ПЛОВДИВСКИ УНИВЕРСИТЕТ "ПАИСИЙ ХИЛЕНДАРСКИ" – БЪЛГАРИЯ НАУЧНИ ТРУДОВЕ, ТОМ 62, КН. 1, СБ. Б, 2024 – ФИЛОЛОГИЯ, PAISII HILENDARSKI UNIVERSITY OF PLOVDIV – BULGARIA RESEARCH PAPERS, VOL. 62, BOOK 1, PART B, 2024 – LANGUAGES AND LITERATURE

DOI 10.69085/ntf2025b272

# RENDERING EMOTIONS: BULGARIAN WELL-WISHING INTO ENGLISH

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Central to this paper is the rendition of Bulgarian cultural scripts of well-wishing into English, particularly as used by Bulgarians writing in English. The paper investigates birthday and New Year wishes written by Bulgarians and collected from personal Facebook pages of native and non-native English speakers, analyzing the formulaic and personalized nature of these messages. By examining these well-wishing practices, the present paper not only considers how emotions and cultural values are expressed in cross-linguistic contexts but also emphasizes the role of English as the communicative medium for conveying culture-specific practices.

Key words: emotions, culture, cultural script, speech act theory, field method

#### Introduction

In the 21st century, communicative rituals of exchanging wishes on occasions such as birthdays, New Year's, and other important life events are often mediated by Social Networking Service (SNS) such as Facebook, where people of diverse cultural backgrounds share the use of English as a common language of communication. The present paper aims to explore how well-wishing practices are rendered into English by Bulgarians posting on Facebook. It examines birthday and New Year wishes, as the most common wishes on social media, collected from the personal pages of Facebook users, focusing on how these messages blend formulaic expressions with personal touches. The present paper analyzes how Bulgarian cultural values and emotions are rendered into English, highlighting the role of English as a means of cross-cultural communication. The present paper examines the field of wish (Kotorova 2014) through the lens of native English speakers as a unified cultural group, and does not

focus on specific cultural subsets such as British, American, or Australian English. This decision stems from two factors. First, the fact that the English language serves as a unifying medium of communication among these cultures, endorsing shared cultural norms and conventions in practices such as well-wishing. Second, to ensure a relevant comparison of cultural norms and to highlight cultural transfer. In the context of World Englishes (Kachru 1985: 178 – 205) and the global usage of the English language this approach aims to outline the linguistic profile of Bulgarian speakers of English, specifically in the field of wish. The concept of cultural scripts (Goddard, Wierzbicka 2004) provides a framework to articulate cultural norms in a way that is clear and accessible to both insiders and outsiders of a culture. The paper particularly examines the speech act of well-wishing, classified as Behabitives (Austin 1962) or Expressives (Searle 1979) and favours Kotorova's classification of this speech act as field of wish. Data collecting for this analysis was conducted in three stages, including methods such as: corpus gathering, native speakers' consideration, and informants. The corpus includes 85 birthday wishes and 23 New Year wishes posted on Facebook by Bulgarians in English. The posts were collected in the arbitrarily chosen period between January 1, 2017, and January 1, 2024.

Notably, in the process of compiling and analyzing the corpus, it became obvious that the majority of collected examples of wishes were predominantly written by women addressing other women. Another observation that deserves attention is that approximately three quarters of the respondents who took part in both surveys are women, too. Although the primary aim of the present paper is to explore cultural transfer, gender appears as a major factor in shaping expressions of emotion in the context of wishes. Women in general tend to be more expressive of emotions, specifically positive ones, and tend to suppress negative emotions, as pointed out by Chaplin (2015: 1). Such behaviour is the norm in some cultures, as observed by Bratanova (2023), who concludes that longer intentional silence in communication implicitly designates negative emotions and feelings. Yet another noteworthy finding is that, while women are more emotionally expressive in general, their ways of expressing their emotions appear to vary significantly across cultures. This assumption stems from the appraisals made by female respondents, who assessed expressions of well-wishing written by other women on the occasions of birthday and New Year's Eve. Respondents specify that wishes are too wordy and too sentimental; although rendered in their mother tongue, they do not align with what native speakers of English would typically write on such occasions. To shape out the gender cultural perspective in the context of wishes, the role

of men is to be mentioned, too. While men are typically less expressive of positive emotions (Chaplin 2015: 1), being part of the cultural framework suggests their anticipation of specific prototypical form of wishes, which suggests a shared cultural standard.

Although the corpus size does not allow for broad conclusions, it reveals the rendition of Bulgarian cultural norms into English as the global language in online communication. To accomplish the objectives of the study, the following questions are explored:

- 1) How do Bulgarian well-wishers render traditional wishes into English, and to what extent do these adaptations retain Bulgarian cultural elements?
- 2) What cultural values and emotions are evident in Bulgarian cultural scripts of well-wishing and how do they manifest in the English language? What cultural values and emotions are evident in English cultural scripts for the same speech acts?
- 3) Are Bulgarian cultural scripts well-received by native English speakers when such scripts appear in messages expressing wishes in English?

#### Literature Review

The present paper builds on previous research, such as: Fong (2000), Kramalak (2016), Dabrowska (2020), Alemi, Moakhar, and Rezanejad (2021), Can and Hatipoglu (2023) who outline cultural differences in the speech act of well-wishing using different methodologies, some of which focus on computer-mediated communication. The present paper also explores cultural differences in the speech act of well-wishing, and particularly the rendition of Bulgarian cultural scripts into English through the lens of cultural scripts and the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (Goddard, Wierzbicka 2004). The NSM in particular allows for a clear explication and comparison of cultural concepts and expressions in the field of wish.

# **Theoretical Background**

The present paper employs the communicative-pragmatic field approach (Kotorova 2014). This new research paradigm classifies speech acts (such as wish, apology, warning, etc.) as fields<sup>1</sup>, providing the opportunity to unite "all possible speech act realizations in a language" by

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The term *field* stands for the intention behind the speech act. It "regards the aim of a communicative act or its illocutionary force as a field dominant" (Kotorova 2014: 187).

following several key steps: 1) using the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), put forward by Wierzbicka (1985) to create "uniform" (Kotorova 2014: 189), clear descriptions of "illocutionary force" (ibid.: 187: 2) identifying the core constituents (widely used phrases expressing the illocutionary force) and periphery constituents (less common phrases) in a field (ibid.: 188); 3) analyzing performative verbs (ibid.:190: 4) considering variations in language and culture (ibid.: 190: 5) carrying out a questionnaire survey to elicit the existing best practices (ibid.: 2014: 190). The NSM approach uses semantic primes to explain complex ideas through simple concepts. Semantic primes (Wierzbicka 1972) are basic concepts that, as observed by Bratanova, "are familiar to all people but cannot be explained or paraphrased in simpler terms. A key feature of primes is that they can hardly be defined concretely since they function as the smallest components of meaning and are used to explicate lexical meaning". The present paper suggests the implementation of the principle of cultural script (Goddard, Wierzbicka 2004) in addition to the use of the NSM. The term *cultural script* stands for an effective approach based on linguistic evidence which helps present cultural standards by means of sematic primes. This approach makes cultural norms easy to understand both for people who are foreign to the culture in question and its members. The present paper employs the stated approach first, in an attempt to outline the differences in cultural norms in the context of exchanging wishes in Bulgarian and English, and second, as evidence for cultural transfer in the speech act of wishes.

### Method

In order to achieve the objective of the study, data was gathered in three stages. In stage one a corpus comprising 108 examples of wishes written by Bulgarians in English has been compiled by collecting posts from the personal pages of Facebook users. All identifying elements, such as names, have been removed from the analyzed data. In stage two the corpus has been used in a survey conducted among native speakers of English whose answers have served as catalyst for the corpus analysis. One hundred native speakers of English, 78 women and 22 men, have participated. They have been invited to complete several tasks, namely to select examples from the corpus, which in their opinion do not align with expressions typical of their culture for the given occasions, to justify their choices and to share what they consider the most typical examples of birthday and New Year wishes. In stage three wishes proposed by native speakers of English from stage two have been further used for another survey, where both the original

wishes and their literal translation<sup>2</sup> in Bulgarian have been provided, and in which 100 Bulgarians have been asked to select birthday and New Year wishes that are not recognized as typical of their culture. Bulgarian participants have been as well asked to write what they consider the most typical examples of New Year and birthday wishes, thus providing basis for shaping the cultural script in this context and for comparison with the corpus gathered from Facebook posts. To ensure authenticity, all examples in the following sections are presented in their original form without any adjustments or modifications.

## **Cultural Scripts Exemplified by Birthday Wishes**

Since all examples of birthday wishes in Bulgarian begin with the formulaic expression *Yecmum рожден ден* and in English with the formulaic expression *Happy birthday*, only the personalized form of these wishes will be presented here organized in terms of main concepts expressed in them in the following order: emotionality, warmth and affection in forms of address and cultural values. Formulaic expressions will be discussed in the result section.

## **Emotionality**

Emotionality in wishes typical of Bulgarian culture is expressed by means of elaborate phrasing. This is often achieved by stacking adjectives in optative structures such as: Да си жив и здрав, много щастлив и обичан, от by stacking nouns in declarative sentences such as: Желая ти много здраве, щастие, късмет и любов. This pattern is preserved in cases of rendering birthday wishes in English, e.g.: We wish you happiness, many, many smiles and a lot of success. Be lucky in your love and life!/I wish you health, luck and all happiness in the world.

In examples of birthday wishes suggested by native speakers of English, such stacking of adjectives or nouns is not present. Wishes are often casual, limited to the formulaic phrases: *Happy birthday* and *Many happy returns* and rarely extend to examples expressing emotions such as: *Happy birthday! Hope you have a great day*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Literal translation of birthday and New Year wishes has been provided in order to outline differences in illocutionary force by means of language and culture variations.

#### Warmth and Affection in Forms of Address

In the corpus warmth and affection in forms of address are expressed by means of adding typical Bulgarian diminutive endings to names of foreigners. For the purposes of maintaining anonymity, the examples presented here will be made up by analogy by using diminutives at the end of common and proper nouns, which is a common practice in Bulgarian culture, e.g.: *Happy birthday, dear chefy! Happy birthday, Davidcho!* 

In examples suggested by native speakers of English such expressions are not present, yet in the English language it is common practice to use the adjective *dear* in front of proper nouns to express warmth and affection.

#### **Cultural Values**

In examples typical of Bulgarian culture, cultural values such as happiness, health and well-being, success and prosperity are expressed by emphasizing one's well-being in all possible aspects. This is evident in examples such as: Да си жив и здрав, много щастие и пари/Честит рожден ден! С пожелание за здраве, късмет, обич, радост и безброй сбъднати желания/Честит рожден ден! Желая ти всичко най-хубаво!/Честит рожден ден, много здраве, любов, щастие и весели моменти/Нарру Birthday! Wishing you the best of luck and loads of love and happiness! Enjoy a great day!/Happy birthday! May all your wishes come true! Be healthy, be happy and be always satisfied by your family and all beloved ones! Be the happiest ever today! Lots of our love is sent to you right now.

In examples of birthday wishes suggested by native speakers of English, the cultural values expressed are good fortune and well-being specifically oriented towards that special day. This is evident in examples such as: May all your wishes come true/Hope you have a great day/I hope you have a wonderful day celebrating.

The Bulgarian cultural script behind the field of wish on the occasion of birthdays based on the examples discussed above and using the NSM framework, can be articulated as follows:

[people think like this]:

It is good to say many many things that are good for the other person at one moment. This can make the other person feel good.

It is good to say things about before and after now.

It is good to say you want big good things to happen to the other person now and after now, after that moment.

The script mentions temporal focus towards the past, which is rare but present in the corpus and stems from examples such as: *May the joy that you have spread in the past come back to you on this day/Thank you for being the best teacher*.

The cultural script behind the field of wish on the occasion of birthdays based on responses of native speakers of English as mentioned above can be articulated as follows:

[people think like this]:

It is good to say one or two things that are good for the other person. This can make the other person feel good.

It is not good to say many things at one moment.

It is good if someone says to someone else they want good things to happen to them now, at the moment.

There are significant differences in the cultural norms articulated in these two cultural scripts in the field of wishes on the occasion of birthdays regarding length, temporal focus and scope of the wish, as exemplified in Table 1:

<b>Table 1.</b> Differences in the Bulgarian and English cultural scripts
in the field of wish on the occasion of birthdays

	Length	Temporal focus	Scope
Bulgarian script	long/verbose	past, present	broad
English script	short/succinct	present	narrow, specific

## **Cultural Scripts Exemplified by New Year Wishes**

Correspondingly, all examples of New Year wishes in Bulgarian and English begin with the formulaic expressions *Честита Нова година* and *Happy New Year* respectively. Consequently, only the personalized forms of these wishes will be presented here, organized in terms of main concepts expressed in them in the following order: emotionality and cultural values. Formulaic expressions will be discussed in the result section.

## **Emotionality**

Emotionality in examples typical of Bulgarian culture is expressed yet again by means of lexical stacking exemplified in the following forms of wishes: I hope 2021 has good health, joy, and luck in store for you and your family!/С пожелание за много здраве, радост и красиви моменти с любимите ти хора. In examples of New Year wishes suggested by native speakers of English such stacking is not present. In most cases, New Year wishes are limited to the formulaic expression Happy New Year and in rare cases include general positive wishes, e.g.: May it be prosperous and full of joy/wishing you all the best for 20...!

#### **Cultural values**

Cultural values typical of Bulgarian culture expressed in New Year wishes are health (e.g. За много години! Живи и здрави!/Нека донесе много здраве, щастие, любов и успехи./Да сме живи и здрави! Наздраве и за много години!/Мау health be the thing you never worry about!), happiness and joy (e.g.: Нека бъде успешна и изпълнена с радост!/Да бъде здрава и щастлива!Мау it be full of joyful moments with family and friends, loads of adventures and love), success and prosperity (e.g.: Да е мирна и плодородна!/С пожелания за много здарве, късмет, избобилие и берекет/Wish you to fulfill all your wishes and desires), and family and togetherness (e.g.: Честита Нова година! Живи и здрави да сте цялото семейство!/С пожелание за много здраве, радост и красиви моменти с любимите ти хора!/I wish you all the best in 2018! May it be full of joyful moments with family and friends, loads of adventures and love).

Cultural values expressed in New Year wishes suggested by native speakers of English are: health (e.g.: *Safe and healthy New Year*), prosperity, success (e.g.: *May it be prosperous and full of joy*) and optimism e.g.: *Cheers to another great year.*)

There is a significant similarity between the scripts behind the field of wish on the occasion of one's birthday and on the event of New Year's Eve in Bulgarian culture. The Bulgarian cultural script behind the field of wish on the event of New Year's Eve based on the aforementioned examples and using the NSM framework, can be formulated as follows:

## [people think like this]:

It is good to say many many things that are good for the other person at one moment. This can make the other person feel good.

It is good to say things about before and after now.

It is good to say you want big good things to happen to the other person after now, after that moment.

The scripts differ to some extent in the temporal focus towards which the wish is oriented. In the case of birthdays, it is anticipated to wish a good celebration which focuses on the current moment, while New Year's wishes are focused mainly on the future.

The instances mentioned above, provided by respondents who are native speakers of English clarify that there is a close parallel between the scripts behind the field of wish on the occasion of one's birthday and on the event of New Year's Eve in English. The script behind the field of wish on the event of New Year's Eve can be formulated as follows:

## [people think like this]:

It is good to say one or two things that are good for the other person. This can make the other person feel good.

It is not good to say many things at one moment.

It is good if someone says to someone else they want good things to happen to them after now, after that moment.

Similarly, the scripts slightly diverge in the temporal focus towards which the wish is oriented. Again, in the case of birthdays it is anticipated to wish a good celebration which puts emphasis on the current moment, while New Year's wishes are focused on the future.

#### **Results**

To outline cultural differences exemplified by language variation, core (formulaic form) and peripheral (personalized form) constituents, as well as performative verbs, need to be identified and analyzed. There is a significant distinction in the formulaic form of wishes in Bulgarian and English. The fixed expressions *Yecmum рожден ден* in Bulgarian and *Happy birthday* in English differ on lexical, grammatical, and cultural pragmatic level. The phrase in Bulgarian is expressed by means of three lexemes (adjective + adjective + noun), in contrast the English phrase is comprised by only two (adjective + compound noun). The meaning of *Yecmum рожден ден* rendered in English is *I congratulate you on your birthday*. On the one hand, such an expression can be considered as a transition from one speech act or

one field (i.e. wish) to another (i.e. congratulation), which, as pointed out by Dąbrowska, is not unusual as they are often analyzed together. On the other hand, it reveals implicit cultural significance presenting this event as an achievement that one deserves congratulations upon. This belief, as pointed out by Dąbrowska, is not shared by native speakers of English, "unless someone has reached an advanced age of 80 or 90 or more". What can be highlighted as similarity between the formulaic forms in both cultures is the lack of performative verb in their original form as both exemplify noun phrases. The Bulgarian formulaic phrase translated into English, however, exemplifies the verb *congratulate*, whereas the English fixed phrase translated into Bulgarian *Щастлив рожден ден* does not. It functions as an exclamation which explicitly conveys the emotional state of happiness related to that occasion by means of a noun phrase.

Personalized or peripheral forms, which appear in addition to the formulaic ones, are where the Bulgarian and the English norms in the field of wish immensely diverge. First, there are not many examples of English personalized forms in the corpus. Second, they are short, and specifically oriented towards the happy occasion, i.e. the birthday itself. For instance: Hope you have a great day/have a wonderful day. Hope you have fun celebrating and hope you're spoilt rotten on your special day/Wishing you a very happy birthday/Have a good one/I hope you have a wonderful day celebrating. The illocutionary force is expressed by means of imperatives in instances such as have a wonderful day and have fun celebrating and by means of performative verbs such as hope and wish which signal the act of well-wishing.

Bulgarian respondents presented with these examples and their literal translation in Bulgarian point out that these wishes are too short, they use *wacmnub* instead of *vecmum* which is unusual and awkward and they lack wishes such as health, luck, love, etc. which are anticipated in Bulgarian culture. Personalized forms in the examples written in English by Bulgarians are large in number and length, exhibiting a broad scope of wishes and including long-term aspirations. For instance: *May you be blessed with time, health and a sufficient dose of luck to enjoy life, to travel or settle; to be happy. May your dreams come true one by one/May you be given more birthdays to fulfill all of your dreams/I wish you happy life and everything perfect/May your wishes come true! And when life gives you lemons make a chocolate cake bacuse you're extraordinary/I wish you health, luck and all happiness in the world!!!/I wish you luck, happiness and health for you and your family!!/Hope you enjoy your day. All the best!/May you enjoy health, joy and success to the fullest!/May the joy that you have spread in the past* 

come back to you on this day/I wish you precious moments with your family and happy hours with your children. The illocutionary force is expressed in some cases by means of optative expressions starting with may and occasionally by means of the performative verbs wish and hope. Native speakers of English presented with these examples point out that these wishes are too wordy, too sentimental, too emotional, misspelled, unusual, and that the focus extends beyond that one special day, as well as beyond the person who celebrates, with references to their family.

Distinctions in the formulaic and personalized messages in the field of wish on the event of New Year's Eve between Bulgarian and English are very similar to the ones in the same field on the occasion of birthdays. Instances in English are again short in length, narrow in scope and do not exemplify diverse language variation. Illocutionary force in formulaic expressions, which very often exemplify the wish as a whole, is expressed by means of the noun phrase *Happy New Year*, and in personalized forms it is expressed by means of optative wishes in phrases such as *may it be prosperous and full of joy*, phrases missing performative verbs such as *all the best for the new year/Safe and healthy New Year/a wonderful 2024* and expressions such as *Cheers to another great year*. Examples of the same field rendered by Bulgarians in English are again long and exhibit a higher degree of emotionality and a broad scope of wishes. There is no difference in the form between traditional formulaic expressions in English and formulaic expressions rendered in English by Bulgarians.

However, there are actually two formulaic expressions in Bulgarian, one being Честита Нова година, which, when rendered literally in English, is Congratulations on the New Year. The case is the same as with Yearum рожден ден rendered in English which, as mentioned above, is not unusual and can be considered as transition from one speech act (i.e. wish) to another (i.e. congratulation). The case with the other formulaic expression used in Bulgarian is noteworthy for it designates yet another cultural difference. The expression in question is За много години, which literally translates as For many years but actually functions as the counterpart of Many happy returns of the day, which is a formulaic expression in English used on the occasion of birthdays, and not New Year's Eve. Divergence is also present in personalized expressions such as: I wish you all the best in 2018!/I hope it will be better than 2020/Wish you to fulfill all your wishes and desires, to have the strongest health and widest smiles trough the whole year/Wish you all the best/May health be the thing you never worry about! May 2018 be full of joyful moments with family and friends, many breathtaking adventures and love to stay. Thank you for being part of my 2017/May it be a happy and healthy one! The

illocutionary force is expressed by means of optative phrases, and by means of the performative verb *wish*. English native speaker respondents point out that these wishes are too wordy, too sentimental, misspelled, and highly unusual.

#### **Conclusion**

The present paper reveals how Bulgarian speakers of English contribute to the evolving landscape of World Englishes and the global use of the English language by transferring Bulgarian cultural values and emotions in the field of wish into English. The present analysis answers the research questions addressed at the beginning through the communicative-pragmatic field approach and the cultural script approach which employs the NSM.

Some major findings can be outlined from the analysis conducted in the study. First, the transfer of cultural script is present in personalized messages reflecting the rich emotional and social values of the Bulgarian culture. Second, while women tend to be more expressive of emotions in general, there are significant cultural differences in how they express these emotions. It is evident in the appraisals of female respondents who find examples of well-wishing written by other women on occasions such as birthdays and New Year's Eve to be too wordy and overly sentimental. Third, there is a significant difference in emotional expression between the two cultures. In Bulgarian culture, wishes typically follow a three-step pattern: a formulaic expression (step 1), followed by a personalized form of the wish in which stacking of adjectives or nouns is present (step 2) and a wish oriented towards the special occasion such as весел празник (step 3), which is optional. In contrast, the cultural script of well-wishing for English native speakers completely omits step two. The pattern of well-wishing in English is a formulaic expression (step 1) followed by a wish oriented towards the special occasion such as have a great day (step 2).

The specific methodology elaborated in pursuit of the goals of the present paper can be further used in other contrastive cross-cultural studies, expand the scope of analysis and include other languages and other social media platforms.

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