

## The Spiritual Substitute: «Bata» and the Efficiency of Exchange in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan

Gulzhan Alymkulova<sup>1</sup>, Tolgonay Eralieva<sup>2</sup>, Ainura Ergeshova<sup>3</sup>, Syuta Sourbaeva<sup>4</sup>, Ruslan Mashrapov<sup>5</sup>, Kairygul Orozbai Kyzy<sup>6</sup>, Baktybek Isakov<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Lecturer, B. Osmonov Jalal-Abad State University, Institute of Philology, Department of English Language and Literature, Jalalabad-Kyrgyzstan, alymkulovagch@mail.ru: ORCID: <https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0009-0008-2788-5204>

<sup>2</sup>Senior Lecturer, Osh State University, eralievatolgonai@gmail.com: ORCID: <https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0009-0006-0834-0829>.

<sup>3</sup>PhD doctoral candidate at the Institute of Journalism and Communication, Kyrgyz National University named after Jusup Balasagyn. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. ainuraergeshova84@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1830-7401>.

<sup>4</sup>PhD doctoral candidate at the Institute of Journalism and Communication, Kyrgyz National University named after Jusup Balasagyn. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. sourbayeva@gmail.com, <https://orcid.org/my-orcid?orcid=0009-0002-8306-5362>

<sup>5</sup>PhD Candidate, Institute of Journalism and Communication, Kyrgyz National University named after Jusup Balasagyn. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. ruslanmashrapov@gmail.com, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8009-8550>.

<sup>6</sup>PhD Candidate, Iskhak Razzakov Kyrgyz State Technical University, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. Email: govoritv.kg@gmail.com: ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4797-5663>

<sup>7</sup>Associate Professor. Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Sociology – Bishkek/Kyrgyzstan: baktibek.isakov@manas.edu.kg ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-8845-2778>.

### Abstract

This article re-examines the Kyrgyz customary practice of Bata (blessing/commitment) not merely as a cultural rite, but as a robust and unique Sacred-Institutional Guarantee Mechanism with significant economic implications. Drawing upon institutional economics and anthropological data concerning practices like *Bata Ayak* (ritualized betrothal gifts) and the high social cost of *Bata Buuzuu* (breaking the commitment), the study argues that Bata effectively reduces transaction costs in social and economic exchanges. By setting a profound moral and spiritual penalty for commitment failure, this practice substitutes the need for expensive formal legal oversight. Bata mobilizes a crucial resource—Intertemporal Social Capital—by projecting trust and accountability far into the future (e. g., programming a child's fate), thereby strengthening the reliability of current agreements and fostering communal wealth accumulation ("бата менен эл көгөрөт"). This mechanism offers a vital lens for understanding how non-state, moral institutions underpin economic stability and enhance relational trust in post-Soviet transitional democracies.

**Keywords:** *Bata*, Institutional Economics, Transaction Costs, Social Capital, Trust, Sacred Guarantee, Kyrgyzstan.

## INTRODUCTION

The *dastorkon* (the ritual spread or table) serves as a fundamental socio-biological construct and a primary symbol of communal existence within Kyrgyz culture. Beyond its utilitarian function, the *dastorkon* represents a critical nexus for social cohesion, conflict resolution, and the mediation of interpersonal relations. Historically, it has functioned as a diplomatic platform where state-level governance is negotiated and armed conflicts are de-escalated. Central to this phenomenon is the *bata* (oral blessing)—a ritualized linguistic expression that encapsulates the profundity of Kyrgyz spiritual wisdom and ethical axiologies.

Though intangible, the *bata* occupies a sacred position in the Kyrgyz ontogeny, acting as a transgenerational cultural heritage. From a linguocognitive perspective, the *bata* is not merely a benevolent wish but a sophisticated linguistic instrument through which sacred relationships between the individual, society, and the environment are articulated. It serves as a tool of linguistic connectivity, marking every developmental milestone of an individual from conception to maturity. In the Kyrgyz mentalité, the *bata* facilitates a linguocultural bridge, where internal cognitive states (intentions and perceptions) are externalized through specific linguistic markers to reinforce social solidarity. The blessing over the *dastorkon* thus transcends the sanctification of sustenance, functioning as a performative act that affirms the sacred unity of the collective.

## METHODOLOGY AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research employs a multi-disciplinary approach, synthesizing established theories in pragmatics and linguoculturology to analyze the functional essence of the *bata*. The theoretical foundation is constructed upon the pragmatic frameworks of C. Morris and V. N. Teliya, the linguopragmatic theories of V. A. Maslova and R. C. Stalnaker, and the regional linguopragmatic scholarship of G. Y. Amanbaeva and Z. S. Ernazarova. Furthermore, the ethno-cultural data is grounded in the seminal works of S. Karalaev, K. Karasaev, A. Akmataliev, and the empirical oral traditions preserved by K. Ashymbaev.

To ensure empirical rigor, the following scientific methods were utilized: *Observational Method*: Systematic observation was applied to cross-linguistic interactions and the ritualization of the *dastorkon* to identify the linguocognitive and linguocultural patterns of blessing transmission. *Analytical Method*: A structural analysis was conducted on the linguistic connectivity and communicative dynamics between participants during the ritualized meal. *Comparative Method*: A comparative analysis was performed to determine the semantic variations of the *bata* across different social contexts. This method was essential for identifying the influence of ritual language on the internal psychological and external social states of the individual. *Functional-Semantic Analysis*: This was employed to decode the linguistic means through which cognitive intentions are transformed into socially binding oral traditions. *Linguocognitive* (Лингвокогнитивдик): Relating to the cognitive processes mapped onto language. *Linguoculturology* (Лингвомаданият таануу): The study of language as a carrier of cultural information. *Axiology* (Баалуулуктар системасы): The philosophical study of values. *Ontogeny* (Инсандын калыптанышы): The development of the individual within a cultural context.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Conceptual Taxonomy of the Speech Act of Blessing*: According to the semantic framework established by Anna Wierzbicka, the act of blessing (*bata*) is categorized as a substantive speech act involving emotional and illocutionary components such as rejoicing, congratulating, and expressing gratitude [Wierzbicka, 1985]. Scholarly consensus further defines *bata* as a transcendent communicative act wherein the speaker invokes a metaphysical entity (God) to bestow benevolence upon a specific interlocutor [Sharifi & Amir, 2012]. Sarsembaeva (2021)

expands this by framing the blessing as a hypothetical communicative bridge where the addresser appeals for protection and support from a divine source.

*Semiotic and Etymological Analysis:* In the Kyrgyz nomadic tradition, as evidenced in the epic "Manas" [Karalaev, 177, 53], the *bata* is accompanied by a distinctive semiotic signifier: the raising and joining of palms. This gesture serves as a non-verbal marker that validates the initiation of the ritual. Etymologically, *bata* is derived from the Arabic *Fatiha* (lit. "The Opener"). In Kyrgyz linguoculture, this reflects the ontological principle that "unless the ancestral spirits (*arbak*) are satisfied, the affairs of the living shall not prosper." This connects the linguistic act to a broader metaphysical framework of ancestral veneration.

*Functional Semantic Dimensions:* Our analysis identifies four primary semantic strata of *bata*: *Liturgical/Ritual:* The recitation of Quranic surahs during significant life-cycle events (e. g. , weddings, burials, daily prayers). *Commemorative:* Ritual prayers dedicated to the deceased (*quran okuu*). *Benedictive:* Expressions of goodwill, gratitude, and social affirmation. *Metaphorical/Contractual:* *Batalashuu* (lit. "mutual blessing") as a symbol of formalizing an alliance, such as betrothals. *The Ritual of "Bata Ayak" and Socio-Linguistic Contracts:* The ritual of *bata ayak* functions as a socio-legal instrument in Kyrgyz tradition. It occurs at the conclusion of marriage negotiations; once the groom's side presents ritual gifts and the parties engage in a collective blessing over the *dastorkon*, the contract is considered sacred. Mambetaliev (134) describes this process as an integration of hospitality and legal commitment. Notably, the concept of "breaking the blessing" (*bata buzuu*) is viewed as an ontological impossibility in the Kyrgyz national consciousness. Once a blessing is uttered over the *dastorkon*, it becomes a binding cognitive and moral imperative.

*Linguopragmatic Significance and the Magic of the Word:* The *bata* is characterized by several distinct features: *Contextual Specificity:* It is not a random utterance but is spatially and temporally regulated. *Verbal Magic:* The ritual reflects a deep-seated belief in the performative power of language (the "magic of the word"). As the Kyrgyz proverb states: "*The people flourish through blessings; the earth flourishes through rain.*" Case studies, such as those found in Auezov's *Abay Zholy* and the memoirs of actor Suimonkul Chokmorov, demonstrate that the *bata* is requested during significant professional and social milestones. In these contexts, the *dastorkon* acts as a platform for obtaining social legitimacy and collective psychological support. The act of "giving food to the people" (*elge tamak beruu*) is inextricably linked to "seeking the blessing" (*bata surau*), confirming that the *bata* is the ultimate linguistic capital within Kyrgyz social dynamics.

Our research indicates that the nomadic ritual of *bata* has evolved from a purely cosmological invocation into a sophisticated instrument of educational programming and psychological orientation. As exemplified in Jakhypbekov's *Teniri Manas*, the patriarch Koshoy invokes the "High Blue Sky" (*Kok Tengir*) and the "Hirsute Earth," establishing a triad between the divine, the terrestrial, and the communal. This collective vocalization functions as a socio-biological synchronization of the group. In the modern context, the *bata* serves as a linguistic developmental roadmap for the younger generation. It functions as a form of "psychological setting" (*ustanovka*), where the elder's words—framed as benevolent commands—program the recipient's future social behavior and spiritual resilience. Within Islamic frameworks, this is further refined as a tool for moral alignment. For instance, the socialization of the character Semetey [Murzaev, 2014] utilizes metaphors of the falcon (*shumkar*) and the stallion (*tulpar*) to embed archetypes of strength and loyalty into the subject's identity.

*Comparative Etymology and Semantic Convergence: Bata vs. Blessing:* A cross-cultural analysis reveals deep-seated semantic intersections between the Kyrgyz *bata* and the English *blessing*.

Category	Kyrgyz Bata (Linguocultural)	English Blessing (Etymological)
Etymology	Derived from Arabic <i>Fatiha</i> (The Opener)	Derived from Old English <i>blōd</i> (Blood/Sanctify)
Primary Meaning	Sacred benevolence, ancestral approval	Consecration, divine protection
Action	Raising palms, wiping the face ( <i>amin</i> )	Invoking divine favor ( <i>benedicere</i> )

According to Hornby (2005) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (2023), the English verb *to bless* (Old English *blētsian*) originally denoted "to hallow with blood," signifying a sacrificial sanctification. Over centuries, this evolved toward the Latin *benedicere* (to speak well of). Similarly, the Kyrgyz *bata*—as hypothesized by Myrzakmatov—may stem from the roots *baa* (value/price) and *taa* (the core/zenith). Thus, *bata* represents the "ultimate evaluation of the core essence." This etymological parallel is profound: both cultures link the act of blessing to the vital forces of life-blood in the Western tradition and the core/energy (*nur*) in the Kyrgyz tradition. In both linguocognitive systems, a heart-centered utterance is believed to alter the "state of the soul," transforming linguistic energy into tangible life-sustenance (*yrysky*). *Socio-Linguistic Conflict Resolution*: The *bata* over the *dastorkon* also serves a critical pragmatic function of a meal with a *bata* formalizes a non-aggression pact: "Let there be no more disputes over land and water." Here, the physical act of wiping the face with the palms serves as a semiotic "seal" on the verbal contract.

As a conclusion, the energy of the "Nur", the Kyrgyz belief in the power of the word (*soz magiyasy*) remains a central pillar of national identity. The *bata* is conceptualized as a "ray" (*nur*)—a bio-energetic transfer that provides the recipient with social "immunity" against misfortune. Whether invoked to program a newborn's future or to solidify a thousand-year alliance between in-laws (*kuda-sook*), the *bata* remains a vital performative act that affirms the continuity of the Kyrgyz nomadic civilization.

### ***Taxonomy and Pragmatic Classification of the Blessing***

The *bata* is a multidimensional speech act that structures the human life cycle. According to Sagynbaeva, it serves as the primary spiritual element of Turkic nomadic identity. Our research categorizes these blessings into specific functional types based on their socio-biological intent. *Collective/Universal Blessings (Ak Bata)*: These are invocations for national stability and social order. They establish a hierarchy of virtues: wisdom for leaders, tradition for elders, courage for men, and virtue for women. The ritualistic conclusion is always the word *Oomiyn* (from the Arabic *Amin* — "so be it"). In the academic editions of the *Epic of Manas* [Orozbekov, 2006], *Oomiyn* functions as a semiotic terminal marker, signaling that the spiritual contract is sealed. The physical act of wiping the face with both palms transforms the acoustic utterance into a permanent spiritual imprint. *Ontogenetic and Life-Cycle Blessings*: Neonatal Initiation (*Oozantuu*): When a child is born, parents host a *dastorkon* for the ritual of *oozantuu* (first taste). The child is given clarified butter (*sary mai*). The blessing programs the child's digestive and spiritual health: "May you live beyond seventy; may your tongue be eloquent." Clarified butter here acts as a "sacred medicine," symbolizing abundance. *Marriage and Betrothal*: Blessings for the bride and groom use metaphors of the "shady tree" (*sayabahuu darak*) and the "golden cauldron" (*altynndan kazan*), focusing on fertility and domestic stability.

### ***Pragmatic Requirements and Ritual Protocols***

The efficacy of a *bata* is dependent on strict adherence to ritual protocols. *Pre-Sacrificial Invocations*: In Kyrgyz tradition, no animal is slaughtered without a *bata*. This ritual acknowledges the gravity of taking a life for sustenance. As noted in the novel *The Broken*

*Sword* (Syngan Kylych), the addresser speaks to the animal, absolving both parties of guilt: "There is no fault in you, but I have a need for food." The "Head of the Blessing" (*Bata Bashy*) occurs when the elder holds the head of the sacrificial animal while the community raises their palms. This creates a collective energy field focused on the "blessings of the table" (*ash-tamak*). *Post-Prandial and Funeral Rites*: Funeral (*Quran Okuu*): Specific Quranic surahs (*Fatiha*, *Ikhlas*) are recited. The resulting "merit" (*soop*) is linguistically transferred to the deceased to facilitate their passage into the afterlife (*Firdaus*). *Daily Gratitude*: Post-meal blessings involve an expression of "infinite gratitude to the Creator" for sustenance.

### ***Situational and Protective Blessings***

Specific linguistic formulas are used for travelers and those in haste, invoking protective deities from both Islamic and pre-Islamic (Tengrist) traditions: *Bayam bar* (Prophetic blessing), *Tenir Ata* (Father Heaven), *Umai Ene* (Mother Umai), *Linguistic Evidence of "The Magic of the Word"*: Kyrgyz paremiology (proverbs) reinforces the belief that the *bata* is the "father of the word" (*sozdun atasy*). "The people flourish through blessings, as the land flourishes through rain." "A man with a blessing will not tire; a man without one will not prosper." The act of "seeking a blessing" (*bata surau*) is a high-responsibility social act. Fathers select their most capable children to receive blessings from renowned elders (*batakoy*), effectively "launching" the child into society with a reservoir of collective energy. The Physical Stance of the Host: During the blessing, the "recipient" (the host of the *dastorkon*) must stand upright. This physical posture signifies the complete absorption of the linguistic energy. As expressed in the songs of Bek Borbiev, leaving the *dastorkon* before the *bata* is a breach of social and spiritual etiquette. The person asking for the *bata* stands at the lower end of the table, facing the guests with open palms, creating a closed circuit of communication and benevolence.

### ***Ritual Semiotics: The Somatic Encoding of Blessing***

The *bata* is not merely an acoustic phenomenon; it is a physio-semiotic performance. According to Imanaliev (100), the protocol for the recipient is rigorous: the child or recipient must hold their hands with the little fingers touching, palms slightly cupped and held close to the face. This posture is maintained in a state of "waiting" until the elder completes the invocation. Only after the final *Oomiyn* is the face wiped with the palms, symbolizing the physical absorption of the spiritual essence. This somatic action functions as a signifier of receptivity and metaphysical alignment. In Kyrgyz ontology, a blessing received with proper semiotic alignment is believed to activate the recipient's *bak* (innate fortune). It is the externalization of the "fragile secret" of human power and spirit through the medium of sacred speech.

### ***Cross-Cultural Pragmatics: The English Tradition***

A comparative analysis reveals that English benedictions share the same illocutionary intent—invoking divine protection and expressing gratitude—but are structured around different extralinguistic factors. *Situational Taxonomy in English Benedictions*: English blessings are categorized into distinct semantic groups, often centering on the "Heavenly Father" as the source of agency: *Maternal Sacralization*: Gratitude for "loving sacrifice" and "selfless devotion," framing motherhood as a spiritual gift. *Pedagogical Protection*: Invocations for the health and safety of children, emphasizing divine omniscience (e. g. , "counting every hair on their head") [Hovhannisyan & Nikolyan, 2018]. *Nuptial and Natal Celebrations*: Blessings focused on "glory," "grace," and "long-term prosperity" for families across generations. *Commensal Pragmatics (The Table Blessing)*: Similar to the Kyrgyz *dastorkon* protocols, the English tradition of "saying grace" over food serves as a functional transition from the physical act of eating to the spiritual act of service. The linguistic formula "Bless this food to our use, and us to Thy service" acts as a consecration of both the sustenance and the consumer.

***Extralinguistic Factors and "Background Knowledge"***

As noted by Naimanova and Kalieva, extralinguistic factors include the socio-cultural "background knowledge" unique to a nation. A prime example is the response to a physiological sneeze: English: "Bless you" or "God bless your heart." This reflects a historical background where a sneeze was once thought to momentarily separate the soul from the body, requiring a protective blessing. Kyrgyz: "Ak chüch!", "Sak bol!" (Be vigilant/safe), or "Salamat bol!" (Be healthy). While the English version invokes the divine, the Kyrgyz response often emphasizes the physical well-being and longevity of the subject.

**CONCLUSION**

In summary, this research demonstrates that the Kyrgyz *bata* and the English *blessing* constitute more than mere cultural remnants; they function as a foundational metaphysical infrastructure for human social and cognitive interaction. Through a comparative linguo-pragmatic lens, we have identified that the act of blessing serves as a universal mechanism for maintaining psychological and communal equilibrium across divergent civilizations. Our findings categorize the socio-biological impact of these ritual utterances into four systemic functions: *Bio-Energetic and Neuro-Psychological Transfer*: The ritual acts as a conduit for what is traditionally termed "miraculous breath" or "sacred energy" (*nur*), which, in a modern neuro-linguistic context, can be interpreted as the positive reinforcement of the recipient's emotional and psychological state. *Structural Harmonization of Interpersonal Relations*: By facilitating a "soul-to-soul" connection, the blessing rituals minimize social friction and establish a hierarchical yet harmonious alignment within the community and family units. *Ontological Future-Programming*: The performative nature of the *bata* functions as a cognitive setting (*ustanovka*). By articulating success, health, and prosperity within a sacred framework, the ritual effectively "programs" the individual's path, enhancing resilience and goal-oriented behavior. *Linguistic Connectivity and Spiritual Sustenance*: The transformation of abstract gratitude into "spiritual food" (*ruhaniy azyk*) underscores the belief in the performative power of language—where words possess the capacity to alter material and spiritual reality.

Furthermore, the etymological convergence between the Old English *blētsian* and the Kyrgyz *bata*—both rooted in concepts of life-force and core values—suggests a primordial human recognition of speech as a sacred instrument of life-preservation. Ultimately, the *bata* transcends its specific linguistic and geographic boundaries, acting as a resonant energy source that recalibrates the human subject toward ethical, virtuous, and prosperous existence. This study opens new avenues for exploring the linguocognitive architecture of rituals in the digital age, suggesting that as global societies become increasingly secular, the fundamental human need for ritualized linguistic sanctification remains an indelible part of our collective consciousness.

**References**

1. Akmataliev, A. *Kyrgyz madaniyaty zhana salt-sanaalary* [Kyrgyz Culture and Traditions]. Bishkek.
2. Auezov, Mukhtar O. *Abai zholy: eki tomdon turgan roman* [The Path of Abai: A Novel in Two Volumes]. Vol. 1, Almaty.
3. Chokmorov, S. *Zhark etip zhanggan zhyldyz* [A Brightly Shining Star]. Bishkek.
4. Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary. HarperCollins, 2003.
5. Hornby, A. S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2005.
6. Hovhannisyan, A. S., and L. Ts. Nikolyan. *English Blessings and Prayers in Cultural Context*. 2018.
7. Imanaliev, E. *Ak tandagy ak bata* [White Blessing at Dawn]. Bishkek, 100 pp.
8. Karalaev, S. *Kyrgyz el oozeki chygarmalary (Manas eposu zhana bata tekstteri)* [Kyrgyz Oral Folk Works (The Manas Epic and Blessing Texts)]. Bishkek.
9. Karasaev, Kh. *Kyrgyz tilinin tushundurmo sozdogu* [Explanatory Dictionary of the Kyrgyz Language].

Bishkek.

10. *Longman Advanced American Dictionary*. Pearson Education, 2000.
11. Mambetaliev, S. *Kylymdar kyiiry: tarykhyi-adabii zhiynak* [At the Edge of Centuries: A Historical and Literary Collection]. Bishkek, 310 pp.
12. *Merriam-Webster's Advanced Learner's English Dictionary*. Merriam-Webster, 2014.
13. Murzaev, M. S. *Kyrgyz eldik pedagogikasynda insandy sotsialdashtyruunun onuguusu (tarykhyi-etnopedagogikalyk aspekt): monografiia* [The Development of Personality Socialization in Kyrgyz Folk Pedagogy (Historical and Ethnopedagogical Aspect)]. Gulchynar, Bishkek, 2014.
14. Myrzakmatov, M. Interview. *Sputnik*, Bishkek.
15. Naimanova, Ch. K., and K. A. Kalieva. *Ekstralingvistikalyk faktorlor zhana fon malymattar* [Extralinguistic Factors and Background Knowledge]. Almaty.
16. *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford University Press, 2023.
17. Sagynbaeva, B. *Turk elderindegi bata salty zhana rukhanii muras* [The Tradition of Blessing and Spiritual Heritage among Turkic Peoples]. Bishkek.
18. Sarsembayeva, N. O. "Qazaq tilindegi bata beru aktlerinin lingvopragmatikalyq sipaty" ["Linguopragmatic Characteristics of Blessing Acts in the Kazakh Language"]. *Ilimii zhiynak*, 2021, p. 207.
19. Sharifiy, M., and N. Amir. *Religioznye i kul'turnye aspekty blagosloveniia* [Religious and Cultural Aspects of Blessing]. Tehran, 2012.
20. Sydykbekov, T. *Omur tamyry* [The Root of Life]. Bishkek, 1990, 510 pp.
21. Vezhbitskaya, Anna. *Semantika i pragmatika rechi* [Semantics and Pragmatics of Speech]. Moscow, 1985.
22. Zhakypbekov, A. *Tengiri Manas: ozoktu roman* [Tengri Manas: A Conceptual Novel]. Bishkek.