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THE INTERACTION OF LANGUAGE AND RELIGION: KEY ISSUES

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Abstract. *This article examines the problem of interaction between language and religion. It reviews key scholarly works on the subject and presents various theoretical perspectives on the relationship between these two fundamental phenomena. The study attempts to analyze the nature of this interaction and argues for the recognition of “language and religion” as a distinct field of linguistic inquiry. The findings suggest that language and religion, while occupying opposite poles in the system of social consciousness, are deeply interconnected through their shared roots in human spirituality and culture.*

Keywords: *language; religion; culture; spirit; linguistics; terminology.*

Annotatsiya. *Mazkur maqolada til va din o‘rtasidagi o‘zaro ta’sir muammosi ko‘rib chiqiladi. Mavzuga oid asosiy ilmiy tadqiqotlar tahlil qilinib, ushbu ikki fundamental hodisa o‘rtasidagi munosabatga doir turli nazariy yondashuvlar yoritiladi. Tadqiqotda mazkur o‘zaro ta’sirning mohiyati tadqiq qilinadi hamda “til va din” yo‘nalishini lingvistik tadqiqotlarning mustaqil sohasi sifatida e’tirof etish zarurligi asoslab beriladi. Natijalar shuni ko‘rsatadiki, til va din ijtimoiy ong tizimida qarama-qarshi qutblarda joylashgan bo‘lsa-da, ular inson ma’naviyati va madaniyatidagi umumiy ildizlar orqali o‘zaro chambarchas bog‘langan.*

Kalit so‘zlar: *til; din; madaniyat; ruh; lingvistika; terminologiya.*

Аннотация. *В статье рассматривается проблема взаимодействия языка и религии. Анализируются ключевые научные работы по данной теме и представлены различные теоретические подходы к изучению взаимосвязи этих двух фундаментальных явлений. Предпринята попытка осмысления природы данного взаимодействия, а также обосновывается необходимость выделения направления «язык и религия» в качестве самостоятельной области лингвистических исследований. Результаты исследования показывают, что язык и религия, занимая противоположные полюса в системе общественного сознания, тесно взаимосвязаны благодаря общим корням в духовной и культурной сфере человека.*

Ключевые слова: *язык; религия; культура; дух; лингвистика; терминология.*

Introduction. Language and religion constitute two of the most fundamental factors shaping national mentality and forming the national, linguistic, and religious worldviews of different peoples. As a specific form of worldview, religion belongs to human society across the globe; for most contemporary people, religious beliefs remain an integral part of their historical and cultural identity.

Language, in turn, represents the oldest form of human communication and a primary vehicle of human consciousness. Wilhelm von Humboldt articulated the decisive influence of language on the spiritual development of humanity, emphasizing that language serves “the highest and common goal of the joint aspirations of the human spirit, the goal of humanity’s knowledge of itself and its relationship to everything visible and hidden around itself” [1].

The connection between language and other dimensions of human existence – spiritual development, knowledge, and culture – is beyond doubt. Language, like religion, belongs to the sphere of humanity's spiritual culture. Humboldt argued that the spirit of a people is expressed through its language. Regarding religions, he maintained that their spirit is founded on the movement of “every person and every religion – from letter to spirit”. Despite the acknowledged importance of the relationship between language and religion, the nature of this interaction remains insufficiently explored within a unified theoretical framework. The present study seeks to address this gap by examining existing scholarship and proposing a systematic approach to understanding how language and religion influence one another.

Methods. This study employs a qualitative analytical approach based on a critical review of theoretical and philosophical literature on the relationship between language and religion. The research examines the works of key figures in linguistics and philosophy, including Wilhelm von Humboldt, Ferdinand de Saussure, Emile Benveniste, and contemporary scholars such as N.B. Mechkovskaya and V.A. Maslova.

The analysis focuses on identifying the principal paradigms within linguistics that have addressed the language – religion nexus. Particular attention is given to the contrast between structural-systemic approaches, which treat language as an autonomous system, and communicative-pragmatic approaches, which situate language within its broader cultural and social context. The study also draws upon philosophical frameworks that conceptualize language and religion as distinct yet interrelated forms of social consciousness. By synthesizing insights from linguistics, philosophy, and cultural studies, this research aims to clarify the theoretical foundations for a separate discipline dedicated to the study of language and religion.

Results and discussions. Observing the development of linguistics throughout the twentieth century, scholars typically identify two main directions.

The first direction focuses on “language in itself”. Here, language is studied as a system of forms and constitutes the subject of structural-systemic linguistics. This paradigm was heavily influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure, who considered the cultural and ethnic conditions of language existence as secondary, relegating them to what he termed “external linguistics”. Within this framework, language is studied as if it existed independently of human beings [2]. The second direction investigates language immersed in the conditions of its own existence. This communicative-pragmatic approach is associated with the philosophical theory of language developed by Wilhelm von Humboldt. It rests on the conviction that language, as a uniquely human gift, constitutes a creative and constructive process. Studying language in its movement and development, according to this view, can bring us closer to understanding the mystery of human nature and the character of different peoples [3].

At the turn of the second and third millennia, linguistics shifted its object of inquiry. Moving beyond the study of “language in itself”, contemporary linguistic science now investigates language within a broader context. In addition to traditional linguistic problems, modern scholarship considers the influence of social, ethnic, psychological, cultural, religious, and other factors on the mechanisms of language use. This expansion has noticeably altered the boundaries of linguistic analysis, broadening the discipline’s object of research [4.3].

As Emile Benveniste observed, “the properties of language are so unique that it is possible, in essence, to speak of the presence not of one but of several structures in language, each of which could serve as the basis for the emergence of a holistic linguistics” [5.45]. According to V.A. Maslova, such “holistic linguistics” began to emerge in the second half of the twentieth century, giving rise to fields such as sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, anthropological linguistics, ethnolinguistics, ethnopsycholinguistics, and sociopsycholinguistics [6.7]. Benveniste’s observation is profoundly significant. It challenges the long-standing tendency within linguistics to search for a single, unified theory that would explain all aspects of language. Instead, Benveniste invites us to recognize that language is inherently multidimensional: it operates simultaneously as a formal system, a cognitive faculty, a social institution, a historical artifact, and a lived human experience. Each of these dimensions reveals a different “structure” of language, and each requires its own methodological approach.

What makes Benveniste’s insight particularly powerful is its implication that no single linguistic theory can claim completeness. Structuralism, generative grammar, cognitive linguistics, discourse analysis each captures one facet of language but inevitably leaves others in shadow. Rather than viewing these approaches as competing, Benveniste’s framework encourages us to see them as complementary, each illuminating a different layer of the complex phenomenon we call language.

In light of Benveniste’s and Maslova’s contributions, we would suggest that the future of linguistics lies not in the pursuit of a single unifying theory but in the cultivation of productive dialogue among multiple perspectives. The task is not to reduce language to a single structure but to understand how its several structures formal, cognitive, social, cultural, historical interact and co-constitute one another. This is precisely the kind of integrative, multi-perspectival approach that holistic linguistics promises.

Finally, these insights bear directly on the study of language and religion. If language indeed comprises multiple structures, then the language-religion nexus can be examined from multiple angles: as a formal system (how religious texts encode meaning), as a cognitive process (how religious concepts are acquired and processed), as a social phenomenon (how religious communities use language to mark identity), and as a cultural artifact (how sacred texts preserve and transmit tradition). Benveniste’s framework thus

provides a theoretical justification for the kind of interdisciplinary, multidimensional approach that the study of language and religion requires.

N.B. Mechkovskaya notes that for philologists, the combination of “language and religion” is typically treated as a theme within “external” linguistics, alongside such topics as “language and society”, “language and other semiotic systems”, “language and consciousness”, and “language and culture” [7.3]. “External” linguistics seeks to understand the semiotic, social, and psychological nature of language, recognizing the uniqueness of linguistic communication across various spheres of human life.

Mechkovskaya further argues that the relationship between religion and language involves a particularly profound problem – one that is not merely “external” but “internal”, affecting the unconscious and thus the spontaneous and influential mechanisms of human psychology and culture. The cognitive value of the “language and religion” topic is therefore tied to the special, fundamental role both phenomena play in the very constitution of the human being [7.3]. We fully align with Mechkovskaya’s assertion that the relationship between language and religion is not merely an “external” matter but constitutes a deeply “internal” problem. Her distinction between the external and the internal is crucial: it moves the discussion beyond a simple enumeration of surface-level interactions such as religious terminology entering everyday speech or sacred texts influencing literary traditions toward an examination of how language and religion co-constitute the very structures of human consciousness.

The present analysis suggests that the problem of language and religion should not be addressed exclusively within the framework of existing linguistic subdisciplines. Both the nature of the problem and the existing body of research indicate the need for a separate linguistic science dedicated to this intersection. Such a discipline would not merely compile existing findings but would actively develop them in a systematic direction.

If one employs the terminology of metascience, it can be argued that the study of “language and religion” has already passed through its prescientific phase, as evidenced by its accumulated achievements, and now possesses the right to be recognized as an independent field of inquiry. Moreover, within the contemporary landscape of linguistic paradigms, this field already exists in practice – much as chemical elements existed in nature and occupied their places in Mendeleev’s periodic system regardless of whether they had yet been discovered. From a philosophical standpoint, language and religion represent two forms of social consciousness, standing alongside other forms of reflecting the world in human consciousness, such as art, morality, law, everyday consciousness, science, and technology. In terms of their content, language and religion occupy extreme positions among these forms of social consciousness. They constitute polar opposites:

- Language contains the simplest, most elementary picture of the world.
- Religion represents the most complex picture, encompassing components of various psychological natures – sensory-visual, logical, emotional, intuitive, and transcendental.

Language functions as a prerequisite and universal form, a shell for all other forms of social consciousness. Religion, conversely, serves as a universal content – historically the first source from which the content of subsequent forms of social consciousness developed. Despite their opposition in terms of content, language and religion are bound by complex interrelationships. These connections stem from their deep roots in human consciousness, roots that extend to the origins of the human in humanity. Language is a universal means of communication; religion provides the universal meanings transmitted through that communication – meanings that are cherished and of paramount importance to individuals and society. The relationship between language and religion is not based on coincidence or on a misunderstanding characteristic of archaic consciousness. Rather, it reflects the fact that religion constitutes a domain of heightened attention to the word. This relationship possesses its own logic, its own paradoxes, and its own drama, contained in the conjunction of two concepts: “element” and “culture” – the element of culture.

The findings of this study suggest that the relationship between language and religion deserves more than a peripheral place within existing linguistic subdisciplines. The nature of the problem, together with the growing body of research devoted to it, points toward the need for a dedicated area of inquiry one that would not simply gather scattered findings but would develop them systematically and coherently.

Several considerations support this view. First, the language–religion interface cuts across multiple levels of linguistic organization, from phonology and morphology to semantics, pragmatics, and discourse. No single existing subdiscipline encompasses all these dimensions. Second, this interface exhibits recurring patterns and mechanisms such as the sacralisation of texts, linguistic taboos, the structure of liturgical language, and the creation of religious neologisms that call for focused theoretical and empirical investigation. Third, the volume of research accumulated across linguistics, anthropology, religious studies, and cognitive science has reached a point where synthesis and theoretical integration are not only possible but necessary.

Using the language of metascience, one might say that the study of language and religion has already moved beyond its pre-scientific stage. It has generated a substantial body of knowledge, developed distinctive methods and questions, and now stands ready to be recognised as a legitimate field of inquiry in its own right. Indeed, this field already exists in practice much like chemical elements existed in nature before they were systematically catalogued, occupying their places in the periodic system regardless of whether they had yet been discovered. The bond between language and religion is neither accidental nor a relic of archaic ways of thinking. Rather, it reflects the fact that religion is a domain where the word receives heightened attention. This relationship has its own internal logic, its own paradoxes, and its own drama captured in the juxtaposition of two concepts: “element” and “culture”, or the element of culture. This formulation points to a central tension. Language, as an “element”, belongs to the spontaneous, natural, often

unconscious dimension of human existence. It is acquired effortlessly, operates largely beneath conscious awareness, and forms the background against which deliberate thought takes shape. Religion, as “culture”, represents the realm of intentional meaning-making, explicit doctrine, and conscious commitment. Yet in practice, the two are inseparable. Religious traditions often cultivate a heightened sensitivity to language to its power, its beauty, its risks. The religious attitude toward language can range from deep reverence for sacred texts to wariness of verbal artifice, from linguistic conservatism to creative innovation.

This dynamic tension between the elemental and the cultural, the spontaneous and the deliberate, the unconscious and the reflective, lies at the heart of the language-religion problematic. It invites inquiry that is simultaneously linguistic, philosophical, anthropological, and psychological.

Conclusion. To conclude, this study has examined the theoretical foundations of the interaction between language and religion, tracing the evolution of linguistic thought from structural-systemic paradigms to holistic approaches that accommodate the complexity of human communication. The analysis demonstrates that while language and religion occupy opposite poles within the system of social consciousness, they are inextricably linked through their shared origins in human spirituality and their mutual dependence in shaping individual and collective identity. Language provides the form through which religious meaning is expressed and transmitted; religion supplies the content that gives language much of its deepest significance. The recognition of “language and religion” as a distinct field of inquiry represents not merely an academic classification but a necessary response to the growing complexity of linguistic research. As linguistics continues to expand its boundaries, integrating insights from philosophy, cultural studies, and psychology, the study of language and religion will likely emerge as a central area of investigation – one that addresses fundamental questions about the nature of humanity, culture, and communication.

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