

Universal and Specific Symbolic Meanings of the Lexeme Water in English, Uzbek and Russian Linguacultures

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Abstract: The present scientific article investigates phraseological units containing the lexeme «water» within English, Uzbek and Russian linguacultures, highlighting both similarities and differences in their usage and cultural significance. Phraseological units, or idiomatic expressions, often reflect the values, beliefs, and practices of a culture, making them a rich area for linguistic and cultural study. The research investigates a variety of phrases across the languages, analyzing their meanings, contexts, as well as the metaphorical implications of water as a natural element.

Key words: comparative linguistics; comparative analysis; phraseological unit; idiom; symbolic meaning; metaphor.

Introduction

Phraseological units, often referred to as idioms or fixed expressions, are essential components of language that provide insight into cultural norms, values, and thought processes. They often encapsulate wisdom, humor, and cultural identity. The present article explores phraseological units containing the lexeme “water” in English, Uzbek and Russian linguistic traditions. By examining these expressions, we can gain a deeper understanding of how different cultures perceive water’s significance in the lives of speech communities.

The Significance of Water in Linguaculture

Water, as a natural resource, holds significant importance in various cultures around the world. It symbolizes life, purity, and nourishment and plays a crucial role in both daily living and spiritual beliefs. In many societies, water is not just a physical necessity but also a cultural symbol that reflects emotional states, social relationships, and moral values.

Water in English Phraseology

In English, there are numerous idiomatic expressions that incorporate the lexeme “water”, each conveying a different meaning. Below are a few notable examples:

1. “Water under the bridge”.

This expression refers to events that have happened in the past and are no longer considered important or relevant. It conveys the idea that one should move on from past grievances: “We had our differences, but that’s water under the bridge now”.

2. “Like water off a duck’s back”.

This phrase describes a situation where criticism, advice, or other forms of pressure have no effect on a person. It suggests resilience or indifference: “He ignores all the negative comments; they just roll off him like water off a duck’s back.”

3. “Blood is thicker than water”.

This proverb emphasizes that familial bonds are stronger than other relationships. The phrase suggests that family loyalty should prevail over friendships: “No matter what happens, remember that blood is thicker than water”.

4. “Throw cold water on something”.

This expression means to discourage or dampen enthusiasm for an idea or plan: “I was excited about the project, but she threw cold water on it with her pessimistic comments”.

5. “Where there’s water, there’s life”.

This phrase signifies the importance of water for survival and flourishing in various contexts, be it in nature, business, or personal life.

Methodology

Water in Uzbek Phraseology

Uzbek culture, rooted in its historical and geographical contexts, also contains various idiomatic expressions featuring water. These phrases often reflect the agrarian lifestyle and the significance of water in the arid regions of Uzbekistan. Here are a few examples:

1. “Suvni ko‘rmagan” (Literally: “One who has not seen water”)

This phrase describes someone who is inexperienced or unaware, yet it can also be used humorously to refer to someone who is naïve: “He acted like a child; he really is a suvni ko‘rmagan.”

2. “Suv o‘z ichida” (Literally: “Water has its own character”)

This expression suggests that a person’s true nature will eventually reveal itself, much like how water flows according to its own path: “Don’t rush to judge him; suv o‘z ichida.”

3. “Suvdan quruq sayr etmoq” (Literally: “To stroll without water”)

This phrase is used to describe someone who is engaged in a fruitless or meaningless endeavor: “They’re planning to renovate that building, but it feels like they’re suvdan quruq sayr etmoq.”

4. “Suvdan pastda qolmoq” (Literally: “To remain underwater”)

This expression describes a situation where someone fails or is overwhelmed by circumstances, akin to drowning in challenges: “After that economic crisis, many businesses are suvdan pastda qolmoq.”

5. “Suv bir, to‘g‘ri bir” (Literally: “Water is one, the path is clear”)

This phrase conveys the idea that clarity and harmony lead to a fruitful outcome. It emphasizes the importance of transparency in relationships and decisions: “We need to be honest with each other; remember, suv bir, to‘g‘ri bir.”

Literature review

Water in Russian Phraseology

Water – is a significant and multifaceted symbol in Russian phraseology, often embodying various cultural, emotional, and philosophical connotations. Below are some aspects of how water is represented in Russian expressions and idioms:

1. Не спросившись броду, не суйся в воду! Не мечись в воду, не пытавшись броду! Не знаявши (Не спросись) броду, не мечись в воду! Не испытав броду, да по уши в воду! (“Without asking the ford, don’t stick your nose into the water”);

2. Тихая вода берега подмывает (и плотины рвет). (“The calm water washes away the shores (and breaks the dams”);
3. Мелкая река, да круты берега. (“A small river, but steep banks”);
4. Вода всё кроет, да берег роет (“The water covers everything, and digs the shore”).

Comparative Analysis

Water is a fundamental element that plays an essential role in the lives of all living beings, and its symbolic meanings often extend beyond its physical properties. In linguistic and cultural studies, the lexeme “water” can manifest universal themes as well as specific cultural connotations. The undertaken comparative analysis explores various symbolic meanings of “water” in English, Uzbek, and Russian linguacultures, highlighting both common features as well as differences.

Results and discussion

Universal Symbolic Meanings of Water

1. ***Life and Vitality.*** Water is considered essential for life, representing nourishment, vitality, fertility.

In English the phrase “water of life” is used metaphorically to denote something essential for existence. In Uzbek The saying “Suv – hayot” (Water is life) emphasizes the importance of water in sustaining life.

2. In Russian «Вода – источник жизни» (“Water is the source of life”) highlights the fundamental role of water in living organisms.

Purity and Cleansing. Water is often associated with cleansing, both physical and spiritual. In Baptism and Christian traditions water symbolizes the washing away of sins and the start of a new life. The ritual of ablution (wudu) in Islam involves washing the hands, face, and feet prior to prayer, symbolizing spiritual cleanliness. In Russian Orthodox tradition, holy water is used in various ceremonies to bless and purify: «смыть все грехи» (“to wash away sins”) underlines water’s cleansing power.

3. ***Healing and Restoration.*** Water is often seen as a source of healing, both physical and spiritual. The following set expressions reflect the belief in water’s healing properties:

In Russian: «как с гуся вода, с лебедя вода, а с тебя, мое дитятко, вся худоба»; «с гуся вода, с тебя худоба, на пустой лес, на большую воду» (“be (like) water off a duck’s back”); «Будь здорова, как вода, богата, как земля, плодовита, как свинья» (“Be healthy like water, rich like land, fertile like a pig”).

4. ***Transformation and Change.*** Water can take different forms (liquid, ice, vapour), symbolizing change and transformation. In English the phrase “go with the flow” reflects adaptability and acceptance of changes in life. In Uzbek the proverb “Suv qaror qilmas” (“Water does not settle”), suggesting that like water, one must keep moving and adapting.

The Russian proverb «Вода все смоет» (“Water will wash everything away”) represents the idea that time and circumstances can change situations significantly.

The following proverbs emphasise the idea of everchanging water, its instability and unsteadiness:

- «В одну воду нельзя войти дважды» (“You can’t step into the same water twice”);
- «Под лежачий камень вода не течёт, а под катящийся – не успевает» (“Water does not flow under a lying stone, but under a rolling stone it does not have time”);
- «По которой воде плыть, ту воду и пить» (“On which water to swim, that water to drink”);
- «Если вода не течет за тобою, иди ты за водою» (“If the water does not follow you, follow the water”).

5. Emotion and Intuition. Water is often connected to emotions, intuition, and the subconscious. In English the collocation “a flood of emotions” expresses overwhelming feelings, emphasizing emotional depth. In Uzbek the set-expression “Suv kabi his-tuyg'u” (“Feelings like water”) indicates the fluidity and sometimes unpredictability of emotions. The Russian trite simile «слезы, как вода» (“Tears are like water”) signifies the expression of deep sorrow or emotion.
6. Mystery and the Unknown. Water often symbolizes the unknown, the subconscious, or mystery due to its depth and fluidity.

English: The phrase “deep waters” can refer to complex emotional issues or situations that are difficult to understand.

Uzbek: “Suvosti sir” (“Water is a mystery”) reflects the idea that water has hidden depths, just like human emotions and thoughts.

Russian: «Сквозь глубину воды что-то таится» (“Something is hidden beneath the depth of water”) suggests the mystery and secrets that water can symbolize.

In English and Russian phraseological funds there exist full or partial equivalents underlining the symbolic meaning of water as *something mysterious, unfathomable, difficult to understand*:

- “No safe wading in an unknown water (wade not in unknown waters)” – «Не зная броду, не суйся в воду»;
- “He knows the water the best who has waded through it” – «Тот знает реку лучше всех, кто прошел ее вброд»;
- “Much water runs by the mill that the miller knows not of” – «Мы многое не знаем из того, что происходит вокруг нас»;
- “Still waters run deep (Still waters have deep bottoms)” – «В тихом омуте черти водятся (Тихие воды глубоки)».

7. ***Freedom and Flexibility***. Water’s ability to take any shape symbolizes freedom and adaptability.

In English: The expression “to be like water” means to adapt to one’s surroundings or circumstances fluidly.

In Uzbek: “Suvdekim, biror joyga qo'y!” (“Like water, go wherever you are placed”) reflects the value of being adaptable and flexible.

In Russian the proverbs «Как вода, которая всегда находит свой путь» (“Like water, which always finds its way”) and «Бывает порою, течет и вода горою» (“It happens sometimes that water flows like a mountain”) emphasize resilience and adaptability; the sayings «Тихая вода роет глубоко» (“Still water digs deep”); «Тихая вода берега подмывает» (“The calm water washes away the shore”) underline its powerful and stubborn nature.

Ethnospecific Symbolic Meanings of Water

In English phraseology Water is described as *something valuable and essential, indispensable for life*:

- “We never know the value of water till the well is dry” – «что имеем, не храним, потерявши плачем»;
- “Stolen waters are sweet” – «запретный плод сладок».
- On the other hand an excess of something valuable can lead to tragic and dire consequences:
- “Too much water drowned the miller” – «хорошенького понемножку».

In English phraseological units that describe success in life by analogy with the operation of a windmill, water symbolizes ***good luck***: luck is necessary in life just as water is necessary for the operation of a mill:

- “All water runs to his mill” – «ему всё удается, ему исключительно везёт»;

- “To draw water to one’s mill” – «лить воду на свою собственную мельницу»;
- “To draw water to somebody’s mill” – «лить воду на чью-либо мельницу».

Water can represent **danger**, particularly in contexts of floods, storms, or turbulent seas.

English: “Caught in the crossfire of water” might refer to being overwhelmed by circumstances, like being caught in a flood.

Uzbek: “Suv – dardimizga daryo” (“Water is a river to our troubles”); “Suv baland kelsa, jiyda almaz bo’ladi” (“If the water rises high, the fruit will not be saved”) suggests that danger increases with excess.

Russian: «Вода – это жизнь, но она может быть и смертью» (“Water is life, but it can also be death”) acknowledges how water can become dangerous, especially during natural disasters.

The analysis of the factual material proves that phraseological units highlighting the symbolic meaning of **danger**, **anxiety**, **worry** are more numerous in English rather than in Russian or Uzbek:

- “to be in hot water (to get into hot water)” – “to be in or get into a difficult situation in which you are in danger of being criticized or punished”;
- “to be in deep water (to get into deep water)” – “to be in or get into serious trouble”;
- “to keep one’s head above water” – “to avoid getting into difficulties; used especially to talk about business”; Russian equivalent «держаться на плаву».

Water may also symbolize **something disturbing and threatening**, as in “troubled waters” – Russian equivalent «мутная вода». It can be illustrated by a number of phraseological units and proverbs in English and Russian: “to pour oil on troubles waters” – « успокаивать волнение, действовать успокаивающе»; “to fish in troubled waters” – «ловить рыбу в мутной воде». The opposite phraseological expressions are “to be in smooth water (to get to smooth water)” – «выбраться из затруднений», whereas “smooth water” is an equivalent to «тихая пристань».

In Russian linguaculture water is metaphorically presented as **a very powerful element**: «Вода всему господин: воды и огонь боится» (“Water is the master of everything: and fire is afraid of water”); **freedom-loving**: «И царь воды не умёт» (“And a tsar will not stop water”), and **unpredictable** «Богатство – вода: пришла и ушла» (“Wealth is water: it came and went”). On the other hand, the fact that in Russian “water” rhymes with the word “trouble” («вода – беда»), “the sea” rhymes with the word “grief” («море – горе») is reflected in the phraseological fund: «Беда, что вода, – нечаянно на двор придет» (“The trouble is that water will accidentally come into the yard”), «Дале моря – меньше горя. Море, что горе: и берегов не видно» (“Farther from the sea there is less grief. The sea is like grief: and the shores are not visible”), «Всегда жди беды от большой воды» (“Always expect trouble from big water”), «С гор вода налегла – и речки помутились» (“The water came down from the mountains and the rivers became muddy”), «Лучше хлеб с водою, чем пирог с бедою» (“Better bread and water than pie with misfortune”).

Conclusion

The exploration of phraseological units featuring water in English and Uzbek, Russian linguacultures reveals the deep connections among language, culture, and the environment. Water serves not only as a vital resource but also as a potent symbol of human experience and emotion. By understanding these phrases, we can appreciate the nuanced ways in which different cultures conceptualize and communicate fundamental truths about life. Therefore, examining language through the lens of idioms can enrich our cultural awareness and foster cross-cultural understanding. The lexeme *water* holds a profound and universal significance across English, Uzbek, and Russian linguacultures, symbolizing life, purity, renewal, and continuity. These shared meanings reflect humanity's collective experience and dependence on water as an essential element of existence. However, the symbolic interpretations of *water* also exhibit cultural specificity shaped by the unique histories, beliefs, and traditions of each society. In English linguaculture, *water* often symbolizes emotional depth, change, and fluidity, reflecting its literary and cultural prominence. In Uzbek linguaculture, *water* is deeply

tied to sustenance, blessing, and prosperity, highlighting its critical role in the region's agrarian lifestyle. Meanwhile, in Russian linguaculture, *water* conveys purification, endurance, and spirituality, often intertwined with religious and folklore traditions. This comparative analysis demonstrates that while universal themes connect diverse cultures, the symbolic meanings of *water* are also enriched by distinct cultural contexts and values. Understanding these nuances enhances cross-cultural communication and fosters a deeper appreciation of linguistic diversity and cultural interconnectedness.

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