

ТЕОРЕТИЧЕСКАЯ, ПРИКЛАДНАЯ И СРАВНИТЕЛЬНО-СОПОСТАВИТЕЛЬНАЯ ЛИНГВИСТИКА /  
THEORETICAL, APPLIED AND COMPARATIVE LINGUISTICS

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2024.49.11>

SPECIFICS OF CONCEPTS FUNCTIONING IN RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

Research article

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**Abstract**

The article examines the existing approaches to understanding of the essence of religious discourse and describes the role of religious concepts as its structural components and indicators. The study proceeds from the definition of discourse offered by Van Dijk, according to the opinion of whom religious discourse reflects the mentality of the nation, shaped by the long-term influence of a particular religion. Religious discourse in the restricted sense is a sacred text of a religion, serving as the source of religious discourse. Religious concepts are value dominants in a national concepts sphere; they function in religious discourse in dependence on the social and cultural situation. A comparative analysis of the frequency of Christian religious concepts functioning in contemporary Russian and British-American discourses is carried out. It is shown that the study of the frequency of religious concepts as indicators of religious discourse by means of corpus linguistics allows to concretize and clarify features of religious discourse, as well as to recreate a linguistic projection of social processes in linguistic societies.

**Keywords:** discourse, religious discourse, confessional discourse, communication, religious concept, indicator.

СПЕЦИФИКА ФУНКЦИОНИРОВАНИЯ КОНЦЕПТОВ В РЕЛИГИОЗНОМ ДИСКУРСЕ

Научная статья

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**Аннотация**

В статье рассматриваются существующие подходы к пониманию сути религиозного дискурса и выясняется роль религиозных концептов в его структуре как индикаторов религиозного дискурса. Отправной точкой является определение дискурса, предлагаемое Ван Дейком. В религиозном дискурсе отражается менталитет народа, обусловленный долговременным влиянием той или иной религии. Религиозным дискурсом в узком смысле является священный текст религии, который одновременно есть источник религиозного дискурса. Религиозные концепты являются ценностными доминантами в национальной концептосфере и функционируют в религиозном дискурсе в зависимости от социокультурной ситуации. На примере сравнительно-сопоставительного анализа частотности христианских религиозных концептов, функционирующих в современных русскоязычном и британо-американском религиозных дискурсах показано, что исследование частотности религиозных концептов как индикаторов религиозного дискурса средствами корпусной лингвистики позволяет конкретизировать и уточнять особенности религиозного дискурса, а также воссоздавать лингвопроекцию социальных процессов в лингвосоциумах.

**Ключевые слова:** дискурс, религиозный дискурс, конфессиональный дискурс, коммуникация, религиозный концепт, индикатор.

**Introduction**

The relevance of the work is determined by the need for linguistic and cognitive studies of national religious discourses. The goal is to reveal an internal link between ongoing social and cultural processes and religious concepts, which are spiritual and moral stereotypes of ethnolinguistic conscience functioning in religious discourses.

Religion, as every aspect of human life, is closely interrelated with language. Certainly, besides words expressing a certain meaning, there are structures which possess "superfluity" [10], i.e. religious symbols with some implicit sense, which is expressed non-verbally. Their role in religion is also great, but human existence mainly is verbalized through the prism of language, through linguistic consciousness and discourse [4, P. 278].

The "discourse" term in linguistics has got many interpretations. T.A.Van Dijk's definition is one of them: "discourse is a speech stream, language in its permanent movement" [3, P. 47] in which both the national and universal mentality and culture are reflected, as well as individual, private ones. We may interpolate this definition to religious discourse and say that religious discourse reflects the mentality of the people and the mentality of individual representatives of this people, shaped by the long-term influence of a religion and the religious culture of the nation. E.E. Anisimova defines religious discourse as "a set of communicative actions, events, texts related to the subject sphere of "religion"" [1, P. 14].

From the point of view of the institutional position of a religion, religious discourse develops in three main directions: doctrinal discourse, discourse of cult and discourse of the religious community (including all social institutions).

I.V. Karasik distinguishes in religious discourse the strategies of prayer, confession, appeal, affirmation (i.e. affirmation in faith), explanation (regarding doctrine) and rite (ritual) [5, P. 13-14]. E.V. Bobyreva marks out so-called discursive functions of religious discourse that are generally characteristic of any discourse, but are religion-specific: representative, communicative, appellative (i.e. being a means of appealing for certain actions), expressive, informative, phatic (i.e. contact-setting). Religious discourse is also characterized by functions that are “institutional characteristic only of this type of communication” [2, P. 3] and that contribute to the regulation of relations in a certain religious community supporting its very existence.

A.V. Olyanich considers that religious discourse by its institutional and personal status is a pattern of “strategic communication” [9, P. 244-251]. The researcher also claims that religious discourse is characterized by duality: on the one hand, it is constructed in a dialogue between the authorities and the people; on the other hand, in a monologue of the authorities directed towards the nation.

The religious discourse in the restricted sense of the word (in the terminology of T.A. Van Dijk) is a sacred text, i.e. a text carrying sacred and cultural senses of a certain religion. The sacred text in a living religion always becomes an “actually articulated text,” i.e. namely religious discourse, because it is reproduced in repeated sacred rites and rituals and sets the main directions in doctrinal discourse.

Linguists emphasize the important role of religious discourse in composing the linguistic worldview of any nation, or its national concepts' sphere. For example, N.B. Mechkovskaya recognizes that a significant part of the life of a society is the “sphere of religion,” the influence of which on other aspects of the social life is very deep, organic and multifaceted: religion impacts greatly on the content of national culture, on the mentality of the nation [8, P. 22].

Indicators of religious discourse are religious concepts. They include universal (archetypal) concepts, represented in a special way in the national language under the influence of a certain religion and specific concepts associated with a doctrine of this religion. Religious concepts form the core of a value picture of the world of a nation. It is religious concepts that carry the most important “meanings, value dominants” for a certain national culture, the totality of which forms a certain type of culture kept in language [6, P. 5].

For example, in Christian discourse there are three confessional discourses: Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, which are realised in national languages by especial way.

Among three confessional Christian discourses, we examined the contemporary Russian-language Christian discourse, which was formed predominantly under the influence of Orthodoxy, and the British-American Christian discourse, which was defined historically by the predominant influence of Protestantism. In this study, we understand as the contemporary period a more than 40-years interval from 1980 to nowadays (2022/2023).

(Note: according to recent statistic data, in 2023, 62% of the population of the Russian Federation were Orthodox Christians [14], in the UK according to latest available data, in 2021 Protestantism covered 52.2% of population) [13], in the United States, according to latest available data for 2022, 34% of the population were representatives of Protestant Churches, 23% were Catholics and 11% were non-specific Christians (obviously, Orthodox Christians – P.T.) [15].

### **Research methods and principles**

To study contemporary religious discourses – the English discourse of Great Britain and the USA and Russian discourse – we have chosen a quantitative method, implying the search of frequency of some similar Christian concepts in national language corpora.

The frequency of using the considered Christian concepts was first analyzed in 2022 and concerned only data in BNC (with sample texts of different formats published between 1980 and 1993) and CoCA (with sample texts of different formats published between 1990 and 2022). BNC data have not been renewed since 1993, but CoCA data have been regularly renewed since 2003 every year till 2020, so we have chosen a common 1980 to 2022 observation period for English language in its two main national variants.

In 2023, similar studies were carried out in the National Corpus of the Russian Language (NCRL) to cover a period between 1980 and 2023. The goal was to compare two discourses in approximately the same temporal frames, because the chosen periods mainly coincide.

According to linguists, (particularly, V.I. Karasik), if a concept has an increased frequency or nominative density in a language and is also verbalized in other representatives, then it appears to be the main concept [7, P. 111]. Proceeding from this statement, we experimentally established the minimum frequency for the concept as 100 per 1 million words. Due to the fact that the common amount of word samples in different national corpora varies, the frequency data of Christian notions in English and Russian found out in situ were recalculated to 1 million words for further comparison analysis.

### **Main results**

As a result of the research, the following religious concepts were identified: indicators of contemporary Russian-language Christian discourse and indicators of contemporary British-American Christian discourse.

British and American Christian English-language discourse analyzed in the period between 1980 and 2022, includes such seven main religious concepts as LOVE, GOD, JESUS CHRIST, LORD, JUSTICE, TRUTH, FAITH with the frequency of 716, 632, 275, 234, 233, 214, 129 per 1 million words accordingly (for more details, see [12, P. 83]).

Indicators of Russian-language Christian discourse in the period between 1980 and 2023 were such main religious concepts as: БОГ, ПРАВДА, ЛЮБОВЬ, ВЕРА, ГОСПОДЬ, ГРЕХ, ИИСУС ХРИСТОС, МОЛИТВА, МОНАСТЫРЬ, СОВЕСТЬ, СПРАВЕДЛИВОСТЬ with the frequency of 1359, 1273, 840, 575, 449, 227, 196, 192, 155, 153, 137 per 1 million words, respectively (for more details, see [11, P. 61]).

As we can see from the above data, the contemporary Russian-language and British-American-language religious discourses coincide on seven main Christian concepts. However, the general set and frequency hierarchy of these main confessional concepts are mainly different. A visual comparison of the frequency of coinciding indicators - main religious

concepts of the contemporary Russian- and British-American-language religious discourses is given in the table below (table 1).

Table 1 - Comparison of the frequency of common (coinciding) main Christian concepts in contemporary Russian Christian discourse and British-American Christian discourse

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2024.49.11.1>

Indicators of Christian discourse (main religious concepts)	Frequency of the indicator in contemporary Russian Christian discourse (per 1 million words) 1980-2023 (A)	Frequency of the indicator in British-American Christian discourse (per 1 million words) 1980-2022 (B)	Ratio A: B
БОГ / GOD	1359	632	2,2: 1
ПРАВДА/TRUTH	1273	214	6:1
ЛЮБОВЬ/ LOVE	840	843	1:1
ВЕРА/FAITH	575	129	4,5:1
ГОСПОДЬ/LORD	449	234	2:1
ИИСУС ХРИСТОС / JESUS CHRIST	196	275	0,7:1
СПРАВЕДЛИВОСТЬ / JUSTICE	137	233	0,6:1

As can be seen from Table 1, in the English-language religious discourse of the British and the Americans in 1980-2022, the LOVE concept ranked first in frequency (843), followed by GOD (632); while in the Russian-language religious discourse, on the contrary, the GOD concept was in the first place in frequency (1359), followed by the TRUTH concept (1273), and then by LOVE (840).

At the same time, the average frequency of Russian-language concepts as indicators of Russian religious discourse actually exceeded the average frequency of the corresponding English-language concepts almost two times over the same period of time. It's interesting to note the almost equal frequency of the LOVE concept in both Russian and British-American English discourse observed during the period under study.

The following table compares the frequency of other concepts (among the eleven identified Christian concepts) in the contemporary Russian discourse in the 1980-2023 period with the frequency of corresponding Christian notions in the contemporary British-American Christian discourse in the 1980-2022 period (Table 2).

Table 2 - Comparison of the frequency of Christian concepts in Contemporary Russian discourse and the frequency of the corresponding Christian notions in Contemporary British-American Christian discourse

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2024.49.11.2>

Indicators of Christian discourse (main religious concepts)	Frequency of the indicator in contemporary Russian Christian discourse (per 1 million words) 1980-2023 (A)	Frequency of the corresponding notion in contemporary British-American Christian discourse (per 1 million words) 1980-2022 (B)	Ratio A: B
МОНАСТЫРЬ – a main concept only in Russian discourse (monastery)	155	10	15,5:1
ГРЕХ – a main concept only in Russian discourse (sin)	227	41	5,5:1
МОЛИТВА – a main concept only in Russian discourse (prayer)	192	48	4:1
СОВЕСТЬ – a main concept only in Russian	153	26	6:1

discourse (conscience)

Table 2 clearly shows that in the contrast to the Russian discourse, such main concepts as МОНАСТЫРЬ (MONASTERY), СОБЕЩЬ (CONSCIENCE), МОЛИТВА (PRAYER), ГРЕХ (SIN) were absent in the contemporary British-American religious discourse in 1980-2022. In fact, the frequency of these notions in BNC and CoCA corpora (10, 26, 48, 41 accordingly) recalculated per 1 million words is not sufficient to consider these notions as indicators of the British-American religious discourse – for more details, see [12, P. 82-83].

As shown in Table 2, the average frequency of English notions of *monastery*, *conscience*, *sin*, *prayer* in the British-American religious discourse was 6 time lower than the average frequency of the corresponding main concepts in the Russian religious discourse in the same period (1980-2023).

### Conclusion

The obtained picture of the frequency of the main Christian concepts in contemporary Russian and British-American religious discourses is, on the one hand, a reflection of the influence of confessional thinking on national mentalities. On the other hand, this picture is a reflection of the consequences of secularization in the concepts spheres of nations: it is known that in British-American society secularization has been going on for the last more than 300 years, and in Russian society it was intensive during 70 years of the twentieth century, when all traditional religious institutions and, first of all, the Russian Orthodox Church were persecuted.

The disastrous consequences of secularization in British and US society include the spread over the last 40 years of same-sex marriage (which is considered a great sin in Christianity and was condemned in the time of Abraham (Gen. 18:20)) and gender reassignment (considered unacceptable in Orthodox theology, which speaks of man and woman as the image of God and the purpose of life as man's striving for the likeness of God). On the contrary, over the last more than 30 years, the Russian Orthodox Church has re-established itself in Russian society, and its influence on the national mentality is reflected in the high frequency values of Orthodox concepts as indicators of the contemporary Russian-language religious discourse.

It is obvious that a linguo-society, in the religious discourse of which religious concepts go on functioning, does not lose its vitality. But if religious concepts lose their significance in the national discourse, it results in inevitable social problems.

Thus, identification of religious concepts as indicators of religious (confessional) discourses based on investigations of national language corpora allows not only to specify and clarify features of religious discourse, as well as to trace linguistic markers of social processes, make appropriate conclusions and forecasts.

### Благодарности

Автор выражает благодарность научному руководителю доктору филологических наук Елене Анатольевне Огневой.

### Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

### Рецензия

Все статьи проходят рецензирование. Но рецензент или автор статьи предпочли не публиковать рецензию к этой статье в открытом доступе. Рецензия может быть предоставлена компетентным органам по запросу.

### Acknowledgement

The author expresses gratitude to scientific supervisor Doc. of Philology Elena Anatolievna Ogneva.

### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

### Review

All articles are peer-reviewed. But the reviewer or the author of the article chose not to publish a review of this article in the public domain. The review can be provided to the competent authorities upon request.

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