



RELIGIOUS EXPRESSIONS AND THEIR PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS IN ENGLISH RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

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Abstract

This study investigates religious discourse in English and Uzbek contexts, concentrating on fixed expressions, pragmatic functions, and metaphorical meanings. It analyzes the influence of cultural, theological, and linguistic factors on discourse formation, emphasizing the importance of speech acts, implicit meaning, and intertextual connections. Particular focus is placed on expressions relating to God, Christ, and sacred writings, illustrating both universal patterns and culturally distinct features of religious language.

Keywords: Theolinguistics, stable expressions, religion, religious language, pragmatic functions, implicit meaning.

Introduction

Religious discourse frequently relies on metaphorical language to articulate concepts that transcend human cognition, embodying abstract, absolute, and spiritual dimensions. Through metaphors, believers gain access to ways of imagining and interpreting the divine that ordinary language cannot convey. As each religious tradition employs distinct metaphorical models, these models shape how God's nature, attributes, and agency are understood. For instance, Christianity and Judaism conceptualize God as the "Father," whereas Islamic discourse likens Him to "Light," reflecting unique linguistic and theological orientations in each tradition. Moreover, deixis, anthropomorphization, and pragmatic meanings play a crucial role in constructing religious realities, as seen



in the use of pronouns such as he for God or expressions like the image of God. These linguistic mechanisms demonstrate how religious texts connect divine authority with human identity and morality. The interplay of metaphors, deixis, and pragmatics becomes especially evident in Christian expressions such as Leading souls to Christ and Giving souls to Christ, which encode presuppositions and implications about salvation, divine ownership, and human purpose. Together, these elements illustrate the profound significance of linguistic structures in shaping religious worldviews and spiritual understanding.

Main Part:

The expression God is love is among the most frequently used religious units in Christian sermons, covering theological or moral topics. Derived from the Latin sermonis meaning “sharing of ideas” or “gathering,” the sermon aims to evangelize, remind listeners of divine truths, and guide them in faith. Central to Christian preaching is Jesus Christ, who, as God’s messenger, teaches humans the necessity of righteous living, inspiring repentance, moral purification, and return to God.

Numerous stable religious expressions are employed to achieve these spiritual and educational goals:

- Lamb of God – declarative act, acknowledging Christ’s sacrifice for humanity’s sins;
- Mournful mother – expressive act, depicting Virgin Mary’s suffering;
- Word of God, Eternal home, One who saves, Chosen people, Heirs of the kingdom of Heaven – assertive acts, reinforcing belief in God’s attributes, salvation, divine reward, and election.

The phrase Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world highlights Christ’s innocence, obedience, and readiness for sacrifice. The Kingdom of Heaven (The Kingdom of Heaven) is metaphorically likened to a royal palace, symbolizing ultimate ideals of devotion to God and love for humanity. Guidance to the Kingdom of Heaven is expressed through The Lord is my shepherd, portraying God as a caring, protective guide. Psalms such as:

The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
He makes me lie down in green pastures,



He leads me beside quiet waters,

He refreshes my soul

depict God as a shepherd, with green pastures and quiet waters symbolizing peace, prosperity, and spiritual renewal.

The unit The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding conveys respect for divine authority, moral awareness, and wisdom. Similarly, Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure (Psalm 16:5–11) emphasizes divine companionship and provision, with “cup” metaphorically representing life-sustaining sustenance.

In religious discourse, metaphorical language enables the perception of concepts that lie beyond the limits of human intellect and imagination—that is, notions possessing abstract, absolute, and spiritual essence. The linguistic orientation shaped through various metaphors used to describe God, His attributes, and His essence occupies a central place in religious worldviews. The metaphorical models present in every religion determine how God is understood. For example, while in Christianity and Judaism God is interpreted as the “Father,” in Islamic discourse, according to the Qur’an and Islamic exegesis, He is compared to “Light.” The expression God is our loving Father conveys metaphorical meaning that God is the supreme being or God is the first, uncaused cause cannot fully express.

Natural phenomena, such as the sun rising in the early morning and setting toward evening, are perceived by people not as events that occur spontaneously, but rather as processes unfolding under the influence of certain cosmic or divine forces. The causal interconnectedness of these phenomena is explained through divine will. The conceptual metaphor Causes are forces linguistically expresses this understanding. In this metaphor, “causes”—that is, the principle of causality—harmonizes with God’s active will in a religious context.

The embodiment of God’s personality in the human being emerges through the expression the image of God. In this expression, personal deixis plays a key role. For instance, the pronoun he is used in Christian texts to refer to God, which allows for reflection within the domain of social and religious deixis regarding the perception of God as a male person. According to such views, the human being—especially the male, including Adam—is acknowledged as being created



in the image of God, and consequently, anthropomorphization (the conceptualization of God in human form) arises in religious texts. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. In this passage, the subject “God” points to a spiritual and divine collective (the Trinitarian concept) through personal deictic units such as us and our. Man refers to humanity as a whole, and through social deixis, authority is bestowed upon humankind over “all the earth” and “every creature.”

In contemporary Christian society, diverse perspectives can be observed regarding the understanding of God; that is, although God is believed to be one, He is manifested in the Holy Trinity—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Such conceptual fluctuations are reflected through the following phraseological units in religious discourse, in which deictic, metaphorical, and pragmatic layers interact harmoniously.

Expressions such as Winning souls to Christ, Leading souls to Christ, and Giving souls to Christ convey the meaning of “dedicating one’s heart to Jesus Christ,” that is, guiding a person toward salvation. In Leading souls to Christ, the implication suggests that “those who do not follow Jesus Christ go astray,” while in Giving souls to Christ, the presupposition expresses that human life does not belong to oneself but to God.

In conclusion, the examination of metaphorical, deictic, and pragmatic features in religious discourse reveals how language functions as a powerful tool for conceptualizing the divine and structuring spiritual experience. Metaphors such as “God as Father” or “God as Light” extend human understanding beyond the limits of empirical reality, while deixis and anthropomorphization make abstract theological ideas relatable by grounding them in human forms of reference. Likewise, phraseological expressions like Winning souls to Christ or Giving souls to Christ demonstrate how presuppositions and implications enrich the communicative force of religious teachings. Ultimately, these linguistic elements work together to establish frameworks through which believers interpret divine authority, human identity, and moral responsibility. Thus, religious discourse is



not merely a medium of belief but a dynamic linguistic system that shapes and reflects the spiritual worldview of its community.

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