Western European Journal of Linguistics and Education
Volume 3, Issue 12, December 2025
https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/2
ISSN (E): 2942-190X Open Access| Peer Reviewed
This article/work is licensed under CC Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0

THE RITUAL-MYTHOLOGICAL LAYER OF THE CONCEPT "WATER" AND ITS LINGUISTIC EXPRESSION

Mominova Masuma Golib qizi
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philological Sciences

Abstract

The article examines the ritual-mythological layer of the concept "water" (*suv*) in the Uzbek language and its linguistic expression. The Old Turkic notion of *yer sub*, the image of Anahita, the Zoroastrian goddess of water, rain-calling songs, and water rituals associated with the life cycle and everyday life are studied in relation to linguistic units. Drawing on the units *tushni suvga aytmoq*, *suvi to'kilgan*, *suv urmoq* and *yer-suv*, as well as the proverb *Yaxshilik qil, suvga tashla* 'Do good and cast it into the water', the article proposes a three-stage model of the transition from ritual to phraseological unit: sacred ritual — everyday custom — phraseological unit with a figurative meaning. It is shown that in the course of desacralisation the meaning of a unit changes in three directions: a reversal of evaluative polarity, the retention of a value-laden meaning, and a shift towards a technical, everyday meaning.
Keywords: concept "water", ritual, mythology, cultural code, phraseological unit, desacralisation, *yer sub*, rain-calling, Uzbek language.

Annotatsiya

Maqolada o'zbek tilida "suv" konseptining marosimiy-mifologik qatlami va uning lisoniy ifodasi tahlil qilinadi. Qadimgi turkiy *yer sub* tushunchasi, zardushtiylikdagi suv ma'budasi Anaxita obrazi, yomg'ir chaqirish qo'shiqlari hamda hayotiy sikl va maishiy turmush bilan bog'liq suv marosimlari lisoniy birliklar bilan aloqadorlikda o'rganiladi. *Tushni suvga aytmoq*, *suvi to'kilgan*, *suv urmoq, yer-suv birliklari va "Yaxshilik qil, suvga tashla" maqoli* misolida marosimdan frazemaga o'tishning uch bosqichli modeli taklif etiladi: sakral marosim — maishiy odat — ko'chma ma'noli frazema. Desakralizatsiya jarayonida birlik ma'nosi uch yo'nalishda o'zgarishi aniqlanadi: baholovchi qutbning almashuvi, qadriyatli ma'noning saqlanishi va texnik-maishiy ma'noga aylanish.
Kalit so'zlar: "suv" konsepti, marosim, mifologiya, madaniy kod, frazema, desakralizatsiya, *yer sub*, yomg'ir chaqirish, o'zbek tili.

ОБРЯДОВО-МИФОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ ПЛАСТ КОНЦЕПТА «ВОДА» И ЕГО ЯЗЫКОВОЕ ВЫРАЖЕНИЕ

Аннотация

В статье анализируется обрядово-мифологический пласт концепта «вода» в узбекском языке и его языковое выражение. Древнетюркское понятие *yer sub*, образ зороастрийской богини вод Анахиты, песни вызывания дождя, а также обряды жизненного цикла и быта, связанные с водой, изучаются в связи с языковыми единицами. На примере единиц *tushni suvga aytmoq*, *suvi to'kilgan*, *suv urmoq, yer-suv* и пословицы *«Yaxshilik qil, suvga tashla»* предлагается трёхэтапная модель перехода от

Western European Journal of Linguistics and Education
Volume 3, Issue 12, December 2025
https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/2
ISSN (E): 2942-190X Open Access| Peer Reviewed
This article/work is licensed under CC Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0

обряда к фразеологизму: сакральный обряд — бытовой обычай — фразеологизм с переносным значением. Установлено, что в процессе десакрализации значение единицы изменяется в трёх направлениях: смена оценочного полюса, сохранение ценностного значения и переход в технико-бытовое значение.
Ключевые слова: концепт «вода», обряд, мифология, культурный код, фразеологизм, десакрализация, *yer sub*, вызывание дождя, узбекский язык.

Introduction

The most ancient layer of any concept is bound up with a people's mythological beliefs and rituals. Although this layer often exists in the minds of present-day speakers at an unconscious level, it leaves its traces in linguistic units, particularly in phraseological units and proverbs. Studying the ritual-mythological layer of a concept therefore makes it possible to explain the motivation of linguistic units, that is, why a given meaning is expressed through this particular image.

Water is one of the elements that enjoy sacred status in almost all cultures. Analysing the symbolic meanings of water, the historian of religious ideas M. Eliade showed that across different religious systems it performs the same function as a means of purification, renewal and rebirth [12, pp. 188–215]. In Uzbek culture, too, water has been held sacred since ancient times: the author's PhD research notes that water has long been revered and exalted in the consciousness of the Uzbek people, that it is regarded as sacred, and that in similes it serves as a symbol of purity and cleanliness [3, p. 19].

Nevertheless, the ritual-mythological motivation of linguistic units associated with the concept "water" has not yet been studied systematically. Although existing studies have noted the connection between certain phraseological units and rituals, the general regularities of the transition from ritual to phraseological unit, and the ways in which meaning changes in the course of this transition, have not been analysed in their own right.

The aim of the article is to describe the ritual-mythological layer of the concept "water", to identify its traces in linguistic units, and to propose a model of the transition from ritual to phraseological unit.

Literature review

Beliefs associated with water among the peoples of Central Asia have been widely studied in ethnography and religious studies. Describing the survivals of pre-Islamic beliefs and rituals among the Uzbeks of Khorezm, G.P. Snesarev also discussed customs related to the water cult [11]. A. Mavlanov and S. Mirzohidov note that in the ancient beliefs of the Uzbeks of the Fergana Valley water was regarded as sacred and as possessing the power to protect against calamity and death; that among the ancient Turks the spirit of earth and water was called *Yer-Sub*; and that the Kultegin inscriptions mention the "sacred earth-water" of the Turks [13].

In the Zoroastrian tradition, water had a goddess of its own. A. Fayziyev and G. Murodova describe Anahita as the goddess "ensuring the abundance of water" in Zoroastrianism and point out that a figurine of Anahita, the goddess of fertility and water, was found at the Katqal'a site in Khorezm [1, p. 398].

In Uzbek folklore studies, the image of water and the ritual songs associated with it have also been investigated. Sh. Turdimov showed that in folk songs water carries positive evaluations, as a life-giving force, a protector of the world of the living and a means of purification, as well as negative ones such as flood, danger and fear [8, p. 110; 3, p. 19]. Among the samples of oral folk art, M. Raxmatova mentions "the texts of ancient chants and songs performed to call rain, to call the wind and to stop it" [7, p. 631]. Analysing the children's rain-calling chant *Yomg'ir*

Western European Journal of Linguistics and Education
Volume 3, Issue 12, December 2025
https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/2
ISSN (E): 2942-190X Open Access| Peer Reviewed
This article/work is licensed under CC Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0

yog'aloq 'Rain, come pouring', Z. Muradova demonstrated that the image of spring rain is inseparable from notions of the purification and renewal of nature [14].

From a linguistic perspective, this issue was partly addressed in the author's PhD research. It showed that the phraseological unit *tushni suvga aytmoq*, literally 'to tell one's dream to water', expresses the ethnic values of the people [3, p. 18], whereas the phraseological unit *suvi to'kilgan*, literally 'whose water has been poured', arose from the practice of purifying a person with water when seeing them off on their final journey [3, p. 19]. It was also noted that a children's game recorded in *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* reflects the features of water associated with intellect and memory [3, p. 14; 9, p. 15]. National-cultural features in phraseological units with the component "water" [4, pp. 57–67] and the function of water as a cultural code in literary texts [5, pp. 86–100] have been examined in separate articles by the author. X. Jabborov's monograph, in turn, explains phraseological combinations, proverbs and aphorisms containing the lexeme *suv* [10; 3, p. 17]. The present article generalises these observations within a comprehensive description of the ritual-mythological layer and a model of the transition from ritual to phraseological unit.

Material and methods

The research material was drawn from three groups of sources: 1) phraseological units with the component "water" recorded in the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language* [6] and in Sh. Rahmatullayev's phraseological dictionary [15]; 2) their uses in O'. Hoshimov's novel *Tushda kechgan umrlar* ('Lives Lived in a Dream') [2] and other literary texts (based on the contexts analysed in the author's PhD research [3]); 3) descriptions of rituals in ethnographic, religious-studies and folklore research [1; 7; 8; 11; 13; 14].

The study employed linguocultural analysis, etymological-motivational analysis and the comparative-historical method. For each unit, answers were sought to three questions: 1) what ritual or belief underlies the unit; 2) what function water performed in the ritual (purifying, carrying away, life-giving or protective); 3) how the meaning of the unit in the modern language has changed relative to its ritual basis. Descriptions of rituals were taken from ethnographic sources; the author assesses not their historical accuracy but their relevance to explaining the motivation of the linguistic unit.

Analysis

1. The mythological layer: the sacred functions of water

A synthesis of the sources shows that in ancient beliefs water was assigned four principal sacred functions. These functions later became the basis for the motivation of linguistic units.

Sacred function	Mythological or ritual basis	Source
Giver of life and prosperity	The *Yer-Sub* spirit among the ancient Turks; Anahita, who ensured the abundance of water, in Zoroastrianism	[13]; [1, p. 398]
Purifying	Washing the deceased and the custom of seeing them off on their final journey; purification rituals	[3, p. 19]; [12, pp. 188–215]
Carrying away	Setting a sick person's clothes adrift on running water to drive away evil spirits; telling a bad dream to water	[13]; [3, p. 18]

Western European Journal of Linguistics and Education
Volume 3, Issue 12, December 2025
https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/2
ISSN (E): 2942-190X Open Access| Peer Reviewed
This article/work is licensed under CC Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0

Sacred function	Mythological or ritual basis	Source
Protective	The belief in the power of water to protect against calamity, misfortune and death	[13]

Of these, the *carrying-away* function deserves particular attention. In shamanistic beliefs, only running water was thought capable of driving away evil spirits [13]. This belief points to an ancient distinction between still and running water. The capacity of running water to "carry away" was subsequently preserved in a number of linguistic units.

The linguistic fate of the notion *Yer-Sub* is also instructive. A unit used in Old Turkic inscriptions in the sense of 'sacred homeland, guardian spirit' [13] has survived in present-day Uzbek in the form of the paired word *yer-suv* 'land and water'. As shown in the PhD research, the lexeme *suv* forms pairs with the words *yer* 'land', *don* 'grain' and *havo* 'air' to express a generalising meaning: *yer-suv*, *suv-don*, *suv-havo* [3, p. 15]. The paired word *yer-suv*, however, has lost its sacred meaning and acquired the meaning 'property, source of livelihood'.

2. Nature rituals: rain-calling

In a society based on irrigated agriculture, precipitation was a matter of life and death. For this reason, Uzbek folklore developed chants and songs aimed at calling rain and stopping it [7, p. 631]. Among such texts, the children's chant *Yomg'ir yog'aloq* is widespread; in it, spring rain is associated with the purification and renewal of nature [14]. Uzbek folklore studies also describe the *Sust xotin* ritual, performed in times of drought, as an example of the rain-calling tradition.

From a linguistic point of view, an important feature of these ritual texts is that rain and water are conceived of as addressees, that is, as animate subjects. This is a case of the personification of a natural phenomenon, and it shares its roots with the tradition of depicting water through human qualities in proverbs such as *Suvning ko'rinishi muloyim, bag'ri tosh* 'Water looks gentle, but its heart is stone' [3, p. 19].

3. Life-cycle and household rituals

A custom related to dream interpretation. As shown in the PhD research, there used to be a custom of telling one's dreams to water: people addressed water with the wish that good dreams would come true and with the plea that bad dreams would not, but would instead be carried away by the water [3, p. 18]. The ritual is based on the *carrying-away* function of water. Later, as speakers came to regard this practice with scepticism, the phraseological unit *tushni suvga aytmoq* acquired the semes 'to indulge in idle fancies' and 'to contemplate something unachievable' [3, p. 18; 6, p. 577].

The funeral rite. The phraseological unit *suvi to'kilgan* arose from the practice of purifying a person with water when seeing them off on their final journey [3, p. 19]. In a literary text it is used as follows: *– Birinchidan, – dedi osoyishta ohangda. – Oyimlarning suvi to'kilgan uydan ketmayman* '"First of all," came the calm reply, "I will not leave the house where Mother's water was poured"' [2, p. 85]. Here, *suvi to'kilgan uy* denotes a cherished place where the last rites of a close relative were performed and which therefore cannot be abandoned. The PhD research emphasises that, although this unit displays semantics opposite to that of the phraseological unit *kindik qoni tomgan*, literally 'where one's umbilical blood was shed', i.e.

Western European Journal of Linguistics and Education
Volume 3, Issue 12, December 2025
https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/2
ISSN (E): 2942-190X Open Access| Peer Reviewed
This article/work is licensed under CC Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0

'one's birthplace', it shares with the latter the seme of 'endearment' [3, p. 19]. Thus, the two phraseological units mark the beginning (birth) and the end (death) of human life and measure the value of a place through life-cycle rituals.

Household life. The units *suv urmoq* 'to sprinkle water on the surface of bread when baking it so that it acquires a glaze' and *suvlamoq* 'to sprinkle water on the surface of bread baking in a *tandir* (clay oven) so that it acquires a glaze', both associated with bread-baking, are linked to the traditional way of life and have recently fallen into disuse [3, pp. 15–16]. In these units water performs not a sacred but a technical, everyday function.

The motif of casting into water. In the proverb *Yaxshilik qil, suvga tashla, baliq bilar, baliq bilmasa, Xoliq bilar* 'Do good and cast it into the water; the fish will know, and if the fish does not, the Creator will', casting something into the water symbolises losing sight of it and expecting nothing in return. According to the meaning of the proverb, however, what is cast into the water is not lost: the world of water (the fish) or the Creator knows of it. Here, the *carrying-away* function of water merges with a *preserving* function. This is consistent with the seme of 'storing information' attributed to water in the PhD research [3, p. 17].

4. From ritual to phraseological unit: a model of desacralisation

The units analysed make it possible to identify a general model of the transition from ritual to phraseological unit. The process comprises three stages:

1. **Sacred ritual.** Water is assigned a specific magical function: it carries away a dream, purifies the deceased or drives away an evil spirit.
2. **Everyday custom.** The ritual begins to lose its religious content and is passed down the generations as a custom that "is simply done this way".
3. **Phraseological unit with a figurative meaning.** The ritual falls out of practice, while its name continues to live on in the language in a figurative sense. When using the phraseological unit, the speaker is often unaware of its ritual basis.

In the course of desacralisation, the meaning of a unit changes in three directions:

Unit	Ritual basis	Function of water in the ritual	Present-day meaning	Direction of change
tushni suvga aytmoq	Telling a bad dream to water and asking that it be carried away	Carrying away	To indulge in idle fancies [3, p. 18]	Reversal of evaluative polarity: belief → disbelief
suvi to'kilgan (uy)	Washing the deceased and seeing them off on their final journey	Purifying	A cherished place that cannot be abandoned [3, p. 19]	Retention of the value-laden meaning
Yaxshilik qil, suvga tashla	Entrusting something to water	Carrying away and preserving	Good deeds are never lost	Retention of the value-laden meaning (didactic)
yer-suv	The *Yer-Sub* spirit, the sacred homeland [13]	Life-giving	Property, source of livelihood [3, p. 15]	Shift from a sacred to an economic meaning

Western European Journal of Linguistics and Education
Volume 3, Issue 12, December 2025
https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/2
ISSN (E): 2942-190X Open Access| Peer Reviewed
This article/work is licensed under CC Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0

Unit	Ritual basis	Function of water in the ritual	Present-day meaning	Direction of change
suv urmoq (on bread)	The tradition of bread-baking	Technical	To sprinkle water on the surface of bread [3, p. 16]	Technical, everyday meaning; the unit is falling out of use

The first direction, the **reversal of evaluative polarity**, is especially noteworthy. In the phraseological unit *tushni suvga aytmoq*, faith in the ritual has given way to the view that it is futile, and the unit has come to carry a negative epistemic evaluation ('something that will never come true'). Desacralisation, therefore, sometimes involves not only a semantic shift but also a passage from belief to doubt. In the second direction, by contrast, the value-laden content of the ritual is preserved: the combination *suvi to'kilgan uy* still expresses the high value attached to the memory of a close relative.

Results and conclusion

1. In the ritual-mythological layer of the concept "water", water is assigned four principal sacred functions: giving life and prosperity, purifying, carrying away and protecting. These functions manifest themselves in various forms in the Old Turkic notion of *Yer-Sub*, the image of Anahita in Zoroastrianism, shamanistic beliefs and the Islamic tradition of purification.
2. The sacred functions of water form the motivational basis of a number of linguistic units in Uzbek: the carrying-away function is reflected in *tushni suvga aytmoq* and *Yaxshilik qil, suvga tashla*, the purifying function in *suvi to'kilgan*, and the life-giving function in the paired word *yer-suv*.
3. The transition from ritual to phraseological unit follows a three-stage model of desacralisation: sacred ritual — everyday custom — phraseological unit with a figurative meaning. In this process, speakers gradually forget the ritual basis of the unit, while the unit itself continues to live on in the language with a new meaning.
4. In the course of desacralisation, the meaning of a unit changes in three directions: a reversal of evaluative polarity (*tushni suvga aytmoq*: belief → disbelief), the retention of a value-laden meaning (*suvi to'kilgan uy*), and a shift from a sacred meaning to an economic or technical, everyday one (*yer-suv*, *suv urmoq*).
5. The phraseological units *suvi to'kilgan* and *kindik qoni tomgan* express the two poles of the life cycle (death and birth) and form a phraseological pair that measures the value of a place through life-cycle rituals.

The findings show that the ritual-mythological layer of the concept "water" lives on in present-day Uzbek as an "unconscious memory". Future research is planned to examine the names of water-related rituals in Uzbek dialects and their phraseological traces on the basis of field data.

References

1. Fayziyev A., Murodova G. Zardushtiylikda suv hamda dehqonchilik bilan bog'liq qarashlar [Views Related to Water and Agriculture in Zoroastrianism] // *Oriental Renaissance: Innovative, Educational, Natural and Social Sciences*. 2023. Vol. 3, No. 3. Pp. 395–398.
2. Hoshimov O'. *Tushda kechgan umrlar* [Lives Lived in a Dream]. Tashkent: G'afur G'ulom Publishing House of Literature and Art, 2002.

Western European Journal of Linguistics and Education
Volume 3, Issue 12, December 2025
https://westerneuropeanstudies.com/index.php/2
ISSN (E): 2942-190X Open Access| Peer Reviewed
This article/work is licensed under CC Attribution-Non-Commercial 4.0

3. Mo‘minova M.G‘. *Suv komponentli lisoniy birliklarning lingvokulturologik xususiyatlari* [Linguocultural Features of Linguistic Units with the Component “Water”]: Abstract of the PhD dissertation in Philology. Qarshi, 2024. 53 p.
4. Mo‘minova M.G‘. Suv komponentli frazemalarda milliy-madaniy belgilar ifodasi [The Expression of National-Cultural Features in Phraseological Units with the Component “Water”] // *O‘zbekiston: til va madaniyat. Lingvistika* [Uzbekistan: Language and Culture. Linguistics]. 2024. Vol. 2 (1). Pp. 57–67.
5. Mo‘minova M.G‘. Badiiy matnda suv komponentining madaniy kod sifatidagi funksiyasi [The Function of the Water Component as a Cultural Code in Literary Text] // *O‘zbekiston: til va madaniyat. Lingvistika* [Uzbekistan: Language and Culture. Linguistics]. 2022. No. 4. Pp. 86–100.
6. *O‘zbek tilining izohli lug‘ati* [Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language]. In 5 vols. Vol. III / Ed. by A. Madvaliyev. Tashkent: O‘zbekiston milliy ensiklopediyasi, 2007.
7. Raxmatova M.O. O‘zbek xalqining folklor san’ati hamda folklor-etnografik jamoalarning musiqa san’ati rivojida tutgan o‘rni [The Folklore Art of the Uzbek People and the Role of Folklore-Ethnographic Ensembles in the Development of Musical Art] // *Scientific Progress*. 2021. Vol. 1, No. 5. Pp. 628–634.
8. Turdimov Sh. *Xalq qo‘shiqlarida ramz* [Symbol in Folk Songs]. Tashkent, 2020.
9. Abdulahatov N. et al. *Mahmud Koshg‘ariyning “Devonu lug‘otit-turk” asaridagi leksik birliklar tadqiqi* [A Study of the Lexical Units in Mahmud al-Kashgari’s “Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk”]. Tashkent: Yangi asr avlodi, 2013.
10. Jabborov X. *O‘zbek tilida suv leksemasining lug‘aviy-ma’noviy xususiyatlari* [Lexical-Semantic Features of the Lexeme “Water” in Uzbek]: Monograph. Qarshi: Nasaf, 2005. 140 p.
11. Snesarev G.P. *Relikty domusul’manskikh verovaniy i obryadov u uzbekov Khorezma* [Relics of Pre-Islamic Beliefs and Rituals among the Uzbeks of Khorezm]. Moscow: Nauka, 1969.
12. Eliade M. *Patterns in Comparative Religion* / Transl. by R. Sheed. London; New York: Sheed & Ward, 1958.
13. Mavlanov A., Mirzohidov S. The cult of water in the ancient beliefs of the Uzbeks of the Fergana Valley [Electronic resource]. URL: cyberleninka.ru
14. Muradova Z. The history of one children’s song (on the continuity of musical tradition) // *San’at*. 2009. No. 3. URL: sanat.orexca.com
15. Rahmatullayev Sh. *O‘zbek tilining frazeologik lug‘ati* [Phraseological Dictionary of the Uzbek Language]. Tashkent: Qomuslar bosh tahririyati, 1992.