A Content Analysis of Themes in Persian Curses*

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1. INTRODUCTION
Undoubtedly, traces of culture and spirit of people of any language community can be found in their language. With the careful analysis of each language, one can understand the culture it reflects. Pishghadam (2012) introduces the Persian concept of Zabahang that refer to the interrelationship between language and culture. He claims that each concept like the curse in a language is one manifestation of the culture that it represents and believes that cross-cultural and cross-linguistic research can use the concept of Zabahang to explore the representation of culture through language. Curse, as part of the vernacular/culture of society, is one of the most important speech acts in any language. This has been rarely noticed by researchers and it is necessary to provide a systematic classification of the themes of curses. In this study, the researchers intended to answer the following questions: What is the distribution of types of curses? Which types of curses have more tokens? And what is the connection between the types of curses and the culture of the society?

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS
The present study used a descriptive method with the aim of thematically classifying Persian curses through content analysis. First, by examining all types and tokens of curses registered in related sources, two hundred and twenty-five curses were collected. After collecting the data and selecting each curse as the unit of analysis, the primary themes were extracted based on the content analysis using axial coding. To ensure validity two rater discussed the coding and coded the curses with 95 percent agreement. In cases of disagreement, a third coder was summoned for help in coding to extract the main themes in the curses.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The results showed that although cursing is not considered acceptable in Iranian/Islamic culture; curses are more or less present in the discourse of people in

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society. People use curses to reduce discomfort, express anger, psychological issues, or educational issues. The content analysis of the curses collected in the present study using the axial coding method showed that in the Persian language, curses can revolve around ten themes. The results of the research, summarized in Table 1, showed that these ten categories, in terms of content, include the following:

Table 1. Common themes in Persian language curses				
N	Theme	Sub-themes	F	%
1	Death	14	94	41.77%
2	Pain	9	32	14.22%
3	Misery	6	30	13.33%
4	Physical damage	7	25	11.11%
5	Sustenance problems	6	21	9.33%
6	Disasters	2	6	2.66%
7	Punishments	2	6	2.66%
8	Family face	2	5	2.22%
9	Unhappiness	3	3	1.33%
10	The hereafter	2	3	1.33%

As indicated in the table, the highest frequency was that of "death category" referring to curses which call for the death of the cursed. 94 out of 225 curses equaling 41.77% of the data had the themes of death. After that, with a significant difference, there is the theme of pain/disease with 32 curses (14.22%). Misery was next with 30 tokens (13.33%). The lowest frequency was related to the unhappiness and post-mortem problems in the hereafter, each bearing 1.3% of the data.

4. CONCLUSION
What can be concluded from this study is that curses are used in Persian with a variety of themes. This extended use and high variation in themes and tokens is a cultural reflection which indicates that Persian native speakers use these to reflect their feelings. The reasons for the widespread use of the death curse compared to other curses, as reflected in the tokens with this theme, can be a reflection of the culture of society. Iranians witness mortality, sadness, depression, mysterious and sometimes scary deaths, so, the most frequent type of curse is for them the death curse. However, those related to the hereafter are less in number as life in the other world is farther from the real experience of the language users. The sub-themes of the curse category of death, such as cleansing the dead, burial mourning, tombstone, funeral and black mourning clothes are frequent in this cultural category. It can be one of the cases that arise from the customs and culture of the society. What this study shows is that the culture represented through language can be considered structured because the language reflecting it is structured. Further research is suggested to better understand curses in Persian written and spoken corpora. Further research can also concentrate on similar cultural concepts such as praise, prayer, acknowledgement, etc.,