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RESPONDING TO BLESSINGS: THE SECOND PAIR PART OF BLESSING SPEECH ACTS IN UZBEK AND ENGLISH

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Abstract. Blessings are usually studied as initiating acts. This article examines their second pair part: what a person says after being blessed. Drawing on conversation analysis (adjacency pairs and preference organisation), speech act theory and politeness theory, it compares responses to blessings in Uzbek and English. Uzbek examples are taken from the author's literary corpus (Abdulla Qodiriy, G‘afur G‘ulom, O‘tkir Hoshimov); English examples are conventional exchanges of everyday usage. Five response types are distinguished: ratification (Omin), echoing, reciprocation (Sizga ham; You too), thanking (Rahmat; Thank you) and counter-blessing (Baraka toping). The analysis shows that Uzbek treats a blessing as a petition to God that the recipient co-signs, so ratification, echoing and counter-blessing are preferred responses. English treats a blessing mainly as a gift to the hearer, so thanking and reciprocation are preferred. The comparison explains recurrent pragmatic difficulties in Uzbek–English communication and translation: a ratifying Omin rendered as Amen sounds liturgical in English, while a bare Thank you may under-perform the response an Uzbek blesser expects.

Keywords: blessing; speech act; adjacency pair; response; preference organisation; Uzbek; English; cross-cultural pragmatics

1. Introduction

In Uzbek communicative culture, wishing good to another person is one of the most frequent and most ritualised verbal acts. In earlier work, I treated three related genres – ritual-folkloric blessing (olqish), prayerful benediction (duo) and secular good wish (tilak) – as components of a single blessing macrosystem, alqov (Qurbanbayeva, 2026a). Later studies described its grammatical forms (Qurbanbayeva, 2026b) and the illocutionary structure of duo (Qurbanbayeva, 2026c). Like most research on blessings, these studies looked at the blessing itself: the first move of an exchange.

A blessing, however, is rarely the end of an exchange. It projects a response, and the response shows how the blessing was understood. When an Uzbek elder says Ilohim, baxtingni bersin ('May God give you your happiness'), the recipient does not stay silent; they say Omin, Aytganingiz kelsin ('May what you said come true') or bless in return. An English speaker who hears Have a lovely weekend! answers You too or Thanks. These responses are short and formulaic, but they are not interchangeable across the two languages.

This article asks two questions. First, what types of response follow a blessing in Uzbek and in English? Second, which responses are preferred in each language, and what does that preference reveal about how each culture understands the act of blessing? The answers matter for cross-cultural communication, for translators of Uzbek literature and for teachers of English as a foreign language in Uzbekistan.

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2. Theoretical background: blessings as first pair parts

2.1. Adjacency pairs and preference

Conversation analysis describes many exchanges as adjacency pairs: a first pair part, such as a greeting or an offer, makes a particular second pair part relevant next (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973; Schegloff, 2007). Not all possible second parts are equal. Some are preferred: they are produced quickly, without hesitation or account. Others are dispreferred: they are delayed, mitigated or explained. Pomerantz (1978) showed that compliments create a dilemma of this kind, because the recipient must both accept a gift and avoid self-praise. Holmes (1986) found that speakers of New Zealand English resolve it mostly by accepting the compliment with thanks.

A blessing poses a similar dilemma but with an extra participant. It wishes something good for the hearer, and the hearer cannot grant it to themselves. The question is therefore not only how to accept the wish, but who is responsible for fulfilling it.

2.2. The illocutionary status of a blessing

In Searle's (1976) taxonomy, a good wish is usually classed as an expressive: it expresses the speaker's favourable attitude towards the hearer. In an earlier study I argued that the Uzbek duo is a hybrid. It is expressive towards the hearer, but it is also a directive addressed to God as a superaddressee, the party expected to make the wish come true (Qurbanbayeva, 2026c). The communicative situation of a duo therefore has three members: the speaker, the beneficiary and God.

This three-party structure is not unique to Uzbek. Clift and Helani (2010) show that the Arabic invocation inshallah does interactional work in conversation, for example in closing a topic, precisely because it places the future in God's hands. Brown and Levinson (1987) would classify blessings as positive politeness, since they attend to the hearer's wish to be approved of and cared for. Wierzbicka (2003) adds that such formulas encode culture-specific scripts: what a speaker is thinking when they use them differs from language to language.

2.3. Hypothesis

If a blessing is understood mainly as a petition to God, the preferred response should align the recipient with that petition: confirming it, repeating it or adding to it. If a blessing is understood mainly as a gift from the speaker, the preferred response should acknowledge the gift: thanking or returning it. The analysis below tests this hypothesis on Uzbek and English material.

3. Data and method

The study is qualitative and contrastive. Uzbek data come from the literary corpus used throughout my dissertation research: Abdulla Qodiriy's novel O‘tkan kunlar (Qodiriy, 2018), the selected prose of G‘afur G‘ulom (G‘ulom, 2012) and O‘tkir Hoshimov's novella Dunyoning ishlari (Hoshimov, 2015). From these texts, every exchange was selected in which a blessing, a good wish, a congratulation or a favour is followed by a recorded reply from another character. Literary dialogue is not spontaneous speech, but it shows what writers and readers recognise as a natural reply, and it preserves the sequential context that lists of formulas lose. Conventional Uzbek response formulas familiar to native speakers were used as supporting material.

English data are conventional exchanges of everyday usage: seasonal and leave-taking wishes, wishes before a challenge, the response to Bless you after a sneeze, and religious benedictions. They are given as illustrations of established patterns, not as frequency data.

Each exchange was analysed in three steps. First, the response was classified by type. Second, its position in the sequence was noted: whether it closes the exchange or adds a new first pair part. Third,

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the response was interpreted in terms of who it treats as responsible for fulfilling the wish. Uzbek examples are given in the original, followed by an English translation; key optative forms are glossed where needed (OPT = optative, 3 = third person, PL = plural).

4. Results: types of responses to blessings

Five response types were identified. They differ in what the recipient does with the wish: confirms it (ratification), repeats it (echoing), answers it with a new blessing (counter-blessing), returns it (reciprocation) or acknowledges it (thanking). Sections 4.3 and 4.4 describe two forms of counter-blessing.

4.1. Ratification

The most distinctive Uzbek response is Omin ('amen'). It does not thank the speaker; it endorses the petition addressed to God. Example (1) shows how far this function extends.

(1) Har kim bunga shak keltirsa, yuzi qozonday qora bo‘lib, dili tandurday otashlarga kuygay, omin! Shogirdlar: – Omin, kuygay!!! – deyishdi. (G‘ulom, 2012, p. 272) 'Whoever doubts this, may his face turn black as a cauldron and may his heart burn in fires like a tandoor, amen!' The pupils said: 'Amen, may it burn!'

Here omin ratifies a malediction, not a blessing. The pupils are not beneficiaries; they are co-signatories. This shows that omin attaches to the optative petition as such, whatever its content. Two further features matter. The ratification is collective: a group voice joins the speaker. And the pupils add the verb kuygay (burn-OPT), so ratification combines with echoing (4.2). In ritual settings, such as the fotiha prayer, omin closes the act and turns an individual petition into a joint one (Qurbanbayeva, 2026c).

4.2. Echoing

In echoing, the recipient repeats the blessing, often with a small change, and so takes it over as their own.

(2) – Ilohim em tushkan bo‘lsin… – Ilohi em tushsin, – deb kuldi hoji. (Qodiriy, 2018, p. 273) 'May God let the remedy have worked…' – 'May God let the remedy work,' laughed the Hoji.

The second speaker turns the perfective tushkan bo‘lsin ('may it have taken effect') into the simpler tushsin ('may it take effect') and keeps the divine vocative. The petition is now voiced twice, by two people, to the same addressee.

4.3. Counter-blessing with thanks

Uzbek Rahmat ('thank you') often does not stand alone after a blessing or a favour. It is typically followed by a blessing that returns the good wish.

(3) – Otam sizlardek yaqin do‘stlariga salom aytishni menga amonat topshirg‘an edilar. – Rahmat, sog‘ bo‘lsinlar! (Qodiriy, 2018, p. 18) 'My father entrusted me with conveying his greetings to close friends like you.' – 'Thank you, may he be well!' (be-OPT.3PL, honorific)

(4) – Katta rahmat, baraka topinglar. (Hoshimov, 2015, p. 26) 'Thank you very much, may you find baraka.'

(5) – Iloyo baraka toping, – deb qoldi onam eshikdan mo‘ralab. – Bola-chaqangizning rohatini ko‘ring. (Hoshimov, 2015, p. 108) '“May God grant that you find baraka,” my mother called after him from the doorway. “May you have joy from your children.”'

(6) Halol yigit ekansizlar, baraka topkurlar. (G‘ulom, 2012, p. 86) 'You turned out to be honest lads, may you find baraka.'

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In (3), the response blesses a third person who is absent: the father who sent the greeting. In (4), rahmat is immediately followed by a blessing, so that thanks and blessing form one chain. In (5) and (6), a blessing alone does the work of thanking: in (5), a doctor has treated the narrator's sick brother and refused a gift, and the mother answers his kindness only with blessings. In Uzbek, then, a blessing is itself the currency of gratitude, and rahmat without it can sound incomplete.

4.4. Counter-blessing after a congratulation

When an Uzbek speaker is congratulated, the expected reply is not a thank-you but an optative.

(7) To‘yga kelgan xotinlarning “To‘ylar muborak, kuyov o‘g‘ul muborak!” deb so‘rashlariga ham ishonchsiz bir ohangda “Qutlug‘ bo‘lsin”, deydir. (Qodiriy, 2018, p. 53) 'To the women who came to the wedding and said “Blessed be the wedding, blessed be the bridegroom son!”, she replies in an uncertain tone, “May it be auspicious.”'

(8) Kumushbibining qizlarga bergan javobi eshitilar-eshitilmaslik edi: – Qutlug‘… (Qodiriy, 2018, p. 55) 'Kumushbibi's answer to the girls was barely audible: “Auspicious…”'

Both characters are unhappy about the marriage, yet both answer within the blessing format. The narrator marks their reluctance through tone (7) and through a reduced, trailing form (8). The preference for an optative reply is strong enough that even a dispreferred stance is expressed inside it, by shrinking the formula rather than replacing it.

4.5. Reciprocation

Reciprocation returns the same wish to the speaker. It exists in both languages: Uzbek Sizga ham ('to you too') and Siz ham omon bo‘ling ('may you be well too'); English You too, Same to you, And to you.

(9) A: Have a good weekend! – B: You too. (10) A: Merry Christmas! – B: Same to you.

In English, reciprocation is the routine reply to seasonal and leave-taking wishes, and it closes the exchange. In Uzbek, it is more typical of secular tilak than of duo.

4.6. English: thanking as the default

In English, Thank you or Thanks is a complete response to almost any blessing or good wish.

(11) A: Good luck with the interview! – B: Thanks! (12) A: (after a sneeze) Bless you. – B: Thank you. (13) A: God bless you. – B: Thank you.

Even (13), which names God, is usually answered with thanks, not with Amen. In everyday English, Amen is largely confined to worship. The idiom Amen to that expresses agreement with a statement, not ratification of a petition.

4.7. Summary

Response type	Uzbek	English	Status in Uzbek	Status in English
Ratification	Omin; Omin, aytganingiz kelsin	Amen (worship); Amen to that (agreement)	Preferred after duo	Marked outside religious settings
Echoing	Ilohi em tushsin (2)	Rare	Available, emphatic	Not conventional
Counter-blessing with thanks	Katta rahmat, baraka topinglar (4)	Thanks, God bless (religious speakers)	Preferred	Marked
Counter-blessing after	Qutlug‘ bo‘lsin (7)	Thank you	Preferred	Not conventional

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Response type	Uzbek	English	Status in Uzbek	Status in English
congratulation				
Reciprocation	Sizga ham; Siz ham omon bo‘ling	You too; Same to you	Available, mostly after tilak	Preferred after routine wishes
Thanking alone	Rahmat	Thank you; Thanks	Possible, may sound incomplete	Preferred, sufficient

5. Discussion

The results support the hypothesis in 2.3. Uzbek preferred responses – ratification, echoing and counter-blessing, including an optative reply to congratulation – all treat the blessing as a petition that someone other than the speaker will fulfil. The recipient's task is to join the petition, add a voice to it or answer it with a petition of their own. English preferred responses – thanking and reciprocation – treat the blessing as a gift from the speaker. The recipient's task is to acknowledge the gift or return it, and the exchange is then closed.

5.1. Who fulfils the wish

The difference follows from the three-party structure described in 2.2. In Uzbek duo, God is an explicit or implied superaddressee, and the optative suffix -sin leaves the agent of the wished event unnamed (Qurbanbayeva, 2026b). A response that thanks only the speaker would address the wrong party; Omin addresses the right one. In secularised English wishes, the superaddressee has faded: Bless you after a sneeze is answered with thanks, as if the speaker had done the hearer a small favour.

5.2. Exchanges that do not close

Uzbek counter-blessings often make a new blessing relevant in turn, so an exchange can grow into a chain, as in the following constructed illustration: Rahmat, iloyo baraka toping – Sizga ham, omon bo‘ling – Omin. English reciprocation, by contrast, typically ends the exchange in two turns. This difference in sequence length is a practical consequence of the preference patterns, and it agrees with the observation that Uzbek uses blessings in almost every everyday situation, including trade and leave-taking (Qurbanbayeva, 2026a).

5.3. Implications for translation and teaching

Two kinds of pragmatic difficulty follow. First, when Uzbek literary dialogue is translated, rendering Omin as Amen moves a routine conversational turn into the register of worship; a translator may need So be it, a reciprocal formula or a short descriptive phrase, depending on context. Example (8) shows a further risk: the reluctance carried by a shortened formula will be lost if the translation simply supplies Thank you. Second, Uzbek learners of English who answer Good luck! with a counter-blessing may sound over-formal, while English speakers who answer an Uzbek elder's duo with a bare Rahmat may under-perform the expected response. Teaching materials should present responses to blessings as a pragmatic topic in their own right, not only the blessings themselves.

5.4. Limitations

The Uzbek data are literary and the English data are conventional examples, so the study shows preference patterns, not frequencies. A corpus study of spoken Uzbek and of English corpora such as COCA or the BNC would be needed to measure how often each response type occurs and how it varies with age, region and religiosity.

6. Conclusion

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This article has examined the second pair part of blessing exchanges, a move that studies of blessings usually leave aside. Five response types were identified: ratification, echoing, counter-blessing (with or without thanks), reciprocation and thanking. Uzbek prefers responses that join the blessing as a petition addressed to God: Omin, repetition of the formula and counter-blessing. Even a reluctant recipient answers a congratulation with a shortened optative rather than leaving the format. English prefers responses that acknowledge a gift from the speaker: Thank you and You too.

The response, then, is where each culture's understanding of blessing becomes visible in interaction. Describing it completes the picture of the alqov macrosystem from the side of the recipient, and gives translators and language teachers a concrete account of what to expect after a blessing. Future work should test these preference patterns on spoken corpora of both languages.

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