

THE RHETORIC OF PRE AND POST- FUNERAL ORATORY (ON THE BASIS OF IRISH PRE - FUNERAL AND GEORGIAN POST- FUNEARAL RECEPTION TOASTS)

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Abstract

The funeral or memorial speech is an integral part of most funeral and memorial services. Funeral speeches include formal eulogies or tributes as well as informal reflections, remembrances and comments. Funeral rituals and funeral oratory are the topics that have received considerable attention by scholars (cultural historians, anthropologists, linguists, philologists), but the rhetoric of pre and post – funeral reception toasts are not investigated at all.

The aim of the author is to compare old Irish and Georgian funeral traditions still preserved in these cultures, examine a number of contemporary Irish wakes and Georgian Kelekhi linguistically, identify rhetorical and lingua - stylistic peculiarities of pre and post-funeral toasts and find similarities and differences between traditions of two different cultures.

Keywords: funeral speech, tradition, toast, pre and post-funeral reception, oratory style.

1. INTRODUCTION

Benjamin Franklin once said: "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." But in Irish and Georgian cultures there is one more inevitable thing that no one can get rid of. In Irish culture there is a social gathering "Wake," usually held before a funeral and in Georgian culture there is an old tradition of holding a post funeral reception, called "Kelekhi," "Chiris Puri," "Aghapi" in Georgian (Neiman, 1978:559).

When somebody dies, people get emotional, cry and sometimes just feel numb. A gathering before or after a funeral may ease the suffering of the loved ones of the deceased. At the same time funerals bring people together who may not have seen each other in some time, and a reception also provides an opportunity for people to reconnect. So, the gathering provides time and place for friends and loved ones to talk about the deceased, tell stories, and reminisce. It is also an opportunity for the survivors to realize their strength and their ability to move on.

2. THE RHETORIC OF GEORGIAN POST- FUNEARAL ORATORY

According to Georgian tradition, when a dead person is buried, his/her family members, relatives, friends and neighbors go to a community social hall (restaurant or catering hall) where they have a special meal together. These receptions are intended to help family and friends remember the loved one who has passed and enjoy the company of each other. There is often food and drinks served at these events and the food is generally provided by the family of the deceased. Visitors drink toasts in the name of the deceased and console the members of the family. Tradition of post funeral reception and toast making has a long history in Georgia. During centuries the tradition underwent many changes. The form of post funeral reception changed. Once it was a small gathering (only family members and relatives), today it is a large gathering with lots of guests. The number of guests vary from 100-300. In the past the reception lasted no more than an

hour. Today it lasts for more than two hours. The list of the food served at a table also changed. It became more varied. In the past the gathering was ruled by a priest, today every post funeral reception is conducted by a specially chosen toastmaster. In the past old Georgian Religious hymns and prayers were heard at the table. Guests drank less, no more than 3 toasts; Today the number of toasts varies from 9 to 13 (Ansari (2014), Kokiashvili (2008), Savaneli (2011).

Toasting and drinking in honor of or in memory of a loved one is common in Georgia. First the survivors choose a toastmaster (a good orator who knows the family and the deceased well). Initially the toastmaster drinks in honor of the God and begs him to give the survivors strength to tolerate the pain. Then the toastmaster drinks in memory of a deceased. He speaks about his character, describes his merits, his good deeds. Guests drink a toast: "May the God forgive him his sins" (ufalma sheundos tsodvebi da daumkvidros sasufeveli, Gmertma gaanatlos misi suli). First toasts are too much emotional, full of euphemistic lexemes. The toastmaster tries to soothe the survivors' feelings and does not mention words "dead" or "died" at all. He calls the deceased person "ojakhidan akhlad tsasuli," "gardasuli" (he who has just left his family), "akhalshesvenebuli," (he who has just found a complete rest in the arms of Jesus) and blesses him/her with words: "Gmertma gaanatlos," "misi suli natelshi amkofos qveknis gamchenma," (May the blessings of light be upon her) "Gmertma samudamo sasufeveli daumkvidros," (May the God place him in Heaven) "msubuqi kofilikos mistvis mshobliuri mitsa" (may the earth be light upon you).

When speaking about the characteristic features of the dead person, a toastmaster marks the listeners' attention towards positive characteristics of the deceased and never criticizes him/her. It is forbidden to speak bad about the dead in Georgian culture. If one listens carefully to the toastmaster, he may think that the deceased was a complete angel – the most tender husband/wife, the best parent, the most careful grandparent, the most devoted friend and a great helper of his/her neighbors and relatives. Descriptions of the deceased are exaggerated and based on enumeration of positive adjectives used mainly in superlative form.

The next few toasts are dedicated to the deceased's dead relatives (parents, children, second halves, even distant relatives). Here, the toastmaster draws parallels between two concepts: "Death" and "Life" marking the preference of "Life." Comparing these concepts, the toastmaster uses metaphors (personifications) and similes. In some cases the similes and metaphors are genuine created by the toastmaster, but in most cases the toastmaster uses trite stylistic devices that are easily perceived by the listeners. Some toastmasters even recite famous Georgian poets' poems about "Life" and "Death," others use quotations of famous Georgian authors ("Sheni chirime sikvdilo, sitsotskhle fasobs shenita" (Vazha Pshavela); "Ver daichiravs sikvdilsa gza vitsro, vertsa kldovani, misgan koveli gascordes, susti da dzalgulovani" (Shota Rustaveli). All these poems and quotations reflect the world vision of Georgian culture about "Life" and "Death." Judging from these quotations, Georgians do not hate "death." Death is strong and merciless but without it no one could perceive how precious "Life" is. Death is inevitable. No one can hide from it. Therefore, death is a great grief: "modit kvela imqveknad gardasuli adamianis mogonebisa shevsvat. Kvela im adamianisa, romeltats usazgvrod dagvtskvita guli da mtsared dagvanakha, ra gamoutkmeli mtsukharebaa akhlobeli adamianis dakargva da ra sheufasebeli ramaa sitsotskhle. Natelshi amkofos ufalma mati sulebi, Amin." (Let us drink for the deceased who hurt our souls and showed how dolorous is losing a close person and how valuable is Life. May the blessings of light be upon them).

This is the first part of a reception. The toasts drunk in memory of all the deceased are called as "Shesandobari."

After blessing the dead, the toastmaster drinks for the health of the head of Georgian Orthodox Church and then for the health of survivors (parents if they are alive, wives/ husbands, children, grandchildren, relatives). If in the first section of the reception the toastmaster's attention was drawn towards concept "death," in the second part the focus is on the concept "Life": "gmertma gatsotskhlot didkhans, tqvengan imqveknad tsasulis sitsotskhlis danaklisi dgeebi tqven shegematot; gmertma gakmarot danaklisi; itsotskhlet didkhans; gmertma shegazlebinot tqveni mitsvalebulis pativistsema da misi khsovna davitskebas ar mitsemodes; girseulad getarebinot da ar shegertskhvinot misi mogoneba; dgegrzelobas da kargad kofnas gisurvebt amieridan;" "ojakhs gaumarjos! Ikharos, imravlos, gmertma akmaros es danaklisi. Amis shemdeg sul lkhinshi, kai dgesa da nishan-kortsilshi shevkhvedrodet ertmanet" (I pray that the almighty gives his family the strength to withstand this situation. I wish his family immense strength and peace in life. God bless his family. Let the family grow, be happy and never forget their deceased's good name).

Later the friends, colleagues and neighbors are blessed. The next toasts belong to undertakers, chefs who prepared the funeral meal. Here the toastmaster exaggerates the merits of each person and thanks them in person.

3. THE RHETORIC OF IRISH PRE - FUNEARAL ORATORY

As for the Irish Wake, it is one of the best known funeral traditions associated with Ireland. The wake is the period between a death and the burial, a time for not only mourning the death but celebrating life.

A wake is usually held in the deceased's home, or the home of a close relative. Typically, a wake is attended by family, relatives, neighbors, friends, work colleagues, school and college friends, and acquaintances. The atmosphere is respectful and one may hear both laughing and crying as people recall stories about the deceased. A wake may last a few hours or all day and people may come and go as they please. Drinking and storytelling are the primary focus of the modern wake; but a good host should also provide food for guests. The mood of a modern Irish wake is a mix of gaiety and sadness. Irish wake toasts in many aspects resemble Georgian Kelekhi toasts. The best toasts are short and simple. First toasts are for the deceased and are poetic, based on metaphors: "To our dear departed friend. May every hair on your head turn into a candle to light your way to heaven," "To our dear departed, that the devil mightn't hear of his death, till he's safe inside the walls of heaven," "To our loved ones who have passed away, may the winds of heaven whisper hourly benedictions over their hallowed graves," "I would like to propose a toast to the deceased, my dear Grandmother. May the Lord hold her in his hand but never clench his fist too hard."

There is no special toastmaster at Irish wakes. Everyone who wishes can propose a toast. The speakers do not mention words "died," "dead." Instead of these lexemes they use euphemistic words and word combinations: "departed," "deceased," "Who have passed away." The deceased are often addressed as "a wonderful and gentle soul," "a beautiful soul," "a good heart." Then they start storytelling about the departed and recollect some humorous stories about him/her. The deceased's description is exaggerated and contains the elements of appraisal: "Connor may not have been a successful man by today's standards. He was never on the cover of a magazine. The car he owned certainly couldn't have counted as a sports car. And his house had that habit of getting his attention with broken pipes, rotten floorboards and a leaking roof...all problems that he fixed himself. He worked hard and he worked long hours his whole life. A more honest and dedicated man has never walked the earth. But Connor was also lucky in many ways. He was lucky enough to convince Kathleen to marry him, and he was lucky enough to have four beautiful daughters. He was also lucky that they took after their mother in that regard. And he was lucky to be Irish, and that's lucky enough. To Connor!"

Women are often depicted as sweet and loving: "I remember how sweet and loving your grandmother was. She was a woman of strength and a lively spirit too. Her death is truly a loss. May eternal repose be granted unto her and may God's perpetual light shine upon her. A prayer, a flower, a candle and sad tears of pain on your grave, dear grandmother." Sometimes the speaker drinks for the deceased's hobbies, for example: "Here's to her favorite things: her cats, her knitting, and her cake. May they always remind us of her. To Grandma!"

At the end of the ceremony the deceased's family is blessed by words: "May God and his Holy Mother take the harm of the years away from you," "Here is health to his family. We wish his family immense strength and peace in life."

It is interesting to mention that the Irish consider death as a rest/peace/sleep. These conceptual metaphors find their materialization in many toasts: "May she / he rest in peace!" "May God watch your sleep forever my dear husband!" "May God give her eternal rest." Many older Irish men and women claim that the day that a person dies is their "third birthday." Their first is, the day that they are born, the second is the day that they are baptized, and the third represents the day that they have entered on to the eternal, happy life (Chastain, 2015:1). In other words, the day of a person's death is a sad and happy day at the same time, sad because of the loss that has occurred but happy because he/she has reached his final destination in life and united with the Lord and Savior: "A beautiful soul, full of love and faith, ascended to heaven, away from me, but closer to God, leaving loneliness and sadness. With immense heartache, I break up with my lovely wife... All my life I will remember your kindness and love. God may forgive you of your sins, and may you stay with the angels up there, in a place free from pain and suffering."

4. CONCLUSION

Comparing funeral traditions and funeral toasts of two absolutely different cultures, I found out that there are more similarities than differences between them. Similarities are found in metaphorical perception of the world, in the usage of highly literary words and euphemistic language, in the rhetoric and of course in the logical development of toasts. The differences are a few. At Irish Wakes focus is on storytelling. Storytelling is accompanied with toasts. At Irish Wakes stories retold by the visitors are often humorous and cause the listeners' delight. The Irish truly understand the healing power of memories and that sharing them out loud

helps people cope and come to terms with death. Plus, sharing a person's memory and life accomplishments helps to honor their final journey.

At Georgian Kelekhi storytelling is of secondary importance. Georgian Kelekhi is much more conservative, no gaiety is allowed there. It is a great and honorable event. There is no place of humor and irony. The toastmaster and the visitors pay respect to the person leaving the community and the community coming together reaffirms that life goes on.

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