

THEOLINGUISTICS AS A UNIVERSAL CODE FOR LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

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Анотація

У статті обґрунтовано статус теолінгвістики як універсального феномену розвитку мови. Досліджено генезис мовлення через звернення до надприродного — від архаїчних молитов до перших писемних пам'яток. Автор доводить, що сакральний дискурс є фундаментом мовної картини світу, що сформував лексичний склад, граматичні норми та високий стиль сучасних літературних мов.

Ключові слова: теолінгвістика, сакральна мова, генезис мовлення, релігійний дискурс, мовна картина світу.

Abstract

This article substantiates the status of theolinguistics as a universal phenomenon in language development. It examines the origins of speech through appeals to the supernatural—from archaic prayers to the earliest written records. The author argues that sacred discourse is the foundation of the linguistic worldview, which shaped the lexical composition, grammatical norms, and elevated style of modern literary languages.

Keywords: theolinguistics, sacred language, genesis of speech, religious discourse, linguistic worldview.

Introduction

Theolinguistics is not merely an interdisciplinary field [2], but a fundamental dimension of existence that demonstrates: language has sacred roots at its core. As Wilhelm von Humboldt, the founder of theoretical linguistics, noted: “Language is not a product of activity (Ergon), but the activity itself (Energeia)... it is the eternally repeated labor of the spirit, aimed at making the articulated sound an expression of thought”[1]. In the context of theolinguistics, this “work of the spirit” is, above all, humanity’s attempt to name the Unknowable.

Language as a Tool for Dialogue with Heaven

The emergence of language is often viewed as a purely evolutionary or social process necessary for survival. However, theological linguistics offers a different perspective: language arose when humans felt the need to name that which lies beyond the visible world. The earliest examples of spoken language were not merely everyday commands or names of objects, but above all invocations, incantations, prayers, and hymns. This confirms the view of Mircea Eliade, who argued that for archaic humans, “the world is sacred to the extent that it was created by the gods”[3].

It is precisely within a religious context that language attains its greatest power. The word becomes not merely a symbol, but an instrument of creation and influence over reality. In many world mythologies (from ancient Egyptian to Christian), the universe emerges as the result of the Deity’s act of speech. Accordingly, human language was perceived from the very beginning as a gift that allows one to establish a connection with the Creator. This phenomenon is universal across all cultures, regardless of geography or ethnicity. Thus, the language through which humans describe this world has been a sacred instrument from the very beginning. Incantations and prayers became the first complex speech acts, in which the word functioned not as a symbol, but as a real force.

From the Spoken Word to Sacred Texts

The history of writing confirms that the earliest written records almost always have religious content. Sacred texts became the focal points around which the entire culture was structured.

This is particularly evident in the Ukrainian context. As researcher V. V. Nimchuk notes, Old Ukrainian writing emerged from the need to translate liturgical books [6]. Thus, religious discourse became a “melting pot” in which the sophisticated vocabulary and grammatical norms, elevated style, and rich lexicon of modern languages crystallized. People sought to record the word not for practical purposes (though these also played a role), but to make their appeal to God eternal.

- Ancient Egypt: The very name of hieroglyphs translates as “sacred marks.”
- Sumer and Akkad: Clay tablets preserve hymns to the gods and epics about the creation of the world.
- Kyivan Rus’: Our writing system and literary language developed around translations of liturgical texts and the Holy Scriptures.

In the context of theolinguistics, a written monument is a recorded experience of a person’s encounter with the divine. Through text, people sought to structure the chaos of the surrounding world, imbuing it with sacred meaning.

Theolinguistics as a Universal Code for Language Development

Today, theolinguistics studies not only ancient texts but also how religious meanings continue to live on in language. David Crystal emphasizes that the religious sphere is one of the oldest and most enduring domains of language use, with its own unique linguistic laws [5]. Even in the secular world, our speech is imbued with “theolinguistic genes”:

1. Etymology: A vast number of words we consider to be everyday terms actually have religious origins (for example, the words “thank you” or “spasibi” are abbreviations of “Spasi, Bozhe” [“Save us, God”]).
2. Conceptual sphere: The concepts of good, evil, sin, soul, and mercy are fundamental to the formation of any people’s linguistic worldview.
3. Phraseology: Expressions that appeal to the supernatural exist in every language as a way to convey the strongest emotions or truths.

Theolinguistics demonstrates that language is not a static system. It evolves, constantly balancing between the profane (the everyday) and the sacred. When we study ancient texts—from Vedic hymns to Byzantine hagiography—we see how language “learns” to express the inexpressible. It is this human desire to name God, to turn to Him in moments of despair or joy, that became the driving force that transformed a set of sounds into the complex, multifaceted system we have today.

Conclusions

In short, theolinguistics is not merely the study of “religious vocabulary.” It is the study of the genetic code of language. The first exclamations of wonder at the grandeur of nature, the first prayers for the dead, the first inscriptions on temple walls—all of these laid the foundation for how we think and speak today. The appeal to the supernatural has been and remains the driving force that compels language to grow, evolve, and seek new meanings. Theolinguistics is a universal phenomenon in the development of any language, since religious consciousness is the primary form of human culture.

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