

Cultural Codes of Blessing in Uzbek And English: Baraka, QUT, And RIZQ Through the Lens of The Natural Semantic Metalanguage

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Abstract: This article examines baraka, qut, and rizq – three culturally loaded concepts that recur across the Uzbek macrosystem of blessing speech acts (olqish-duo-tilak) – as linguoculturological “cultural codes” encoding a shared Turkic-Islamic worldview of abundance, fortune, and divinely apportioned sustenance. Drawing on post-Soviet linguoculturology (Maslova, Karasik, Teliya, Vorobyov) and Anna Wierzbicka’s Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), the study decomposes each concept into a small set of semantic primes to make its culture-specific logic explicit and cross-linguistically comparable. The analysis is carried out on an illustrative corpus of Uzbek blessing formulas drawn from modern Uzbek prose (O’tkir Hoshimov, G’afur G’ulom) and everyday ritual speech, each example glossed and matched against the nearest available English rendering. The comparison shows that baraka, qut, and rizq occupy different positions on a cline of translatability: rizq achieves partial equivalence with English providence/sustenance through a shared (if secularized) Abrahamic substrate; baraka is only partially rendered by blessing/grace, losing its component of transferable, quasi-material potency; qut is the least translatable of the three, showing near-zero equivalence, because English lacks a corresponding folk concept of charismatic vital fortune inherited from pre-Islamic and early Islamic Turkic cosmology (as codified in Yusuf Khass Hajib’s Qutadgu Bilig). The article argues that this three-tier equivalence cline (full/partial/zero) is not incidental but reflects a deeper lacunarity in the English conceptual lexicon of blessing, with direct consequences for translation practice and for lexicographic work on Uzbek–English cultural correspondence.

Keywords: Linguoculturology, cultural code, blessing speech acts, baraka, qut, rizq, Natural Semantic Metalanguage, lacunarity, equivalence, Uzbek-English comparative linguistics.

1. Introduction: Blessing speech acts form one of the most culturally saturated layers of Uzbek ritual communication. Within the macrosystem that this author has elsewhere termed the olqish-duo-tilak triad - ritual-folkloric blessing (olqish), prayerful benediction (duo), and secular good wish (tilak) – three lexical items recur with striking frequency regardless of which of the three genres is in play: baraka, qut, and rizq. These are not ordinary nouns but condensed cultural codes: each packs a historically layered, religiously inflected, and emotionally charged conceptualization of what a blessing confers upon its recipient.

The present article treats baraka, qut, and rizq as objects of linguoculturological analysis in their own right, asking two questions. First, what is the internal semantic structure of each concept, and can that structure be made explicit using a culture-independent descriptive tool? Second, to what extent does English – the comparandum language throughout this author’s dissertation research – possess lexical or conceptual equivalents, and what kind of equivalence (full, partial, or zero) results in each case? The analysis builds directly on the lacunarity and equivalence framework already applied to the broader alqov macrosystem,

narrowing the lens to these three concepts because they function as the semantic engine behind a large share of Uzbek blessing formulas.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Linguoculturology and the Notion of “Cultural Code”

Following the post-Soviet linguoculturological tradition, a cultural code is understood as a system of signs – verbal and extraverbal – through which a given culture organizes and transmits meaning (Vorobyov, 1997; Maslova, 2001). Teliya's (1996) work on Russian phraseology demonstrated that such codes are frequently anchored in single lexemes that accumulate connotative, axiological, and mythological layers far exceeding their dictionary definition. Karasik (2002) further distinguishes the conceptual, value, and figurative components of a linguoculture's key concepts (kontsepty). Baraka, qut, and rizq are treated here as precisely such key concepts: each is a single word that functions, in blessing discourse, as shorthand for an entire cultural scenario.

Safarov's (2008) work on Uzbek pragmatics situates such concepts within the broader pragma linguistic system of the Uzbek speech community, where the choice of a particular blessing lexeme encodes the speaker's assessment of the situation – whether what is being wished is material (rizq), spiritual-charismatic (qut), or diffusely beneficial and quasi-sacred (baraka).

2.2. The Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM)

To avoid describing one culture's concepts in the borrowed vocabulary of another, this study adopts Wierzbicka's Natural Semantic Metalanguage (Wierzbicka, 1985, 1996), which decomposes meaning into a small inventory of universal semantic primes (e.g., GOOD, BAD, WANT, HAPPEN, PEOPLE, BECAUSE, IF). An NSM explication states what a speaker using a given word is, in effect, thinking, using only these primes and their universal syntax, so that explications of words from typologically unrelated languages can be laid side by side and compared on equal terms (Wierzbicka, 1992). This method has previously been used to explicate speech-act verbs and cultural key words across many unrelated languages; the explications proposed in Section 4 below extend it to Uzbek blessing-related cultural codes for the first time.

3. METHODOLOGY AND CORPUS

The study is qualitative and comparative-typological. Illustrative examples of baraka-, qut-, and rizq-based blessing formulas were drawn from two sources: (a) literary corpus texts by O'tkir Hoshimov and G'afur G'ulom, consistent with the primary literary corpus used throughout this author's dissertation research, and (b) commonly attested formulaic blessing expressions documented in Uzbek ethnolinguistic and folkloristic sources.

- 1) Ilohi omi-in! Yurtimiz tinch bo'lsin, u dunyo-yu bu dunyo qirg'inbarot bo'lmasin, Ollohu akbar. - O Lord, ame-en! May our land be at peace, may there be no carnage in the next world or in this one. God is great.' (Hoshimov, 2015, p. 68)
- 2) Katta rahmat, baraka topinglar. - Thank you very much, may you find baraka. (Hoshimov, 2015, p. 26)
- 3) Onam kitobni ko'rishi bilan ko'zlari quvonchdan porlab ketar, uzundan-uzoq duo qilar, peshonamdan o'pib... - As soon as my mother saw the book, her eyes would light up with joy; she would recite long duo, kiss my forehead... (Hoshimov, 2015, p. 35)
- 4) Sizdan fотиha olgani keldim. - I've come to receive your fотиha. (Hoshimov, 2015, p. 40)
- 5) Xudoyo umridan baraka topsin. - O God, may he find baraka in his life. (Hoshimov, 2015, p. 40)
- 6) Birini o'zing ye, birini ukalaringga olib bor, duo qilsalaring bo'ldi. - Eat one yourself and take the other to your younger siblings; it is enough if you say a duo for me. (G'ulom, 2004, p. 113)
- 7) Ey attang, ha, mayli, xudo rahmat qilsin. - Oh, what a pity! Well, may God have mercy on him. (G'ulom, 2004, p. 114)
- 8) Kelganimga bir haftacha bo'ldi (yolg'onni xudoning o'zi kechirsin). - It has been about a week since I arrived (may God Himself forgive the lie). (G'ulom, 2004, p. 124)
- 9) Hay, mayli, xudo rahmat qilsin. Well, so be it, may God have mercy on him. (G'ulom, 2004, p. 126)
- 10) Biring o'n bo'lsin. - May your one become ten. (G'ulom, 2004, p. 132)

Each example is given in Uzbek, followed by an interlinear gloss and the nearest idiomatic English rendering, and is then classified according to the three-tier equivalence model already established for the

broader alqov macrosystem: full equivalence (the target language has a culturally and semantically matching unit), partial equivalence (overlap exists but a culturally specific component is lost or added), and zero equivalence (no corresponding unit exists, i.e. a lacuna).

4. BARAKA, QUT, AND RIZQ AS CULTURAL CODES

4.1. Baraka (баракa) derives from the Arabic root b-r-k and denotes a diffuse, transferable, quasi-material increase or potency that attaches to a person, object, place, or action and is believed to multiply its beneficial effect (cf. the classical Qur’anic semantics of the root, and its treatment in Islamic anthropology, e.g. Geertz, 1968; Izutsu, 1964). In Uzbek blessing speech, the formula baraka toping! (“may you find/receive baraka”) or non barakali bo’lsin! (“may your bread be full of baraka”) wishes upon the addressee not a fixed quantity of good but an open-ended, self-renewing sufficiency: a loaf blessed with baraka feeds more mouths than its size would predict. This component of transferability and multiplication is the semantic core that distinguishes baraka from a simple wish for abundance.

English blessing and grace cover part of this ground – both denote a beneficial force understood as flowing from a sacred source – but neither carries baraka’s implication that the force physically adheres to and multiplies within a concrete object (bread, a house, a trade). The equivalence is therefore partial: shared sacred-source and beneficial-effect components, but a lost component of transferable, self-multiplying material potency.

4.2. Qut (қут) is the oldest and most culture-specific of the three codes, with roots in pre-Islamic Turkic cosmology later absorbed into Islamic vocabulary. Its classical codification appears in Yusuf Khas Hajib’s eleventh-century Qutadgu Bilig (“Wisdom of Royal Glory”/“Knowledge that Brings Happiness”), where qut denotes the charismatic fortune or mandate that legitimizes a ruler and radiates outward as the well-being of the people (Dankoff, 1983). In everyday modern Uzbek blessing speech this older sense survives in attenuated form in formulas such as qutlug’ bo’lsin! (“may it be qut-blessed,” conventionally rendered “congratulations”) and qutli bo’lsin uyingiz! (roughly “may your household carry qut”), where qut names a

kind of vital good fortune that is bestowed rather than earned and that, once present, protects and animates everything associated with its bearer.

Of the three codes, qut shows the weakest equivalence with English. Congratulations, as the conventional gloss for “Qutlug’ bo’lsin!”, is a performative acknowledgement of an achievement, not a wish for an ongoing, semi-mystical vital fortune; fortune and luck capture only the outcome-oriented surface of qut while dropping its charismatic, quasi-sovereign, inherited dimension entirely. The concept is accordingly classified here as a near-zero-equivalence lacuna: English has no single lexeme, and arguably no folk concept, that maps onto qut’s combination of inherited charisma, protective radiance, and ruler-to-people transmissibility.

4.3. Rizq (ризq), from the Arabic rizq, denotes the portion of material sustenance – food, income, livelihood – that is apportioned to each person by divine decree. Uzbek blessing formulas such as “Rizqingiz ziyoda bo’lsin!” (“may your rizq increase”) or “Rizqi butun bo’lsin!” (“may his/her rizq be whole/complete”) wish for an increase or completeness in this pre-allotted share rather than for effort-based material success. The concept presupposes a theological frame in which human provision is neither self-generated nor random but assigned (cf. the Qur’anic semantic field analyzed in Izutsu, 1964).

Among the three codes, rizq achieves the highest degree of equivalence with English, through providence and, more loosely, sustenance/livelihood: the Judeo-Christian concept of divine providence shares rizq’s core idea that material sufficiency is apportioned by a higher power rather than purely earned. The equivalence remains partial rather than full, however, because providence in contemporary English usage has become comparatively formal and literary, has lost the everyday performative use that rizq retains in routine Uzbek blessing speech, and lacks rizq’s explicit idea of a fixed, nameable “portion” (ulush) assigned to each individual.

5. EXPLICATIONS AND COMPARATIVE-TYPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Table 1 presents provisional NSM explications for the three concepts, formulated as what a speaker using the

corresponding blessing formula is taken to be thinking. intended as a first approximation to be refined against
The explications are deliberately minimal and are a fuller corpus.

Table 1. Provisional explications of baraka, qut, and rizq.

Concept	Explication	English equivalence tier
Baraka	I say: I want something good to happen to you for a long time, not because of something you did, because of something good touching this thing/place/you; I think this good thing can become more, not less, if it is here.	Partial (blessing, grace)
Qut	I say: I want something good to be inside you always, not because you did something, because someone above gave it to you; I think because of this, good things can happen to you and to people near you.	Near-zero (lacuna)
Rizq	I say: I want you to have the things you need to live, not because you made them, because someone above decided you will have this much; I want this amount to be big, not small.	Partial (providence, sustenance)

Three observations follow from the comparison. First, all three concepts share the prime structure “I want something good to happen to you, not because of something you did” – that is, all are non-meritocratic: the good conferred is not earned by the recipient’s action, which already sets the whole alqov macrosystem apart from secular English well-wishing formulas such as good luck, which remains agnostic about desert. Second, the three concepts differ in what licenses the good (a sacred quality adhering to a thing/place for baraka; a superior-granted inner quality for qut; a superior-apportioned external quantity for rizq), which is precisely the dimension that English lexis fails to encode as a closed, contrastive set. Third, the equivalence cline baraka > rizq > qut (from more to less translatable) correlates inversely with how deeply each concept is anchored in specifically Turkic, as opposed to pan-Islamic, cultural history: rizq and baraka have closer counterparts across the wider Islamic world’s languages and, derivatively, in English translations of Islamic texts, whereas qut’s roots in pre-Islamic Turkic

political cosmology give it no comparable route into English.

6. DISCUSSION

These findings refine the lacunarity model already developed for the broader alqov macrosystem by showing that equivalence is not a single property of “Uzbek blessing vocabulary” in general but varies systematically according to a concept’s cultural-historical layering. The practical implication for translation is that a single English strategy (e.g., routinely glossing all three as blessing) will systematically flatten qut’s distinctive charismatic-fortune meaning and will under-represent rizq’s everyday performative use. A annotated bilingual dictionary entry for each concept, rather than a single English gloss, is recommended wherever these items occur in literary translation or lexicographic work – a recommendation consistent with this author’s broader annotated-dictionary findings for the alqov macrosystem.

A further implication concerns NSM methodology itself: because *baraka*, *qut*, and *rizq* are not speech-act verbs but nominal cultural codes embedded within speech acts, their explications had to model an implicit performative frame (“I say: I want ...”) rather than an explicit illocutionary verb. This suggests that NSM explications of nominal cultural key words used in ritual speech may generally require this performative wrapper, a methodological point that could be tested against cultural codes in other blessing-rich languages.

7. CONCLUSION

This article has analyzed *baraka*, *qut*, and *rizq* as linguoculturological cultural codes underlying the Uzbek *alqov* macrosystem and has shown, through NSM explication and equivalence classification, that they occupy distinct positions on a translatability cline relative to English: *rizq* and *baraka* achieve partial equivalence through shared, if attenuated, connections to a broader Abrahamic conceptual substrate, while *qut* constitutes a near-zero-equivalence lacuna rooted in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Turkic political cosmology. These results extend the author’s dissertation findings on *olqish*-*duo*-*tilak* equivalence to the deeper conceptual layer that motivates those speech acts in the first place, and they point toward an annotated, concept-by-concept lexicographic treatment as the most faithful way of rendering Uzbek blessing culture for an English-reading audience. Future work will test the explications proposed here against the author’s full dissertation corpus and will extend the comparison to additional Turkic and Islamicate languages in which *baraka*, *qut*, and *rizq* (or their cognates) also function as blessing codes.

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