

## THE EMERGENCE OF THE ETHNOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON THE LEXEME “WATER” IN CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL LINGUISTICS

**Mahliyo Ilhom qizi Hayitova**

PhD Student, Samarkand State University

[mahliyohayitova96@gmail.com](mailto:mahliyohayitova96@gmail.com)

### Annotation

Linguistics of the 20th and 21st centuries is characterized by a great interest in the study of the human factor in language, which led to a change in the scientific paradigm of linguistic research. This new scientific paradigm paved the way for a large-scale analysis of the language system from an anthropocentric point of view. The anthropocentric paradigm, which emerged in the last quarter of the 20th century, is considered a fundamental turning point in linguistics, and many studies are being conducted in this regard. Each language unit that exists in the language is being studied from only one point of view - from the point of view of human thinking.

The emergence of a new theory in modern linguistics is inextricably linked with the study of the factor of the speaker. The emergence of the anthropocentric turn in linguistics put aside the structuralism principle of language research "in itself and for itself" and focused the main attention on the individual factor. Now every unit in the language, every event is analyzed only from the point of view of the human factor.

**Keywords: anthropocentric theory, language and thought, lexeme “water”, concept.**

### Аннотация

Языкознание XX и XXI веков характеризуется большим интересом к изучению человеческого фактора в языке, что привело к изменению научной парадигмы лингвистических исследований. Эта новая научная парадигма проложила путь к масштабному анализу языковой системы с антропоцентрической точки зрения. Антропоцентрическая парадигма, возникшая в последней четверти XX века, считается фундаментальным поворотным моментом в лингвистике, и в этом направлении проводится множество исследований. Каждая языковая единица, существующая в языке, изучается только с одной точки зрения – с точки зрения человеческого мышления.

Появление новой теории в современной лингвистике неразрывно связано с изучением фактора говорящего. Появление антропоцентрического поворота в лингвистике отодвинуло в сторону принцип структурализма исследования языка «в себе и для себя» и сосредоточило основное внимание на индивидуальном факторе. Теперь

каждая единица языка, каждое событие анализируется только с точки зрения человеческого фактора.

**Ключевые слова:** антропоцентрическая теория, язык и мышление, лексема «вода», концепт.

The emergence of the anthropocentric paradigm in 21st-century modern linguistics, the increasing number of systematic scientific studies in this area, and the clarification of the conceptual foundations of this new direction have become distinctive features of contemporary linguistic research. The firm establishment of this paradigm in linguistics has prompted the process of interdisciplinary integration, resulting in the emergence of entirely new scientific fields at the intersection of traditional disciplines. For instance, the intersection of literature and linguistics gave rise to *linguopoetics*, while the convergence of cultural studies and linguistics led to the development of *linguoculturology*. Similarly, the combination of information technology and linguistics has resulted in the formation of *computational linguistics*. Other hybrid disciplines, such as *sociolinguistics*, *pragmatics*, *psycholinguistics*, and *neurolinguistics*, have also emerged through the merging of two distinct scientific fields.

One of the rapidly developing new fields within contemporary linguistics is *ethnolinguistics*. In the context of growing economic-political, cultural, and scientific relations among nations, and as part of international communicative and cultural processes, a number of important linguistic issues have been brought to the forefront. These include the interrelationship between languages, linguistic culture, and the unique national features of languages, as well as the historical and cultural connections between peoples and their languages. As a result, new subfields such as *ethnolinguistics* and *linguoculturology*—situated at the intersection of linguistics and cultural studies or ethnography—have emerged, each with its own subject matter and focus of inquiry.

In our present study, we explore the ethnolinguistic aspects of the lexeme “**water**”, a concept that holds an essential place in the cultural and ethnic consciousness of many peoples. We also reflect on how this lexeme is interpreted across both related and unrelated languages.

The manner in which linguistic phenomena are reflected in human cognition, the extent to which linguistic activity is processed and perceived through human thought, and the consideration of language as a mental construct have become core concerns of modern linguistic theory. Our approach to the lexeme “*water*” is shaped by a desire to examine it through the lens of cultural cognition, with particular emphasis placed on its ethnolinguistic interpretation.

Water is one of the universal symbols that has attracted the attention of scholars across various disciplines. In the humanities, water is studied as a fundamental concept of culture from diverse

perspectives—mythological, poetic, and culturological. In addition, research has explored the presence of water in culturally significant texts, in idiomatic and metaphorical expressions used in everyday language, and in literary works. Linguistic and symbolic representations of water have also been examined extensively. As such, water, as a cultural concept, has been objectified in language and treated as a universal archetypal element of the unconscious, and has been studied across a range of disciplines including philosophy, psychology, literary studies, linguistics, cultural studies, and semiotics.

Indeed, it is difficult to conceive of any living organism that does not contain water. It is omnipresent in all things and is essential to life itself. The renowned natural scientist V.I. Vernadsky once wrote: “Natural water creates and encompasses the entire life of a human being. There is perhaps no natural substance whose role in society, in everyday life, and in human existence is so clearly defined” [3, p.7].

This observation, which has stood the test of time over millennia, continues to retain its vital significance. In truth, just as water is biologically indispensable to the structure of the human body, it also occupies a stable position in human consciousness and cognition. The ancient Greek philosopher Thales, who considered water to be the primordial substance and foundation of all existence, also affirms the validity of this perspective. Thales asserted, “Water is the beginning of everything. The Earth floats on water”. Such views reinforce the deep-rooted significance of water in the philosophical and scientific traditions of humanity.

In agrarian life, the peasant’s work revolves around the land, and the productivity of that land depends on the availability of water. The rich presence of water-related vocabulary in the Uzbek language is a direct result of the people's daily dependence on water, especially within agricultural contexts. It also reflects centuries of irrigation practices and the interaction between farmers and the land. Unsurprisingly, the Uzbek people have created numerous proverbs related to water. As Professor E. Begmatov aptly notes: “The presence or scarcity of certain types of words in a particular language is directly linked to the objective needs of the people who speak that language. These needs are determined by the natural environment, socio-economic conditions, and cultural and spiritual demands of the society” [1]. For instance, the Uzbek language is rich in terminology related to agriculture and irrigation. In contrast, the languages of peoples living in the far north have more terms associated with snow, cold, and fishing industries. Thus, the dominant occupations of a community influence the relative weight of lexical items used in its language.

When speaking about water, it is essential to recognize it as one of nature's most precious resources and miraculous phenomena. It is especially fitting to recall the poetic and emotional reflections of French writer Antoine de Saint-Exupery, who celebrated water with deep reverence: "Water! You have neither taste, nor color, nor aroma. You cannot be described. You are relished without being understood. You are not simply necessary for life – you are life itself" [1, p.7]. The famous Japanese researcher Masaru Emoto has conducted extensive experiments on water as though it were a living organism. He has emphasized that this universal and essential element – whose existence needs no justification – has the potential to help solve both global and personal issues. As human beings begin to understand the essence of water, they simultaneously begin to comprehend the essence of humanity itself. Emoto demonstrated that our thoughts, words, and emotions can influence the molecular structure of water, and thereby affect our health.

Using high-speed photography, Emoto observed that ice crystals formed in water changed shape when exposed to positive thoughts and emotions. Water from clear springs or samples that had been exposed to loving words formed bright, intricate, and colorful snowflake-like patterns. In contrast, polluted water or water exposed to negative speech and thoughts produced dull, monochromatic, and uniform patterns. Based on these experiments, Emoto published his book "*The Hidden Messages in Water*," which became a bestseller and reached millions of readers. This book has the potential to fundamentally reshape human perspectives on the world.

In world linguistics, the lexeme "water" has been extensively studied and thoroughly researched by a number of scholars from a linguistic perspective. Notably, the prominent linguist Mariya Birney conducted significant scientific research on this lexeme in her doctoral dissertation titled "*The World of Water in the Prose of I. Bunin (A Linguocognitive Analysis)*" (in Russian: "*Мир воды в прозе И.Бунина*"). She analyzes water as a general symbol and concept. "Attempts to study the phenomenon of water in the humanities outside of its relevant context have a long history and tradition. These attempts are primarily connected with studying mythological views about water as a natural phenomenon. The axiom of ancient world cosmogony includes the idea that water is the basis of all beginnings. Therefore, the world philosopher Felito Melisian interprets water as the oldest mythological prototype and the primary element of the entire world of elements" [2, pp. 31-35].

Thus, since the creation of the universe, water has been recognized as the main source of life and an inseparable part of all elements existing on Earth. From ancient times, various myths and legends have emerged as evidence of water's incomparable value. In some of these, water's creative qualities are glorified, while in others its destructive features are emphasized. Because water was regarded as a divine concept, it was associated with gods and worshipped. During times of drought,

people prayed to the water deity for the return of life-giving water. When rivers and seas overflowed their banks, they again implored the water god for help and repented for their sins. For this reason, people have always treated water and water gods with respect. Looking at history, it is evident that almost every people had their own water deities. Ancient peoples believed that water gods possessed great power and authority, governing rivers, seas, and oceans. They strongly believed that all water-related phenomena – droughts, floods, and storms – occurred solely at the will of these deities. For example, in Greek mythology, Poseidon, the brother of the chief god Zeus, was considered the god of the sea and water. Similarly, in Roman mythology, the god Neptune held a special revered position as the god of water. According to ancient Celtic mythology, Lir was regarded as the god of water, and his name in the Irish language means “sea.” In Norway, Nord was considered the supreme god of fishermen and seafarers. Likewise, in ancient Norse culture, Aegir – whose name translates from Old Gothic as “water” – was also a water deity. They strongly believed that unfortunate events occurring at sea were caused by these gods. During the era of ancient kingdoms, Egyptians regarded Sobek – the crocodile-headed god – as the deity of the Nile River. Later, the god Nu embodied similar concepts and was regarded as the supreme deity of all gods. In Sumerian mythology, Enki was considered the patron of fresh water, wisdom, and magic. The ancient Sumerians believed that when strong waves or storms arose in the ocean, the god was showing his shoulders. One of the oldest Indian texts, the *Rigveda*, mentions Varuna as the god of water, lakes, rivers, oceans, and seas, stating that he ruled underwater. In the sacred Zoroastrian scripture, the *Avesta*, Anahita was regarded as the patroness of water, fertility, and health. It is noted that Zoroastrian warriors prayed to Anahita for safety and victory before going into battle. In Chinese culture, Gonggong was considered the god of water and storms, often depicted as a black dragon with a human face. In Japanese mythology, Ryujin was worshipped as the god of rain, and in some sources, he is referred to as Utatsumi. The Japanese strongly believed that this deity fulfilled people’s hopes and desires. In the legends of Polynesian and Maori peoples, the ocean god Tangaroa is mentioned, sometimes named Tangaloa or Kanaloa. Since the Maori were primarily fishermen and seafarers, they held this god in special reverence. Among the Aztec tribes, Tlaloc was regarded as the god of rain and thunder and also as the patron of rivers, lakes, and fresh water.

From the above information, it is clear that water and related phenomena and concepts have been firmly embedded in human consciousness for a very long time. In primitive times, when humans were powerless before natural phenomena, they deified everything connected with water. Water gods appeared in precisely this manner.

Linguist Mariya Birney pays special attention to the etymology of the lexeme “вода” (water) and presents several ideas on this matter. The word for water exists in various forms across different languages: in English as “water,” in Lithuanian as “vanduo,” in German as “wasser,” in Latin as “unda,” in Hindi as “uda,” and in Old Sanskrit as “udan.” Although their phonetic forms differ to some extent, they all share a common root morpheme – “wod,” which recurs in the lexemes denoting water in each of these languages. Therefore, the component “wod” can be identified as the dominant part of the word “water” in all European languages. Thus, the etymological origin of the lexeme “water” in ancient Turkic languages, similar to that in many world languages, particularly Indo-European languages, traces back historically to a single source word. Over time, due to significant migrations and the increasing divergence between peoples, differences arose in both the pronunciation and spelling of this word.

The lexeme “water” and its semantic features have been more extensively studied in Tajik linguistics. Specifically, linguist M.R. Asadova, in her scholarly work titled *“Comparative Structural-Semantic and Etymological Analysis of Geographical Terms in Tajik and English Languages,”* examines the etymological and semantic aspects of geographical terms in Tajik in comparison with English. Her dissertation also explains geographical terms formed on the basis of the lexeme “water.” In Tajik geographical terminology, simple-root words and lexemes with the same root – such as *obak* (water) – are considered, but they have different prefixes and suffixes, resulting in lexical units like *obi*, *obaki*, *zeriobi*, *nazdiobi*, and *obanbor* (meaning water, watery, underwater, water body, etc.). These are not homonymous simple-root words but are connected through word-formation relations, representing different word forms of a single lexeme formed by derivational processes [3, p. 41]. The linguist mainly studies the geographical features of water and its use in geographical terminology. She emphasizes that in Tajik, most geographical terms contain the word “water,” and its ability to form new words is very high. In particular, she identifies *obi*, *obaki*, *zeriobi*, *nazdiobi*, and *obanbor* as derivations from the Tajik root *ob*, forming cognate word groups. Although the aforementioned research does not explore the linguocultural aspects of the lexeme “water,” it attempts to fully reveal its characteristics as a terminological unit.

Another Tajik linguist, Sh. Karimov, in his doctoral dissertation titled *“Linguistic Features of Ecological Terminology in Tajik and English Languages,”* compares hydronyms found in Tajik lexicon with their counterparts in English. He also pays special attention to the etymology and study of the lexeme “water.” In the chapter *“The Main Terms Underpinning the Formation and Development of the ‘Water Ecology’ Terminological System in Tajik,”* he states the following: “Modern Tajik, like other well-developed languages, has a stable and rich lexical stock, consisting of

many terminological systems and lexical-semantic groups. The terms of the ‘water ecology’ subfield form one of the recently developed rich lexical-semantic groups. Words and phrases related to water ecology play a significant role in the formation of this terminological system. The core of this terminological system consists of terms such as “ob – water”, “dare – river”, “rud – river”, “korez – canal” and others” [4, p.80]. From these statements, it is clear that the scholar mainly focused on the terminological aspects of the lexeme “water” and studied the explanation and etymology of terms derived from it. Additionally, the linguist categorizes lexemes derived from “water” and related hydronyms into a separate lexical-semantic group and classifies them semantically. “Accordingly, this chapter attempts to trace the formation and development of the ‘water ecology’ terminological system and to connect the linguistic facts of this knowledge field’s development with extralinguistic facts. It also provides explanations of the main terms that laid the foundation for the formation and development of the ‘water ecology’ terminological system in Tajik” [4, p.9]. However, the national-cultural aspects of “water” as a cultural unit have received little attention.

At the same time, this scholarly work notes that numerous studies have been written in Tajik linguistics about the lexical and grammatical features of the term “[ab] – water,” and in particular, several dissertations have been defended on this topic. According to the linguist, the earliest views on this subject were expressed in the Middle Ages. Scientific works from that period also included interpretations of the word “ob [ab] – water” and compound words formed with its help. One such work is *Al-muam* by Shams Qays Roziy, written in the 13th century, which reflects the main methods of word formation in the Tajik language. Moreover, this work used productive word-formation models to analyze the terminology of specific fields of knowledge at that time. One of the relatively productive models was word formation using the word “ob – water”. Shams Qays Roziy discussed the role and place of word-forming elements or affixes in the creation of terminological units related to “ob”, providing several characteristic examples containing the element “ob”, such as: “gulob”, “dulob”, “kulob”, “selob”, “g’arqob”, “girdob”, “zahob”, “sarob”, “bunob”, “sherob”, “poyonob”, “tezob”, “qorob”, “zardob”, “xunob”, “simob”, “sapedob”, “xushob”, “dushob”, “kitob”, “kazob”, “simob”, “panirob” and others. Thus, the creation of new simple and compound words based on the lexeme for water attracted scholars’ attention as early as the Middle Ages.

It should be specially noted that most of the Tajik words used by Shams Qays Roziy in his work still exist today as compound words with the same meanings used in the Middle Ages. In M.N. Qosimova’s work *“Ob in Ferdowsi’s Shahnama”* the structural and semantic features of the lexeme “ob” (water) and its use in compound words, as well as phraseological units formed on this basis, have been analyzed. Similarly, Tajik linguists M.Muhammadiyev, X.Majidov, and X.Talbakova have

also paid particular attention to the interpretation and study of the modern Tajik word “ob”. The well-known writer Sadriddin Ayni’s scholarly works also contain many terms and compounds related to the lexeme “water”. Another source introducing us to the use of the word “ob” (water) in Tajik compound and phraseological units is the article *“On the Word “Water” in the Modern Tajik Language”* by Professor D.T. Tojiyev. It should be especially emphasized that the word “water” was specifically studied in the Noqardosh languages of the Persian-Tajik group. This is Tojiyev’s work written in Russian. In this work, Tojiyev compares Persian-Tajik language materials with Russian words related to water and describes the lexical-semantic and word-formation features of the Tajik word “ob (water)”. He writes the following about the meanings of the word “ob”: “The word *ob* has entered the core vocabulary of the language since ancient times, serving as a foundation for enriching the basic vocabulary of the Tajik language by creating a large number of words, phrases and terms. The figurative use of the Old Persian word *ar* (water) was entirely based on objective linguistic laws, intensifying the meaning of brightness” [1, p.17]. Additionally, in his research, D.T. Tojiyev notes that the Tajik word “ob” forms numerous phraseological units together with somatic words such as eye, mouth, and nose. He thoroughly examines the semantics of the lexeme “ob” and its use in compounds, comparing them, where possible, with Russian phraseological units. Tojiyev’s scholarly work gathers such rich, diverse, and unique material that it is impossible to ignore even the smallest details. The abundance and uniqueness of this information demonstrate the immense and unparalleled role water has played in the lives of the Tajik people. Water is not only a source for quenching thirst, irrigation, and the main resource of life but also a symbol and source of prosperity and happiness. For example, the scholar highlights another aspect embedded in Tajik cultural consciousness — the belief that if water appears in a dream, good fortune will surely follow. This alone indicates that from the earliest notions connected to water, it was primarily seen as a symbol of goodness.

The scholar also notes that in Tajik, there are many metaphorical phraseological units formed from auxiliary verbs combined with the word for water, such as “ob kardan” (to water, to irrigate), “ob shudan” (to become water), “ob karda xo‘rdan” (to drink water) [5, p.123]. In these units, we observe various semantic nuances of the lexeme “water”. Another polysemantic feature of the word “water” is its ability to be used for any liquid. D.T. Tojiyev supports this idea with examples such as apple juice (apple water), pomegranate juice (pomegranate water), broth (soup water) and wine (grape water). Here, the lexeme “water” moves far from its dictionary definition, expanding its semantic range and displaying polysemy. Thus, this term is not used solely for the liquid that quenches thirst. In contexts where it co-occurs with other words, it goes beyond its original meaning boundaries.



In general, the lexeme “water” has been studied more extensively in Tajik linguistics both as a term and as a linguocultural or ethnolinguistic unit, with research in this field having started many years ago. Most of the studies conducted so far have analyzed the lexeme “water” primarily as a terminological unit, paying little attention to its ethnolinguistic aspects. Nevertheless, these early scientific investigations deserve recognition as pioneering works in the field. At the same time, there is hardly any branch of linguistics that has not studied water or addressed its linguistic features. In every national linguistics tradition, the lexical-semantic, stylistic, and linguopoetic properties of the lexeme “water” have been thoroughly examined and researched.

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