

Original Research Article

## Exploring Non-linguistic patterns of Jordanian Written Wedding Invitations: A Multimodal Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to provide a comprehensive analysis of salient non-linguistic features that characterize the genre of Jordanian wedding invitation cards. It also explores how socio-cultural and religious beliefs and practices are reflected in the generic formulaic structure of this genre. In order to explore non-linguistic features, a genre analysis was carried out upon a corpus of 200 wedding invitation cards. The analysis was influenced by the work of Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) as it profitably illuminates the relationship between social practice and written discourse and refuses linguistic choices as the only meaning-making devices and identifies space, colour, picture, position, and size, among many others, as important semiotic devices. The findings of the study revealed that the writers of Jordanian wedding invitations use a number of non-linguistic resources the way they like to generate some special effects and express private and organizational intentions within the framework of culturally recognised purposes. It is hoped that the results of this study will be of great help in further understanding the socio-cultural perceptions, attitudes and values that shape these two communicative events as well as aiding in efforts towards intercultural communication.

## Introduction

Invitation is "a commemorative social action having the function of informing and requesting the presence or participation of a person(s) kindly and courteously to some place, gathering, entertainment, etc., or to do something" (Al-Ali, 2006, Al-Zubaidi, 2017). The wedding day is one of the most memorable days in each person's life. It's a day that we should live and cherish each moment to the fullest. Wedding in each society and culture requires several preparations including the wedding invitation card. According to Al-Ali (2006), there are two types of invitations, namely written and spoken. Written invitations include certain generic features compared to spoken ones. Written wedding invitations include information such as the name of the bride and groom, place and time of the wedding. There are different types and styles of invitation cards. Jordanian people use a distinct style in providing invitation cards for wedding ceremonies. The analysis of such invitations will result in underlying facts regarding the explanations which are rooted in Jordanian and Islamic culture as well as priorities of the couples and their families.

The communicative purpose of a wedding invitation is to inform people that a wedding party is going to be held in a specific time and place and to call upon them to participate in this occasion by their presence. In Jordanian

culture, as in all cultures, the written wedding invitation card is characterized by certain generic non-linguistic features that distinguish them from other types of written genres; it is a traditional text in which socio-cultural, as well as religious conventions play a huge role. Wedding invitation cards belong to a group of genres referred to by Miller (1984) as "homely discourse", which includes, as Al-Ali (2006, p. 692) argues, announcement texts of everyday life such as birth, weddings, graduations, obituary announcements and the like. A wedding invitation card is a recognizable 'homely' discourse that is widely known to people all over the world. That is to say, its content is easily predicable in terms of the mention of the name of a bride and a groom, and the time and place of the wedding ceremony, etc.

In spite of their obvious prevalence and uniqueness, wedding invitation cards have long been understudied homely genres in comparison with other types of genres. This research attempts to unravel some of the mysteries surrounding this popular widespread communicative event from which individuals can learn the practices and rules of specific social groups in a society. Moreover, this study serves as a useful resource about Jordanian society in terms of the use of non-linguistic choices in a particular rhetorical context, as well as socio-cultural and religious background. In other words, this study is a window that provides a view into various aspects of Jordanian culture and a guide to the way through which Jordanian people construct and organize their wedding invitation cards. The present paper seems to be interesting, because while there is a substantial body of research on the rhetorical structure of wedding invitations (Clynes and Henry, 2005; Al-Ali, 2006; Momani and Al-Refaei, 2010; Sharif and Yarmohammadi, 2013; Sawalmeh, 2014, 2015, 2018), it is difficult to think of a study in the existing literature devoted to the way that non-linguistic choices of a varying nature are related to the sociocultural and religious dimensions in wedding invitations.

### **Theoretical Background and Review of Related Literature**

The present study draws on Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) multimodality perspective on textual analysis in that it refuses linguistic choices as the only meaning-making devices and identifies space, colour, picture, position, and size, among many others, as important semiotic devices. The choice of colour employed in a text, according to Kress and van Leeuwen, depends on the sociocultural context within which sign-makers act.

Genre is a concept which is used in detailed formal and functional analysis. As Bhatia (2002) believes, genre is "multi-disciplinary" which is not only used in linguistic anthropology and discourse analysis, but also in cognitive science, sociology and even advertisement. Different definitions have been presented by various scholars. According to Dudley-Evans (2000), genre is a means of attaining a communicative goal in response to special rhetorical needs that will change based on the shifts in those needs. Swales (1990) describes genre as "a class of communicative events" which shares a set of communicative purposes as well as related structures, stylistic characteristics and content. Kress (1989) defines genre as "the term which describes that aspect of the form of the texts which is due to the effect of their production in particular social occasions" (p. 36). Genre analysis, according to Allison and Ruiying (2004), "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".

In the past few years, two studies investigating the discourse of wedding invitation cards have been carried out in Jordan (Al-Ali, 2006, Momani & Al-Refaei, 2010). In a study which explored written wedding invitations, Al-Ali (2006) used a genre and critical discourse analysis to examine religious affiliations and masculine power in the texts. He found that religious affiliations and masculine power played a crucial role in shaping the overall component moves, and coloured the naming practices and lexical choices in the genre. His analysis of a large dataset of 200 Arabic written wedding invitation cards, for instance, revealed that this genre opened with verses from the Holy Qur'an in the form of formulaic and ritualistic quotations which promote marriage in Islam. Masculinity and patriarchal kinship culture then ran through the ritualized invitation text. For example, the

“Heading” move began with stating the names of the couple’s tribes, and such social forces kept on dominating the representations of the wedding inviters, the guests, the couple and even the time and the place of the wedding ceremony.

In another study done in Jordan, Momani and Al-Refaei (2010), using model of analysis proposed by Holmes (1997) and a modified version of the model outlined by Clynes and Henry, investigated the generic structure of Jordanian wedding invitation cards in order to find out what components Jordanian inviters employ to articulate the communicative purpose of these invitations. They also investigated the effect of socio-cultural aspects on the generic structure of wedding invitation cards through surveying many Jordanian people’s opinions using a questionnaire and interviews. The sample of the study consisted of 55 invitation cards from a collection of 150 cards covering the periods from 1979 until 2006. They found that the wedding invitation card genre in Jordan was built around obligatory and optional moves which communicate a lot of information about socio-cultural values and norms in Jordanian society that affect the structure of such genre.

Even though Al-Ali and Momani and Al-Refaei’s studies have on the whole yielded excellent and interesting results, they do not have a number of shortcomings. Firstly, they concentrated only on the common generic text structures or components of the Jordanian wedding-invitation genre. And secondly, they did not provide in-depth analysis of the non-linguistic patterns which characterize the wedding invitation genre. The present study takes a wider perspective to genre analysis, focusing on the sociolinguistic discourse variability and dynamics in light of the underlying social and institutional motives and forces. Moreover, Al-Ali’s and Momani and Al-Refae’s studies were conducted in 2006 and 2010 respectively, and it will be very interesting to see if the language of wedding invitation card has changed in the eight years that separate these studies, as examining this genre over a longer period of time might reveal new structural and non-linguistic differences, and show how such genre can evolve and develop over time under the impact of social and religious forces that affect the linguistic and textual choices of the genre.

## **Methods and Procedures**

A sample of 200 wedding invitation cards was randomly selected. After collecting the data, similarities and differences in generic features within various Jordanian wedding invitation cards were considered.

The analysis of non-linguistic features focuses on Kress and Van Leeuwen’s (2001) social semiotic multi-model of textual. The multimodal analysis takes a combination of textual and visual modes of meaning making into account. Specifically, it probes into the analysis of the typical verbal and non-verbal features of the wedding invitation discourse, and the sociocultural norms embedded in this type of discourse.

Dynamics like printed forms, colors, layouts, calligraphy, graphics, and paper materials were analyzed by means of this analytic paradigm. The social, cultural and religious representations encoded in the discourse of wedding invitations were examined. The qualitative method was used to analyze the selected corpus. To cross-check the credibility of corpus analysis, some Jordanian people were interviewed to give their opinions of the generic, semiotic and socio-cultural features identified in the present corpus.

## **Results and Discussion**

A multimodal theory of communication is a theory which looks at how people interact and communicate with each other, not only through writing, but also through speaking, gaze, gesture, and visual forms. It is based “on an analysis of the specificities and common traits of semiotic modes which take account of their social, cultural and historical production” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001, p.4). Jordanian wedding invitation cards include common non-linguistic features that differentiate this genre from other genres such as colours, typography and graphic images.

## Colours

The choice of colour employed in a text, according to Kress and van Leeuwen, depends on the sociocultural context within which sign-makers act. The choice of colour by the producers of a wedding invitation card can be considered as important meaning-making as it carries some cultural, social and religious peculiarities.

It goes without saying that the colour of a wedding invitation card plays a prominent role in having eye-catching effect on the readers of these wedding invitation cards as it is the first thing they will notice when reading them. Colours exert a subconscious influence upon the reader's attitudes during the process of arousing emotions and interest. Thus, the importance of colours during the perception of a wedding invitation card is incontrovertible. Each colour evokes diversified perceptions and also reflects people's mental disposition, temperament, personality, mood and many other factors. Also, every colour elicits different associations, i.e., dark colours usually tend to evoke negative, sad, depressing emotions, whereas bright ones invoke the feelings of cheer, gladness, joy and happiness (Krčmařova, 2008, p. 38). To be more specific, blue, for instance, implies pureness, serenity and peace. Consequently, the correlation between colours, mood and personality is indisputable. Using a proper colour for the wedding invitation card seems to be the fastest way to express mood and emotions without saying a word. Therefore, the producers (the bride and groom) of the wedding invitation card certainly know which colour has a psychological influence on readers (wedding invitees).

Colours, which are employed in wedding invitation cards, should be eye-catching, attractive and appealing as they tend to be the first identifiable visual element on the page that attracts the readers to the wedding invitation card. According to Šalda (2009, p. 24), colours represent these qualities:

White: it represents purity, faith and virginity.

Brown: it is a symbol of home and planet and serves as a symbol of autumn.

Grey: it is understood as a colour of firmness, security and conservativeness. It represents maturity, higher age and dignity.

Purple: it is a symbol of nobles, wealth, extravagance, wisdom, magic and arrogance.

Green: it symbolizes youth, fortune and vigour. It is also connected with jealousy, experience and money. The green colour is seen as sharp and is not very relaxing.

Orange: it is the colour of enthusiasm, attractiveness, creativity and warmth and serves as a symbol of autumn and harvest.

Blue: it is the colour of depth and stability and symbolizes the freedom, wisdom, loyalty, cleanliness, technology and security.

Yellow: it represents optimism, sunshine, joy, hope, impulsiveness and warmth.

With regard to colours used in Jordanian wedding invitation cards, it is established, in this research, that colours enhance the aesthetics of wedding cards so as to catch the attention or the eyes of their readers. Thus, we can find typical colours and designs on these wedding cards. Choosing a colour scheme for a wedding invitation card is very important because it is the first glimpse the guests will receive of the wedding day theme.

A careful examination of the data has revealed that the most popular colours used in Jordanian wedding cards include red, green, white and black and white together. The colour red on the cards is "an auspicious colour as it represents fertility as befitting a marriage" (Gonsalves, 2010). As for the colour green, it is considered as a

traditional colour of Islam in Jordanian culture, and it has a special mention in the Holy Qur'an. It was the first colour used by the prophet Mohammed peace and blessings be upon him and represents cleanliness, purity and nature. To Jordanians, the colour green denotes the freshness of Islam and brings unity and union among them. The green coloured marriage invitation is a universal symbol of peace, love and harmony. It highlights the rites of a wedding and enhances the grace of the wedding ceremony. The colour green, too, clearly, depicts the true happiness of Muslim wedding (Sharma, 2013).

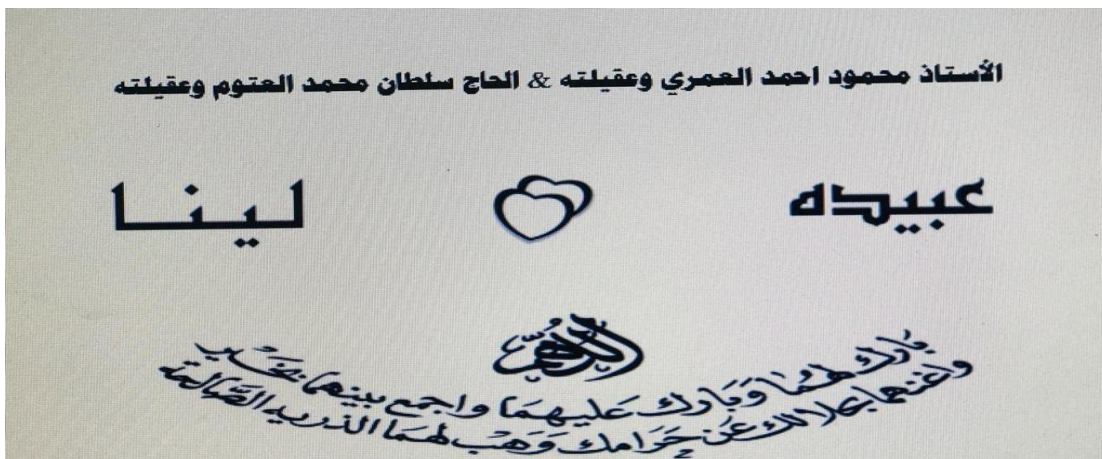
Regarding the colour white of Jordanian invitations, it is regarded a perfect and ideal colour; it represents truth, positivity and kindness. Due to these characteristics, white coloured marriage invitations are printed to bring peace, simplicity and purity to the wedding celebration (ibid, 2013).

Also, Jordanian wedding invitation cards feature the white and black colours together. Blaine (2009) states that black and white wedding invitation cards are the easiest and most affordable for couples. No matter what the groom's budget is, black and white invitations will always fit. It is interesting to note that of the 200 wedding invitation cards under study, about 120 feature the black and white colours due to the fact that some families who are tight on budget usually cannot afford the high expenditures of producing wedding invitation cards with other colours.

### Typography

The arrangement, appearance, and style of printed words in Jordanian wedding invitation cards may suggest various connotations and ideas. Since verbal language communicates specific messages, written language also forms the image of wedding invitation discourse. The producers of such wedding invitation cards choose different and attractive fonts, styles, shapes or sizes to make their wedding invitation cards special, eye-catching, and elegant for readers. They are certainly aware that the words and their particular typefaces may influence the readers ranging from effecting perceptions and moods to evoking new feelings and emotions. In addition, they try to choose suitable typographical features that correspond with other graphic elements such as layout, colours, background of the wedding invitation card.

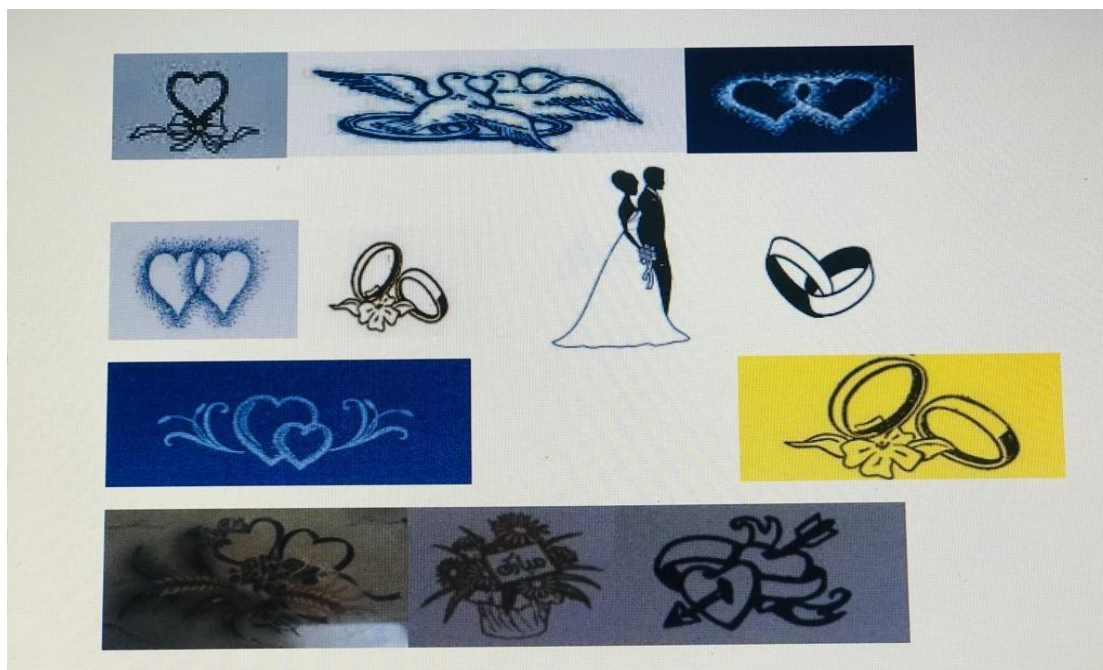
As far as Jordanian wedding invitation cards are concerned, there is a strong tendency to employ many typefaces such as Times New Roman and Tahoma, Simple Bold Jut Out, Simple Indust Shaded, PT Bold Mirror or PT Bold Stars because they are visible, thus appealing to wedding invitation readers. The examined data revealed that "the names of the bride and groom" move, "The names of the inviters of the wedding" move and the "Opening" move in all wedding invitation cards were all printed as separate lines in boldface with a large size font. Here are. Some illustrative examples:



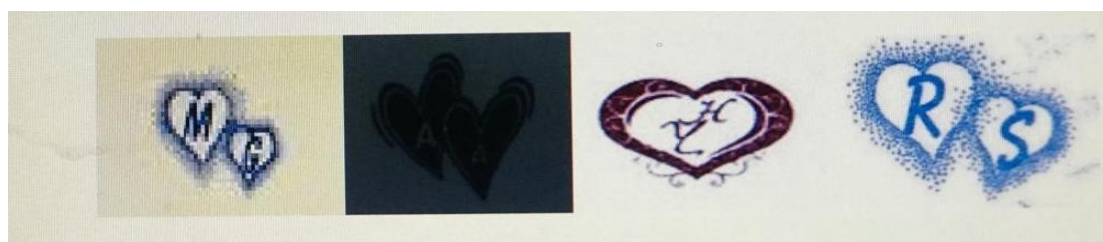
In the above examples, the producers of wedding cards have used larger and bold letters in the invitations in order to perhaps draw the readers' attention and make them curious about the content of these invitations and thus may lead the readers to carry on reading the invitation card and rouse their curiosity to know more about the wedding arrangements and finally may reach their goal to persuade them to attend the wedding party.

### Image

The most communicative non-verbal element in all wedding invitation cards under investigation is the image. The bride and groom tend to include beautiful and attractive images to make their wedding invitation cards memorable, distinct, catchy and unique. The photographic images certainly attract the attention of readers and contribute to achieving the communicative goals of the wedding invitation card genre. The most striking result to emerge from the data is that the great majority of the wedding invitation cards are beautifully embellished with images of wedding rings, bouquets of mixed flowers, hearts, bunches of roses, birds, arrows, couple, etc. Consider the following images taken from the corpus:



It is important to note that the position of such photographic images is frequently changed; it never occupies a constant place within wedding invitation cards. The position of the image may come between the names of the bride and groom, at the corner, the upper part of the page, the right side of the page, or the left side of the page. Interestingly, names, usually just first names and/or first initials, may be enclosed in a heart shape in wedding invitation cards. It should be also noted that all the first letters of the bride's and groom's names were written in English not in Arabic in all the data examined. Consider the following examples:





## Conclusion

This study aimed to make a significant contribution to the study of genre of Jordanian wedding invitation cards with the objective to analyse the non-linguistic features and communicative purposes practiced in this genre to determine specific conventionalized purposes which are associated with different socio-cultural, as well as ideological backgrounds that Jordanian people practice in constructing and interpreting this genre.

Wedding invitation cards are not limited to merely announcing the wedding of two people; rather, they mirror Jordanian people's ideas and judgments, depending on many factors such as economic standing, religious beliefs, cultural practices, customs, etc. They are characterized as ceremonial genre texts generally constrained by socio-religiously motivated practices and conventions.

Wedding invitations are the first glimpse guests might have of the magnificence of the celebration. Ranging from preprinted to custom-designed cards, Jordanian wedding invitation texts are printed on light cardboards of unique colors such as white, cream, golden, silver, beige, pink, and the like. The front page decorated with ribbon, pressed flowers, embossed images of wedding rings, hearts, roses, bouquets of mixed flowers, or a studio portrait of the bride and the groom almost always features either the first names of the bride and the groom in English. Jordanian wedding cards are flavored with the beautiful art of calligraphy. The names of the bride and the groom, sometimes intertwined, are typed in a separate line using a larger font size. Another nonlinguistic element that attracts attention in Jordanian wedding cards is the presence of decorative borders, including floral and traditional borders. The color of the ink and the envelope are carefully selected to go with the invitation design.

The writers of wedding invitation cards employ particular non-linguistic features that contribute to achieving the intended communicative goals of the genre. For example, colours and typography are common features used in wedding invitations. The use of these features plays a prominent role in the style and design of these wedding invitation cards and make them special, eye-catching, and elegant for the invitees. Moreover, they tend to include beautiful and attractive images to make their wedding invitation cards memorable, distinct and unique. It must be noted also that the use of particular non-linguistic features such as colours, typography reflects the high economic social status of the wedding invitation writer as using such features costs a lot of money.

Another conclusion which can be drawn from this study is that Jordanian inviters employ particular non-linguistic features such as colours, typography and graphic images. Interestingly enough, it was found that these features played a prominent role in the style and design of wedding invitation cards, where the producers of such wedding invitation cards choose attractive fonts, styles and shapes to make them special, eye-catching, and elegant for the invitees. Moreover, they tend to include beautiful and attractive images to make their wedding invitation cards memorable, distinct and unique. The photographic images undoubtedly attract the attention of the readers and contribute to achieving the intended communicative goals of the wedding genre. It is hoped that this study will be of great help in further understanding the socio-cultural perceptions, attitudes and values that shape these two communicative events as well as aiding in efforts towards intercultural communication.

## About the Author

**Murad Sawalmeh** received his PhD in Linguistics from the University of Huddersfield, United Kingdom in July 2015, his MA in Linguistics from the University of Jordan in July 2007, and his BA in English Language and Literature from Al al-Bayt University in June 2004. He has over 12 years of teaching experience. During this period, he taught different linguistics and translation courses at BA level. He participated in many conferences in the United Kingdom, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Linguistics and Translation at the Department of English Language and Literature, Dhofar University, Oman, which he joined in 2017. His areas of research interest include translation, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, genre analysis and applied linguistics. He has published research papers in international academic journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science including *SAGE Open*, *International Journal of Arabic-English Studies*, *English for Specific Purposes World*, *International Journal of English and Education*, *Journal of Advances in Linguistics*,

*International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation, and International Journal of Humanities and Social Development Research*. He has also authored a book for Arabic speaking students, entitled “*English Grammar for all Levels*” (2007). Besides his position with the *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*, Murad Sawalmeh is a reviewer for a number of international journals including *International Journal of English Linguistics, American Research Journal of English and Literature, Journal of English for specific purposes World*.

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