

Ritual Lexical Units in the Language and Culture System: A Comparative Linguocultural Analysis of Karakalpak and English

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ABSTRACT

Ritual lexical units represents a distinctive functional layer of language in which linguistic units, cultural values, social norms, religious beliefs, and collective memory intersect. This study examines the linguistic and cultural characteristics of ritual lexical units in Karakalpak and English from a comparative linguocultural perspective. The research focuses primarily on wedding and funeral rituals and analyzes ritual lexical units according to their nominative, communicative, symbolic, axiological, cultural-transmission, identificational, and sacred functions. The analysis demonstrates that ritual lexical units cannot be adequately described merely as a thematic or terminological group of lexical units. Its meaning is largely determined by ritual context, cultural conventions, social roles, and the performative character of ritual communication. Karakalpak ritual lexical units reflects collective and kinship-oriented models of social organization, Islamic and pre-Islamic Turkic cultural elements, and a strong connection between ritual speech and collective memory. English ritual lexical units, by contrast, more frequently emphasizes individual agency, personal choice, and autonomous participation, particularly in wedding discourse. At the same time, both linguistic cultures employ ritual language to transmit cultural values, regulate social interaction, express identity, and establish symbolic or sacred meanings.

Keywords: Ritual lexical units, ritual discourse, Karakalpak language, English language, linguoculturology, cultural worldview, wedding rituals, funeral rituals, cultural memory

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between language and culture is one of the central issues of contemporary linguoculturology, ethnolinguistics, sociolinguistics, and linguistic anthropology. Language functions not only as a means of transmitting information but also as a mechanism for preserving and reproducing culturally significant knowledge. This relationship becomes particularly evident in ritual discourse, where linguistic forms are closely connected with traditional practices, social roles, cultural values, religious beliefs, and collective memory (Humboldt 1984; Maslova 2001; Vorkachev 2001).

Ritual lexical units occupies a special position within the lexical system because its meaning is determined not only by the lexical semantics of individual words but also by the cultural and communicative context in which they are used. In this study, ritual lexical units is understood as a set of lexical units functioning within ritual discourse and satisfying the specific communicative requirements of traditional practices. It includes words denoting participants, actions, objects, situations, and meanings associated with transitions between particular social or ontological statuses (Maslova 2001).

The complexity of ritual lexical units derives from its simultaneous relation to linguistic, cultural, religious, and social systems. Its distinctive character emerges at the intersection of these systems rather than within any single one. Although ritual terminology and specialized terminology may both have restricted spheres of use and require specific cultural or professional competence, terminology generally tends toward conceptual precision and monosemy, whereas ritual lexical units may activate broad symbolic and cultural associations (Lotte 1961; Danilenko 1977).

For example, the Karakalpak word *patiya* can be translated lexically as “blessing” or “wish,” but within traditional ritual

discourse it invokes the sacred authority of an elder, the successful completion of a ritual, spiritual protection, and continuity between generations. The English term eulogy, similarly, acquires a specific performative and commemorative function in funeral discourse, contributing to the construction of collective memory concerning the deceased (Walter 1994).

Ritual discourse is characterized by conventionalized participation, recurrent formulas, and predetermined communicative roles. Participants, speech acts, and temporal sequences are frequently prescribed in advance. Ritual speech is also teleological: its purpose is not limited to transmitting information but is directed toward achieving a particular social, symbolic, or sacred state (Arutyunova 1990; Sternin 2003).

The theoretical basis of the present study draws on research concerning language and culture, linguistic worldview, discourse, cultural memory, semiotics, and speech acts (Apresyan 1995; Assmann 2004; Lotman 2000; Searle 1969).

The aim of this study is to identify the linguocultural characteristics and functional organization of ritual lexical units in Karakalpak and English and to determine how ritual lexical units encode culturally specific models of social organization, values, identity, and worldview.

The study addresses four research questions: (1) What distinguishes ritual lexical units from general and terminological vocabulary? (2) What functions do ritual lexical units perform in Karakalpak and English? (3) How do wedding and funeral ritual vocabularies reflect culturally specific worldviews? (4) What similarities and differences can be identified in the symbolic, axiological, and sacred functions of ritual language?

2. METHODS

2.1. *Research design*

The study employs a qualitative comparative linguocultural approach. The analysis is based on lexical units and ritual formulas associated primarily with wedding and funeral traditions in Karakalpak and English. The comparative method makes it possible to identify both universal characteristics of

ritual communication and culturally specific features reflected in lexical choices.

2.2. *Analytical framework*

The analysis combines semantic, contextual, functional, linguocultural, comparative, and discourse-oriented methods. Particular attention is paid to the relationship between lexical meaning and ritual context. Following functional approaches in linguistics and linguoculturology, seven principal functions are distinguished: nominative, communicative, symbolic, axiological, cultural-transmission, identificational, and sacred (Jakobson 1975; Vorobyov 1997; Vorkachev 2001).

2.3. *Materials*

The material includes Karakalpak ritual lexical units associated with wedding and funeral traditions, including *patiya*, *betashar*, *quda*, *qudasha*, *jeñge*, *qayın ata*, *qayın ene*, *kıyew bala*, *shimildıq*, *kepin*, *joqlaw*, *janaza*, *láhet*, and *sadaqa*. English materials include bride, groom, wedding ceremony, wedding vows, wedding ring, bridesmaid, best man, honeymoon, eulogy, prayer, hymn, pallbearer, officiant, and wedding blessing. The source material also incorporates examples from literary texts and established ritual formulas in order to demonstrate how lexical meaning changes within culturally determined discourse.

3. RESULTS

3.1. *Ritual lexical units as a special functional layer*

The analysis shows that ritual lexical units constitutes a specific functional layer of the lexical system rather than a simple thematic category. Its principal distinctive characteristic is contextual dependence. A word that has a neutral meaning in everyday communication may acquire a symbolic or ritual meaning when used within a traditional ceremony (Maslova 2001).

For example, the Karakalpak word *júzik* (“ring”) is an ordinary designation of an object in everyday language. Within a wedding context, however, it may become associated with

marriage, commitment, social recognition, and symbolic union. Likewise, *dástúrxan* ordinarily denotes a cloth or table arrangement associated with serving food, whereas within remembrance rituals it may symbolize hospitality, respect for the deceased, and social obligations toward ritual participants.

Ritual lexical units also demonstrates considerable stability. Because ritual formulas are repeatedly reproduced, linguistic changes may affect them more slowly than ordinary vocabulary. Archaic expressions can therefore survive in wedding and funeral discourse because their traditional form contributes to the authenticity and legitimacy of the ritual (Walter 1994).

3.2. *The cultural worldview reflected in kinship vocabulary*

One of the most significant differences between Karakalpak and English ritual lexical units concerns kinship terminology. Karakalpak wedding discourse contains a highly differentiated system of kinship terms, including *qayın ata*, *qayın ene*, *kúyew bala*, *qaynağa*, *jeńge*, *baldız*, *quda*, and *qudasha*. English frequently uses generalized forms such as father-in-law, mother-in-law, brother-in-law, and sister-in-law.

This difference reflects different patterns of social categorization. In Karakalpak culture, marriage has traditionally been conceptualized not merely as a union between two individuals but also as a relationship between families, kinship groups, and wider communities. Consequently, lexical distinctions encode social relationships that may remain implicit or generalized in English (Maslova 2001).

The Karakalpak system therefore demonstrates a relatively high degree of lexical differentiation in the representation of marital and affinal relations. English in-law terminology, by contrast, provides broader categories that do not distinguish all of the same social relationships.

3.3. *Wedding discourse: Individual and collective orientation*

The comparative analysis reveals differences in the organization of wedding discourse. English wedding formulas often foreground individual agency. The formula “I take thee to be my lawfully wedded wife/husband” is grammatically structured

around the first person and emphasizes individual consent and personal commitment (Cummings 2011).

Traditional Karakalpak ritual discourse demonstrates a stronger collective orientation. The *betashar* genre presents the bride to the new household and the wider community. The ritual therefore represents not only a relationship between two individuals but also the incorporation of the bride into a new social and kinship structure (Nurmukhamedov 1984).

The collective character of Karakalpak ritual discourse is also visible in traditional formulas in which the community is represented as a collective participant. Thus, lexical and grammatical patterns reveal different models of social identity: individual agency is more strongly foregrounded in English wedding discourse, whereas collective and kinship identity is more strongly represented in traditional Karakalpak wedding discourse.

3.4. *Funeral vocabulary and religious worldview*

Funeral vocabulary provides another important area of comparison. Karakalpak funeral terminology reflects a complex interaction between Islamic and older Turkic cultural elements. Lexical units such as *janaza*, *láhet*, and *sadaqa* represent Islamic religious terminology, while *joqlaw*, *qaytis bolw*, and *ata-baba* preserve elements associated with older Turkic cultural understandings of death and ancestors (Matyakubov 2015).

The coexistence of these semantic layers indicates that Karakalpak funeral discourse represents a historically developed synthesis of different symbolic systems. Islamic concepts and older cultural representations coexist within a single ritual structure.

English funeral vocabulary contains numerous euphemistic expressions associated with Christian cultural traditions. Expressions such as *to pass away*, *to go to a better place*, and *to be at peace* soften direct reference to death and emphasize transition, peace, and hope (Walter 1994).

This contrast illustrates different approaches to the linguistic representation of death. Karakalpak *joqlaw* traditionally permits a more explicit emotional expression of grief, whereas English

euphemistic expressions may linguistically mitigate the directness of death-related reference.

3.5. Functional organization of ritual lexical units

Nominative function

Ritual lexical units names culturally significant objects, participants, actions, and situations. Karakalpak terms such as *shimildiq*, *kepin*, and *joqlaw* designate culturally specific phenomena, while English terms such as pallbearer, officiant, and pall similarly designate specialized ritual roles and objects. The existence of a specific lexical designation indicates that the corresponding phenomenon has acquired cultural significance.

Communicative function

Ritual lexical units organizes communication between participants. In Karakalpak weddings, communication between *quda* and *qudaǵay* may follow established stages involving greetings, shared meals, marriage arrangements, and ritual hospitality. In English funerals, eulogy, prayer, and hymn form a conventional communicative sequence. Such organization corresponds to the broader understanding of ritual discourse as regulated speech activity (Arutyunova 1990; Searle 1969).

Symbolic function

Ritual lexical units function as condensed cultural symbols. Karakalpak *patiya* represents more than an ordinary wish: it symbolizes the sacred power of speech, respect for elders, continuity between generations, and communal wishes for prosperity. English bless and give one's blessing can perform comparable symbolic functions in religious and ritual contexts (Eliade 1994).

Axiological function

Ritual language communicates and reinforces cultural values. Karakalpak wedding blessings emphasize prosperity, family harmony, respect for parents, and communal well-being. English wedding vows similarly communicate love, commitment, mutual responsibility, and personal loyalty. Ritual language therefore

does not merely describe values but reinforces them through repeated ceremonial performance (Lotman 2000).

Cultural-transmission function

Ritual lexical units is an important mechanism of intergenerational cultural transmission. Younger members learn ritual terminology through participation in ceremonies. Terms such as *quda túsiw*, *sırğa salıw*, and *betashar* transmit information about ritual actions as well as family roles, social relations, and marriage. Comparable processes occur through English terms such as bride, groom, wedding vows, bridesmaid, best man, and honeymoon (Assmann 2004).

Identificational function

Ritual lexical units contributes to cultural and social identification. Traditional Karakalpak ritual formulas may signal an individual's connection to Karakalpak cultural traditions. Similarly, appropriate use of English wedding formulas such as I do and I will demonstrates knowledge of culturally established ritual norms. Ritual lexical units can therefore function as an index of cultural competence and group identity.

Sacred function

The sacred function distinguishes ritual lexical units from many other lexical layers. In ritual contexts, words may be believed to possess transformative or protective force. The Karakalpak tradition of *patiya* illustrates this function: a blessing pronounced by a respected elder is associated with prosperity, happiness, protection, and successful family life. The English concept of wedding blessing performs a comparable function in Christian ceremonies. The sacred function also helps explain the resistance of ritual formulas to linguistic change because alteration may be perceived as weakening ritual effectiveness (Eliade 1994).

4. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that ritual lexical units should be regarded as an active component of cultural communication

rather than as a passive repository of traditional words. From the perspective of Humboldt's distinction between *ergon* and *energeia*, language is both a product and an ongoing cultural activity. Ritual discourse provides an especially clear example because cultural meanings are reproduced through repeated linguistic performance (Humboldt 1984).

The findings are also consistent with the concept of the linguistic worldview. Ritual lexical units provides access to culturally specific ways of conceptualizing marriage, kinship, death, memory, identity, and social belonging. Because ritual expressions are repeatedly used in socially significant situations, they preserve cultural conceptualizations that may not be visible in ordinary vocabulary (Apresyan 1995; Maslova 2001).

The comparison between Karakalpak and English demonstrates that universal ritual functions may be realized through culturally different linguistic structures. Both languages use ritual lexical units to name culturally significant objects and actions, organize communication, express values, transmit traditions, construct identity, and invoke sacred meanings. However, the relative prominence and linguistic realization of these functions differ.

Karakalpak ritual lexical units demonstrates a particularly strong orientation toward collective identity, kinship organization, elder authority, and continuity between generations. The wedding ritual is represented as the incorporation of an individual into a broader social and kinship structure. Funeral vocabulary reveals the coexistence of Islamic and older Turkic cultural layers (Matyakubov 2015).

English ritual lexical units more strongly emphasizes individual agency in wedding discourse. The grammatical structure of wedding vows foregrounds personal consent and individual commitment. Funeral vocabulary demonstrates a tendency toward euphemistic representation of death and linguistic mitigation of grief (Cummings 2011; Walter 1994).

These differences should not be interpreted as absolute distinctions between all speakers or ritual practices. The comparison identifies dominant tendencies in the analyzed material. Historical change, regional variation, religious

diversity, and individual practice may produce considerable internal variation.

An important implication is that ritual lexical units provides particularly valuable evidence for reconstructing cultural memory. Repeated ritual formulas preserve knowledge about social roles, behavioral norms, values, and relationships between generations. In this sense, ritual language functions simultaneously as a linguistic system and a mechanism of cultural memory (Assmann 2004; Lotman 2000).

5. CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis demonstrates that ritual lexical units occupies a distinctive position in the lexical and cultural systems of Karakalpak and English. Its specificity derives from the interaction of lexical meaning with ritual context, cultural conventions, social roles, collective memory, and religious or symbolic beliefs.

The study identifies seven principal functions of ritual lexical units: nominative, communicative, symbolic, axiological, cultural-transmission, identificational, and sacred. These functions demonstrate that ritual lexical units do considerably more than name ritual objects, actions, or participants. They organize communication, encode cultural values, reproduce social norms, construct identity, transmit cultural knowledge, and activate culturally recognized symbolic and sacred meanings (Jakobson 1975; Vorobyov 1997; Vorkachev 2001).

The Karakalpak material reveals a strong connection between ritual lexical units and collective identity, kinship relations, elder authority, cultural continuity, and the coexistence of Islamic and pre-Islamic Turkic elements. English ritual lexical units demonstrates a stronger emphasis on individual agency in wedding discourse and a tendency toward euphemistic representations of death.

At the same time, the comparison reveals significant universal features. In both linguistic cultures, ritual lexical units functions as a mechanism for regulating socially important

events and transmitting cultural meanings from one generation to another.

Therefore, the study of ritual lexical units should extend beyond traditional lexical-semantic description. A comprehensive analysis requires consideration of discourse structure, cultural symbolism, social organization, collective memory, and pragmatic function. Comparative research in this field can contribute to the reconstruction of national linguistic worldviews and to a deeper understanding of how language participates in the preservation and reproduction of culture.

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