered to clarify why they died and why they survived.

Throughout history, humans have had varying ideologies, cultures, religions and political

backgrounds, which involve physical, mental or psychomotor activities that are linguistically expressed by sets of lexical items that stand for their semantic contents.

At the beginning of the 20th century, many ideologies emerged, including Nazism and fascism. Many lexical items were commonly used in Nazi or fascist ideology, such as *Ahnenpaß*, an 'ancestor's passport' for Germans to show their Aryan heritage; *Abschaum* (political advisories in Nazism); and *Angstbrosche*, an ironic expression for latecomers to the Party in 1931. After World War II, Nazism was squelched by the alliance of capitalism and socialism; Germany was then divided between the two world forces and converted from Nazism to capitalism and socialism. Therefore, exhibiting any Nazi ideology would be illegal according to the German constitution: 'Article 139 [Continued applicability of denazification provisions] The legal provisions enacted for the "Liberation of the German People from National Socialism and Militarism" shall not be affected by the provisions of this Basic Law'. Most Germans abided by this law; thus, a huge number of Nazi-related lexical items were eradicated from common use. Human linguistics has lost many of its components. The first components were the loss of the semantic meaning of these words (*Ahnenpaß*, *Abschaum* and *Angstbrosche*) and the linguistic contexts where these words were either spoken, that is, the loss of the environment where Nazis carried out their different ideological activities. When German Nazis converted to either capitalism or socialism, it aggravated the status of Nazi lexical words. It is clear that the loss of a word's semantic content can be impacted by the loss of ideological



activities as a result of law, which is as a result of the loss of environment where the ideological activities were practiced.

I propose that in the mid-20th century, *Akhwan* ('male brothers' in Arabic) disappeared from Egyptian Arabic colloquial dialect for political reasons – the expected pragmatic meaning of *Akhwan* among Egyptians refers to the Islamic Brotherhood, although Egyptian law banned this Islamic group in 1954 (Serpil, 209). Egyptians use the Arabic word *Ikhwat* (a group of female sisters) to express a group of male brothers, and they use the *Aljmaah* (a group of people) metaphorically to refer to the Islamic Brotherhood.

There has been a worldwide discrimination policy practiced in the United States, Europe and other parts of the world practiced throughout the last centuries. Many words and phrases ('Black', 'slave' and 'negro') were used to employ this policy in government institutions and public places. This policy was legal in nature, as claimed by Jones (1981), 'Racial discrimination was institutionalized in different ways in the South' and in the North. This policy was adopted by the U.S. Constitution accordingly 'Article 2(1) emphasizes the need for State Parties to undertake by all means a policy of eliminating racial discrimination in all its forms and promoting understanding among all races' and Article 2(1)(d) emphasizes the state's responsibility to end and prohibit by all means, including legislation, racial discrimination by any person, group or organization.' This policy has changed because of the increase in human rights awareness among Americans. Because Black people are not accepted in America and they are not treated equally with White Americans, it

presents a social and security threat. Therefore, American politicians called for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution regarding the end of the policy of discrimination. As a result of this policy, discriminatory words are not accepted for common use by White Americans.

Culture is defined as a series of values, attitudes and behaviours practiced by a specific group of people. Culture can be described in different terms: the amount of knowledge that is acquired by different social groups, attitudes of groups of people, and behaviour. To practice different kinds of culture, you need language in a specific time, place and event. Accordingly, Glotfelty (2001) claimed that culture is linked to the physical world (environment), influencing it and being influenced by it. The relationship between language and culture appears in the language we speak. Duranti (1997) reported that the language one speaks and the social environments where it occurs are inseparable; language should be processed as a cultural behaviour. The variables time, place, event, words and culture are mentally processed; therefore, the loss of any of these variables may cause the loss of a word that stands for each cultural expression. Some words culturally were dead, e.g. the Arabic word *وَأَد* means in English to bury live female infants in a hole in the ground. This cultural phenomenon was practiced by Arabs before the message of Islam, but Islamic instructions forbid this behaviour; therefore, this word was no longer used as a social practice, and it is present in the Holy Quran to remind Muslims how shameful this behaviour was. The same word is still metaphorically used in Arabic *وَأَد الفكرة* means in English to abandon an idea.



Although the Arabic word (فارس) 'knight' is used throughout Arabic literature, it has recently been replaced by many words that stand for a person who rides a horse in a horse race. The same word is metaphorically used in Arabic to show the characteristics of knight that describe a quality of a good person like gentle, brave, polite and generous; therefore, this word has been rarely used.

There are many immortal words in Arabic and English, including 'god', 'sun', 'earth', 'sky' and 'water'. The meanings of these words have not changed because they stand for the unique quality and quantity of a certain object, but they may have some modification in their spelling or pronunciation because of some phonological/orthographical interference.

Many words stand for dead objects or animals and these words are listed in dictionaries for the purpose of linguistic documentation. For example, *dinosaur* alludes to a dead animal but is still used metaphorically for an old man who never changes his style. The word *dragon* is antiquated but still used to signify an angry woman. The use of dead or rarely used words denotes the metaphorical meaning in different contexts because the features or aspects were characterised by these animals, and these features are suitable for idiomatic expressions.

Although they stand for different meanings, many words are rarely used in English because of their spelling; therefore, many linguistic factors stimulate word death. One of these factors is complicated spelling because most people prefer to convey messages using simple spelling and pronunciation. This list includes *thitherward* (towards a place), *vexatious* (annoying) and *sanctimonious* (attempting

to appear morally superior), which are rarely used because of their complicated spelling forms.

There are many English words and phrases that are rarely used because they either consist of many letters or more than one word, so an abbreviation system is used, e.g. 'ad' is short for 'advertisement'; 'AM/PM' stand for 'ante meridiem/post meridiem', referring to time of day; 'BC' stands for 'before Christ'; 'news' stands for a phrase 'nothing ever worth saying'; and 'C.V.' stands for 'curriculum vitae'. The use of abbreviations has become more popular and practical in the field of medicine, which uses a lot of Latin medical terminology with extensive and strange spelling forms in English.

Many dead English words are still mummified in certain contexts, such as the poetry of William Shakespeare and the idiomatic system, old novels and drama. These kinds of contexts are appropriate for linguistic documentary systems that record dead or old words for any kind of comparative linguistics study.

Many dead words have been resurrected and are becoming commonly used today, e.g. 'Googol' is an original word of Google, which means the number 1 followed by a hundred zeroes. There is a new context in the revolution of digital information; therefore, a need for the term stands for a powerful research engine, and the meaning of Google can be an excellent trademark for this research engine. The word Google has become a trademark verb meaning 'to do an internet search'. Most of these words have recently been used as technical terms for specific contexts.



Many linguistic factors help the revival of words. The first is the different meanings of a word. If one word stands for different meanings, it will survive, even if some contexts disappear. Second, a word that plays the roles of more than one class of speech, e.g. many English words are simultaneously considered nouns and adjectives or verbs and adverbs. The different classes of speech that are employed by one word could be discriminated either by the grammatical function of a word within a sentence (subject, verb, object or adjective) or by shifting the placement of the stress from one syllable to another within a word to change the word class, e.g. collect, counter and express. Third, if many languages borrow a specific word from one language, this means that the borrowed word stands for a unique context and expresses one direct meaning. Fourth, a word that is used to convey a speaker's intended meaning can form different social and linguistic contexts; in this case, a word is revived and stands for different pragmatic meanings, e.g. the word 'tree' is used in many idiomatic expressions ('up a gum tree', 'bark up the wrong tree', 'out of your tree').

The originality of this article prompts me to introduce lexicathatology as a new term for a new lexicological sub-discipline. Thanatology comes from the Greek *thanatos* (death) and was used by Elisabeth Kubler (1969), who wrote a book, *On Death and Dying*, which described studying death and dying. I use it as a new sub-discipline in lexicology that studies the linguistic and environmental conditions and linguistic/non-linguistic factors that play essential roles in keeping a word alive and that are used frequently by speakers and writers. The linguistic factors include polysemy, conversion,

borrowing words, pragmatic meanings, common religious nouns, and literature. Non-linguistic factors include culture, politics and sports, where the word goes and dies or survives. For further scientific research, lexicathatology studies the death causes of grammatical units, affixations, sounds, wisdoms, proverbs and idioms. Lexicathatology can accommodate studies of other linguistic areas, such as the life of the pragmatic meaning of phrases in social groups and the loss of non-linguistic signs.

The nature of lexicathatology can serve sociology as a socio-thanatology. This discipline describes and analyses the conditions under which some social values lead to death and why humans adopt some new social values. The dead and new culture of any community can be studied using cultural thanatology as a new anthropological discipline. The nature of politics is fluid due to many variables. Some policies are abundant and others adopt; politico-thanatology studies, examining under what circumstances policies are abundant, amended, adapted or adopted. These new disciplines in the humanities produce databases that can be used for further studies.

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