

## HUMANITIES

### THE CORRELATION OF LANGUAGE AND RELIGION

**Andrzej Krynski**

Professor, PhD, Polonia University in Czestochowa,  
e-mail: a.krynski@pnap.ap.edu.pl, orcid.org/0000-0001-9635-023X, Poland

**Michael Poluzhyn**

Professor, PhD, Polonia University in Czestochowa,  
e-mail: vennata2017@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2962-9350>, Poland

**Natalia Venzhynovych**

PhD, Uzhhorod National University,  
e-mail: natalie.venzhynovych@uzhnu.edu.ua, orcid.org/0000-0002-0230-4118, Ukraine

**Abstract.** Language appears in the role of a precondition and the universal form, the cover of all other forms of social consciousness; religion – as universal contents, historically first source, from which all further contents of social consciousness have developed. A significant part of information is specific for each religion that is seemingly connected with the peculiarities of environment perception by an individual ethnos, which is determined by historical, cultural, demographic, political, economic development of this or that people. It is this part of religious information that is of special value and importance for every religion, reflecting its world outlook and representing a particular model of the universe.

**Keywords:** language, religion, information, philosophy, history, communication.

*DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.23856/2912>*

### Introduction

As it is well-known, language is a human ability to speak, express his or her thoughts, the totality of arbitrarily reproduced sound signs generally accepted within a certain community for designating objectively existing phenomena and notions as well as conventional rules of their combinations in the process of thought expression. Unlike language, religion is a view and idea underlain by faith in the existence of the supernatural forces, which rule over the world. The correlation between language and religion is still a sophisticated problem, concerning unrealized, spontaneous and influential devices of human psychology and culture. The inward intimate world of man, as a rule, is getting developed, while the process of his or her self-perfection comes into being.

### Language and religion

From the point of view of philosophy language and religion refer to the categories of spiritual human culture. They are two forms of social consciousness ranking with such other forms of world reflection as arts, philosophy, moral, law, ordinary consciousness, science, technology, etc.

From the viewpoint of semiotics language and religion are two original sign systems, possessing their own plane of contents and plane of expression. The contents of language plane and the contents of religion plane are two different world models, in other words, two polar oppositions. Language comprises a simple, elementary world model; religion – sophisticated, moreover, the religion contents envelop the components of different psychic nature: perceptible and visual, logical, emotional, intuitive, transcendental. Language appears in the role of a precondition and the universal form, the cover of all other forms of social consciousness; religion – as universal contents, historically first source, from which all further contents of social consciousness have developed. One may say, that language is the universal means, technology of communication; religion belongs to universal senses, transmitted in communication, sacred senses, the most important for humanity and society.

Language is a certain really existing sign system, used in some community, time and area. It is important to emphasize that language, possessing inward integrity and unity, is a polyfunctional system. Among its functions the most important are those, which are connected with basic operations concerning information (human comprising knowledge of reality) – creating, and sending information.

Speaking about the plane of language contents, that is the information available in speech, one should distinguish two levels of information custody with language participation. Firstly, information is contained in the language itself, i.e. in semantic systems of dictionary and grammar, secondly, with the help of language – in speech, i.e. in oral and written texts, created by means of language (*Mamanazarov, Tavares Ribeiro, Allies, Kulishov, 2017*).

If we compare, on the one hand, this information about extralinguistic reality, which can be inferred from the most complete explanatory dictionary and a detailed semantic grammar of some language, on the other, – the information is comprised in oral and written texts in any language, then it is not difficult to see that information accumulated in the semantic language system, judging by its amount is thousands of times less than the information available in the language texts. However, these initial ideas form the foundation underlying the edifice of a more complete, profound and precise knowledge of the world around. In its basic amount the information, making up language semantics is known to all the speakers of the same language (terminological periphery of the general dictionary here is certainly not taken into account), without distinction of age, education, social status. Late information available in texts, is known to individual speakers in different degrees in accordance with their age, education, social status and profession (*Krynski, Covarrubias, Mamanazarov, Kulishov, 2016*).

Thus, language knows little about the world in comparison with everything mankind knows, because language is historically the first modelling system of human consciousness, the first imprinted world view. The world model, reflected in language, may be characterized as naive (not scientific). It has been seen by human eyes, neither God, nor device, being approximate and imprecise, but the language world model is basically visual and responds to common sense. The role of language with respect to spiritual culture of society is comparable with the role of dictionary as regards the whole variety of texts, which can be written while using this dictionary. One and the same language may serve as the means of polar ideologies, contradictory philosophical conceptions, countless variants of worldly wisdom.

It is more difficult to give the definition of religion than to language. Philosophers and theologians define religion in different ways accentuating a certain peculiarity of relations of man to the higher creature or to the higher forces a person worships. Some people suppose that the essence of religion is in subjective faith, others – in objective revelation; one group of

people defines religion as an individual attitude of soul to the divine, another reduces it to the collective creation and that social organization by means of which cult, dogma, religious community and hierarchy are created. Of primary importance is the intellectual element, that is religion is defined as a sort of comprehension and presentation of the reality (*Gegel, 1997: 201*); either the emotional element, e.g. the feeling of dependence" (*Shleiermacher, 1994: 58*), or, at last, the element of a human will in its relation to the higher moral will (*Kant, 1964: 542-543*).

An interesting definition to religion was given by an American sociologist Robert Bella, who defines it as a special system of communication – "a symbolic model forming human experience – both as cognitive and emotional in solving the most principal problems of being" (*Bella, 1972: 267*).

To define the plane of religion contents is more difficult than to give the definition itself. It is explained by the uniqueness of that knowledge, those senses, that religion evokes in a person. The experience of death, evil and sufferings leads a person to raising profound questions concerning all those things for which everyday categories of cause and consequence do not give response. Religious symbols offer intelligent context, in which this experience may be explained on account of putting it into a more grandiose universe structure and offering an emotional comfort, even if it were the comfort of self-denial.

A mystical component is to a certain degree available in the structure of religious consciousness. In any religion there is, by the ideas of believers, some connection between people and supernatural forces. This moment of connection is reflected in the most general and ancient sense of the word "religion". It is in this connection that the psychological basis or the pivot of religion consists in. As U. James considers, the confidence in the fact, that between God and soul some intercourse has been established is the central point of any living religion, and the most frequent and massive manifestation of such connection is a prayer, which by H. James' words is the "soul and essence of religion" (*James, 1993: 362-363*).

Mystical communication means that a person hears God's answer, understands the information that has been sent him or her from Heaven. This is that "mountain voice", that sight or Epiphany, happy thought or any voice from above, appealed to a prophet, apostle, seer, shaman – that voice, which in the arising tradition will become the Chief Precepts of God.

In addition to the founders of religious, mystical endowments were observed in a great number of thinkers, preachers, religious contents, the comparison with any other information circulating in human society, religious contents are of maximum value. It is owing to two circumstances: firstly, religion seeks responses to the most important issues of being; secondly, its responses, having enormous generalized strength, are by no means abstract; they appeal not so much to logic, as to more sophisticated subtle and intimate fields of human consciousness – to his or her soul, intellect, imagination, intuition, feeling, wishes, conscience.

V. Rosanov, comparing his contemporary psychology and religion, wrote, "<...> all these (newest psychological discoveries) will seem a sort of a doll play in comparison with psychological observations and psychological laws, being discovered in writings of great devotees of hermitage and generally "our fathers". " Wundt's psychology is much poorer than aphorisms of Antony the Great and Egyptian Macari. In conclusion, their language, this quiet, and impetuous speech is so full of pathos and grandeur, not without reason as far back as in manuscript epoch had millions of listeners-readers. Honest to God, in no epoch of Wundt and Mill anyone will rewrite in hundreds of thousands of copies. It would seem dull for paper,

pen, the copyists and readers would not stand. The mysterious speech of the Bible and the Gospel is eternal while extending one's knowledge of religion in front of eyes in a certain language; in conclusion, the issues of conscience life, mysteries of repentance and rebirth of human soul – all these things are more diverting than mammoth bones and even radioactive light" (*Rozanov, 1914: 76-77*).

Some time before, in 1911 he wrote, "The pain of life is much more powerful than the interest to life, that is why religion will always overcome philosophy (*Rozanov, 1970:12*). Notwithstanding the contrast of language contents and religion, complicated intercorrelations exist between them owing to the profound taking root in human consciousness, which goes back to the human nature in man.

Religion and domination factors have been playing and still play an outstanding role in language destinies and in a broader sense, in the history of human communication. In culture history in which as the fates decree either this or that religious dogma "fell out to be given an account of or set out in writing for the first time and afterwards canonized, the people began calling "prophetic" or "apostolic" languages. There are few of such languages. Firstly, they are languages the script of which was created for writing down religious contents. They are these writings that put together the earliest texts in these languages. These languages are: Vedian, Sanskrit, Hebrew and Aramean, Aveste, Pali, Old Slavonic (Church-Slavonic). Secondly, to prophetic languages the researches refer those who had possessed a significant writing and literary tradition and were afterwards used for writing dogmatic texts. They are: Venyan, Old Greek and Latin, and the Classic Arab Language.

The Sacralization of Revelation, written in the Holy Scripture creates the phenomenon of unconventional (absolute) sign perception in the Bible: sacred is not only God, but his written word, his name, letter in the name; sacred must be invariably those words, with which prophets and disciples glorified God and told him about their love and faithfulness. Religious texts turn out to be the main mediators between a human being and the other world. They lead him or her to a religious knowledge, opening in this way the doors of cognition and concealed mysteries of being.

The exceptional authority of prophetic languages is connected with it in their cultural and religious worlds. They not only became classic literary languages of their area, but in the course of centuries were the main factors in the development of language situations. Nearly all prophetic languages extended their communicative functions. For many centuries these were the languages not only of ecclesiastical sphere but also of secular culture, education and science, literature, law. Till now the language of the Coran preserves the status of the chief language in the Arab and Moslem world (Classical Arab).

"Cherished senses", written in prophetic languages, were sacred, therefore the peoples did everything to preserve both texts and languages themselves in the original form. Therefore prophetic languages are exclusively stable. State, cultural and religious traditions of Old Persians have been interrupted and changed, the languages of descendants have become unrecognizable, however, the Aveste language went out of use but is preserved owing to the Scripture ("Aveste"). Thanks to the connection with the scripture the possibility of revival of the forgotten prophetic languages is still preserved. Such is the fortune of Ivrit – the language of sacred books of Judaism.

The necessity of communicating with believers in their own languages is vividly mentioned in the Bible "when suddenly they heard what sounded like a powerful wind from heaven, the noise of which filled the entire house in which they were sitting; and something appeared to them that seemed like tongues of fire; these separated and came to rest on the

head of each of them. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak foreign languages as the Spirit gave them the gift of speech”.

Now there were devout men living in Jerusalem from every nation under heaven and at this sound they all assembled, each one bewildered to hear these men speaking his own language. They were amazed and astonished” (*The Jerusalem Bible, 1974: 157*).

Gradually Christianity increased the number of languages to communicate with God and this was inevitably connected with translation. The translation of religious books became one of the most important events in social history of a great number of languages. The Scripture and liturgy in a native language promoted its prestige and assertion as a leading canal of communication in society. Besides, Scriptures often became material and language bases of superdialect (general national literary language). E.g., the translation of the Bible by Martin Luther (1532-1534) played an important role in the creation of the General German Literary Language, which was authoritative for all German lands and dialects. His “New Testament ran into 72 editions before 1558. The famous six volume Kraticka Bible of the Czech Brothers” (1579-1593) had the analogical uniting significance. The same is true with Serbo-Croatian translation of “The New Testament” by Vook Caradgich in 1847. In their cultures these texts served the standard of correct (literary) speech, the language “tuning fork” for grammars and dictionaries.

The translation of sacred books and the use of any language in divine services in sermons and prayers replenished the word-stock. The Scripture in a folk language facilitated the intensive development of new forms of speech-allegorical, abstract-philosophical and expressive-metaphorical.

The Scripture belongs to the most frequently read books and sounding texts. Therefore the Scripture deeply penetrates into people’s consciousness becoming exceptionally stable its part. Only a language takes a deeper and stronger root than the Scripture, but on the other hand, the Scripture itself actively penetrates into language in the form of proverbs, phrases, popular patterns and symbols.

A. Pushkin said about this “proverbility” most perfectly well, “There is a book, in which each word is interpreted, explained, preached in all parts of the world, applied to all possible circumstances of life and events of the world, out of which one cannot repeat a single expression, that everybody did not know by heart and was not a proverb of peoples; it doesn’t comprise anything unknown for us; that book is entitled Gospel” (*Pushkin, 1949: 99*).

Thus, we see that religious and ecclesiastical factors exert the strongest influence on language fortunes. The reverse dependence – religion from language is a point of greater nicety and complication. This dependence is not so direct and definite as ecclesiastical factor in the history of literary languages. But, paradoxically, “cherished senses” turned out to be inseparable from those words, in which they were said for the first time. Unconventional sign reception in religious texts creates “inward” and “multiple”, almost with every word connected dependence of “cherished senses” on their language forms” (*Mechkovskaya, 1998:4*). As a whole, all the collisions of the historical existence of sacred books are connected with the problem of authenticity of a sacred text to God blessed source.

The peculiarity of the church lexis is the fact, that it is inseparably connected with notions, which have been formed for centuries in the course of heated discussion and caused at times schism (dissidence) in the Christian World (e.g. discussions whether to call God’s Mother or Christ’s Mother led to the schism at one of the Oecumenical Councils). One of the basic causes of the Schism of the Russian Orthodox Church was the correction of church books and introducing insignificant at first sight changes in the Creed, the Gospel formula of

making the sign of the cross “In the Name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit”. The first and principal cause of the Schism was the protest against innovations in church matters, which patriarch Nikon introduced and which consisted in correcting church books and in changing some church customs and rituals. The history of correcting church books in Russia had a dramatic character. Patriarchs blessed translators and priests for correcting books and afterwards accused them of heresy.

While translating religious contents into another language one is to be especially cautious, as for any religion its canonical texts are “given by God” and therefore are not the subject to change. Religion is thought by the believers as the connection between higher and eternal essence (Absolute, God, gods), and people. God, The Absolute informed people the most important thing – the knowledge of life which is fixed in Scriptures (in the Tor – in Israelites, The Bible – in Christians, the Coran in the Mussulmans, etc.). The primary verbalization of religious continuum has occurred in this way, that is the fixation of language units for meaningful elements of a certain religion. This verbalization is holy as God said it, and God’s word must be invariable. It is the deviation from this verbalization that is condemned by any religion. In rendering religious contents in other language it is necessary to retain all the nuances of sense, fixed up in sacred texts.

At the same time, the majority of information of any religion is to a sufficient degree confidently rendered in another language. It is apparently connected with the common direction of human consciousness development. However, a significant part of information is specific for each religion that is seemingly connected with the peculiarities of environment perception by an individual ethnos, which is determined by historical, cultural, demographic, political, economic development of this or that people. It is this part of religious information that is of special value and importance for every religion, reflecting its world outlook and representing a particular model of the universe. Consequently, this part of information creates the greatest difficulties while rendering it in other languages, because it is necessary to preserve the amount of contents laid in religious concepts for accurate rendering of religious contents. Special notions are fixed up in definite vocabulary, which becomes specific for a certain religion. The formation of its equivalents in another language offers a sophisticated language problem.

By force of this, in the history of religion the issues of language always played a vital role. The Church very reluctantly, only in the most exceptional cases consented to translate the Scripture. Very often the translation of the Scripture into new languages led not only to the dissemination of the teaching, but also to its modification. The necessity in new translations or in new interpretations could turn out to be the manifestation and factor of different heretical and dissident stirring to action. The emergence of sacred texts in new languages, in the long run, led to the emergence of new churches, e.g., Anglican, Lutheran, etc. The translation of the Bible into the Church Slavonic Language by Saint Equiapostolic Brothers Cyril and Methodi have also led to the emergence of the New Russian Orthodox Church.

### **Conclusions**

The dramatic nature and paradoxicalness of the language and religion correlation is in the fact, that language, being only a means of communication, turned out to be able to cause religious contradictions that, in the long run, led to the change of contents of “cherished

senses". Therefore religion has always been notable for the heightened attention to the word and expression.

The history of religions consists in the movement and changes of some special information, on its territorial dissemination or reduction, in its certain transmission – retelling, translation, interpretation, explanation. It is in the sphere of religion for the first time that the problem of cognition emerged in full extent, that is the problem for the sake of which philology exists.

## References

- Bella, R. N. (1972). *Sociology of Religion. American Sociology: Prospects, Problems, Methods*. Moscow: Progress, 265-281. [in Russian].
- Gegel, G. V. (1977). *Philosophy of Religion, Vol 2*. Moscow: Mysl, 574. [in Russian].
- James, U. (1993). *The Variety of Religious Experience*. Moscow: Nauka, 432. [in Russian].
- Kant, I. (1964). *Works, Vol. 3*. Moscow: Mysl, 794. [in Russian].
- Kryncki, A., Covarrubias, J. C., Mamanazarov, A., & Kulishov, V. (2016). *The economic Paradigm of Educational Globalization*. *Scientific Journal of Polonia University*, 18(3), 11-19. doi.org/https://doi.org/10.23856/1801. [in English].
- Mamanazarov, A., Tavares Ribeiro, M., Allies, P., & Kulishov, V. (2017). *Genesis of Economic Culture Formation*. *Scientific Journal of Polonia University*, 24(5), 16-24. doi.org/https://doi.org/10.23856/2402. [in English].
- Mechkovskaya, N. B. (1998). *Language and Religion*. Moscow: Grand, 352. [in Russian].
- Pushkin, A. (1949). *Full Collection of Literary Works, Vol. 2*. Moscow: Nauka, 256. [in Russian].
- Rozanov, V. (1914). *Apocliptical Sect (Khlysts and Skopetses)*. SPb.: Academy of Sciences, 208. [in Russian].
- Rozanov, V. (1970). *Selected Works. Solitued. Deciduous Leaves. Apocalypse of our Time. Letters of Gollback*. Munich: A. Neymanis, 564. [in Russian].
- Shleiermacher, F. (1994). *Speeches of Religion to the Educated People, Despising It; Monologues*. SPb.: Aletya, 333. [in Russian].
- The Jerusalem Bible*. (1974). London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 339. [in English].