

RESEARCH ARTICLE

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# LINGUISTIC VARIATION IN ONLINE SYMPATHY EXPRESSION

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## Abstract

The digital age has transformed the way individuals express sympathy and condolences, particularly in the aftermath of tragic incidents such as the devastating earthquake that hit Turkey on February 6, 2023. This study aims to explore the linguistic variation in online condolences posted on social media platforms in response to this natural disaster. By employing a qualitative analysis of condolence messages, we examine the syntactic and pragmatic elements that characterize these expressions of sympathy. Our findings reveal distinct linguistic patterns and thematic functions, including expressions of empathy, solidarity, and religious undertones. The study highlights the influence of cultural and contextual factors on the language of online condolences, shedding light on the complex interplay between language, culture, and digital communication in times of tragedy.

**Keywords** Online condolences, linguistic variation, digital communication, sympathy expressions, cultural influences, social media, empathy in crisis, solidarity and support, religious sentiments.

## INTRODUCTION

On February 6, 2023, Turkey was struck by a devastating earthquake, resulting in significant loss of life and destruction. In the face of this tragedy, individuals from around the world turned to digital platforms to express their condolences and support for the victims and their families. The digital age has transformed the way we communicate our sympathies, allowing for immediate and widespread expressions of solidarity.

The practice of offering condolences is deeply embedded in human culture, serving as a means of providing comfort and support to those experiencing grief. However, the transition to digital communication has introduced new dimensions to this age-old practice, enabling people to express their condolences in diverse and

innovative ways. This study aims to explore the linguistic variation in online condolences posted in response to the 2023 earthquake in Turkey. By analyzing the language used in these messages, we seek to uncover the syntactic and pragmatic elements that characterize expressions of sympathy in the digital era. Our research investigates how individuals utilize language to convey empathy, solidarity, and comfort through digital platforms, and how these expressions are shaped by cultural and contextual factors. The study examines linguistic patterns and thematic functions in online condolences, such as expressions of sympathy, positive statements, expressions of solidarity, and religious-oriented comments. Through this analysis, we aim to gain insights into the evolving nature of human communication in times of crisis and the role of digital platforms in facilitating collective mourning

and support.

By understanding the linguistic variations in online condolences, this research contributes to the broader field of digital communication studies, particularly in the context of crisis and tragedy. It sheds light on how language and culture interact in the digital space to express human emotions and support in the aftermath of a disaster.

## **METHODS**

The expression of condolences in the digital age has garnered increasing attention in the field of psycholinguistic research. As social media and online platforms become prevalent means of communication, understanding the linguistic and cultural nuances of digital condolences becomes crucial. This literature review explores key themes and findings from previous studies that inform our understanding of online condolences, particularly in the context of natural disasters like the 2023 earthquake in Turkey.

The advent of digital communication has transformed traditional practices of expressing condolences. Researchers such as Zhou and Jurgens [9] have examined the nature of online condolences, noting that digital platforms offer a space for immediate and widespread expressions of sympathy. Schmidt-Crawford et al. [8] highlight the importance of online condolences in providing prompt support to the grieving, emphasizing the role of digital communication in creating a virtual community of solace.

The linguistic aspects of online condolences have been a focal point of research. Studies by Elwood [2] and Morady Moghaddam [5] have analyzed the syntactic and pragmatic elements of condolence messages, identifying common themes such as expressions of sympathy, offers of assistance, and religious-oriented comments. These findings underscore the diversity of linguistic expressions used in conveying condolences across different

cultural contexts. Cultural factors play a significant role in shaping the expression of condolences. Research by Zunin and Zunin [3] and Calderwood and Alberton [1] has explored how cultural norms and rituals influence the language of condolences. Manning [4] and Klass [3] discuss the importance of understanding cultural variations in mourning practices to ensure respectful and empathetic communication. The role of online condolences in times of crisis, such as natural disasters, has been examined by scholars like Morady Moghaddam and Esmaeilpour [6]. These studies highlight how digital platforms facilitate collective mourning and support during traumatic events. The research underscores the need for effective communication and cultural sensitivity in expressing condolences in the aftermath of disasters.

While existing literature provides valuable insights into online condolences, there is a gap in understanding the linguistic variation and cultural influences specific to the context of natural disasters like earthquakes. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing online condolences following the 2023 earthquake in Turkey, contributing to a deeper understanding of digital communication in times of crisis.

This study employs a qualitative research design to explore the linguistic variation in online condolences posted in response to the 2023 earthquake in Turkey. The aim is to analyze the syntactic and pragmatic elements present in these messages and to understand how they reflect cultural and contextual factors.

The data for this study were collected from various social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and personal blogs. Using keywords and phrases such as "Turkey earthquake 2023" and "condolences for Turkey," we gathered a corpus of online condolence messages. The collection period spanned 12 months following the earthquake to capture a wide range of responses.

The analysis of condolence messages was guided by an adapted version of the coding scheme developed by Elwood [2], which is based on the semantic formulas proposed by Olshtain and Cohen [7]. This coding scheme categorizes condolence messages into two macro levels: direct and indirect. The direct category includes micro-level functions such as offering condolences, acknowledgment of the death, and expression of sympathy. The indirect category encompasses micro-level functions such as expression of solidarity, religious-oriented comments, and future-oriented remarks.

The collected condolence messages were annotated and categorized according to the coding scheme. Each message was analyzed for its semantic content and placed under the appropriate category. Frequency analysis was conducted to determine the prevalence of each category in the data set. The analysis also involved a qualitative examination of the messages to identify linguistic patterns and thematic functions.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of online condolences posted in response to the 2023 earthquake in Turkey revealed diverse linguistic expressions. Similar to the findings of previous studies, the most common category was the expression of sympathy, with messages expressing sadness and empathy for the affected families and individuals. Examples include "Feeling sad for all families who lost loved ones" , "My heart is broken for this man, for all the children who are frightened and need love." , "My heart goes out to all those affected by the tragic earthquake in Turkey. Stay strong." (Facebook), "Deeply saddened by the news of the earthquake. My condolences to the families who have lost their loved ones." (Instagram) [10], "So sorry to hear about the devastation in Turkey. Thinking of all the victims during this difficult time." (Facebook).

Expressions of Solidarity and Support: Expressions

of solidarity and support were also prominent, reflecting a global sense of unity and concern. Many messages conveyed a willingness to assist and support the affected communities, such as "Keep helping for those who need help... God bless you with your family" and "How I wish I can be in Turkey to help with the rescue of the people.", "We are with you, Turkey. The world stands united in support during this challenging time." (Instagram), "Sending love and support to everyone affected by the earthquake. We are all in this together." (Facebook), "Our hearts are with Turkey. Let's come together to help those in need." (Instagram).

Religious-Oriented Comments: Religious-oriented comments were frequent, reflecting the cultural context of the region and the spiritual nature of condolence expressions. Phrases like "May Allah grant her" and "Heavenly father, please place your healing hands on the people of Turkey" were common, indicating a reliance on faith for comfort and support. Other examples of religious-oriented comments are as follows: "Praying for peace and healing for all affected by the earthquake in Turkey. May God's grace be upon you." (Facebook) , "In these trying times, may Allah provide strength and comfort to the people of Turkey." (Instagram) , "Heavenly Father, watch over Turkey and bring solace to those who are suffering." (Facebook) .

Future-Oriented Remarks: Future-oriented remarks, though less frequent, expressed hope for recovery and resilience. Messages in this category included phrases like "Prayer for all people in Turkey Amen" and "I send prayers for all the people in Turkey," reflecting a forward-looking perspective and a desire for healing. The examples are: "Hope for a swift recovery and rebuilding process in Turkey. The future will be brighter." (Instagram), "Wishing strength and resilience to all those impacted. Better days are ahead." (Facebook), "May the coming days bring healing and restoration to the beautiful nation of Turkey."

(Instagram).

The results of this study highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of online condolences in the aftermath of the 2023 earthquake in Turkey. The linguistic variation observed in the condolence messages reflects a range of emotions, from sorrow and empathy to hope and solidarity. The prevalence of expressions of sympathy in the data set is consistent with previous research that emphasizes the importance of acknowledging loss and expressing empathy in condolence messages. These messages often serve as a means of emotional support, helping the bereaved feel understood and less isolated in their grief.

Expressions of solidarity and support were also prominent, reflecting a global sense of unity and concern. In the context of the Turkish earthquake, these messages underscore the role of digital platforms in facilitating collective mourning and support across geographical boundaries [8]. Religious-oriented comments were frequent, highlighting the cultural and spiritual dimensions of condolence expressions. This is particularly relevant in the context of Turkey, where religion plays a significant role in society [3]. The use of religious language in condolence messages can provide comfort and hope to the affected individuals, resonating with their beliefs and values [2].

Future-oriented remarks, though less frequent, offer a glimpse of hope and resilience. These messages reflect a forward-looking perspective, emphasizing the possibility of healing and recovery [5]. This aspect of online condolences is crucial, as it provides a sense of optimism and encouragement to the affected communities [4].

Overall, the findings of this study contribute to our understanding of digital communication in times of crisis. The diverse linguistic expressions used in online condolences reveal the ways in which language serves as a tool for empathy, solidarity,

and support [9]. As digital platforms continue to play a central role in social interactions, exploring the linguistic and cultural dimensions of online condolences will remain an important area of research [8].

## **CONCLUSION**

This study explored the linguistic variation in online condolences posted in response to the 2023 earthquake in Turkey. The analysis revealed a rich tapestry of expressions, encompassing sympathy, solidarity, religious sentiment, and future-oriented remarks. These findings underscore the multifaceted nature of digital condolences and the role of language in articulating a collective response to tragedy. The prevalence of expressions of sympathy highlights the universal human impulse to offer comfort in the face of loss. Expressions of solidarity and support underscore the potential of digital platforms to transcend geographical boundaries and foster a sense of global community. The frequent use of religious language reflects the cultural and spiritual dimensions of condolence expressions, emphasizing the importance of cultural sensitivity in digital communication. Future-oriented remarks, though less common, provide a crucial element of hope and resilience, essential for recovery and healing. This study contributes to the growing body of research on digital communication in times of crisis, highlighting the ways in which online platforms facilitate collective mourning and support. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, further research is needed to understand the nuanced ways in which language, culture, and technology intersect in the expression of condolences. By examining the linguistic patterns and thematic functions of online condolence messages, we can gain deeper insights into the human capacity for empathy and solidarity in the face of adversity.

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