



RELIGIOUS SPEECH ACTS AND CHARACTER VOICE IN THREE ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF ABDULLA QODIRIY'S O'TKAN KUNLAR: A FUNCTIONAL-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This article examines how religiously marked utterances shape character voice in three English translations of Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan Kunlar*: Mark E. Reese's *Bygone Days*, Carol Ermakova's *Days Gone By*, and the collaborative *The Days Gone By* by I. M. Tukhtasinov, O. M. Muminov, and A. A. Khamidov. The study treats a religious expression not as an isolated lexical item but as a socially situated action that may bless, thank, warn, authorize, judge, identify, or contest. A qualitative comparison is conducted through a voice-sensitive functional matrix comprising propositional content, illocutionary force, confessional index, speaker stance, and dialogic position. Close readings of the *Fatiha*-gratitude exchange, Otabek's *hayya alal-falah* metaphor, the *mahr* and *nikah* passages, the title *hoji*, the communal appeal *musulmonchilik*, and the phrase *halol kasb* show that formal retention does not necessarily preserve voice. Reese generally safeguards Islamic terminology and historical texture; Ermakova frequently reconstructs legal or ritual function through explanation; the collaborative version often retains source forms but at several points introduces confessional substitution or unsupported interpretation. The findings demonstrate that translation quality varies by speech-act type rather than by translator alone. Functional adequacy is therefore best understood as the disciplined reconstruction of what an utterance does and what kind of speaker it constructs within the novel.

Keywords: religious discourse; speech act; character voice; functional-pragmatic analysis; *O'tkan Kunlar*; literary translation; functional adequacy.

1. Introduction

Abdulla Qodiriy's *O'tkan Kunlar* is built from more than plot, description, and historical reference. Its social world is heard through recurrent ways of speaking: the respectful formula of a household elder, the measured judgment of a reform-minded young merchant, the authoritative language of a marriage officiant, the fatalistic vocabulary of parents, and the cynical religious generalization of a morally compromised figure. Religious expressions participate directly in this differentiation. *Fatiha*, *shukr*, *mahr*, *khutba*, *hoji*, *gunoh*, *taqdir*, *musulmonchilik*, and related items do not merely identify Islamic concepts. Within concrete exchanges they establish intimacy, produce consent, allocate responsibility, legitimate authority, or expose the speaker's limited outlook.



The present study compares three direct English translations of the novel: *The Days Gone By* by I. M. Tukhtasinov, O. M. Muminov, and A. A. Khamidov (2017), *Days Gone By* by Carol Ermakova (2018), and *Bygone Days: O'tkan Kunlar* by Mark E. Reese (2019). The aim is to determine how translation choices affect the relationship between religious speech acts and character voice. The article asks three questions: (1) Which pragmatic functions are activated by selected religious expressions in the Uzbek text? (2) How does each English version reconstruct or alter those functions? (3) What changes in the reader's perception of the speaker result from such choices?

2. Theoretical framework

Speech-act theory shifts analysis from what a sentence denotes to what a speaker accomplishes by uttering it. Austin's distinction between saying and doing, later systematized by Searle, is particularly productive for religious discourse because religious formulas frequently operate as actions: they bless, vow, authorize, condemn, console, or mark ritual transition (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979). In literary prose these acts are doubly framed. They belong to the fictional interaction among characters, yet they also contribute to narrative composition and authorial evaluation.

Translation may alter voice in two ways. It can change the illocutionary profile of an utterance—for example, turning an institutional declaration into generic information—or it can change the kind of speaker imagined by the reader. An added supernatural cause can make a pragmatic, realistic character sound superstitious; a Christian clerical label can relocate an Islamic official into an alien institutional frame. Voice fidelity thus requires more than stylistic fluency. It requires consistency between the target utterance and the character's established ethical and social identity.

3. Materials and methods

The material consists of Qodiriy's Uzbek novel and the three English editions identified above. The analysis is qualitative and comparative. Passages were selected purposively because they combine a clearly identifiable religious marker with a strong interactional or characterizing function. The sample includes household gratitude, reformist political reflection, marriage negotiation, ritual performance, religious naming, communal moral appeal, and narratorial ethical judgment.

4. Results and discussion

Hasanali: gratitude as expressive and phatic voice





In the early hospitality scene, Otabek seats the guests after a *fatiha* and asks Hasanali about his condition. Hasanali responds with “*Xudoga Shukur*”. The exchange performs two linked actions. *Fatiha* helps organize the social transition from arrival to conversation, while the gratitude formula expresses relief without self-dramatization. Hasanali’s voice is consequently marked by restraint, courtesy, and ordinary religious groundedness. The expression is not doctrinal exposition; it is everyday piety embedded in interpersonal care.

Reese keeps *Fatiha* and renders the answer as “Thanks God.” The ritual marker remains visible, and the gratitude act is recognizable, but the non-standard English construction slightly weakens the natural dignity of the voice. Ermakova uses “a short prayer” and “Allah be praised.” Her domestication of *fatiha* removes the named cultural practice, yet the reply strongly preserves the confessional and expressive force. The collaborative translation retains “brief *fatiha*” and “Thanks to God,” but later adds that “the devil has infected me.” This causal explanation has no basis in the source exchange, where exposure to coal fumes is implied. The addition does more than alter information: it recasts Hasanali as a speaker who explains physical discomfort demonologically. A single unsupported phrase therefore changes the character’s epistemic and religious profile.

Otabek: liturgical intertext as reformist voice

Otabek’s statement that no one would hear *hayya alal-falah* in a graveyard transforms a formula from the *adhan* into a political metaphor. The call conventionally invites believers toward success or salvation; the graveyard image represents a society incapable of responding. The utterance is assertive in grammatical form, but its broader force is evaluative and accusatory. It constructs Otabek as a reform-minded speaker whose disappointment is expressed through an Islamic intertext rather than through abstract political terminology.

Reese does not retain the Arabic phrase. He replaces it with an expanded image of the dead addressing the living and with “calls for help.” This makes the metaphor immediately legible, but it removes the *adhan* as the cultural source of the image and narrows *falah* to rescue. The English Otabek remains critical and eloquent, yet his reformist language becomes less specifically rooted in Islamic public sound and communal obligation. Ermakova keeps a recognizable form of the Arabic call and the graveyard setting. The confessional index and intertext survive, though an unglossed formula may remain opaque to many readers. The collaborative version also retains the phrase but appends “call for help,” which improves access while again reducing the semantic range of *falah*.

**Mahr and nikah: declarative-performative institutional voice**

The marriage scene contains speech whose primary function is not description but the creation of legal and social relations. The discussion of mahr recognizes Kumush's entitlement within Islamic marriage, while the sequence of hamd, salawat, khutba, and the consent question gives the ceremony performative force. The officiant's voice is institutionally authorized: what he says helps constitute the marriage rather than merely report it.

Reese retains mahr and places the discussion before the imam. The borrowing protects the Islamic legal category, although readers without prior knowledge must infer the bride's ownership from context. Ermakova replaces the term with an explanation that the groom gives property to his future wife "in full ownership." The cultural label is absent, but the legal agency of Kumush becomes unusually clear. In this instance, explication without borrowing is functionally stronger than a culturally specific term left semantically closed. The collaborative version retains mahr but adds "bridal belongings" and refers to the officiant as a "priest." The first phrase shifts the concept toward trousseau or wedding goods; the second transfers Islamic authority into a Christian clerical model. The source term remains on the page, yet its institutional relations are reorganized.

Hoji: a title as an index of inherited moral authority

The naming formula "Otabek, Yusufbek hoji o'g'li" introduces more than genealogy. Hoji indexes completed pilgrimage, public respect, and the family's moral standing. Because Otabek's identity is repeatedly interpreted through his father's reputation, the title participates in characterization before Yusufbek's own extended speech becomes available. It is an assertive-identificational unit with social consequences.

All three English versions preserve the title: Hajji, hadji, and hoji. The difference is primarily transliteration practice rather than functional loss. Reese uses the internationally recognizable Hajji; Ermakova's hadji reflects another conventional romanization; the collaborative version retains the Uzbek form hoji. Each solution keeps the title visible and avoids reducing it to Mr., pilgrim, or elder. This is one of the clearest examples in which formal retention and functional preservation coincide, because the title's opacity is partly resolved by its recurrence and by Yusufbek's narrative role.

Yet even here consistency matters. If other religious offices are generalized as teacher, educated person, or priest, the preserved hoji may appear as an isolated exotic label rather than part of a coherent social hierarchy. Character





voice is supported not only by individual terms but by the target text's whole system of status distinctions.

Musulmonchilik: communal ethics and the scale of address

The lament "Eh, essiz musulmonchilik..." condenses an ethical judgment into a communal religious noun. Musulmonchilik does not simply mean the state of being Muslim. In context it invokes expected conduct, mutual responsibility, and the shame of violating a shared moral order. The speech act is expressive and axiological, but its scale is collective: the speaker judges an action against a communal code rather than against private preference.

Ermakova's "Eh, Muslim" and Reese's "Oh, fellow Muslim" retain direct confessional address, with Reese more clearly recovering solidarity through fellow. The collaborative translation—"How could he do such a dishonest thing!"—communicates moral condemnation but removes the communal Islamic frame. Dishonest names a personal ethical defect; musulmonchilik invokes a violated relationship among members of a religious community. The shift therefore reduces dialogic scope. The target speaker sounds morally indignant, but no longer speaks from within a shared religious identity.

Table 2. Functional effects of selected translation solutions

Source episode	Dominant function and voice	Comparative tendency	Main functional risk
Fatiha + Xudoga shukur	Phatic transition and expressive gratitude; Hasanali's restrained piety	Reese retains term; Ermakova strengthens natural confessional response; collaborative version adds demonological causation	Character becomes awkward or superstitious
Hayya alal-falah	Reformist assertion and political-spiritual metaphor; Otabek's critical intelligence	Reese paraphrases; Ermakova and collaborative version retain Arabic form	Either intertext disappears or meaning remains opaque
Mahr	Legal recognition of the bride's right;	Reese borrows; Ermakova explicates	Legal agency and Islamic



Source episode	Dominant function and voice	Comparative tendency	Main functional risk
	institutional performativity	ownership; collaborative version adds “bridal belongings” and “priest”	institutional frame are weakened
Hamd–salawat–khutba	Ritual sequence leading to binding consent	Reese retains terminology; Ermakova reconstructs sequence; collaborative version generalizes	Distinct ritual acts collapse into generic prayer
Hoji	Religious-social identification and inherited authority	All three retain title in different romanizations	Systemic hierarchy may still flatten elsewhere
Musulmonchilik	Communal moral appeal and confessional solidarity	Reese and Ermakova retain address; collaborative version moralizes generically	Collective identity becomes private judgment
Halol kasb	Narratorial ethical assertion of lawful, innocent livelihood	Reese preserves ethical meaning more strongly; others foreground peacefulness	Religious-axiological force is neutralized

5. Conclusion

The comparative analysis yields four principal conclusions. First, formal retention of a religious term is neither necessary nor sufficient for functional adequacy. Ermakova’s descriptive rendering of mahr can preserve the bride’s legal agency more effectively than a borrowed term followed by an inaccurate gloss. Second, unsupported additions may transform character identity even when the surrounding religious vocabulary is preserved; the demonological explanation attached to Hasanali is the clearest example. Third, confessional substitution affects institutional relations, as shown by priest in the nikah scene. Fourth, translation strengths are speech-act specific. Reese is often strongest in terminological and historical retention, Ermakova in ritual and legal explication,



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and the collaborative version in selective borrowing, yet none is consistently superior across all functions.

A voice-sensitive functional approach offers a practical model for translation criticism. The critic should ask not only what a source expression means, but who speaks, what action the utterance performs, which religious-cultural frame authorizes it, and what image of the speaker emerges. A translation is functionally successful when the English passage allows the character to occupy a comparable moral, emotional, and social position in the translated novel.

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