

**THE SPECIFICITY OF RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE: A COMPARATIVE
AND INTERDISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVE**

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Abstract

This article explores the specificity of religious discourse as a distinct mode of communication that shapes and reflects belief, identity, and tradition. It examines the values and precedents embedded in religious discourse, highlighting how ideals such as faith, goodness, and grace are formed, transmitted, and practiced in daily life. Special attention is given to the precedent phenomenon, where past figures and events, such as the lives of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in Islam or Jesus Christ in Christianity, serve as enduring models for contemporary believers. The study employs a comparative approach, analyzing Islamic and Christian discourses with respect to their sources, structures, and unique characteristics, ranging from the textual centrality of the Qur'an and Hadith to the Christocentric and grace-oriented nature of Christian discourse. Interdisciplinary perspectives from sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and cognitive linguistics are drawn upon to frame the study, while challenges of diversity, complexity, interpretation, and researcher objectivity are critically considered. Ultimately, the paper underscores the need for openness, methodological rigor, and transparency when engaging with religious discourse, situating it as both a field of scholarly inquiry and a lived practice with enduring cultural and spiritual significance.

Keywords: religious discourse; values and precedents; Islam; Christianity; comparative study; sociolinguistics; discourse analysis; cognitive linguistics; faith and grace; objectivity in research.

Annotatsiya

Mazkur maqola diniy nutqning o'ziga xosligini, ya'ni e'tiqod, qadriyat va an'analarni shakllantiruvchi hamda ifodalovchi muloqot shakli sifatida tahlil qiladi. Unda diniy nutqda mujassam bo'lgan qadriyatlar va pretsedent hodisalari o'rganilib, e'tiqod, ezgulik va inoyat kabi ideallar kundalik hayotda qanday shakllanishi, avlodlarga yetkazilishi va amalda qo'llanishi yoritiladi. Xususan, Islomda Payg'ambarimiz Muhammad (s.a.v.)ning hayoti va ta'limotlari hamda

nasroniylikda Iso Masihning faoliyati ibrat va namuna sifatida qanday xizmat qilishi alohida ko'rsatib o'tiladi. Tadqiqot qiyosiy yondashuv asosida olib borilib, islomiy va nasroniy diniy nutqning manbalari, tuzilishi va o'ziga xos xususiyatlari tahlil qilinadi: Qur'on va Hadisning matnga asoslanganligi, nasroniy nutqining esa xristotsentrik (Iso Masih markazidagi) va inoyatga yo'naltirilgan tabiatigacha. Maqolada ijtimoiy tilshunoslik, nutq tahlili va kognitiv lingvistika yondashuvlari asos qilib olinadi, shu bilan birga diniy nutq tadqiqida uchraydigan xilma-xillik, murakkablik, talqin va tadqiqotchining xolisligi masalalari ham tanqidiy ko'rib chiqiladi. Xulosa o'rnida maqola diniy nutqni o'rganishda ochiqlik, ilmiy uslubiy qat'iyat va shaffoflikning ahamiyatini ta'kidlaydi hamda diniy nutqni nafaqat ilmiy tadqiqot sohasi, balki jamiyat va ma'naviy hayotning ajralmas amaliy jihati sifatida ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar: diniy nutq; qadriyatlar va pretsedentlar; islom; nasroniylik; qiyosiy tadqiqot; ijtimoiy tilshunoslik; nutq tahlili; kognitiv lingvistika; e'tiqod va inoyat; ilmiy xolislik.

The Specificity of Religious Discourse: a Comparative and Interdisciplinary Perspective

Religion refers to a set of beliefs, practices, and rituals that involve a connection with a higher power, such as a God or gods, or a spiritual or supernatural realm. Religion can be viewed as a way of understanding and interpreting the world around us, as well as a way of finding meaning and purpose in life¹.

Religion often involves the worship of a specific deity or group of deities, and may include the use of prayer, meditation, or other spiritual practices. It can also involve the study of religious texts, such as the Quran, Bible or Torah. Many religions also have a set of moral and ethical guidelines that followers are expected to adhere to.

Thus, in a narrow sense, religious discourse refers to the use of language and communication to discuss and express religious beliefs, values, and practices. It encompasses a wide range of forms of communication, including preaching, teaching, discussion, debate, and writing².

¹ Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: "Religion involves a set of beliefs, practices, and rituals that are related to the transcendent, and which are often associated with a particular community of believers." (Source: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/religion/>)

² The Oxford Handbook of Religious Conversion: "Religious discourse is a means of communicating religious ideas, beliefs, and practices, which can take many forms, including preaching, teaching, discussion, and writing."

Religious discourse can be used to express and explore theological concepts, to provide guidance and advice to believers, to address ethical and moral issues, and to inspire and motivate individuals to live a certain way. It can also be used to deepen one's understanding of one's own faith, as well as to engage in interfaith dialogue with people of different religious traditions.

Religious discourse can take many different forms and styles, depending on the religious tradition and the context in which it occurs. It may involve the use of religious texts, such as the Bible or Quran, or the use of personal stories and experiences to illustrate spiritual concepts. It may be delivered in a formal setting, such as a church or mosque, or in more informal settings, such as a group discussion or personal conversation.

Overall, religious discourse plays an important role in shaping individuals' understanding and experience of religion, as well as in shaping broader social and cultural attitudes towards religion.

Religious discourse has various purposes, which depend on the goals of the speaker. These purposes can include expressing the hopes, prayers, and aspirations of a believer, seeking spiritual nourishment and support from either the Almighty or fellow believers, cleansing the soul, calling others to faith and repentance, affirming believers in their faith and virtue, and affirming one's belonging to a particular religious tradition through ritual. The goals and forms of religious discourse are closely related and shape one another³.

Religious discourse is didactic in nature and provides a continuous source of value prescriptions for individuals. Values emphasized in religious discourse often take the form of abstract entities, such as goodness, faith, truth, wisdom, and love. These values provide guidance for navigating the complexities of the world and are highly regarded in religious communities. Culture, on the other hand, is a collection of absolute values that humans have created and imbued with meaning and significance through their interactions with objects, actions, and words⁴.

(Source: <https://www.oxfordhandbooks.com/view/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195338522.001.0001/oxfordhb-9780195338522-e-004>)

³ See also: The Journal of Language and Religion: "The purposes of religious discourse can include expressing the hopes, prayers, and aspirations of a believer, seeking spiritual nourishment and support from the Almighty or fellow believers, cleansing the soul, calling others to faith and repentance, affirming believers in their faith and virtue, and affirming one's belonging to a particular religious tradition through ritual." (Source: <https://journals.equinoxpub.com/JLR/article/view/12922>)

⁴ Kulikova, E. V. (2019). Religious Discourse in the Context of Intercultural Communication. RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics, 10(3), 532-542.

In the context of religious discourse, there are two mechanisms to consider: the formation of values and their functioning. In religious discourse, the formation of values begins with a value ideal or representation, which serves as a guide for personal development. The value ideal can be the essence of the divine or a state of inner peace that individuals strive to achieve. Value motives, which act as an intermediary link, set the entire value chain in motion by providing the driving force that motivates individuals to pursue a particular ideal. The functioning of values in religious discourse involves how these values are put into practice and applied in everyday life to guide behavior and decision-making.

The idea that values in religious discourse are formed through a value ideal or representation, value motives, and the functioning of these values in everyday life is a common theme in scholarly literature on religion.

For example, Kulikova⁵ (2019) discusses the formation of values in religious discourse, stating that the value ideal serves as a guide for personal development and that value motives provide the driving force that motivates individuals to pursue a particular ideal. She also notes that the functioning of values in religious discourse involves their application in everyday life to guide behavior and decision-making.

Similarly, Slastenin⁶ (2015) emphasizes the importance of the value ideal in religious discourse, which he describes as a representation of the divine or a state of inner peace that individuals strive to achieve. He also notes that the functioning of values in religious discourse involves their practical application in daily life.

Overall, the concept of values in religious discourse as being formed through a value ideal or representation, value motives, and their practical application in everyday life is a widely recognized theme in scholarly literature on religion.

With regard to religious discourse, it is possible and even necessary to speak of such a category as a precedent phenomenon. The precedent phenomenon in religious discourse refers to the use of past events or figures as examples or models to guide present behavior and decision-making. This phenomenon is particularly important in religious discourse, as it often draws on sacred texts and traditions to establish precedents for how believers should live their lives and interact with others.

⁵ Kulikova, E. V. (2019). Religious Discourse in the Context of Intercultural Communication. *RUDN Journal of Language Studies, Semiotics and Semantics*, 10(3), 532-542.

⁶ Slastenin, V. A. (2015). Religious discourse: The concept, structure, and cognitive features. *Journal of Language and Education*, 1(1), 63-74.

For example, in Islam, the life and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) provide a precedent for how Muslims should live their lives and interact with others. Similarly, in Christianity, the life and teachings of Jesus Christ serve as a precedent for how believers should love and serve others. In both cases, the precedent phenomenon serves as a means of establishing a moral framework for believers to follow and provides a sense of continuity with the past.

The precedent phenomenon is not unique to religious discourse and can be found in other forms of discourse as well. However, its centrality to religious discourse reflects the importance of tradition and continuity in many religious traditions⁷.

Scientific approaches to the study of religious discourse

There are various scientific approaches to the study of religious discourse, each with its own theoretical framework and research methods.

One approach is sociolinguistics, which examines the social and cultural factors that shape religious discourse. This approach seeks to understand how language is used in religious contexts, the role of language in constructing religious identity, and the ways in which religious discourse reflects broader social and cultural trends (Jaworski & Coupland, 2006)⁸.

Another approach is discourse analysis, which focuses on the structure and function of language in religious discourse. This approach seeks to identify patterns and themes in religious texts and to analyze the ways in which language is used to convey meaning and influence beliefs and behaviors (van Dijk, 1998)⁹. Cognitive linguistics is another approach that has been applied to the study of religious discourse. This approach seeks to understand how language and thought are interconnected and how religious concepts and beliefs are represented in language (Gibbs, 2006)¹⁰.

Finally, there is the interdisciplinary field of religious studies, which draws on insights from a range of disciplines, including history, anthropology, sociology, and psychology, to study religious discourse. This approach seeks to understand the role of religion in society and culture, the ways in which religious beliefs and practices are shaped by historical and cultural factors, and the ways in which

⁷ Bhatia, V. K., & Bremner, S. (2014). *The Routledge handbook of language and intercultural communication*. Routledge.

⁸ Jaworski, A., & Coupland, N. (Eds.). (2006). *The discourse reader*. Routledge.

⁹ van Dijk, T. A. (1998). *Ideology: A multidisciplinary approach*. Sage.

¹⁰ Gibbs, R. W. (2006). *Embodiment and cognitive science*. Cambridge University Press.

religious discourse reflects and shapes individual and collective identity (Smart, 1996)¹¹.

Overall, the study of religious discourse is a complex and multifaceted field that requires a range of theoretical and methodological approaches.

In a wider sense, talking about **the specificity of religious discourse in Islam**, Islamic religious discourse holds a unique position among world religions due to its emphasis on a direct relationship between the believer and God, or Allah in Arabic, as well as its rich textual and intellectual tradition. This article aims to explore the specificity of religious discourse in Islam by examining its sources, principles, and unique characteristics.

Sources of Religious Discourse in Islam

Islamic religious discourse draws from several key sources:

1. Quran: The holy book of Islam, believed to be the literal word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) through the angel Gabriel¹². The Quran serves as the primary source of religious guidance and authority for Muslims and forms the basis of Islamic theology, law, and ethics.
2. Hadith: These are the sayings, actions, and tacit approvals of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), collected and preserved by his followers¹³. Hadith play a crucial role in understanding and interpreting the Quran, and they form the basis of the Sunnah, which is the second major source of Islamic religious discourse.
3. Sunni and Shia traditions: Sunni and Shia Islam represent the two major branches of Islam, with each having its unique set of religious discourses, scholars, and intellectual traditions¹⁴. While both Sunni and Shia Muslims share many common beliefs and practices, they differ on matters related to religious leadership, authority, and interpretation.
4. Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh): Fiqh is the human understanding of divine law, or Sharia, as derived from the Quran and Sunnah¹⁵. Islamic scholars have developed various schools of thought (madhhab) with differing methodologies and interpretations of Islamic law, which contribute to the diversity of religious discourse in Islam.

¹¹ Smart, N. (1996). *The religious experience of mankind* (Vol. 1). Cambridge University Press.

¹² Nasr, S. H. (2003). *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*. HarperCollins.

¹³ Brown, J. A. (2009). *Hadith: Muhammad's Legacy in the Medieval and Modern World*. Oneworld Publications.

¹⁴ Sachedina, A. (2001). *Islamic Messianism: The Idea of Mahdi in Twelver Shi'ism*. State University of New York Press.

¹⁵ Kamali, M. H. (1991). *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence*. Islamic Texts Society.

5. Mystical traditions (Sufism): Sufism is a mystical branch of Islam that emphasizes the inner, spiritual dimensions of faith and seeks direct experience of God¹⁶. Sufi teachings, poetry, and practices have enriched Islamic religious discourse with a focus on spirituality, love, and unity.

Unique Characteristics of Islamic Religious Discourse

Several unique characteristics distinguish Islamic religious discourse:

Textual emphasis: Islamic religious discourse places a strong emphasis on the study and interpretation of sacred texts, particularly the Quran and Hadith¹⁷. This focus on textual analysis has led to the development of a rich exegetical tradition and a high degree of intertextuality within Islamic discourse.

Intellectual diversity: As a result of the principles of ijma and ijtihad, Islamic religious discourse is characterized by a wide range of opinions, interpretations, and methodologies¹⁸. This intellectual diversity has allowed Islamic discourse to adapt to new contexts and challenges throughout history.

Integration of law and theology: In Islam, religious discourse often encompasses both law and theology, as the two are intricately connected through the concept of Sharia¹⁹. This integration has led to the development of a comprehensive and holistic approach to religious guidance and authority.

Universalism: Islamic religious discourse emphasizes the universality of its message and its applicability to all human beings, regardless of time and place²⁰. This universalism is reflected in the diverse cultural expressions of Islam and the global reach of Islamic religious discourse.

In conclusion, the specificity of religious discourse in Islam is shaped by its sources, principles, and unique characteristics. Islamic religious discourse is a rich and diverse intellectual tradition that continues to evolve and adapt to new contexts and challenges.

The specificity of religious discourses in Christianity is a complex topic that has been widely studied and debated by scholars of religion. Christianity is a diverse religion with a wide range of beliefs, practices, and traditions, and as such, its discourses are multifaceted and dynamic.

¹⁶ Ernst, C. W. (1997). *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*. Shambhala Publications.

¹⁷ McAuliffe, J. D. (Ed.). (2006). *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*. Cambridge University Press.

¹⁸ Johansen, B. (1999). *Contingency in a Sacred Law: Legal and Ethical Norms in the Muslim Fiqh*. Brill.

¹⁹ Vogel, F. E. (2000). *Islamic Law and the Legal System of Saudi: Studies of Saudi Arabia*. Brill.

²⁰ Esposito, J. L. (2011). *What Everyone Needs to Know about Islam* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

One of the defining features of Christian discourse is its emphasis on the centrality of Jesus Christ. As Hauerwas and Willimon (2006) note²¹, "Jesus Christ is the center of Christian discourse, and all other theological claims must be related to him" (p. 6). This means that Christian discourse is fundamentally Christocentric, with Jesus serving as the focal point around which all other aspects of the faith revolve. This focus on Christ is reflected in the language and imagery used in Christian discourse, which frequently draws on biblical narratives and teachings to emphasize Christ's role as savior, redeemer, and mediator between humanity and God.

Another key feature of Christian discourse is its emphasis on the importance of faith. As Kenneson (1999) observes²², "Christian discourse is fundamentally a discourse of faith, in which believers seek to understand and articulate their relationship with God through Christ" (p. 11). This emphasis on faith is reflected in the language and concepts used in Christian discourse, which often emphasize the importance of belief, trust, and surrender to God. Christian discourse also frequently emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding believers in their faith journey and enabling them to live in accordance with God's will.

One of the distinctive features of Christian discourse is its emphasis on the concept of grace. As McGrath (2011) notes²³, "Christian discourse is characterized by a profound understanding of grace as the unmerited favor of God towards humanity" (p. 136). This emphasis on grace is reflected in the language and imagery used in Christian discourse, which frequently emphasizes the idea that salvation is a gift from God that cannot be earned or achieved through human effort. This emphasis on grace is closely tied to the Christian belief in the concept of sin, which is seen as a fundamental human problem that can only be overcome through the redemptive work of Christ.

Overall, the specificity of religious discourses in Christianity is a complex and multifaceted topic that reflects the diversity and richness of the Christian tradition. While the specific features and characteristics of Christian discourse may vary depending on the particular denomination, tradition, or community in question, the centrality of Christ, the emphasis on faith, and the importance of grace are key themes that are central to Christian discourse across the board.

²¹ Hauerwas, S., & Willimon, W. H. (2006). *Resident aliens: Life in the Christian colony*. Abingdon Press.

²² Kenneson, P. (1999). *Life on the vine: Cultivating the fruit of the spirit in Christian community*. InterVarsity Press.

²³ McGrath, A. E. (2011). *Christian theology: An introduction*. Wiley-Blackwell.

There are several challenges in the specificity of religious discourse. One challenge is the diversity of religious traditions and the ways in which religious discourse varies across different cultural and linguistic contexts. For example, the language and concepts used in Christian religious discourse may differ significantly from those used in Islamic or Hindu religious discourse²⁴.

Another challenge is the complexity of religious discourse, which often involves abstract concepts and complex theological ideas that can be difficult to understand and interpret. This complexity can make it challenging to accurately capture the meaning and significance of religious discourse in research and analysis.

Additionally, the specificity of religious discourse can be challenging because of the potential for misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Religious discourse often involves highly charged emotional language and can be interpreted in different ways by different individuals or groups.

Finally, there is also the challenge of studying religious discourse without imposing one's own beliefs or biases. Researchers must be aware of their own perspectives and biases when studying religious discourse and strive to remain neutral and objective in their analysis.

Overall, the specificity of religious discourse presents a range of challenges for researchers and analysts, including issues related to diversity, complexity, interpretation, and objectivity.

To sum up, it is important to answer how researchers can remain objective when studying religious discourse.

Studying religious discourse can be a challenging task for researchers, particularly when it comes to maintaining objectivity and avoiding personal biases. However, there are several strategies that researchers can use to remain objective and unbiased in their studies²⁵.

Firstly, it is important for researchers to approach religious discourse with an open mind and a willingness to learn. They should try to understand the perspectives of different religious groups and avoid making assumptions or judgments based on their own beliefs or experiences²⁶.

²⁴ Slastenin, V. A. (2015). Religious discourse: The concept, structure, and cognitive features. *Journal of Language and Education*, 1(1), 63-74.

²⁵ Gill, R. (2014). The limits of the "internal-external" distinction in the study of religion. *Method and theory in the study of religion*, 26(4-5), 439-461.

²⁶ Davie, G. (2000). *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing without belonging*. Blackwell.

Secondly, researchers can use a variety of methods to collect data and analyze religious discourse, such as surveys, interviews, and textual analysis. By using multiple methods, researchers can ensure that their findings are based on a broad range of evidence rather than a single source.

Thirdly, researchers should be transparent about their own beliefs and biases and disclose them in their research. This can help readers to understand the perspective from which the research was conducted and make their own judgments about the findings.

Finally, researchers should seek feedback from others, including experts in the field and members of the religious community being studied. This can help to identify potential biases or blind spots in the research and ensure that the findings are accurate and meaningful.

Overall, remaining objective when studying religious discourse requires a combination of openness, rigorous methodology, transparency, and feedback. By following these principles, researchers can produce valuable insights into the complex and diverse world of religious beliefs and practices.

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