

The commercialization of speech events: the nexus of Islam and market

On the basis of my ethnographic fieldwork on religious speeches in Kyrgyzstan carried out in 2018 and 2019, I argue that in order to better understand speech performances of religious figures and religious movements we need to separate the content of a speech event from its form. The concept of form refers to various aspects of a speech event such as space, time, language, content, length, behavior of the speaker and participants that are regulated by constitutive rules, whereas the content is one aspect of a speech event. I distinguish between Islamic, secular and novel forms of speech events. I characterize, for example, the Friday *khutba* and the Friday *wa'z* as Islamic forms of speech events. There are, however, seminars and lectures organized by religious figures that are secular in form but are religious in content.

The separation of the form from the content of a speech event allows us to see how some religious figures strategically adopt and employ secular forms of speech events to make claims to authority or reach out to a secularly inclined public that might not be attracted to events organized in accordance with religious forms. This separation further explains why it is appropriate for religious figures to charge a fee for speech events like seminars and lectures that have secular forms, whereas it is unacceptable to charge a fee for the Friday *khutba* or the Friday *wa'z*.

To make my points more tangible, I will present two case studies of Myktybek Arstanbek and Shamil Alyautdinov. The former is a journalist who turned pious. The latter is the imam-khatib of the Friday mosque in Moscow and widely popular in Kyrgyzstan for organizing seminars aimed at personal development. Both of them organize seminars and lectures and charge fees for them. After the discussion of these two ethnographic cases, I elaborate on how the separation of the form from the content enables a deeper insight into the nexus of Islam and market.

Short biography

Gulniza Taalaibekova is a doctoral student at Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, Germany. She submitted her dissertation titled "Speech Form as a Resource: Islamic Forms, Secular Forms, and Novel Forms of Speech Events in Kyrgyzstan" in July 2023. Within the framework of her thesis, she deals with the role and impact of various forms of speech events and their medialization and commercialization in bringing about cultural and social changes in Kyrgyzstan. Before embarking on her PhD research in 2017, she studied at Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen to obtain her MA degree and conducted research in Armenia. She earned her BA in Anthropology from American University of Central Asia in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan in 2015.