



Article

Linguocultural Features of Religious Lexicology in the Novel "Petersburg" By Andrei Bely

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Abstract: This article examines the linguocultural characteristics of religious lexis in Andrei Bely's symbolist masterpiece, "Petersburg." The research explores how religious terms, biblical allusions, and ecclesiastical vocabulary function within the text to reflect the spiritual crisis of early 20th-century Russia. Following the IMRAD structure, the paper analyzes the intersection of language, culture, and religion, focusing on how Bely utilizes religious lexicology to construct the mystical and apocalyptic atmosphere of the city. The study employs linguocultural and contextual analysis to demonstrate that religious lexis in the novel serves as a bridge between the physical reality of the Russian Empire and the metaphysical realms of Symbolism.

Keywords: religious lexicology, Andrei Bely, "Petersburg," linguoculturology, Russian Symbolism, biblical allusions, apocalyptic discourse.

1. Introduction

The study of Andrei Bely's novel "Petersburg" through the lens of religious lexicology requires a deep understanding of the sociocultural and philosophical atmosphere of the Russian Silver Age. At the dawn of the 20th century, Russia was undergoing a profound spiritual transformation, often described as a "religious Renaissance" or "God-seeking" movement. This period was characterized by a synthesis of traditional Orthodox values and new, radical mystical searchings, including Anthroposophy, Theosophy, and Occultism. In this context, religious lexis in Bely's prose is not merely a stylistic ornament but a fundamental constituent of the "Symbolist world-model." The novel "Petersburg" serves as a linguistic laboratory where religious terms are extracted from their liturgical contexts and re-embedded into a modern, fragmented, and apocalyptic narrative [1].

From a linguoculturological perspective, religious lexicology is a vital carrier of "cultural codes." A word like *voskresenie* (resurrection) or *zhertva* (sacrifice) in the Russian linguistic consciousness carries a centuries-old weight of Byzantine tradition, folk belief, and imperial ideology. Bely utilizes this "collective memory" of the language to create a multi-layered text where a single term can simultaneously refer to a biblical event, a historical tragedy, and a character's internal psychological state. The "Petersburg myth"—the idea of the city as a spectral, cursed, and doomed space—is constructed primarily through the pragmatic use of religious units that suggest an imminent cosmic judgment [2].

The scientific novelty of this research lies in its focus on the "linguocultural transmutation" of religious terms. Unlike previous literary studies that focused on the plot or the historical archetypes of the characters, this study investigates how Bely manipulates the semantic boundaries of religious words. In the novel, the city of St. Petersburg is portrayed as a "parody of the New Jerusalem." Consequently, the religious lexis used to describe it undergoes a process of "ironic sacralization." The bureaucratic structures, the cold geometry of the streets, and the rigid hierarchy of the state are described using terms associated with divine order, thereby exposing the spiritual vacuum of the Russian Empire. This introduction establishes that

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religious lexis is the primary semiotic system through which Bely diagnoses the "metaphysical illness" of his time [3-5].

Furthermore, the research addresses the influence of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy on Bely's linguistic choices. The religious lexis in "Petersburg" is colored by a specific "color-symbolism" and "vibrational" quality, where traditional Christian terms are merged with esoteric concepts of "astral light" and "spiritual evolution." This makes Bely's lexicology unique—it is a syncretic system that reflects the fragmented consciousness of the modern man. By analyzing these features, we aim to demonstrate that "Petersburg" is a text where language acts as a "theurgic force," attempting to transform the chaos of the revolution into a new mystical order through the power of the religious word [6].

2. Methods

To provide a rigorous analysis of the linguocultural features of religious lexis in Bely's "Petersburg," this research employs a complex methodological framework that integrates several branches of modern linguistics. The study of religious lexicology in a symbolist text requires a move away from purely structuralist methods toward more dynamic, interpretative models.

The Method of Linguoculturological Field Construction. The primary method used is the construction of "linguocultural fields." Instead of analyzing words in isolation, we group religious lexical units into conceptual clusters or "fields." Each field has a "nuclear" term (e.g., *God*, *Apocalypse*, *Sin*) and a "periphery" of related associations, metaphors, and allusions found in the novel. This allows us to see how Bely expands the traditional cultural field of Orthodoxy to include modern political and mystical meanings. We analyze the "inner form" of the word—the initial image that gave rise to the term—and how Bely's prose revives or distorts this image to serve the novel's symbolic needs [7].

Semantico-Symbolic Mapping. In a Symbolist novel, every word is a "window" into a higher reality. We utilize the method of "symbolic mapping" to track the shifts in meaning that religious terms undergo. For example, we examine the word *krest* (cross) not only in its ritualistic sense but as it appears in the architectural lines of the city or the physical positions of the characters. This method involves a careful reading of the text to identify "hidden allusions"—where a secular description subtly utilizes the rhythmic and lexical patterns of a prayer or a liturgical chant [8].

The Method of Pragmatic Contextualization. Following the speech-act theory, we analyze the "illocutionary force" of religious utterances. We differentiate between:

- Institutional Religious Speech: The rigid, hollow use of religious lexis by state figures (e.g., Apollon Apollonovich).
- Existential Religious Speech: The desperate, searching use of religious terms by characters experiencing a spiritual crisis (e.g., Nikolai Apollonovich).
- Narratorial Religious Commentary: The use of religious lexis by the narrator to create an atmosphere of cosmic dread or "apocalyptic irony." By comparing these contexts, we can identify the "pragmatic dissonance" that defines the novel's style—the gap between the sacred word and the profane reality of 1905 Russia.

Cognitive-Associative Analysis. We employ cognitive linguistics to explore the "conceptosphere" of the novel. This involves identifying the "frames" and "scripts" associated with religious lexis. For instance, the "Apocalypse frame" in the novel is not just a theological concept but a cognitive script that organizes descriptions of the weather, the movement of the crowds, and the ticking of the bomb. We analyze how Bely activates specific cultural associations in the reader's mind by strategically placing religious markers within otherwise mundane descriptions. This method helps to reveal the "subliminal" religious layer of the text that influences the reader on a psychological level [9].

3. Results

The investigation into the religious lexicology of "Petersburg" yielded several significant findings that demonstrate the novel's status as a unique linguocultural phenomenon. The

results are categorized into three major dimensions: the structural, the symbolic, and the ideological.

The Structural Dominance of Eschatological Lexis. The most prominent result is the discovery that eschatological vocabulary (words related to the end of the world) forms the semantic backbone of the novel. Terms such as *sud* (judgment), *truba* (trumpet), *konets* (end), and *bezdna* (abyss) appear with high frequency and in highly varied contexts. Analysis shows that Bely "secularizes" these terms, applying them to the political instability of the 1905 Revolution. The result is a linguistic environment where the social collapse of the Russian Empire is perceived by the reader as a cosmic, divinely ordained event. This "apocalyptic coloring" is achieved not through direct statements, but through the constant repetition of religious markers in descriptions of the city's mist, the shadows of the buildings, and the facial expressions of the characters [10].

Lexical Syncretism and the "New Mysticism". A key result is the identification of "lexical syncretism" – the merging of Orthodox Christian vocabulary with occult and anthroposophical terms. Bely creates a new type of "religious-symbolist lexis" where traditional words like *svet* (light) are redefined according to Steiner's theories of color and spirit. Our analysis shows that:

Orthodox terms are often used to describe the "dead" or "mechanical" side of the city (the church as a state institution).

Mystical/Occult terms are used to describe the "living," albeit chaotic, spiritual search of the younger generation. This linguocultural divide accurately reflects the intellectual split in the Russian Silver Age between institutional religion and individual mystical experience [11].

The Grotesque Subversion of the Sacred. The results demonstrate a consistent pattern of "grotesque use" of religious lexis. Bely frequently places sacred words in proximity to "low" or "absurd" objects. For example, the movement of a bureaucrat's hand or the sound of a ticking bomb might be described with the solemnity of a liturgical ritual. This technique, identified through our contextual analysis, serves a specific pragmatic function: it de-sacralizes the state and shows that the "Petersburg period" of Russian history has reached its spiritual end. The "sacred word" becomes a tool for "unmasking" the reality, proving that in Bely's world, the religious lexicology is the primary means of expressing the tragic irony of human existence in an age of revolution [12].

Frequency and Distribution of Key Concepts

The following table highlights the most prominent religious concepts found in the novel and their linguocultural functions:

Table 1.

Transmutation of Meaning

Concept	Key Lexemes	Linguocultural Function
Apocalypse	<i>Konec sveta, Vsashnik, Truba</i>	Reflecting the imminent collapse of the Empire
Sacrifice	<i>Zhertva, Krest, Iskuplenie</i>	Defining the relationship between father and son
Ritual	<i>Liturgiya, Ladan, Svecha</i>	Creating a sensory-mystical atmosphere of the city
The Demonic	<i>Bes, Sataninskiy, Ten</i>	Personifying the chaotic forces of the revolution

A significant result is the discovery of "semantic shifts." Traditional Orthodox terms in Bely's prose often lose their stable theological grounding and become fluid, reflecting the "unstable reality" of the city. For example, the word *hram* (temple) is frequently applied to state buildings, symbolizing the sacralization of the Russian autocracy and its subsequent spiritual emptiness [13].

4. Discussion

The discussion focuses on the linguocultural significance of Bely's religious lexicology as a reflection of the "Russian soul" at a historical crossroads. In "Petersburg," religious lexis functions as a "cultural memory" that conflicts with the Westernized, rationalistic structure of the city. According to linguoculturologist V. Telia, the cultural connotation of a word is what

links language to the national psyche [14]. In Bely's novel, religious words like *sudba* (fate) and *pokayanie* (repentance) carry deep Eastern Slavic connotations that stand in opposition to the "geometric" and "lineal" logic of the St. Petersburg bureaucracy.

One of the central points of discussion is the "apocalyptic pragmatics" of the text. Andrei Bely uses religious lexis to prepare the reader for a metaphysical explosion. As noted by scholars of Russian Symbolism, the religious word in this period was intended to be "theurgic"—not just to describe reality, but to transform it. In "Petersburg," the frequent use of eschatological vocabulary creates a linguistic tension that mirrors the social tension of the 1905 Revolution. The religious lexis acts as a diagnostic tool for the "illness" of the Russian state.

Furthermore, the influence of Anthroposophy on Bely's lexicology cannot be ignored. The religious lexis is often colored by occult meanings, where "light," "astral," and "color" terms merge with traditional Christian vocabulary. This creates a "syncretic linguoculture" unique to Bely. As argued by Lotman, St. Petersburg is a "semiotic mechanism," and Bely's religious lexis is the key that unlocks its mystical code [15]. The religious word in the novel is never static; it is always in a state of "becoming," reflecting the instability of the period.

Finally, the discussion addresses the role of religious lexis in the "Father-Son" conflict (the Ableukhovs). The religious terms used by the father are frozen and institutional, while those used by the son are chaotic and searching. This linguocultural divide represents the gap between the old religious order and the new mystical search of the 20th century.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the linguocultural study of religious lexicology in Andrei Bely's "Petersburg" demonstrates that language serves as a vital medium for expressing the spiritual and cultural crisis of Russia. The research highlights several key points:

Religious lexis in the novel is a multi-layered system that combines Orthodox tradition with Symbolist mysticism, creating a unique linguocultural synthesis.

The vocabulary of the Apocalypse dominates the text, serving as a linguistic reflection of the historical and spiritual transition of the Russian Empire.

Bely's use of religious terms is characterized by a "semantic fluidity" that mirrors the surreal and unstable nature of the St. Petersburg myth.

Religious lexis functions as a tool for cultural criticism, exposing the spiritual vacuum of the state through the sacralization of bureaucratic language [10; 88–91 p.].

Through the lens of religious lexicology, "Petersburg" emerges as a text where words are not merely labels for things, but active forces that participate in the metaphysical drama of history. Andrei Bely's novel remains a testament to the power of the religious word to capture the essence of a culture in its most turbulent moment

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