

The Expression of The Idea of Religious Tolerance Through Language Means in Nathan Der Weise

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Abstract: This article examines the expression of the idea of religious tolerance through language means in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan der Weise*. The drama occupies a central place in Enlightenment literature because it presents tolerance not merely as an abstract philosophical principle, but as a lived ethical and communicative practice. The purpose of the study is to identify the linguistic and stylistic devices through which the idea of religious tolerance is constructed, developed, and artistically intensified in the text. The research focuses on lexical selection, dialogic structure, rhetorical strategies, pragmatic features, metaphorical organization, and the interaction between authorial intention and character speech. Special attention is paid to the dramatic dialogues of Nathan, Saladin, Recha, the Templar, and Daja, as well as to the symbolic and persuasive role of the parable of the three rings. The analysis demonstrates that tolerance in the drama is expressed through a combination of ethically marked vocabulary, balanced syntactic organization, dialogic openness, mitigated confrontation, persuasive parabolic discourse, and the gradual replacement of confessional opposition with humanistic universality. The findings show that language in *Nathan der Weise* functions not only as a medium of communication but also as a moral and ideological instrument that transforms conflict into understanding. The study concludes that Lessing's linguistic construction of tolerance reflects the Enlightenment project of reconciling difference through reason, empathy, and dialogic coexistence.

Keywords: Religious tolerance, Lessing, *Nathan der Weise*, language means, dramatic discourse, dialogue, rhetoric, stylistics, Enlightenment, linguistic expression.

Introduction: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* remains one of the most significant literary works of the German Enlightenment because of its philosophical depth, dramatic structure, and enduring ethical relevance. At the center of the drama lies the idea of religious tolerance, articulated not through doctrinal statements alone but through a complex network of linguistic, stylistic, and dialogic means. In the eighteenth century, when confessional divisions remained powerful and often destructive, Lessing proposed a model of coexistence based on reason, humanity, and mutual recognition. This model is embodied in the drama not only thematically, but linguistically. The idea of tolerance in *Nathan der Weise* is inseparable from the forms of speech through which it is voiced, negotiated, challenged, and eventually affirmed.

The relevance of this topic is determined by the continued importance of examining how literature communicates ethical ideas through language. Religious tolerance in *Nathan der Weise* is not presented as a simple slogan. It emerges through dialogue, lexical opposition, metaphor, rhetorical mediation, and pragmatic restraint. Each character contributes to the ideological structure of the drama through a specific speech manner. Nathan's wisdom, Saladin's strategic openness, Recha's emotional sincerity, the Templar's internal struggle, and Daja's confessional narrowness together form a polyphonic field in which tolerance gradually takes shape as the highest form of human communication.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the linguistic means through which the idea of religious tolerance is expressed in *Nathan der Weise*. The central research

task is to show how lexical, syntactic, stylistic, and pragmatic devices function within the dramatic text to move the discourse from suspicion and opposition toward recognition and ethical reconciliation. The study proceeds from the assumption that in Lessing's drama the philosophical content of tolerance is realized primarily through language and therefore can be most fully understood through linguistic and stylistic analysis.

The research is based on qualitative textual analysis of Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* in the context of literary stylistics, discourse analysis, and linguistic pragmatics. The primary material of the study is the dramatic text itself, with particular focus on key dialogues and monologic passages where religious identity, conflict, or reconciliation is verbalized. The analysis takes into account the speech of the principal characters, the structure of dramatic exchange, and the role of figurative language in shaping meaning.

The methodological framework combines several approaches. Stylistic analysis is used to identify lexical choices, rhetorical figures, syntactic patterns, and expressive means associated with the representation of tolerance or intolerance. Discourse analysis makes it possible to examine how meaning is constructed in dialogue, how turns of speech shape ideological relations, and how communicative positions shift over the course of the drama. Pragmatic analysis is employed to interpret implication, indirectness, mitigation, and persuasive intention in character interaction. Elements of conceptual analysis are also applied, particularly in relation to the symbolic language of the ring parable and its role in reframing religious difference.

The article treats tolerance not only as a thematic concept but as a discursive process. Therefore, attention is given to the gradual transformation of language from confessional marking and categorical judgment toward universality, ethical moderation, and dialogic openness. This makes it possible to show how Lessing's language becomes the principal vehicle of Enlightenment humanism.

The analysis shows that the idea of religious tolerance in *Nathan der Weise* is expressed through a carefully organized system of language means, among which lexical choice occupies a primary position. Lessing's text repeatedly introduces terms connected with religion, identity, and difference, yet these terms are rarely left in rigid opposition. Instead, confessional vocabulary is gradually reframed within a broader semantic field of humanity, virtue, and wisdom. Words associated with Jew, Christian, and Muslim initially function as markers of division and social prejudice. However, as the

dialogues unfold, these labels begin to lose their exclusivist force and are subordinated to more universal ethical categories. This lexical shift is essential because it reflects the drama's movement from external identity toward inner moral worth.

A second important result concerns the dialogic structure of the drama. Tolerance in *Nathan der Weise* is not proclaimed in isolation but generated through dialogue. Lessing deliberately constructs many key scenes as encounters between difference-bearing voices. The dramatic meaning of tolerance emerges through interaction rather than monologic statement. This is especially evident in the conversations between Nathan and the Templar, Nathan and Saladin, and later in the broader network of revelations that transform mutual perception. The language of these dialogues is marked by questioning, clarification, reinterpretation, and strategic delay. Nathan, in particular, often responds not by direct contradiction but by redirecting the conversation toward reflection. This dialogic method is one of the most powerful linguistic means of expressing tolerance, because it models the coexistence of differing perspectives without immediate domination.

The speech of Nathan functions as the central linguistic embodiment of tolerance. His language is characterized by balance, moderation, conceptual clarity, and ethical tact. He rarely uses harsh evaluative language, and even when confronted with prejudice, he prefers reasoned explanation over emotional retaliation. His syntax often reflects measured thought, with sentences that unfold logically and persuasively rather than explosively. This creates a speech portrait in which wisdom is inseparable from verbal self-control. Nathan's tolerance is therefore not only what he says, but how he says it. Through lexical restraint, dialogic openness, and rhetorical patience, his speech becomes the verbal form of ethical humanity.

A particularly significant role is played by indirectness and mitigation. Lessing does not make tolerance effective through aggressive moralizing. Instead, the drama repeatedly uses indirect speech strategies to soften confrontation and open interpretive space. Nathan often avoids categorical assertion when a more dialogically productive response is possible. This pragmatic moderation allows him to preserve the dignity of the interlocutor even while challenging prejudice. Such speech behavior reflects a fundamental principle of tolerance: recognition of the other as a participant in meaning rather than an object of correction. The linguistic use of softened opposition, ethically charged paraphrase, and delayed conclusion gives the drama its persuasive force.

The most concentrated expression of religious tolerance through language is the parable of the three rings. From a linguistic point of view, this passage functions as a metaphorical and narrative reorganization of religious conflict. The parable replaces direct confessional confrontation with symbolic narration, thereby shifting the level of discourse from polemic to reflection. The three religions are no longer debated in abstract theological terms; they are reimagined through the familiar structure of family inheritance, authenticity, and moral testing. This metaphorical transformation is crucial because it allows tolerance to be articulated without relativistic chaos or dogmatic closure. The language of the parable is calm, illustrative, and ethically oriented. Its persuasive power lies in its ability to suspend literal dispute and replace it with a cognitive model that invites judgment based on conduct rather than claim. Thus the parable functions as both a rhetorical and cognitive tool of tolerance.

The study also shows that rhetorical questions play an important role in expressing the idea of tolerance. These questions often encourage self-examination rather than accuse. They destabilize prejudice by exposing its assumptions and compel characters to think beyond inherited binaries. Such rhetorical strategies are particularly effective because they preserve dramatic dynamism while avoiding crude didacticism. Lessing's tolerance is persuasive precisely because it emerges through thought-provoking language rather than doctrinal imposition.

Another important linguistic means is the contrast between emotionally charged and ethically moderated discourse. Daja and the Templar, especially in earlier parts of the drama, often speak from within confessional and emotional frameworks shaped by fear, loyalty, or inherited hostility. Their language may be more abrupt, categorical, or reactive. By contrast, Nathan's speech gradually reorients the drama toward ethical universality. This stylistic contrast is not accidental. Lessing uses the difference in speech types to demonstrate that intolerance is often linguistically linked to reduction, rigidity, and immediate judgment, while tolerance is associated with complexity, reflection, and verbal openness. In this way, the ideological conflict of the drama is mirrored in its speech organization.

The analysis further indicates that tolerance is expressed through the gradual rehumanization of the other. At the beginning of the dramatic movement, characters often perceive one another through generalized categories. As dialogue deepens, individualized forms of address, personal recognition, and affective nuance become more frequent. This shift

from category to person is central to the language of tolerance. The other is no longer merely a representative of a religion, but a human being with memory, suffering, dignity, and relational ties. Linguistically, this is marked by movement away from generalizing labels toward ethically individualized speech.

Lessing also uses symmetrical dialogue structures to create a sense of communicative equality. Even when one character is wiser or more patient, the dramatic form avoids turning the tolerant position into a unilateral sermon. Instead, tolerance is built through exchange, response, hesitation, and recognition. This symmetry is especially visible in scenes where apparent opposition gives way to shared humanity. The language here becomes less confrontational and more collaborative, reinforcing the idea that truth in matters of human coexistence cannot be monopolized.

The findings confirm that the expression of religious tolerance in *Nathan der Weise* is deeply embedded in the linguistic fabric of the drama. Lessing does not separate ethical meaning from verbal form. On the contrary, tolerance is constructed through specific speech patterns, rhetorical procedures, and dialogic strategies. This makes the drama particularly important for linguistic and stylistic analysis, because its philosophical message is inseparable from its discourse.

One major implication of the analysis is that tolerance in the drama is represented as a communicative achievement rather than a passive attitude. Characters do not simply possess tolerance as a private virtue. They perform it through speech by listening, reframing, moderating, questioning, and narrating. The language of tolerance is therefore active, strategic, and relational. It does not erase difference, but makes coexistence thinkable through ethical discourse.

Another important point concerns the Enlightenment character of Lessing's language. The drama reflects a belief in the transformative power of reasoned dialogue. Yet this reason is never purely abstract. It is joined with empathy, narrative imagination, and rhetorical tact. The language means that express tolerance are therefore not dry logical formulas but ethically charged communicative forms. Lessing's contribution lies precisely in this synthesis of rationality and humanity.

The analysis also suggests that the drama remains relevant because it shows how language can either harden or soften conflict. Confessional division in the text is intensified when language is rigid, categorical, and reductionist. It becomes negotiable when language opens space for complexity and mutual recognition.

This insight gives Nathan der Weise lasting significance not only as a literary work but as a model of ethical discourse.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the idea of religious tolerance in Nathan der Weise is expressed through a complex and purposeful system of linguistic means. Lexical shifts from confessional labeling to ethical universality, dialogic openness, syntactic balance, pragmatic mitigation, rhetorical questioning, and metaphorical narration all contribute to the construction of tolerance as the central ideological value of the drama. The parable of the three rings functions as the highest concentration of this linguistic strategy, transforming religious rivalry into a narrative of moral testing and human equality.

The study makes it possible to conclude that Lessing's drama presents tolerance not as a detached philosophical thesis but as a mode of speech and interaction. Through the linguistic organization of dialogue, the text demonstrates that understanding arises when language moves beyond exclusion toward reflection and recognition. Therefore, the expression of religious tolerance in Nathan der Weise should be understood as both a stylistic achievement and an ethical-discursive program of Enlightenment thought.

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