



RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE: CONCEPTS, CHARACTERISTICS AND FUNCTIONS

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Abstract. This paper explores religious discourse in English and Uzbek contexts, focusing on stable expressions, pragmatic functions, and metaphorical meanings. It examines how cultural, theological, and linguistic factors shape discourse, highlighting the role of speech acts, implicit meanings, and intertextuality. Special attention is given to expressions centered on God, Christ, and sacred texts, revealing both universal and culture-specific aspects of religious language.

Key words: theolinguistics, stable expressions, religion, religious language, pragmatic functions, implicit meaning.

Introduction. Religious discourse encompasses discussions about God, eternity, miracles, salvation, prayer, values, and morality (Banzen, 2010). It includes statements about God's existence or attributes, sermons, moral teachings, and public religious communication aimed at guiding society. In English discourse, key concepts often revolve around Jesus Christ, while Uzbek discourse frequently emphasizes Muhammad (s.a.v.) and Islamic teachings. Despite differences in religious figures, both traditions share similar pragmatic functions, including assertive, directive, declarative, expressive, and implicative acts.

Main part: Religious discourse, as noted by Greg Banzen, encompasses discussions about God, eternity, miracles, salvation, prayer, values, and morality. In other words, statements concerning the existence, attributes, or actions of God constitute religious utterances and speeches. Beyond theological statements, religious speech also includes moral discourse addressing principles and laws related to social and ethnic inequality, justice, and the struggle against oppression. It covers sacred speech present in biblical texts and modern liturgy, analyzing both diachronic (historical development) and synchronic (contemporary usage) aspects of religious language. Additionally, public religious discourse seeks to regulate social life, establish norms, and reinforce ethical and moral standards.

Professor Courtney S. Campbell of the University of Oregon emphasizes that such discourse is transmitted through abstract principles, myths, narratives, parables, and meaningful stories. Religious speech is not limited by length; it is inherently flexible, encompassing real, factual, symbolic, and distinctive features that regulate human behavior, moral conduct, and social norms. It functions both as a communicative tool and as a repository of spiritual and cultural values.

Religious discourse examines the language of world religions through semiotic, pragmatic, and cognitive linguistic lenses, considering how it is positioned within broader intellectual and cultural contexts. Its lexicon is highly metaphorical, often linking spiritual, moral, and ethical concepts through symbolic expressions. For instance, expressions such as *revelation-garment*, *apostasy-adultery*, and *love-heart purification* demonstrate how religious discourse encodes complex moral and spiritual ideas through linguistic metaphors. These metaphorical constructions not only communicate theological concepts but also provide cognitive frameworks that guide believers in interpreting the sacred world.

A defining characteristic of religious discourse is its sacredness and fideistic orientation, reflecting a commitment to belief and trust in divine authority. In English, religious discourse is expressed through a range of terms including: *Christian discourse*, *theological discourse*, *spiritual talk*, *biblical jargon*, *faith-based language*, *godly terminology*, *holy-writ vocabulary*, *sacred dialect*, *scriptural language*, *spiritual lexicon*, *theological vocabulary*, *bible-speak*, and *church talk*. Additional related terms include *divine discourse*, *liturgical discourse*, *fideistic discourse*, *missionary discourse*, *religious-popular discourse*, and *preachy/metaphysical discourse*, demonstrating the multidimensional nature of religious communication.

In addressing God, English religious discourse employs terms such as *Theos*, *Deus*, *Dio*, *Gott*, and *God*, reflecting hierarchical and non-hierarchical relationships embedded within the politeness framework of pragmatics. Politeness strategies are evident in the use of titles such as *King–Lord*, *Father*, *Doctor*, *Professor*, *Pastor*, *Shepherd*, and possessive forms like *My Father*, *Our King*, and *My Refuge*. In relation to Christ, titles such as *the Christ*, *the Messiah*, *the Redeemer*, *the Son of Man*, *the Son of David*, *the Son*, *the Son of God*, and *the Son of the Father* are employed, signaling reverence, theological authority, and hierarchical positioning within religious communities.

English cultural and religious texts—including prayers, sermons, praises, pastoral addresses, and hymns—feature stable, recurrent linguistic expressions with specific discursive characteristics. These expressions convey spiritual-aesthetic content, social identity, religious beliefs, and pragmatic functions. As cultural codes, they utilize biblical metaphors, intertextual references, formulaic expressions, parables, and paremiological units to spiritually support, morally educate, and religiously inspire Christian communities.

According to J. Searle's speech act theory, these stable religious units serve multiple communicative functions:

- a) **Assertive acts:** conveying truth and affirming theological propositions.
- b) **Directive acts:** issuing commands, requests, admonitions, or encouraging participation.
- c) **Commissive acts:** promising commitments or obligations.
- d) **Declarative acts:** formally announcing divine truths or moral standards.
- e) **Expressive acts:** communicating emotions, devotion, and spiritual experiences.

A clear example is the expression *God is love*, which represents a metaphorical and theological assertion. It illustrates God's attributes in a holistic manner while exemplifying assertive speech acts. This expression communicates the ontological and theological truth that God is the essence of love (John 4:8–4:16). In practical terms, it reinforces believers' understanding of divine love as the foundation of ethical and spiritual conduct.

The concept of divine love also finds resonance in Sufi mysticism, where *husn-i mutlaq* (absolute beauty/love) is interpreted as intense devotion to God. In Sufi thought, true love (*maḥabbat-i haqqī*) is distinguished from metaphorical love directed toward the beauty of humans or the world. This form of devotion emphasizes spiritual purification, self-discipline, and ethical alignment with divine will, linking metaphysical concepts to lived spiritual experience.

Moreover, religious discourse is characterized by its intertextuality. Expressions draw on scripture, historical teachings, liturgy, and tradition, creating layered meanings that are both explicit and implicit. For example, phrases such as *The Lord is my shepherd* and *To eat the flesh and drink the blood of Christ* carry metaphorical, theological, and pragmatic significance.



The former conveys divine guidance, protection, and spiritual nourishment (Psalm 23:1–3), while the latter expresses spiritual participation and devotion in the Eucharist (John 6:53–55). These expressions not only guide moral and spiritual behavior but also establish shared conceptual frameworks within religious communities.

Conclusion.

Religious discourse operates as both a social and cognitive phenomenon. It integrates symbolic language, ethical instruction, and spiritual narrative to construct moral, communal, and personal identities. Through recurrent expressions, metaphorical devices, and speech acts, religious discourse mediates the relationship between the divine and human, the sacred and the mundane, and the moral and the social.

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