

Blessings as Speech Acts: Thematic Roles in Uzbek Language through A. Kahhar's Works

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Abstract. *This article investigates the thematic roles of blessings as speech acts in the Uzbek language, with specific focus on examples extracted from the works of renowned Uzbek writer A. Kahhar. The study aims to analyze the linguistic characteristics and cultural significance of expressing blessings in Uzbek, and to explore how these speech acts contribute to social interactions and the construction of meaning within the language.*

Blessings represent a meaningful linguistic construct through which the speaker conveys their affective states and evaluative attitudes toward the interlocutor. The semantic interpretation of these expressions relies on the presupposition of mutually shared background knowledge between the speaker and the hearer.

Blessings, often categorized as good wishes, are a prevalent type of speech act observed across various languages. Influenced by cultural and social factors, many expressions of blessings have undergone semantic shift, losing their literal interpretation and functioning as idiomatic or conventionalized expressions within specific linguistic communities.

Key words: *blessings, good wishes, locutionary act, thematic roles, Uzbek language, A. Kahhar.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The existence of language is closely tied to human actions of speaking or writing. During the performance of these actions, linguistic units (primarily sentences) reveal the potential to express meanings beyond their literal sense, such as affirming, commanding, warning, or making promises. These meanings are the outcome of the speech activity carried out by the speaker. Thus, a speech act is a linguistic communication made by the speaker to the listener within a specific context and for a particular purpose.

The concept of speech act was present in the teachings of scholars such as W. Humboldt, Sh. Bally, K. Bühler, E. Benveniste, M. Bakhtin in earlier periods. However, the theory of speech acts fully developed as a doctrine in the works of British philosopher J. Austin, American psychologist J. Searle, and others.

J.L. Austin in the 1950s introduced the idea that utterances can be performative, accomplishing actions such as apologizing, promising, or declaring. Austin's seminal work, "How to Do Things with Words" (1962), distinguished between locutionary acts (the literal meaning), illocutionary acts (the speaker's intention), and perlocutionary acts (the effect on the listener). His student, John Searle, expanded on this framework in the 1960s and 1970s, offering a detailed classification of speech acts and emphasizing the role of intentionality and convention in their performance. Searle [1969, p.18] believes that a "study of the meaning of sentences is not in principle distinct from a study of speech acts." They represent the same area of investigation due to their shared focus and thematic alignment

because “every meaningful sentence in virtue of its meaning can be used to perform a particular speech act (or range of speech acts)”.

It should be mentioned that blessings are classified as commissive speech acts because they are related to some future actions; We try to analyze these structures both structurally and semantically. Tafarroji M. & Malekzadeh P. (2015) dealt with a special classification of prayers and curses and tried to analyze the kind, characteristics and functions of prayer and curse utterances in Turkish by examining specific examples with respect to age, gender and place. In order to collect data the researchers interviewed 120 males and females that participated in the study. It was revealed that the females use prayer and curse utterances more frequently than males. Rural people used prayer and curse utterances more often than urban ones.

Sharifi Sh. and Ebrahimi Sh. (2012) analyzed prayers and curses in Persian and they classified them into two categories. Those which have association with countries’ culture, traditions, customs and religion and those which have progressed and produced gradually and no specific cultural root can be traced for them. Authors summarized that human beings utter some negative or positive statements at the time of happiness or sadness when they are unable to do anything else. In other article Sharifi Sh. and her student & Karimpour A. (2012) analyze cursing and blessing speech acts in Ilami dialect of Kurdish. There they discussed structural and semantic components of Ilami cursing and blessing. Authors concluded that cursing and blessing share some common grammatical features. Affected by cultural and social factors, a large number of cursing and blessing expressions are no longer understood literally and they should be treated as idiomatic expressions.

The thematic roles of blessings as speech acts present a unique opportunity to explore how language expresses positive social intentions. Blessings — utterances such as “Good luck” or “Best wishes” — play a vital role in fostering interpersonal relationships, maintaining social harmony, and expressing solidarity.

Blessings in Uzbek language have been examined by various scholars; however, no linguist has conducted an analysis of these expressions within the framework of speech act theory. In his research, Qochqorov N. (1994) under the academic supervision of Sarimsoqov B. investigated the genre-specific features and aesthetic-linguistic properties of blessings and curses. Blessings and curses have also been studied as a folklore genre by Niyazova M. (2021), who has deeply examined ceremonial blessings, gave comparative analysis of English and Uzbek blessings. Another scientific research was done by Aripov M (2022) where the author investigates linguacultural and linguapoetic specialties of Turkish blessings and prayers. The researchers have looked at blessings in other languages but has not fully addressed their specific functions in Uzbek. This gap highlights the importance of exploring how blessings function in speech acts within the context of Uzbek literature.

The practice of using blessings in Uzbek culture reflects deeply rooted social and spiritual values. However, the thematic roles of blessings as speech acts in the Uzbek language remain underexplored in linguistic studies. This article aims to examine the thematic roles of blessings in Uzbek, using examples from A. Kahhar’s literary works. Current study explores the syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects of blessings in Uzbek and their role in achieving social and personal goals, such as health, success, and protection.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Blessings are accompanied with a positive connotation. In most cases it is a request of God to help us or others and fulfill our needs. At this part, some Uzbek blessing speech acts will be analyzed. They are taken from works of prominent Uzbek writer Abdulla Kahhar. The rationale for selecting examples specifically from A. Kahhar’s works lies in the folkloric nature of his writing, characterized by the simple and fluent yet meticulously crafted language of his characters, enriched with figures that vividly embody the Uzbek mentality. For each example a table is drawn. Then different theta roles will be distinguished.

Table 1

Blessing locutionary act:	Xudo hayr bersin (A. Kahhar “The thief”)
	God blessing may give
English translation:	God bless him
Function:	wishing
Patient:	to himself
Agent:	an old man
Cause:	his ox has lost and the old man is sad about it
Goal:	protecting from calamity

Table 2

Blessing locutionary act:	Xudoyo, ayamdi daydiga davo beygin (A. Kahhar “The patient”)
	Oh God, my mom’s sickness cure give
English translation:	Dear Lord , My Mom is very sick, please give her full recovery
Function:	wishing and hoping
Patient:	a daughter
Agent:	a mother
Cause:	the mother is sick and daughter is worried about her health
Goal:	the health of mother

Table 3

Blessing locutionary act:	... bir muhabbating o’n bo’lsin (A. Kahhar “My dear mothers”)
	one your love ten be
English translation:	May the love you share today only grow stronger and stronger over the years
Function:	wishing and hoping
Patient:	a mother
Agent:	a daughter
Cause:	the mother is happy about daughter’s marriage and is
Goal:	to live life full of love

Table 4

Blessing locutionary act:	... Umingiz uzoq bo’lsin (A. Kahhar “Years”)
	your life long be
English translation:	May you live long and live well
Function:	wishing and encouraging
Patient:	an old man
Agent:	a guy
Cause:	an old man is amazed by a guy’s succeed in life and his kindness to his father
Goal:	to have long and fruitful life

Table 5

Blessing locutionary act:	Xudoyo umringizdan baraka toping! (A. Kahhar “Hurting teeth”)
	Oh God you life blessing find
English translation:	God bless your life
Function:	thanking and wishing
Patient:	a woman
Agent:	a man
Cause:	a man has helped to solve the problem
Goal:	to be succeed in life

DISCUSSION

An analysis of the above tables provides insights into the theta roles, functions, goals, and causes of blessing expressions in the Uzbek language. Below, we highlight some key findings.

Agent. In most of the examples mentioned above, the agent, who delivers the blessing, wishes well for others as a way of expressing approval of their actions. However, a blessing can also be expressed in a way that has a reflexive effect. In the example given in Table 1 *Xudo hayr bersin* (So that God bless) agent and patient are the same: an old man is saying blessing to himself. Sad about topic, the agent hopes that God blesses him and his problems to be solved soon. In all examples above it is clear that the agent is in singular form. But it cannot be said about patient, it can be either singular or plural as in the example below:

Umringiz uzoq bo'lsin – a guy – singil patient

Umr(lar)ingiz uzoq bo'lsin – parents – plural patient

Function. Blessings can have many functions. As seen from the examples above, wishing, hoping, encouraging and thanking, etc.. In some cases more than one function may be served by a single bless. For instance, a blessing can contain wishing and hoping, wishing and encouraging, thanking and wishing at the same time.

Goal and medium. Every blessing is articulated with the intention of fulfilling a specific purpose, often tied to aspirations for success, well-being, or protection. Linguistically, such utterances function as performative speech acts, where the speaker invokes divine or spiritual intercession to actualize their desired outcomes. These blessings frequently include the use of sacred or revered names, such as those of God or saints, serving as mediators in the illocutionary act of seeking divine favor. Examples include expressions like *Xudo yor bo'lsin* (May God help you), *Ilohim baxting ochilsin* (May God bless you with finding a good partner and a happy marriage), and *Pirlar madadkor bo'lsin/ Pirlar qo'llasin* (May the saints assist and support). Through these formulas, speakers linguistically construct a connection between the spiritual and material realms, leveraging religious and cultural pragmatics to reinforce the efficacy of the utterance.

The meaning of blessings can be intensified by adding objective case, possessive case, reflexive pronoun and adverbs.

Xudo o'zi hayr bersin (reflexive pronoun)

Xudo hayringni bersin (bergur) (possessive case)

Xudoyo, o'zing, ayamdi daydiga davo beygin (reflexive pronoun)

Xudoyo, ayamdi daydiga tezroq davo beygin (adverb)

Bir muhabbating o'n bo'lsin, kam bo'lmasin (adverb, verb repetition)

Umringiz uzoq va mazmunli/sermazmun bo'lsin (adverb)

Cause. Every speech act is performed for a variety of purposes. In fact, most Uzbek blessing expressions like in other languages cannot be literally understood. These expressions should, in fact,

be regarded as idioms. For instance, phrases like “baxting ochilsin” or “kam bo’lmasin” are not meant to be interpreted literally. To grasp their intended meaning, one must have a thorough understanding of the core concepts and cultural nuances embedded in Uzbek traditions.

CONCLUSION

Blessings are frequently employed in the dialogues of characters created by Uzbek writers, serving as reflections of the beliefs and cultural practices of the Uzbek people. In the present research we tried to examine the structural and functional characteristics of a selection of Uzbek blessings derived from A. Kahhar’s stories and dramas. The analysis reveals that these blessings exhibit shared syntactic and semantic features. Structurally, they are typically articulated in either the second or third person, while semantically, they function as idiomatic expressions, whose meanings cannot be derived from their literal interpretation.

From a pragmatic perspective, Uzbek blessings fulfill various speech act functions such as expressing gratitude, conveying well-wishes, expressing hope, offering encouragement, and more. Each blessing is inherently goal-oriented, aiming to invoke outcomes such as protection, good health, love, longevity, productivity, and success. To achieve these desired outcomes, speakers often rely on cultural intermediaries, invoking the names of divine entities or saints (pirs) as part of their illocutionary force.

Additionally, the metaphorical nature of Uzbek blessings underscores the necessity for contextual and cultural knowledge to interpret their intended meaning, as these expressions cannot be understood on a purely compositional basis. Given the extensive variety of blessings in the Uzbek language, further comparative linguistic studies could yield significant insights into their structural, semantic, and pragmatic dimensions.

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