THE RELIGIOUS-SEMANTIC INTERRELATION BETWEEN LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND RELIGION: A LINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON ENGLISH AND UZBEK

Rejapov Izzatbek Olimbayevich
Mamun University
rejapov_izzatbek1@mamunedu.uz

Abstract. *The article examines the religious-semantic interrelation between language, culture and religion on the material of English and Uzbek. Religion is treated not as an external subject of description but as one of the formative sources of the linguistic worldview, whose traces remain in the lexicon, phraseology and speech etiquette long after the ritual context that produced them has weakened. Drawing on the linguophilosophical tradition of W. von Humboldt, the hypothesis of E. Sapir and B. Whorf, and the linguocultural approaches of V. Maslova, V. Telia and V. Karasik, the study distinguishes three layers of religious semantics — direct terminology, derived evaluative vocabulary and covert religious semantics in everyday words — and describes desemantisation as the principal mechanism of their transformation. Contrastive analysis of English and Uzbek material shows that the two languages share the mechanism but differ in its depth, in the donor languages involved and in the degree to which the original religious reference remains active. The findings are relevant to linguoculturology, contrastive phraseology, translation studies and the teaching of English to Uzbek learners.*

Keywords: *religious semantics, linguistic worldview, linguoculturology, desemantisation, phraseology, speech etiquette, cultural code, English, Uzbek.*

Annotatsiya. *Maqolada til, madaniyat va din o‘rtasidagi diniy-semantik bog‘liqlik ingliz va o‘zbek tillari materialida tahlil qilinadi. Din tasvir obyekti sifatida emas, balki tilning olamning lisoniy manzarasini shakllantiruvchi manbalaridan biri sifatida qaraladi: uning izlari leksikada, frazeologiyada va nutqiy odobda, hatto ularni yuzaga keltirgan diniy kontekst kuchsizlangandan keyin ham saqlanib qoladi. V. fon Gumboldtning falsafiy qarashlari, E. Sepir va B. Uorf gipotezasi hamda V. Maslova, V. Teliya va V. Karasikning lingvokulturologik yondashuvlariga tayangan holda diniy semantikaning uch qatlami — bevosita diniy atamalar, ulardan hosil bo‘lgan baholovchi leksika va*

kundalik so‘zlardagi yashirin diniy semantika — ajratilib, ularning o‘zgarish mexanizmi sifatida desemantizatsiya jarayoni tavsiflanadi. Qiyosiy tahlil ikki tilda mexanizm umumiy bo‘lsa-da, uning chuqurligi, manba tillar va dastlabki diniy ma’noning faolligi bo‘yicha jiddiy farqlar mavjudligini ko‘rsatadi.

Kalit so‘zlar: *diniy semantika, olamning lisoniy manzarasi, lingvokulturologiya, desemantizatsiya, frazeologiya, nutqiy odob, madaniy kod, ingliz tili, o‘zbek tili.*

Аннотация. *В статье рассматривается религиозно-семантическая взаимосвязь языка, культуры и религии на материале английского и узбекского языков. Религия трактуется не как внешний объект описания, а как один из источников формирования языковой картины мира, следы которого сохраняются в лексике, фразеологии и речевом этикете даже после ослабления породившего их ритуального контекста. Опираясь на лингвофилософскую традицию В. фон Гумбольдта, гипотезу Э. Сепира и Б. Уорфа, а также лингвокультурологические подходы В. Масловой, В. Телия и В. Карасика, автор выделяет три слоя религиозной семантики — прямую терминологию, производную оценочную лексику и скрытую религиозную семантику повседневных слов — и описывает десемантизацию как основной механизм их преобразования. Сопоставительный анализ показывает, что при общности механизма языки различаются глубиной его действия, составом языков-источников и степенью сохранности исходной религиозной отсылки.*

Ключевые слова: *религиозная семантика, языковая картина мира, лингвокультурология, десемантизация, фразеология, речевой этикет, культурный код, английский язык, узбекский язык.*

Introduction

The idea that a language carries within it the accumulated experience of the community that speaks it is one of the oldest in the philosophy of language. W. von Humboldt described language as the outward manifestation of the spirit of a people and argued that every language contains a particular view of the world [1]. E. Sapir and B. Whorf gave this intuition an empirical direction by proposing that habitual linguistic categories shape habitual thought [2; 3]. Modern linguoculturology, which took shape at the end of the twentieth century, reformulated the question in more tractable terms: not whether language determines thought, but where exactly a culture stores its values, and how a speaker retrieves them [4; 5; 6].

Among the sources that fill this store, religion occupies a position that is both central and insufficiently described. Religion supplies a community with its most durable evaluative categories — purity and defilement, permitted and forbidden, blessing and curse, fate and free will — and language fixes these categories in units that continue to be used long after the ritual context that produced them has weakened or disappeared. The English speaker who says *goodbye* is not aware of pronouncing a contraction of *God be with ye*; the Uzbek speaker who says *xayr* rarely recalls the Arabic *khayr*, meaning good, the good that is wished upon the departing person. In both cases the religious semantics has not been lost: it has become invisible.

The aim of the present article is to describe the mechanisms by which religious meaning is encoded, transmitted and transformed in the lexicon, phraseology and speech etiquette of English and Uzbek, and to establish where the two languages converge and where they diverge. The relevance of the task is twofold. Theoretically, it clarifies the role of religion as a source of the linguistic worldview alongside myth, folklore and everyday experience. Practically, it addresses a recurrent difficulty in translation and in foreign language teaching: units with religious semantics resist literal rendering and produce pragmatic failures that are rarely anticipated by the learner.

Materials and methods

The material of the study comprises lexical and phraseological units with religious semantics drawn from explanatory and phraseological dictionaries of English and Uzbek, formulas of speech etiquette recorded in both languages, and units whose religious origin is established etymologically but is no longer felt by the ordinary speaker.

Four methods were applied in combination. Etymological analysis was used to establish the religious source of units whose present meaning no longer displays it. Componential analysis served to separate the denotative core of a unit from its evaluative and cultural connotations. Contrastive analysis established correspondences and asymmetries between the two languages. Linguocultural interpretation, understood in the sense proposed by V. Maslova and V. Telia, related the linguistic data to the cultural attitudes they encode [4; 5].

1. Religion as a source of the linguistic worldview

The linguistic worldview is commonly defined as the totality of notions about reality fixed in the units of a given language. Its sources are heterogeneous: sensory experience, economic practice, myth, folklore, literature and religion all contribute. Religion, however, differs from the others in one important respect.

Where myth supplies images and literature supplies precedents, religion supplies a normative system — a set of prescriptions concerning what is permitted, what is forbidden, what is pure and what defiles. Because these prescriptions regulate daily conduct rather than belief alone, they enter the language of daily conduct.

A. Wierzbicka has shown that the key words of a culture, examined semantically, give access to the assumptions the culture does not state explicitly [7]. Her analysis of evangelical concepts demonstrates that such words cannot be translated by simple substitution, because their meaning is embedded in a system of religious presuppositions [8]. W. Keane, reviewing anthropological work on religious language, observes that religious speech is marked less by a special vocabulary than by a special relation between the speaker and the authority of the utterance [9]. F. Sharifian, in the framework of cultural linguistics, treats such units as cultural conceptualisations distributed across the members of a speech community rather than stored in any individual mind [10].

Taken together, these approaches suggest that religious semantics in language should be sought not primarily in theological terminology, which is the property of specialists, but in the ordinary lexicon, where religious categories have been naturalised.

2. Three layers of religious semantics in the lexicon

The material examined allows three layers to be distinguished, differing in the degree to which the religious reference remains accessible to the speaker.

The first layer is direct religious terminology: English *baptism, communion, sermon, confession, congregation*; Uzbek *namoz, ro'za*, hajj, *masjid, iymon*. Here the religious reference is fully transparent, the unit is used consciously, and translation difficulties are of the familiar kind produced by cultural realia.

The second layer consists of evaluative vocabulary derived from religious categories but applied outside religious contexts. The English adjective *sinful* is used of waste, indulgence and extravagance with no theological implication; *blessed* and *cursed* function as intensifiers of positive and negative evaluation. In Uzbek, *halol* and *harom*, whose origin is the juridical system of Islamic norms, are regularly applied to labour, income and conduct: *halol mehnat* denotes honest work, *harom pul* denotes money obtained dishonestly. The religious source remains recognisable, but the unit has acquired an autonomous ethical meaning.

The third layer is the most interesting linguistically, because the religious reference has become covert. English *holiday* derives from *holy day*, *goodbye* from *God be with ye*, *farewell* from a blessing formula. Uzbek *xayr*, used as a parting formula, continues Arabic *khayr*, good; *rahmat*, the ordinary word for

thanks, continues Arabic *raḥma*, mercy, originally a divine attribute. In none of these cases does the contemporary speaker perform a religious act by using the word. The religious semantics survives as the etymological motivation of a unit whose function is now purely pragmatic.

3. Desemantisation as the principal mechanism

The transition between the layers described above is effected by desemantisation: the gradual weakening and eventual loss of the denotative religious reference, accompanied by the retention of the evaluative or pragmatic charge. The process may be represented as a sequence of three stages.

At the first stage the unit performs a genuine religious act. At the second it retains the religious form while performing a social function: the English *Bless you* uttered after a sneeze is no longer a petition for divine protection but a marker of politeness, and its omission is felt as rudeness rather than as impiety. At the third stage the religious form itself becomes opaque and the unit is reanalysed as an ordinary word, as in *holiday* or *goodbye*.

It should be emphasised that desemantisation is not a loss of meaning but a redistribution of it. What disappears is the reference; what remains, and often intensifies, is the evaluative component. This explains a phenomenon frequently noted in contrastive work: units of religious origin are among the most emotionally charged in the lexicon precisely in those contexts where their religious content has been most thoroughly effaced.

The degree of desemantisation is not identical in the two languages. In English, the process has advanced further, which is consistent with the long history of secularisation of public discourse in English-speaking societies. In Uzbek, many formulas occupy an intermediate position: *xudo xohlasa* and *insholloh* function pragmatically as hedges qualifying a commitment about the future, yet the speaker who uses them retains access to their religious content and may activate it deliberately. This double status has consequences for translation, to which we return below.

4. Phraseology and speech etiquette

Phraseology is the domain in which religious semantics is preserved most fully, because the idiom resists the analytical pressure that dissolves the individual word. English phraseology of biblical origin is extensive and well documented: *the salt of the earth*, *the forbidden fruit*, *a cross to bear*, *to wash one's hands of something*, *the eleventh hour*, *to cast the first stone* [11]. Uzbek phraseology of Islamic origin is equally rich: *tuz-non haqqi*, invoking the obligation created by shared food; *oq fotiha*, the parental blessing given before a

significant undertaking; *gunohi azim*, a grave sin; *peshonaga yozilgan*, literally written on the forehead, denoting predestined fate.

The last example is instructive for contrastive analysis. English possesses functionally comparable expressions — *it was meant to be*, *written in the stars* — but their source domain is different: the Uzbek idiom derives from the Islamic conception of a divine decree inscribed for each person, whereas the English expressions derive from astrological imagery. Functional equivalence therefore conceals a divergence of cultural motivation, and a translation that renders one by the other transmits the meaning while losing the cultural code.

Speech etiquette displays the same pattern in a more regular form. The Uzbek greeting *assalomu alaykum* is a wish of peace and carries an obligatory response; *omin* concludes a petition; *xudo xohlasa* qualifies a promise. English counterparts — *God bless*, *Godspeed*, amen — have largely been displaced from neutral registers into marked ones: archaic, formal or ironic. The asymmetry is not one of religiosity but of register distribution: in Uzbek the religious formula occupies the neutral register, in contemporary English it does not.

Table 1. Selected correspondences with divergent cultural motivation

Semantic field	English	Uzbek	Nature of the divergence
Parting	goodbye (< God be with ye)	xayr (< Ar. khayr ‘good’)	Parallel desemantisation; different donor languages
Gratitude	thank you (< think, to feel gratitude)	rahmat (< Ar. raḥma ‘mercy’)	Religious source only in Uzbek
Fate	it was meant to be; written in the stars	peshonaga yozilgan	Astrological vs. scriptural source domain
Ethical evaluation	sinful, blessed	harom, halol	Christian vs. Islamic normative system
Commitment about the future	hopefully; God willing (marked)	xudo xohlasa; insholloh (neutral)	Different register distribution
Blessing before an undertaking	(no direct equivalent)	oq fotiha	Lacuna in English

5. Contrastive observations and applied implications

The comparison of the two systems yields four observations of a general character.

First, the mechanism is shared but the donor languages differ. English religious semantics entered the lexicon through Latin, Greek and Hebrew, mediated by the Church and by biblical translation, whose influence on the standard language has been described in detail [11]. Uzbek religious semantics entered through Arabic and Persian. The structural consequence is that religious vocabulary is felt as learned and elevated in English, whereas in Uzbek a considerable part of it belongs to the everyday core.

Second, the depth of desemantisation differs, as shown above. Third, the register distribution differs: what is neutral in one language is marked in the other.

Fourth, and most consequential for applied work, the two systems produce lacunae in both directions. Uzbek *oq fotiha* has no single English equivalent, since English lacks the institution it names; English grace, in its theological sense, and *redemption* resist rendering into Uzbek by a single unit for the same reason. The translator is obliged to choose between a descriptive periphrasis that preserves the content and a functional substitution that preserves the pragmatic effect.

For the teaching of English to Uzbek learners the practical conclusion is that units of religious origin should be presented not as items of vocabulary but as elements of a cultural code. The learner who transfers the neutral status of *xudo xohlasa* to English *God willing* produces an utterance that is grammatically impeccable and pragmatically inappropriate. Errors of this type are not corrected by grammatical instruction; they require explicit cultural commentary.

Conclusion

The study permits the following conclusions. Religion functions as one of the formative sources of the linguistic worldview, and its traces are preserved in the lexicon, phraseology and speech etiquette of both languages examined. Religious semantics is distributed across three layers — direct terminology, derived evaluative vocabulary and covert semantics in everyday words — which differ in the accessibility of the religious reference to the contemporary speaker.

Desemantisation constitutes the principal mechanism of transition between these layers. It involves the loss of the denotative religious reference with the retention, and frequently the intensification, of the evaluative component. English and Uzbek share this mechanism but differ in the depth of its operation, in the donor languages involved and in the register distribution of the resulting units.

The divergences established are systematic rather than incidental, which makes them predictable and therefore teachable. Further research may usefully extend the analysis to the discourse level, where religious semantics operates through argumentative patterns and precedent texts rather than through isolated units.

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