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The final goodbye: The linguistic features of gravestone epitaphs from the nineteenth century to the present

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Graveyard epitaphs from the nineteenth century to the present are a rich linguistic resource for investigating attitudes towards death, ritual and identity from a diachronic perspective. Grave inscriptions regardless of whether they are 'magnificent' or 'mundane' serve as remembrances of the deceased and can be used to study processes of change. In this study, a corpus of 957 epitaphs from the nineteenth century to the present day were examined for evidence of diachronic changes in ritual, identity construction, use of euphemistic metaphors and sacred language. The corpus was categorised according to age and temporality. Corpus methodology was used to analyse data using AntConc and normalised frequency scores per 1000 words. In addition, Log likelihood (LL) scores were used to test results for significance. Findings from the analyses suggest that changes have occurred in linguistic style and attitudes towards death, especially in relation to child death. Coping with the death of a child, appears to pose bigger challenges for modern parents than it did in the nineteenth century. Religion still appears to be the source from which people draw comfort and solace although the influence of religion is now much less than in the past. These findings are discussed in light of the evolution of gravestone inscriptions over time and are indicative of the differing values of the day.

Key words: Rituals; Language of Epitaphs; Gravestone Inscriptions; Epitaphs; Linguistic Style; Identity Construction; Euphemistic Metaphors; Sacred Language

1. Introduction

Headstones or gravestones are memorial stones set in the memory of a deceased individual. An epitaph, usually found on a gravestone, is a brief literary inscription used to commemorate the dead. Carved in stone, grave inscriptions are intended to immortalise the deceased. Grave inscriptions also reflect the thoughts of those left behind, as it's the surviving family members who bury the dead and often construct the gravestone inscriptions on behalf of their dead. Anderson, Sielski, Miles and Dunfee (2011) observe that in a way gravestones are like photographs of the day which are left behind for

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future generations to interpret.

The present study is intended as a continuation of a previous diachronic study of obituaries in Sri Lanka (Herat, 2014). As a former colony of Britain, Sri Lankan obituaries were heavily influenced by British traditions and rituals of commemorating death and this led to an interest in examining what British epitaph inscriptions were like as the former study showed many similarities in language and style evident in older forms of British writing. Similar to obituaries, epitaph inscriptions are another public form of communicating notions of death and dying. As the nineteenth century was especially sensitive to issues of social class and to the subject of death as noted by Wheeler (1994) and Crespo-Fernandez (2006), the present study investigated epitaph inscriptions from the nineteenth century to the present day from a diachronic perspective to see what changes have occurred in constructing epitaphs and expressing the identity of the deceased.

The investigation of language use in epitaphs proved to be a worthy enterprise because there is very little linguistic research on epitaph inscriptions aside from the few studies mentioned here. Epitaphs highlight how survivors view not only the deceased but death itself and give us an understanding of how language use as well as attitudes to death have changed over time. This paper presents a comparative study of the linguistic devices used in nineteenth and twenty first century epitaphs from three cemeteries in Liverpool. It focuses on notions of death and dying on gravestone inscriptions in order to account for diachronic variation over time for coping with death. Diachronic changes are examined in two corpora: child, and adult. As no previous work exists that differentiates between child and adult epitaph inscriptions from a diachronic perspective, this paper is intended to fill this gap. I will commence by discussing the theoretical background to the study followed by a discussion of the corpora and data collection and will then present the results examining each of the research questions in turn. Finally the study will be concluded with a summary of the results obtained.

2. Background

Different cultures and different religions use a variety of death rituals (Capone, 2010; Sahoo, 2014; Salmani Nodoushan, 2013, 2015). Funerary rituals in Shia Islam, as mentioned by Salmani Nodoushan (2013, 2015) are not the same as the funerary rituals employed by Catholics in Italy (Capone, 2010). Rituals performed by Italian Catholics bear similarities with, but also considerable differences from Catholics and Christians in the UK. According to Goffman (1967) how people choose to remember their dead can therefore be regarded as part of their individual and collective self presentation. In Reimers' (1999, p. 148) words, "people employ rituals to demonstrate where

they belong and who they are, but that they are not merely ways to present an alleged identity." In Austin's (1976) framework, "rituals are performative actions, i.e., actions that bring about ontological changes." As Anderson et al (2011, p. 359) note in their abstract, "from the magnificent to the mundane, gravestone inscriptions serve as remembrances of the dead and provide concrete evidence of the thoughts and values of the day." This is the case of epitaphs, "inscriptions placed on tombstones which for hundreds of years have been a part of the death ritual of western cultures" (Crespo-Fernandez, 2013, p. 100). One aspect of rituals is that they unite participants both with each other and with situations and collectives beyond themselves, such as relatives in other places, ancestors and rising generations (Meyerhoff, 1984).

Only a few studies exist that capture the fundamental importance of gravestone inscriptions and their associated rituals and immortalisation of the deceased through linguistic means. According to Anderson et al gravestone inscriptions "immortalise the deceased, tell their life story and impart lasting messages to family members and passers-by" (2011, p. 360). Gravestone inscriptions are also extremely useful in giving us an insight into "the attitudes toward death, religion and belief in the afterlife" (Warner, 1959). In this connection, Crespo-Fernandez (2013) examined euphemistic metaphors in English and Spanish epitaphs from Highgate Cemetery in London and the Cemetery of Albercete in Spain. This comparative study specifically focused on euphemistic metaphors that were aimed at "substituting the notions of 'death' and 'dying'. He discovered that in comparison to Spanish epitaphs, which were more sacred and political, English epitaphs were more "optimistic" and "life-like" in their approach to death.

A study of gravestone inscriptions by Anderson et al (2011) examined 1,214 gravestone inscriptions from a linguistic perspective in order to discover the values of the day through the use of language. The particular focus of the study was the type of language used, for instance whether it was 'sacred' or 'secular', and if it showed 'acceptance of death'. They found that secularisation was not as pervasive as they had thought and that gravestone inscriptions in the US had become more sacred in character over the last 110 years.

McGeer (2008) investigates the language used in the epitaphs of Second World War memorials on Canadian soldiers' graves. In his words, "headstones present inscriptions arresting in their dignity and simplicity, conveying in a few words the impact of death on the family" (2008, p. 67). His findings highlight how epitaphs record the ways in which generations of humans have confronted death and sought comfort and meaning through a few words written on a gravestone. McGeer's work also emphasised the changes in attitudes towards death during the nineteenth century, as people began to

"adopt a gentler approach to comforting the grief stricken, by emphasising the bliss of the departed" (2008, p. 67). However, McGeer's study is not a linguistic analysis of gravestone inscriptions and does not evaluate the language used to represent the deceased's identity; rather, it analyses the language used to commemorate a lost one and the impact of that death upon the family.

3. Corpus data and methodology

The paper intends to answer the following research questions:

1. Have the rituals of death in constructing epitaphs from the nineteenth century to the present day remained the same or have they changed with time?
2. Is the identity of children and adults constructed differently? Does age matter?
3. What euphemisms and metaphors are used in conceptualising death, and have they changed over time?
4. Are the inscriptions from the nineteenth century more sacred than the ones from the present day?

The corpus samples epitaph data from three cemeteries in Liverpool, England: (a) St. James' Cemetery, (c) Yew Tree Cemetery, and (c) St. Peter's church graveyard, Woolton. The data for the corpus were subdivided into 4 categories: nineteenth century, twenty first century, child epitaphs, and adult epitaphs. The researcher herself collected a total of 957 inscriptions from the three cemeteries. If an epitaph in the corpus (as in example 1) contained inscriptions for a number of family members (e.g., parents, children and grandchildren, each of the inscriptions would be counted as a separate entry.

(1) In affectionate remembrance of ALICE FRENCES BAILEY who departed this life May 1st 1871 aged 26 years
Also in memory of WILLIAM HENRY GEORGE died February 7th 1880 aged 2 years and 7 months
Also FRANCES GEORGE died November 7th 1885 aged 3 ½ years
Also ELIZABETH GEORGE died October 5th 1886 aged 15 years
Also JOHN GEORGE father of the above died March 7th 1914 aged 74
Also FREDERICK WILLIAM GEORGE aged 35 years lost in the SS Zent which was torpedoed by German submarine on April 5th 1916
Also MARGARET ALICE wife of the above John GEORGE died December 17th 1925 aged 83 years
In loving memory of JAMES GEORGE died 8th November 1948 aged 78 years dearly loved husband of Edith George

Also EDITH GEORGE his beloved wife died 9th September 1960

There were 181 gravestone inscriptions for children who had died in the nineteenth century and 50 gravestone inscriptions for children in the present day. The total corpus contained 5,008 words. The majority of the nineteenth century child epitaphs were taken from St. Peter's church yard, Woolton. The total adult epitaph corpus contained 51,380 words of which 21,534 were from the nineteenth century corpus, and 29,846 were from the present day gravestone inscriptions.

Of the 957 epitaphs collected, 726 were adult epitaphs; of these, nineteenth century epitaphs consisted of 177 adult inscriptions and 549 twenty first century adult inscriptions. Of the total corpus 231 inscriptions were child epitaphs; of these 181 inscriptions were from the nineteenth century and 50 inscriptions were from the present day. As Crespo-Fernandez, 2013, p. 103) observes "epitaphs are obviously a rich source of death related euphemism" which provide interesting and authentic linguistic data to show diachronic changes in attitudes towards adult and child deaths.

Table 1.
The Epitaph Corpus from the Nineteenth Century to the Present Day

Corpus	No. of epitaphs	No. of words
nineteenth century child epitaphs	181	3,388
Present day child epitaphs	50	1620
nineteenth century adult epitaphs	177	21,534
Present day adult epitaphs	549	29,846

The choice for the three cemeteries was not random either. I am well aware that a bigger sample of epitaphs from different parts of Britain from the nineteenth century to the present would have allowed for more thorough diachronic and statistical work, however, due to difficulties of legibility of some of the gravestone inscriptions and time and space limitations, I had to restrict myself to collecting data that was clearly legible on well preserved gravestones, which meant that I was only able to collect data from three cemeteries. The three cemeteries in the study were selected based on their age, accessibility, size and location. All three cemeteries were opened in the nineteenth century and are still operating with more recent gravestones. St James' cemetery opened in 1829, Yew Tree cemetery in 1893 and St. Peter's cemetery in 1826.

The epitaphs showed certain stylistic features in their construction. The first element of the headstone was a biblical quotation from the *Bible* or the *Book of Common Prayer* or verses from hymns. The source is usually provided for biblical quotations and the top of the gravestone around the quotation or

verse is sometimes decorated. After the religious epithet, there is an introductory phrase such as 'In loving memory of' or 'Here lies'. The next element on the headstone is the name of the deceased, in large uppercase letters. After this, some kind of personal characteristic of the deceased is given, for example, 'beloved husband of x' for a man or 'beloved wife of x' for women. This is written in a different style, usually in smaller letters than the name of the deceased. The name of the spouse of the deceased or the parents of a child is usually capitalised and given in large letters. This is followed by features of social identity, in terms of work or occupation and then the date of death with age in years or months (for a child). Following this, most epitaphs have additional inscriptions added to the gravestone in the same style, using the word 'Also' to separate each of the deceased individuals. No additional verses or introductory phrases are used. Sometimes words such as 'reunited' are inscribed at the bottom of the gravestone.

The number of inscriptions collected from each cemetery varied in number with more inscriptions for adults than children. The cemeteries from which data were collected varied in size and the number of inscriptions on each epitaph also varied. In terms of categorisation of the inscriptions, as mentioned before, they were categorised according to the time period, and the age of the deceased. The inscriptions were then analysed using AntConc 3.2.4. (Anthony, 2009). Depending on the type of language that was used, the data were further categorised into sacred or secular. Anderson et al (2011, p. 363) considered inscriptions to be sacred in tone if they either mentioned a religious figure (God, Lord, Thou, etc.,) or used words "related to religious constructs," for instance 'thy will be done'. In this paper, an inscription will be deemed to be sacred if it uses religious language or metaphors related to religious beliefs or biblical language, etc.

4. Results and discussion

As stated earlier, this study aimed at answering the following questions:

- Question #1: Have the rituals of death in constructing gravestone inscriptions changed from the nineteenth century to the present day?
- Question #2: Is the identity of children and adults constructed differently? Does age matter?
- Question #3: What euphemisms and metaphors have been used in conceptualising death and have they changed over time?
- Question #4: Are nineteenth century inscriptions more sacred than the present day inscriptions?

In this section, the findings and results of the study are presented and the above questions are answered.

4.1. Have the rituals of death in constructing gravestone inscriptions changed from the nineteenth century to the present day?

All of the inscriptions contain features such as the name of the deceased, the relationship to the family, position in the family, where the deceased is from, the year of death and the age of the deceased. Some inscriptions also contain the date of birth, name of the parents and place of death, especially if the death occurred elsewhere, for example, at sea or while living abroad, and if the death was tragic or accidental, the cause of death is given but this is not a prevalent feature in all epitaphs. In child epitaphs, the ritual included giving the full name of the child, their date of death and exact age, for example, the number of years, months or days foregrounding the untimely nature of the death. Adult epitaphs emphasise the life lived by giving the date of birth, date of death, and age of the deceased. Most epitaphs memorialise further deaths in the family using the word 'also'. In some cases epitaphs contain inscriptions for mothers, fathers, children and grandchildren providing historical evidence of relationships and deaths in the family over a long period of time. Mytum (1994, p. 260)[1] observes that "gravestones were not only focuses for private, family grief and remembrances but were active at a wider level." He cites Jenkins (1971 cited in Mytum 1994, p. 260) as stating "that burial grounds and their memorials can be used to explain and perpetuate the memory of kinship relations which stretched back over generations." Some gravestones contain inscriptions from the nineteenth century to the present.

Table 2.
The Frequency of Words Used to Describe the Relationship of the Deceased Child

Relationship	19th century child	21st century child
Daughter	8.55	7.40
Son	13.28	11.11
Sister	0.29	1.23
Brother	0.29	4.32
Granddaughter	0.59	7.40
Grandson	1.18	3.08
Baby	0	3.70
Infant	2.65	0.61

The relationships evident within the epitaphs shown in Table (2) and (3) confirm that the identity of the deceased was constructed using the deceased's relationship to the family. The nineteenth century data show that in children's epitaphs, the most frequent words were son (13.28 per 1000 words) and daughter (8.55 per 1000 words). The word 'infant' also had a fairly high frequency being used 2.65 times per 1000 words. In adult epitaphs, the most frequent relationships are those of 'husband' and 'wife' (with an

occurrence of 8.49 and 14.90 per 1000 words). The data from modern epitaphs show a similar trend with the most frequent relationships referring to either husband or wife. Unlike in the nineteenth century epitaphs, however, the number of occurrences of death in the corpus for men and women are relatively similar; the frequencies for 'husband' and 'wife' are fairly close 4.38 and 4.95 per 1000 words respectively (see Table 3). This gives an indication of social values, as unlike today, more women are likely to have married in the nineteenth century and it is also suggestive of the sensitiveness to social morality compared to the present day.

Table 3.
The Frequency of Words Used to Describe the Relationship of the Deceased Adult

Relationship	19th century adult	21st century adult
Wife	14.90	4.95
Husband	8.49	4.38
Mother	2.87	0.0012
Mum	0.13	1.31
Father	2.32	0.97
Dad	0.09	1.00
Daughter	6.26	1.44
Son	5.99	1.40
Sister	6.26	0.134
Brother	0.55	0.16
Granddaughter	0.41	0.067
Grandson	0.60	0.10

In the nineteenth century child epitaphs, the word 'son' collocates (to the left) with the words 'beloved', 'eldest', 'youngest' 'their' and 'infant, showing the importance of the position of the child within the family and their age. The word 'daughter' likewise collocates the most with the words 'beloved', 'their', 'only', 'youngest' and 'infant'. The use of the third person possessive pronoun 'their' as opposed to the second person possessive pronoun 'our' may relate to the formal style of language used in the nineteenth century or may indicate the fact that the headstone and the epitaphs were contributed by close relatives some years after the death of the deceased. In the twenty first century, the word 'son' collocates with 'beloved' as well as other descriptive words such as 'loved', 'adored', 'dear', 'precious', 'darling', 'beautiful' and 'special'. Likewise, the word 'daughter' too collocates most often with the words 'beloved', 'most loved' and 'our dear'. Although with both son and daughter there are one or two instances where words such as 'eldest' and 'youngest' are used, these are infrequent compared to the nineteenth century. There is more description of the child which shows a change in the relationship between parents and children which is now closer than it was in

the nineteenth century as well as a changed attitude towards the death of a child. There is less acceptance than before of the passing of a child. Whereas in the nineteenth century, child deaths were more common place due to illness and childbirth, this is not the case today. With the advancement of modern medicine, it is more difficult to accept the death of a child.

The rituals of death do not appear to have changed over time although attitudes towards death appear to differ between the nineteenth century epitaphs and the ones from the present day. In the nineteenth century, death is viewed as a normal part of life and is treated without too much hyperbole. According to Anderson et al (2011), death was both familiar and personal before the modern era and it was not viewed as "a distant or intangible occurrence," but rather as something that is ever-present, whereas from the early twentieth century onwards, death has come to be viewed in a more romanticised fashion, where it is not seen as final. This is evident through figurative and metaphorical language that is used (e.g., 'together forever', etc.). Lundgren and Houseman (2010) note that people today view death as an enemy to be banished, rather than accepting death as an inevitable event.

Another observable difference is the formality in style. The present day epitaphs are much less formal compared to the epitaphs from the nineteenth century which include distinctive vocabulary that is archaic or old fashioned such as 'relict' for the widow of the deceased and 'esquire' for a gentleman, and archaic grammar (such as 'hath', 'lieth', 'cometh', ' sleepeth', 'weepeth') which uses the old third person inflection –eth instead of the modern –s inflection, as in example (2).

(2) Here lieth CHARLES EDWARDS, fourth son of CAPTAIN KYRKE, Summer Hill, near Wrexham. Who died 5th May 1838. Aged 2 years.

Since the purpose of the epitaph is to immortalise the deceased, families contributing epitaphs to be engraved on headstones are likely to have been wary of using ordinary speech forms, instead using the more formal, archaic language for commemorating the death of a loved one and leaving a lasting impression.

4.2. Is the identity of children and adults constructed differently? Does age matter?

4.2.1. Name and age as identity

In terms of identity construction, there is little difference between the rituals used in the past and those used today. A diachronic analysis of the corpus made it evident that the main changes were in linguistic style. In the past, the language used was more formal compared to present day epitaphs. Likewise,

epitaphs in the nineteenth century are less ornate than epitaphs in the present century. The death of children in the nineteenth century is treated with more finality than in modern day epitaphs; the language is more desperate, attesting to the hardship that families undergo in accepting the finality of their loss and the dissolution of all their hopes and dreams. The main graphological features are capitalising the child's name and the family name and giving the date and year of death and the child's full name, date of death and age at death, as follows:

(3) In affectionate remembrance of GEORGE ALEXANDER son of Thomas and Sarah ADAMS who departed this life January 21st 1876 aged 14 months

The child epitaph also emphasises the child's relationship to the family by stating his role within the family simply as 'son of' without any adjectival description such as 'beloved' or 'loving'. In contrast, adult deaths are conceived differently by giving the first name and surname of the deceased in large letters and in upper case as well as the date of birth, date of death and the relationship to family members. The name of the spouse is also foregrounded through the use of capitalisation:

(4) In affectionate memory of ELIZABETH SARAH, wife of RICHARD SUTTON, who entered into rest, Nov 22nd 1899. In her 95th year

In example 4, ELIZABETH SARAH's relationship to the family is demonstrated through the words 'wife of RICHARD SUTTON'; this is a feature that is evident within most British epitaphs where the relationship of the deceased to the family is provided. The names of the deceased and the next of kin are foregrounded through the use of uppercase letters. In children's epitaphs, as discussed before, whether the child is the son or daughter and their position within the family (e.g., eldest, fourth, youngest etc.) is also stated in the epitaphs and this is another way in which their identity is constructed. Giving the position of the child within the family also reveals the degree of loss some families have suffered. Some note the death of an only son or daughter or even an only child, whereas other epitaphs bear witness to the multiple losses suffered by one family within a short span of time. The mention of numerous children also suggests that unlike in the present day where there are nuclear families limited to one or two children, the families in the nineteenth century were bigger with at least five or more children, hence the necessity to mention their position in the family. Also unlike today, due to high mortality rates, death was accepted as an inevitable part of life.

In the twenty first century, the same rituals of death are evident such as

foregrounding the name of the child using uppercase letters and giving the date and precise age at death. One of the features different from the nineteenth century epitaphs is the use of the personal pronoun 'our'; In the nineteenth century, a more formal style is used and there are no instances of the use of 'our'. The only personal pronoun that is used is 'their'; additionally, not only the child's name but also the names of the parents and the child's relationship to them are given. Example (5), which comes from a modern epitaph, has a more informal tone with the use of 'our' and demonstrates the close family bond mentioned before:

(5) Precious memories of our beloved son ADAM PETER GRANNELL who fell asleep 22nd May 2000. Aged 20 days. A tiny flower lent not given. To bud on earth and bloom in heaven.

Both old and modern inscriptions for children use euphemistic terms for death such as 'departed this life' and 'fell asleep' but of the inscriptions from the different centuries, the twenty first century inscription is more personalised and uses figurative language such as 'a tiny flower' not seen in the nineteenth century which suggests that inscriptions from the early twentieth century onwards have become more ornate and elaborate portraying a change in attitude towards death. The informality of the language and the style since the late twentieth century is also evident in the following adult inscription where the relationship of the deceased is given as 'a beloved mum and nan' as opposed to beloved mother and grandmother.

In both adult and child epitaphs, age is seen as significant and this is seen by the preciseness with which a child's age is given and in the way a child is described. Words such as 'infant' and 'infancy' are frequent within nineteenth century child epitaphs with the word 'infant' used 2.65 times per 1000 words. In twenty first century epitaphs, the word 'baby' is common with a frequency of 3.70 per 1000 words. Likewise, the personal pronoun 'our' has a frequency of 10.49 per 1000 words. The term 'our baby', used to describe the child's age at the time of death, shows that the bereaved dwell on the hopes and dreams death has denied them by taking their babies so young whereas others find solace by accepting God's will 'Thy will be done' or in the hope of a reunion in a life to come. Words such as 'forever in our hearts', affirm the everlasting sacred bond between the deceased and the survivors.

Age is provided within adult epitaphs either by giving the age of death explicitly or by showing their life time by giving their exact date of birth and death as in example (6).

(6) In loving memory of BARBARA FARLEY. 15th July 1946 – 1st January 2000. A beloved Mum and Nan.

4.2.2. Personal identity

The use of personal characteristics when describing the role the deceased had within the family, such as 'beloved', 'devoted' and 'affectionate' are also used to portray a positive identity of the deceased. This linguistic feature was found to be more frequently used in the nineteenth century adult epitaphs, than in the present day adult inscriptions.

Table 4.
Personal Characteristics Used to Describe the Deceased

Characteristics	19th Century child epitaphs	21st century child epitaphs	19th century adult epitaphs	21st century adult epitaphs
Beloved	2.95	6.79	12.30	4.12
Loving	5.01	10.49	10.49	5.82
Devoted	0	0	1.34	1.27
Affectionate	3.83	0	2.18	0.16
My dear	0.59	1.85	3.71	2.84
Treasured	0	0	1.16	0.60
Cherished	0	1.85	0.09	0.16
Precious	0	1.85	0.04	0.03

In the nineteenth century, not many personal characteristics are evident within the child epitaphs. The most frequent characteristics are 'loving' which had a frequency of 5.01 per 1000 words and 'beloved' which had a frequency of 2.95 per 1000 words. Most inscriptions, however, do not provide personal characteristics; this may be due to lack of space or the cost of engraving. The personal characteristics used to describe children appear to have remained the same with 'loving' and 'beloved' having an even higher frequency in the twenty first century with 6.79 and 10.49 per 1000 words. The higher frequency may reflect the change in relationships between parents and children, attitude towards death as well as the change in linguistic style which appears to have become more personal and informal.

With the adult epitaphs, the nineteenth century epitaphs provide more personal characteristics of the deceased such as 'beloved', 'loving' and 'my dear'. Of these, 'beloved' seems to be the most favourite characteristic with 12.30 per 1000 words and 'loving' with a frequency of 10.49 per 1000 words. 'My dear' also has a frequency of 3.71 per 1000 words. As I observed in a recent paper on obituaries in Sri Lanka (2014, p. 23), these words reinforce the quality of the intimacy between the deceased and their family. It is therefore interesting that over time, there is a decrease in the use of these terms. In the modern day epitaphs, the use of these personal characteristics have fallen with 'beloved' and 'loving' only having a frequency of 4.12 and

5.82 per 1000 words respectively. The log likelihood significance test shows that compared to the present century 'loving' was relatively overused with a score of 1.05 as opposed to 0.58 for modern epitaphs. What these scores suggest is that there has been a change in the style of writing. In the past, the language that is used is restricted to more formal vocabulary, whereas in modern day epitaphs there is more choice in language use with forms such as 'cherished', 'treasured', etc., which highlight the intimacy between family members. As Table 4 demonstrates more formal language such as 'affectionate' is now not as common as it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth century with only 0.16 uses per 1000 words.

4.2.3. Social identity

Biographical details on the headstones project the various social classes and walks of life of the deceased. Although what work or occupation the deceased was engaged in is not a prevalent feature within modern epitaphs, highlighting the virtues of the deceased through the work they did or their occupation occurs in the nineteenth century adult epitaphs with a frequency of 6.55 per 1000 words, and only 0.03 per 1000 words within the twenty first century adult epitaphs. This is suggestive of Victorian concerns with social values. Occupations are only included if they are 'worthy of display'. The inclusion of the deceased's occupational virtues provides a further layer to their identity and what they were like in life (as in example 7).

(7) George Webster Chemist and Druggist of Liverpool. Much respected for his skill and kindness to the afflicted.

Example (7) shows the role the deceased played in life, and demonstrates the high regard with which they were held in life. The deceased is remembered for his 'skill' and 'kindness to the afflicted' personal qualities that are seen as important for his profession but which also emphasises his personal and professional characteristics through the words 'much respected'.

With the exception of one inscription which states the occupation of the deceased as that of a pilot, none of the other twentieth to twenty first century inscriptions states the occupation of the deceased. This may be because of changed attitudes towards death. The main identity constructs are seen as name, age and relationship to the family. McGeer (2008, p. 99) states that epitaphs "in any day and age have always attempted to bestow praises and meanings upon the deceased—who or what they were, what they did, what qualities they possessed, what they stood for and what reputation they left on earth." Similar uses of language are seen here as in example (8) where Catherine Wilkinson's personal qualities are praised and her reputation is exalted to that of a hero.

(8) CATHARINE WILKINSON. Died 11th November 1860, aged 73 years. Indefatigable and self denying. She was the widow's friend; The support of the orphan, The fearless and unwearied, Nurse of the sick, the originator of baths and wash houses for the poor. "For all they did cast off in their abundance, but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living" ST MARK XII CHAPTER 44 VERSE-

Similar to example (7), the valedictory words in example (8) provide information about the role the deceased played within the community and the personal characteristics they possessed such as 'self denial' emphasising the heroic and exemplary qualities of their personality. There are however, no epitaphs that state any negative qualities of the deceased. This upholds what McGeer (2008, p. 99) says about never speaking ill of the dead. Even in example (9), there is no negativity in the identity that is constructed. The facts are provided with no evaluative judgments about the deceased.

(9) In memory of PETER MATHER, who died 4th May 1868. Aged 41 years. He was an inmate for 29 years.

The social identity of the deceased is also constructed through references to their place of birth or death. Place of death figures in about 40% of the adult epitaphs from the nineteenth and twenty first century. Death and burial far from kith and kin is celebrated through gravestone inscriptions erected in their honour in Liverpool, as in examples (10) and (11):

(10) In affectionate memory of Harry Holt, who died at Jacksonville, Florida, US

(11) In affectionate memory of Thomas Fisher of this town. Solicitor.

These examples provide further information regarding the identity of the deceased and their relationships both to the location they died in and the location where their family and friends lived. Example (10) suggests that Harry may have moved away from the Liverpool area leaving his family and friends behind. Whilst (11) suggests that Thomas was a successful solicitor within the Liverpool area. This is reflected in McGeer's work (2008) where many of the epitaphs noted the deceased's home town or location. The incorporation of the deceased's location in the epitaphs investigated in this study allows the survivors to show the links that the deceased had with their hometown and the closeness and feeling that they felt towards their city and in addition provides information about travel and migration patterns of the deceased.

One of the many fascinating things about the nineteenth century epitaphs is also the way that they commemorated the death of a loved one by telling people a little about their life and how they met their end. Unlike modern epitaphs, about 35% of nineteenth century epitaphs record the cause of death, especially if the death was accidental or tragic, as in examples (12) and (13).

(12) Sacred to the memory of Louisa Margaret Foy Wood. Niece to Andrew Ducknow Esq. Proprietor of the Royal Amphitheatre London. She departed this life on Thursday March 1840 Aged 11 years. Her death was occasioned by her apparel having accidently taken fire. The brief period of extreme suffering which preceded her dissolution she endured with Christian fortitude and resignation.

(13) Also William his brother he was drowned in his father's pond, May 4th 1868 aged 2 years.

In (12) Victorian social values are evident as it is not the names of her parents that are given but the name of her uncle who was a man of social standing. As Long (1987, p. 965) observes, what work a person does is a "readily readable emblem of social worth." Likewise, the linguistic formality of the style of writing is evident through words such as 'Esquire', 'occasioned', 'apparel' and 'dissolution'. Her cause of death, her clothes accidently catching fire shows the tragedy of her demise and makes readers and passersby aware of the heroism with which she endured her 'extreme suffering'. The sacred nature of the epitaph is seen by the words 'Christian fortitude'. In (13), the tragedy of the death is brought out through the young age of the child "drowned in his father's pond." Again, a snapshot of the child's short life is created through the mention of how he died.

4.3. What euphemisms and metaphors have been used in conceptualising death and have they changed over time?

4.3.1. Conceptual metaphors

As has been noted, for whatever reason, religious or cultural, people are reluctant to talk about death in straightforward terms. Often, euphemisms and conceptual metaphors are used instead to conceptualise death. This is not only evident in gravestone inscriptions but also in obituaries (see Herat 2014). In the corpus of nineteenth and twenty first century epitaphs that were collected, a number of euphemisms and conceptual metaphors were used to talk about death. From the analysis of the corpus, I identified the main metaphors and euphemisms that contribute to the understanding of death. In the nineteenth century and present day child epitaphs, I found only two

conceptual metaphors, namely 'death is a journey' and 'death is a sleep'. As mentioned by Crespo-Fernandez (2013, p. 104), in this study too, the conceptual mappings provide positive rather than negative connotations of death. One of the interesting aspects in the epitaphs is the tone of finality. Unlike in obituaries, where the word 'died' is rarely mentioned, in epitaphs, the word 'died' had the highest frequency with 5.37 uses per 1000 words in the nineteenth century epitaphs. In the twentieth to twenty first century epitaphs, the word 'died' has increased fivefold being used much more than conceptual metaphors with a frequency of 25.92 per 1000 words. This reflects a more direct approach to dealing with the notion of death and this is confirmed by the data which shows that conceptual metaphors appear to be more prevalent in the nineteenth century compared to modern day inscriptions. In the nineteenth century epitaphs, the word 'departed' was used more frequently with a frequency of 7.08 per 1000 words. In the twenty first century, the most frequent conceptualisation of child death is 'as a sleep' with a frequency of 4.32 per 1000 words. The conceptual metaphor of death as a journey is less frequent with a frequency 0.61 per 1000 words.

4.3.1.1. Death as a journey

The conceptual metaphor viewing death as a journey was more frequent in the nineteenth century child epitaphs than in present day epitaph inscriptions as evident from Table 5.

Table 5.
Conceptual Metaphors Used to Describe Death in the Corpora

Conceptual metaphor	19th century child	21st century child
Departed	7.08	0.61
Fell asleep	0.59	4.32

This conceptualisation of death treats the act of dying as an act of leaving; the deceased is seen as the one who undertakes the journey and in some cases the destination is provided, for example, an encounter with God in Heaven (Crespo-Fernandez, 2013, p. 104). The most frequent mapping in the nineteenth century child epitaph corpus is the conceptual metaphor 'who departed this life'.

The death of a child in any time period can be seen as difficult to accept because death as is seen in some of the epitaphs is not anticipated and therefore hard to accept. The analysis however reveals that compared to the present day, in the nineteenth century, a child's death is viewed in a more positive manner, as a journey to be with God. This positive view of death gives the deceased an identity of an angelic figure, who has left to become an angel

of God than it is today. The use of phrases such as "who plucked those lilies? The master" conceptualizes the child as pure and unblemished and softens the blow of the harsh reality faced by the child's family and enables them to see the child's death in a more positive light, as having gone to a better world. There is also a tendency, within both nineteenth and twenty first century epitaphs to view children as flowers with the connotations of 'blooming' and 'flowering' in heaven. This suggests the fragility and innocence of children and the 'unexpected' and 'unanticipated' nature of their death; families can be seen to derive comfort from their great loss in the knowledge that their child will 'bloom' in heaven something denied to them on earth. In (14), the child is the lili and the parent is the 'gardner" who 'weepeth' but who silently accepts the 'master's' will.

(14) In loving memory of GEORGE ALFRED, son of WILLIAM and SARAH ANN CANNELL who departed this life Dec 2nd 1884. Aged 4 years. "Who plucked those lilies? The master. The gardener weepeth, but is silent"

In most of the epitaphs, the verbs such as 'departed this life', 'fell asleep', etc. do not explicitly state the destination of the journey, leaving it implicit. As (Crespo-Fernandez, 2013, p. 105) observes, sometimes numerous "consolatory expressions" are used within this metaphor such as "in god's loving hands," "together forever now," and "peace perfect peace." He (2013, p. 105) sees this as "evoking the comforting thought that the deceased is not really dead, but merely set out on a journey." However, as in the epitaphs from Highgate Cemetery, this corpus of epitaphs also has inscriptions that refer to the final destination as an encounter with God. Example (15) encapsulates the parents' conviction that the death of their beloved child has been meaningful because it was a heroic sacrifice to be with the heavenly father. Example (15) draws on passages from scripture, for instance, 'he fought the fight for thee' 'he won the victory' etc. which stand out as words of solace for those seeking comfort in the death of their loved one. In example (16), references to 'unfinished symphonies', 'enlightenment by Christ' and 'walk always a child of light' show the reaction of the parents to the loss of the child and the comfort they draw from their religious belief that the child is with God.

(15) Here lieth CHARLES FREDERICK, infant son of JOHN and ELIZABETH LEAKE. Departed life 19th Nov 1835. Aged 14 months. A lamb unmasked; untried He fought the fight for thee, he won the victory and thou art satisfied.

(16) SWEENEY GARY PATRICK. Beloved son and brother. 10.4.2000-21.3.2007. 6 years old but the unfinished are among the most beautiful

> of symphonies. He has been enlightened by Christ. He will walk always a child of the light. When the Lord came he went to meet him. With all the angels and saints.

In diachronic terms, the conceptualisation of death in the modern era is different from the way death was viewed in the nineteenth century. The data analysis suggests that the identity of the deceased is more personalised, for example, through the use of the personal pronoun "our" and the comparison of the child to a 'tiny flower', as in example (5). The conceptualisation of death is also not as final as in the past; instead, there is a sense of life after death which is suggested through the use of figurative language.

Table 6.
A Comparison of Conceptual Metaphor use in the Nineteenth Century and Present Day Epitaphs

Conceptual metaphor	19th century adult epitaphs Frequency per 1000 words	20th-21st century adult epitaphs
Departed	4.45	0.36
Passed away	1.11	0.93
Fell asleep	0.65	0.46

A similar diachronic difference is evident in adult epitaphs. Table 6 provides evidence that in the nineteenth century, death as a journey metaphor was more common than it is now with an occurrence of 4.45 per 1000 words compared to 0.36 per 1000 words in the present day. The decrease in metaphor suggests a denial of death. Whereas in the past, death was a normal occurrence with family members present at the bed side of the dying, death in the modern day is almost the opposite with people dying in hospital with no family close by "surrounded only by machines and strangers" (Anderson et al., 2011, p. 362). There is, according to Anderson et al, a progressive lack of acceptance of death over the past century.

4.3.1.2. Death as a rest

Another conceptual metaphor that is used in both child and adult inscriptions is the metaphor of 'death is a rest'. In the words of Crespo-Fernandez (2013, p. 107), "the relaxation that is obtained in sleep is transferred to death" where "death is conceptualised as a peaceful and serene experience." As is evident from Tables 5 and 6, 'fell asleep' is not a metaphor that is very common in the nineteenth century; this may be due to the fact that a rest or sleep is seen as a temporary activity and in the nineteenth century people viewed death as more final than they do now. There is greater acceptance of the death of an older person compared to that of a child. Although it is used in both

nineteenth and present day inscriptions, the use of this metaphor is less frequent in comparison to the 'death is a journey' metaphor. In addition, other conceptualisations that denote 'death as a rest' are used such as "called to rest," "entered into rest," "here rest," and "rest in peace." These metaphors are however, only evident in adult inscriptions, and not in child epitaphs, again showing that society is more likely to accept the death of an older adult than a child. The metaphor of 'sleeping' is occasionally used to refer to a child's death but even this is not a common use. A child's death at any age is more difficult to accept as it is completely unanticipated. Example (17) simultaneously conveys the expression of grief and loss while accepting the loss of their loved one through the phrase 'who entered into rest'. His social worth is also highlighted through his association with Sir William Syers and his occupation as Judge's Clerk in India, which also shows the role that Britons played in the colonial enterprise.

(17) Here lieth the body EVANS SAMUEL, of Maguire Street. Husband to MARGARET, who entered into rest 31st March 1840. Aged 80 years. He went out to Bombay in the E. I. with Sir William Syers, the first judge of that presidency as judges Clerk in 1798.

4.4. Are nineteenth century inscriptions more sacred than the present day inscriptions?

Anderson et al. (2011, p. 362) explain that "secularisation theory posits that society has gradually moved away from religious practices, values and institutions," and that this has led people to adopting behaviours that are irreligious. He refers to this practice as a kind of 'modernisation'. According to Groeneman and Tobin (2004) the decline in church membership and attendance are indicators of people's lack of commitment to religious beliefs and institutions. This theory can be applied to the UK where religion holds less importance and relevance than during the Victorian era and thus it is relevant to investigate whether this decline has impacted on how the dead are memorialised in graveyard inscriptions.

Unlike Anderson et al.'s study (2011) where the language of epitaphs appears to have become more sacred in tone over the past century or so, in the present corpus, the tendency to use more sacred or religious language is more prominent in nineteenth century inscriptions with 20.10 uses of sacred language per 1000 words as compared to modern day epitaphs, with a frequency of 5.10 per 1000 words with religious language mainly prevalent in modern day child epitaphs. The log likelihood calculation suggests that compared to the twenty first century, sacred language was used more frequently in nineteenth century with an LL score of 286.84. Although religion may not play a prominent role in life, it is not surprising that people

turn to religion in the face of inexorable sorrow as a source of solace and comfort. The epitaphs demonstrate that strength and comfort was sought in biblical verses and religious belief. As McGeer notes, "the frequency of epitaphs that draw on scripture and hymns reflect the belief of a generation more religious or at least more church going, than our own, one that turned for spiritual solace to the *King James' Bible* or the *Book of Common Prayer*" (2008, p. 23). The rituals of death in epitaph construction involve drawing from traditional sources and making them particular to the individual. A lot of formulae can be seen in the epitaph sample (examples 18-25) which is mostly drawn from Christian burial services, biblical passages and hymns. The use of sacred language displays the influence that religion had either on the deceased or their family, whose duty is to contribute an epitaph. One of the noticeable features in the use of this type of language is the tone, usually that of an acceptance of God's will (as in examples 18, 20, and 21) or plea for blessings or mercy, as in (as in 25, 26 and 27).

(18) Dear friend mourn not for as in Adam, all die, even so in Christ shall be made alive.

(19) If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep, in Jesus will God bring with him "Thy will be done."

(20) Blessed are they who died in the LORD.

(21) A lamb untasked; untried He fought the fight for thee, he won the victory and thou art satisfied

(22) Be ye also ready for such an hour as ye think not the son of man cometh"

(23) Here rests in sure and certain hope of the resurrection unto eternal life, the body of JANE,

(24) Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by your name, you are mine

(25) God bless our little angel

(26) Rest eternal grant him O'Lord

(27) Grant O' Lord through the Grave and Gate of death we may pass to our joyful resurrection.

The use of religious words and phrases in the corpus is "another proof of the fact that religion determined much of the language" used in epitaphs and testify to the importance of Christian belief, to bring solace and comfort to the bereaved. According to Wheeler (1994, pp. 6-13), during the nineteenth century, "religion was thought as providing not only a reason for living but also a reason for dying." In the present day, the comfort of religion is mostly sought when the death is that of a child, where solace is found in the acceptance of God's will or in the belief that the child has gone to a better world. As Anderson et al. (2011, p. 368) observe, "death at a young age will continue to be a challenge for individuals, families and society generally regardless of the period of history."

5. Conclusion

On the basis of the evidence obtained, it is clear that there are indeed diachronic differences between the linguistic features of epitaphs from the nineteenth century to the present day. Unlike epitaphs in the modern era, nineteenth century epitaphs go beyond merely recording a death and instead gives a small snapshot of the life of the deceased by elaborating important details such as what they were like, what kind of work they did, how they were regarded and how they died, holding as Crespo-Fernandez (2007, p. 17) observes, "a social mirror to mortality of a different degree of subjectivity and elaboration depending on factors surrounding the deceased such as civic worth, economic status and religious beliefs." As evident from the data, the attitude to death differed depending on the age of the deceased. Child deaths were more common place in the nineteenth century due to lack of modern medicine and high mortality rates from diseases such as consumption; as a result, there were more acceptances of child deaths, whereas in the modern era, child deaths are treated differently in more metaphorical terms demonstrating the sorrow and hardship of accepting the death. This is also seen through the invocation of faith and religious belief as sources of comfort and acceptance for the deaths. In terms of the levels of formality, more archaic and old fashioned words and phrases are used in the nineteenth century epitaphs in comparison to the modern epitaphs which have become less formal with more colloquial speech patterns being appropriated in writing.

The diachronic changes also relate to how the deceased was regarded within the family, and there are changes in the information that is contributed to the epitaph which reflect changes in the family structure. In the past, there were bigger families and more deaths suffered by one family, and this is reflected through references to the child's position as 'eldest', 'youngest', etc. In the present day, the descriptions have more to do with emotive feelings about the deceased, and this is reflected through the use of the personal pronoun 'our' and descriptive words such as 'beautiful son', etc.

Another change that is evident is the more secular character of modern epitaphs. In the nineteenth century, religion is seen to play a more prominent role than today with most epitaphs drawing on the language of religion such as biblical verses, hymns, and the *Book of Common Prayer*. Although religion is present in modern epitaphs too, the comfort of religion is mainly obtained for child epitaphs and not as much for adult inscriptions. The analysis also revealed that acceptance of death directly correlates with the age at time of death and that society is more accepting of the death of an older adult compared to that of a child.

In conclusion, the evidence obtained from the corpus of epitaphs from the nineteenth century to the present day has offered a portrait of the differences between the past and present attitudes and rituals of death. I hope to have demonstrated that the linguistic features found in nineteenth century and present day epitaphs are highly circumscribed by age and personal characteristics of the deceased such as their social worth and religious beliefs. I would like to conclude by stating that the linguistic devices used in epitaphs have proved that death is viewed differently today than in the past and that the Victorians had a more utilitarian approach to death than is visible in the modern era. The changes to life circumstances, modern medicine, and technology as well as reliance on the individual rather than religion have all contributed to the way that death is viewed and ritualised in epitaphs today.

Notes:

1 Mytum (1994) examines the use of Welsh in Nineteenth and Twentieth century Pembrokeshire and describes the structure of the gravestones. There are some similarities in style but unlike the present corpus, in the epitaphs he investigated the introductory remarks such as “Sacred to the memory of” appeared right at the top of the gravestone with the first word standing on its own at the top. There were also some differences in the information that was included in the epitaphs and the placement of the biblical quotations.

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