



Article

Belarusian nationally specific image of the universal concept of water

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Abstract

This paper seeks to outline and describe the Belarusian national specificity of the universal concept of water. It explores the concept as a multilevel structure of a dynamic character capable of replenishing its content with new features in response to the challenges of contemporary life. The study comprises several types of data: lexicographical, corpus data and publicistic materials (newspaper articles, national reports). The research presents the interaction of ecological and cognitive approaches to language. The linguistic methods and procedures applied in the article are the dictionary definitions analyses, the contextual, semantic, conceptual analyses, the observation, interpretation, classification, systematization, and description. The results of the empirical material analysis show that the nucleus of the concept represented by the lexeme *vada* ‘water’ gives an idea of a typical member of the category and can be regarded as a universal component of the concept. The peripheral elements reveal a broad semantic cognitive potential of Belarusian water. The concept under study transfers the traditional ecological issues of “people–water” interrelation (the idea of life-giving, purity, honesty, natural beauty, danger and difficulties) as well as the idea of continuous sustainable development of society (life of people after the Chernobyl tragedy, responsible use of water and conservation of water objects). Ecological safety development of the country is a national priority striving to take a more central place in the concept sphere of Belarusian society.

Keywords: sustainable development, water, concept structure

1. Introduction

Modern science tends to develop the interrelation of various branches of scientific

knowledge. In the field of humanities, this synthesis has found its manifestation in the investigations of language in the ecological and cognitive aspects.

One of the actively developing areas of contemporary linguistics — cognitive semantics — deals with the word meaning as a multilevel concept. It is the meaning of the word that is the link between language and cognition. Word meanings reflect invisible cognitive structures that individuals use unconsciously when building their communication with other community members, and when treating the physical environment around them.

The hallmark of cognitive semantics is a dynamic approach to meaning. According to Boldyriev (2001), linguistic meanings convey only a part of our knowledge about the world. The bulk of knowledge is stored in our consciousness in the form of various mental structures — concepts. The latter is able to include new characteristics¹.

Meanings of linguistic units are determined by a person's cognitive abilities. Word meanings are formed in the process of cognition as they are not ready-made structures. From the point of view of cognitive linguistics, cognition is a process of generating and transforming concepts (meanings). Therefore, a concept is the most important object of cognitive semantics research. A concept is a mental entity; a structural element of the mental system which arises as a result of information processing, and reflects, in a generalized form, the knowledge and experience of a person, and is represented by language means.

A point that needs to be mentioned here is that the “psychic unity of mankind” is provided by a set of some fundamental concepts. Wierzbicka (1996), who took a keen interest in the topic of conceptual analyses, wrote that linguistic and cultural systems differ greatly from each other, but there are semantic and lexical universals that indicate a common conceptual ground on which human language, thinking and culture are based.

Language is an integral part of any national culture. The acquaintance with the culture necessarily presupposes the study of its material component (historical, geographical, economic and other determinants) as well as the penetration into the way of national thinking; the aspiration to look at the world from the point of view of native speakers of language and culture.

Linguistic phenomena can uncover human cognitive abilities (Chomsky, 1972, p. 6). Therefore, language is considered a front-page means of access to invisible cognitive structures of human thinking. Study of linguistic phenomena allows us to obtain reliable information about the universal and national ethnic features of the worldview. The most important concepts are encoded in language. In each language, hence, in the collective linguistic conscience, there is a nationally specific image of a universal (fundamental) concept.

¹ The translation from Russian and Belarusian into English was done by the author of the article with the help of several dictionaries: Glosbe (<https://en.glosbe.com/be/en>), Multitran (<https://www.multitran.com>), New large English-Russian dictionary in three volumes (<https://eng-rus.slovaronline.com>), and Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (<https://elt.oup.com/catalogue/items/global/dictionaries/oxford-advanced-learners-dictionary>).

A theory of conceptual analysis deals with a concept as a multi-faceted mental phenomenon. It means that the concept structure covers the content of a word, as well as all associations and background knowledge about the word.

The object of the present study — WATER — is clearly a fascinating topic for numerous reasons: it is one of the crucially important concepts in human consciousness and culture; it is a phenomenon that is still alive not only in our subconscious (the lexeme *water* as a representative of the above-mentioned concept will never be moved from the active vocabulary of a native speaker to the passive one), but also in interdisciplinary research (linguistics, philosophy, science, statistics, social studies, environmental studies, etc.). This circumstance emphasizes the relevance of the concept for native speakers of the Belarusian language and the topicality of our research.

The concept of WATER is a type of verbalized concept as it has various linguistic means of representation in different languages. If we present the concept as a circle, the center of this circle (concept nucleus) will be occupied by the lexical meaning (semantic content) of the word representing the concept.

Lexicographic data for the word *water* in different languages show that the basic meanings have much in common. In some Slavic (Russian, Ukrainian, Belarusian, Polish) and Germanic languages (English, German), the core of the WATER concept is generally presented as follows: *a colorless liquid without smell or taste that falls as rain; is in lakes, rivers and seas; and is used for drinking and washing*. Around the nucleus (on the periphery), we find equally important components introduced by cultural and historical traditions, socio-political, economic, geographical and other determinants, constituting national and ethnic features of the universal concept.

The present research was inspired by the fact that while the historical experience of Belarusians is to some extent available², there has not been any major publication that would provide a comprehensive description of a universal concept of WATER with regard to the Belarusian national mentality. The study will shed light on the traditional ecological knowledge embedded in the local language³.

To plunge into the fascinating world of water and to establish the ethnic cultural specificity of this universal concept in the Belarusian language, it is necessary to analyze lexicographic data applying dictionary definitions analyses, to identify all possible WATER associations using the personal experience of the author and the results of a previous study. To see the cultural background of the concept, we need to carry out content analyses of contexts fixing the concept in question. Linguistic interpretation of the concept structure will help model the fragment of the Belarusian worldview.

² Koval, V. I. (2016). *Mifologičeskije verovanija vostočnych slavjan*. GGU im. F. Skoriny; Maslova, V. A. (2004). *Kognitivnaja lingvistika*. TetraSystems.

³ In the UNESCO Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, the Belarusian language is stated to be vulnerable because of a small percentage of people using it in everyday communication.

2. WATER concept: structure and linguistic representation

In the Belarusian language, the concept of WATER is represented by the word *vada* ‘water’. The dictionary definition of the word *water* gives an ordinary everyday idea of the concept (Skarnik, 2021)⁴: A transparent, colorless liquid that forms streams, rivers, lakes, seas and is a chemical compound of hydrogen with oxygen // Water mass // Drink, technical solution // Water — in the meaning of “mineral waters”. This is how we understand the meaning of *water* when we see or hear the word. Thus, the core or semantic nucleus of the concept reflects the most general, essential features of an object or phenomenon and gives an idea of a typical member of a certain category.

The native speaker’s associations⁵ with *vada* ‘water’ are very diverse: *chystaja* ‘clean’, *prazrystaja* ‘clear’, *kliuchavaya* ‘spring’, *balodnaja vada* ‘cold water’, *kraj rek i azjor* ‘country of rivers and lakes’, *siniaovokaja Belarus* ‘blue-eyed Belarus’, *butkaja vada* ‘fast water’, *tsiomnaja vada* ‘dark water’ in the meaning ‘a dangerous place’, *vialikaja vada* ‘big water’ in the meaning ‘a flooding’, *sviataya vada* ‘holy water’, *vierhavodka* ‘top water’, *kalodziejnaja vada* ‘well water’ in the meaning ‘clean and good for drinking’, *radniki, kluchy* ‘water sources’, *paparats’ kvietka* ‘fern-flower’, *noch na Ivava Kupalu* ‘Ivan Kupala night’⁶, *pavadki* ‘floods’, *Palessie* ‘Polesie’⁷, *baloty* ‘swamps’, *kliukva* ‘cranberry’⁸, *rusalki* ‘mermaids’, *vadzianyja* ‘mermen’⁹; books¹⁰: *Lindzi na balotsie (Ivan Mieliezh)* ‘People on the Swamp by Ivan Mieliezh’, *Drygva (Jakub Kolas)* ‘Swamps by Jakub Kolas’, *Palesskaja rabinzony (Janka Maur)* ‘Polesie Robinsons by Janka Maur’, *Dzikaje paliavannie karalia Staha (Uladzimir Karatkievich)* ‘King Stakh’s Wild Hunt by Vladimir Karatkievich’; *apieratsyja “Bagratsion”*¹¹ ‘a military operation “Bagration”’.

The associations show that the basic meaning of *water* (the nucleus of the concept) does not cover the entire spectrum of knowledge about the object in question. Around the nucleus, on the periphery, vivid ethnic cultural features (cultural background, national values and experience) are grouped, which are lexically realized in phraseology.

Analyses of phraseological units given in dictionaries (Skarnik, 2021; *Elektronnaja Encykłapiedyja*, 2021) show that the concept of WATER in the conscience of Belarusians

⁴ The definition was taken from *Skarnik*, a modern electronic dictionary based on the Belarusian Dictionary of 1984 in 5 V-s/ ed. K. Krapiva, and translated into the English language.

⁵ The associations come from the personal experience of the author (a native speaker of the Belarusian language) and show the results of a previous study. One hundred native speakers of different social groups (professors, students, teachers, senior schoolchildren, white- and blue-color workers) gave their associations with *water*.

⁶ There is an old belief that on the night of Ivan Kupala (celebrated in July) a girl who found a fern-flower would become happy. Fern-flowers are commonly found near water.

⁷ The territory with a great number of rivers, lakes and swamps.

⁸ Berries that grow in wetlands.

⁹ Fairytale characters living in lakes in forests.

¹⁰ Descriptions of people’s lifestyle in relation to different types of water objects occupy the central place in the narratives of Belarusian-speaking authors.

¹¹ In 1944, during the Great Patriotic War, German troops suffered the greatest defeat in the entire military history of Germany. The battle took place in Belarusian swamps. Soviet soldiers, unlike German ones, had certain devices for their tanks which facilitated a safe passage of Belarusian swamps.

covers different spheres of life¹².

People need water for life and normal functioning. A positive attitude to water is represented in a number of phraseological units: *jak ryba u vadzje* ‘as fish in water’ (to feel good as fish in water), *dobra jak z vadoju* ‘good as with water’ (to feel good as when you have enough water), *jebats’ jak z vadoju plyts’* ‘to go smoothly as water does’ (to have a comfortable trip), *zhyvaja vada* ‘life-giving water’ (water that can cure).

Water can function as a signal of troubles: *zhoutaja vada* ‘yellow water’ is a sign of eye illnesses, *tsiomnaya vada* ‘dark water’ is an attribute of a dangerous place or situation.

Family relations have a special reflection in phraseology. One can say *jak dz’vie kropli vady* ‘as two drops of water’ when someone looks like anyone else in the family. Very distant relatives can be characterized as *siomaja vada pa kisiali* ‘the seventh water on jelly’ (in the sense that relatives are so distant that can be hardly regarded as relatives).

Water phraseologisms are used to describe a person’s qualities and emotional state: *chysty jak vada* ‘clean as water’ in the meaning ‘honest’, *vady nikomu nie zamutsits’* ‘will not stir water’ in the meaning ‘will not bring any harm’, *druz’bba — I vada nie razmyje* ‘friendship — and water will not wash it away’ in the meaning ‘a very strong friendship’, *tsishej vady, nizhej travy* ‘quieter than water, lower than grass’ in the meaning ‘a very calm and peaceful person’, *u garachaj vadzje kupany* ‘washed in hot water’ in the meaning ‘a hot-tempered person’, *nabrats’ vady u rot* ‘fill the mouth with water’ in the meaning ‘a very silent person’, *vyjs’ tsi subim z vady* ‘to get out of water dry’, *jak z gusia vada* ‘like pouring water on a goose’, *pabyu u vadzje I nie mokry nidzje* ‘was in water but got out of water dry’ (three last phraseological units mean ‘get out of any situation, get away from responsibility’), *jak u vadu gliadzjets’* ‘as to look into water’ in the meaning ‘to make correct assumptions’, *jak u vadu apushchany* ‘as put into water’ in the meaning ‘very sad and disappointed’, *kipiets’ jak vada u garshku* ‘boil like water in a pot’ in the meaning ‘to be very nervous’.

Belarusian people often compare their work with water: *rabota idzje jak vada* ‘the work goes as water’ in the meaning ‘a person works slowly but very effectively’, *nasits’ u reshatsie vadu* ‘to carry water in a sieve’ in the meaning ‘to do pointless work’. If there are poor results of work, people can have only bread and water: *pasadzjets’ na hlieb I vadu* ‘to give only bread and water’, *pierabivatstva z vady na hlieb* ‘to survive only with water and bread’, *hots’ vady napisia* ‘drink some water at least’.

The topicality of WATER as one of the key concepts in Belarusian culture is undoubted since, in one form or another, it is widely represented in different types of discourse. Difficulties arise when referring this concept to the category of constantly relevant or variable elements. In our opinion, the concept in question is an example of a variable one.

Initially, the concept of WATER was based on the idea of water as a source necessary for human life. Water had a sacral meaning. In industrial society water was a resource that had to be used as much as possible to achieve certain goals. There was not too much care about water, as this natural resource was sufficient. Due to human factors (such as carbon

¹² Two hundred phraseological units with the component ‘water’ have been analyzed.

footprint, for example) and subsequent climatic changes, the resources of fresh water on Earth have been decreasing. A substantial water quality deterioration occurring between the points of supply and consumption has brought the studied concept to the fore again and made it more topical than ever.

Another spark for the study of WATER is the fact that it can be classified as a developing concept, i.e. actively used in the national concept sphere, replenishing its structure with new features representing the internship between people and challenging conditions of contemporary life.

At the beginning of the 20th century, water was clean enough and people could *napitstva rasoj* 'drink the dew', *kupatstva u rasie* 'bathe in the dew' (a metaphor), *biegats' pa luzhynab basanozh* 'run barefoot in puddles', *biegats' pad dazhdzhom* 'run in the rain' and *prynosits' vadu z raki, kab pryगतavats' ezhu* 'bring water from the river to cook food'. With the development of the industrial society, prototypical ideas about *water* started to be supplemented with new meaningful characteristics that outreach the ethnic cultural peculiarities of the concept, that is, its peripheral part, and approach the concept nucleus due to their significance both for the native speakers and the entire European community.

Probably, no one will deny that the excessive use of drinking water and other water resources, drainage of swamps, emissions of pollutants into rivers and consumer culture have a destructive impact on the natural environment leading to a reduction of biological diversity and irreversible destruction of the biosphere.

The crucial importance of water ecology for Belarusian society is seen on two levels. The government of the country launched documents meeting the requirements of the agenda for sustainable development¹³ aimed at the improvement of water resources quality in our country. Analyses of some documents show that the most discussed problems are the following:

- 1) *After-Chernobyl environment* (Chernobylskaja avarija, 1998)¹⁴: *zarazhennaja voda* 'contaminated water'; *radiatsionnyj monitoring vodnyh objektov* 'radiation monitoring of water objects'; *migratsyja Cs-137 v sostavie riechnogo stoka* 'Cs-137 migration with river runoff'; *koncentratsyja Cs-137 v povierhnostnyh vodah riek* 'concentration of Cs-137 in surface water of rivers'; *vypadienije radioaktivnyh chastits na dno vodojoma* 'sedimentation of radioactive particles at the bottom of water reservoirs'; *vynos radionuklieidov vodami riek* 'removal of radionuclides by river waters'; *Naibol'shemu radioaktivnomu*

¹³ Sustainability is a paradigm for thinking about the future in which environmental, societal and economic considerations are balanced in the pursuit of an improved quality of life (taken from: Sustainable Development <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development/what-is-esd/sd>).

¹⁴ The data come from the National Academy of Sciences report (1998) *Chernobylskaja avarija: posledstvija I ih prieodolienije* 'Chernobyl tragedy: overcoming of consequences'. The report is in Russian, and the original examples from the document are latinized from Russian.

The situation with the Belarusian language in Belarus is rather tricky. Although, there are two official languages in the Republic, the majority of official documents are printed in Russian. But the very existence of such documents, either in Russian or Belarusian, shows the awareness of the Belarusian society about the problem and the involvement in solving it.

zagriaznieniju podverglis' rieki Dniepr, Sozh, Pripiats', v mien'shej stiepieni — Nieman i Zapadnaja Dvina 'The Dnieper, Sozh and Pripiat rivers had the highest radioactive contamination, less polluted were the Neman and Western Dvina rivers.'; *Urovien' zagriaznionnosti povierhnostnyh vod sviazan s ekstremal'nymi situatsyjami (zasubi, pavodki, dozhd'i)* 'The level of surface waters pollution is associated with extreme situations (droughts, floods, rains).'

2) *Water use and recycling* (Ustojchivoje razvitije, 2012; Kontsepsyja, 2018)¹⁵: *ratsjonalnoje ispolzovanije pot'jevoj vody* 'rational use of drinking water'; *tehnicheskaja voda* 'industrial water'; *stroitel'stvo i riekonstruksyja ochistnyh sooruzhenij* 'building and reconstruction of water cleaning facilities'; *sistiema povtornogo i oborotnogo vodosnabzhenija* 'water recycling system'; *Sokrashchenije objomov potreblenija sviezhej vody v proizvodstviennom sektore I zbilishchno-kommunal'nom hozjajstvie obuslovalo snizhenije objomov sbrosov stochnyh vod v vodnyje objekty* 'A decrease in the use of fresh water in the industrial sector and housing and communal services led to a decrease in the volume of wastewater discharges into lakes and rivers.'; *V poslednije gody uspeshno rieshajetsia probljema pit'jevoj vody, priezhdie vsiego v sel'skoj miestnosti...* 'Recently the problem of drinking water has been successfully solved, primarily in rural areas....'

3) *Natural water systems*¹⁶: *zjelionyje liogkije Jevropy*¹⁷ 'green lungs of Europe'; *bolota — dom dlja zburavliej*¹⁸ 'swamps — a house for cranes'; *uhodiasbchaja voda* 'leaving water' in the meaning 'lowering groundwater level'; *ekologichieskoje samochuvstvije* 'ecological well-being'; *kachiestvo vodnyh riesursov* 'quality of water resources'; *izmienienije kolichiestva osadkov* 'changes in precipitation'; *siezonnyj diefitsyt vody* 'seasonal water shortage' (and as a result — fires, hurricanes, increase of forest pests); *vodoobrannaja zona* 'water protection zone'; *V Bielarusi prinimajutsia zhiostkije tribovanija k sodержaniju vodoobrannyh territorij, chto pozvoliajet minimizirovat' popadanije zagriazniajushchih veshchestv v podzjemnyje gorizonty, vodojomy I vodotoki* 'In Belarus rather stringent requirements to the conservation of water areas are applied which minimize the extent of underground horizons and water reservoir pollution.'; *Sozdany zapovedniki, zakazniki, natsional'nyje parki I drugije osobo obranijemyje vodnyje territorii* 'Reserves, national parks, wildlife reservations and other specially protected water areas have been created.'

¹⁵ The examples are withdrawn from the Ministry of economy report (2012) *Ustojchivoje razvitie riespubliki Belarus na principah "zjelionoj ekonomiki": natsionalnoje soobschbenije* 'Sustainable development of the Republic of Belarus on the principles of "green economy": national report'; from *Kontsepsyja natsional'noj strategii ustojchivogo razvitija Riespubliki Belarus na period do 2035 goda* (2018) 'Concept of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Belarus for the period up to 2035'. The reports are written in Russian.

¹⁶ Ibidem

¹⁷ One hectare of Belarusian peatbog cleans the air in about the same way as 13 hectares of forest.

¹⁸ Cranes live mainly in swampy areas.

3. New components of WATER concept

The three above-mentioned subtopics present the new experience brought into life by the challenges of the contemporary post-industrial world. New features find their lexical representation in texts produced by native speakers¹⁹. The periphery of the concept can be enriched with three components:

1) *Chernobyl tragedy and ecological consequences: Stan zabrudzhanastsi vady stanje viadomy paslia praviadziennia usih analizau* (Na Dniapry vyjauliena zaginulaja ryba. Zviazda // Belaruski N-Korpus) ‘The state of water pollution will be known after all the tests’; *Na shl’abu ryby sbmat pierashkod (platsiny, zabrudzhanasts’ vady)...* (Nierast lasasiovyh u Bielarusi. Zviazda // Belaruski N-Korpus) ‘There are many obstacles in the way of fish (dams, water pollution)...’; *Zhybaram garadou, zaleznyh ad vadashovishchau, ekolagi zajaul’ajuts’, sbto indeks zabrudzhanastsi rek stalichnaj voblastsi u 2012 godzje nie pagorshyusia. A jakasts’ vady, napryklad, u Zabodnij Biarezynie I takih rekah, jak Plisa i Siervach, paliapshajetsta* (Vada vysokaj jakastsi zjavitstva u bol’shastsi agragaradkou. Agientstva navinau // Belaruski N-Korpus) ‘Environmentalists inform the residents of the cities dependent on water reservoirs that the index of river pollution in the capital region in 2012 did not deteriorate, and water quality in such rivers as the Western Berezina, Plisa and Servach is improving’.

2) *Responsible consumption of water: Znizylasia, jak my uzho gavaryli, vadakarystannie ...* (Natalits’ smagu goradu. Zviazda // Belaruski N-Korpus) ‘The use of water as we have already mentioned has decreased...’; *Va usih vidah dziejnasti chalavieka utvarajutstva stsiokavyja vody, jakija nieabhodna achystsits’. PSN — geta stantsyji, achyshchal’nyja zbudavanni stsiokavyh vod, I adkazvajuts’ za achystku getyh vod* (Achyshchal’nyja zbudavanni, 2021, para. 1) ‘In all human activities, wastewater is formed that needs to be cleaned. PSN are wastewater treatment plants which are responsible for the cleaning of this water.’; *Prject dapaunijaje mierapryjemstvy ablasnoj pragramy „Chystaja vada”, nakiravanyja na ahovu vodnyh ab’jektou* (Zialiony portal. Tavarystva zialionaja sietka, 2013, para. 11) ‘The project complements the activities of the regional program “Clean Water” aimed at protecting water reservoirs’.

3) *Conservation of natural water systems: Razam z navukoutsami stvorym ekalagichnuju kartu navakollia z paznachenniem zabrudzhanastsi shkodnymi reczyvami ziamiel I vodnyh ab’jektou* (Pieradvybarchy vobraz ALENY Anisim I jaje pragrama. Nasha Niva // Belaruski N-Korpus) ‘In collaboration with scientists, we will create an ecological map of the surrounding territory where the most polluted lands and water objects will be

¹⁹ Belaruski N-Korpus and other Belarusian Internet resources have examples emphasizing the crucial importance of water issues for Belarusians.

marked.’; *Baloty Bielarusi lichatstva liogkimi Jeuropy, galounymi vytvortsami kislarodu. U zapaviedniku baloty chargujutstva z liesam, rekami I aziorami. Azioru patsihu zarastajuts’.* *Proidzje chas i azioru pieratvoratstva u sutsel’nuju bagnu. Takija zakony stvaraje sama pryroda* (Liogkija Jeuropy, 2021, para. 3) ‘The swamps of Belarus are considered to be the lungs of Europe, the main producers of oxygen. In the reserves, there are swamps interchanging with forests, rivers and lakes. The lakes are slowly getting covered with plants. It will take some time, but lakes will turn into complete swamps. These are nature’s laws.’

Participating actively in numerous programs and international fora, Belarus focuses on working out joint decisions for the sustainable functioning of aquatic ecosystems and their protection. This work in the frame of sustainable development principles (*The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* — goal 6: clean water and sanitation, goal 12: responsible consumption and production, goal 13: climate action, goal 15: life on land) finds its reflection in the linguistic worldview of Belarusians: *vykarystannie i abova vodnyh resursau* ‘water resources use and protection’, *vodnaya biaspieka krainy* ‘water security of the country’, *vada — natsyjanal’naje bagatstvie krainy* ‘water as the national wealth of the country’, *zahavannie tselasnasti ekosistem* ‘ecosystems integrity preservation’, *kantrol’ za vykarystanniem presnavodnyh resursau* ‘the use of freshwater resources control’, *stresavaja nagrazka na vodnyja resursy* ‘stress load on water resources’, *upravlennie vodnymi resursami* ‘water resources management’, *spynennie nieratsyjanal’naga vykarystannia vodnyh resursau* ‘irrational exploitation of water resources cessation’, *raspratsouka strategii vodagaspadarchaj dziejnas’tsi na mizhnarodnym, natsyjanalnym, regijanalnym i miastsovym uzrouniah* ‘development of a water management strategy at the international, national, regional and local levels’, *spraviadliwy dostup da vady* ‘equitable access to water’, *biaspieka vodnyh resursau u 21 stagodzdzzi* ‘water security in the 21st century’²⁰.

One of the latest challenges of modern life is the covid-19 situation. Access to clean water has become the key issue in following a so-called “covid ritual”. It implies following the rules of personal hygiene, which is not possible without water. It is a new issue which has not yet found its manifestation, neither in Belarusian N-Korpus nor in newspapers published in the Belarusian language. But, to our mind, the idea of “clean water in following the covid-19 ritual” should become a component of the WATER concept structure as it has crucial importance for preserving the health and life of people and maintaining sustainable development, not only in Belarus but in the whole world.

4. Conclusion

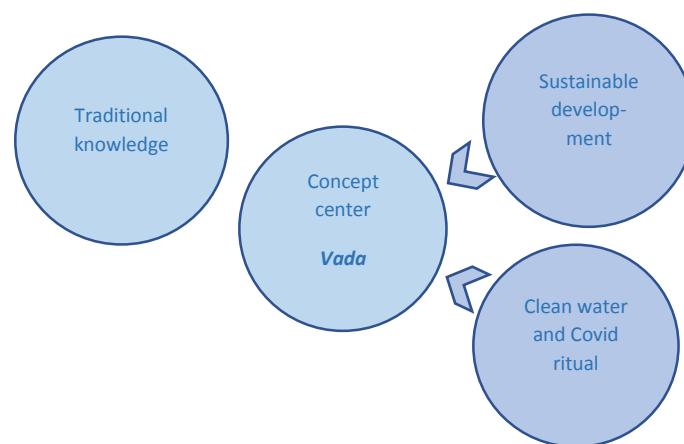
The role of the Belarusian language in responding to the above-mentioned issues opens up

²⁰ The phrases come from the newspaper “Zviazda”, the oldest Belarusian paper (Zviazda. (1998-2021). <https://zviazda.by/be>). Its daily circulation is 25,000 copies. The number of analyzed texts (2020-2021) dealing with water issues is 300.

new paces for understanding how talking about eco-responsibilities may facilitate people to steer common actions into a more balanced relationship with nature.

Empirical data analyses give grounds to say that in each language, hence, in the collective linguistic conscience, there is a nationally specific image of a universal (fundamental) concept. The interrelation between the universal and ethnic cultural components, i.e., nucleus (general typical idea) and peripheral elements (traditional knowledge and new components), of the basic human concept WATER looks as follows: The center of the concept as of a multilevel structure is covered by the lexical meaning of the word representing the concept and reflects the typical idea about the object. The peripheral elements reveal a broad semantic cognitive potential of Belarusian *water*. The concept transfers not only the phenomenon of nature but also different spheres of human life in close interrelation with *water*. The concept conveys the traditional knowledge — peculiarities of everyday life (phraseological units): family relations, work, emotional states, physical states, personal qualities of people, etc.; the idea of the beginning, of purity, honesty, natural beauty, danger, difficulties, life-giving force, protective function of water (associations) — and new features approaching the center; namely, the idea of continuous sustainable development of society (texts, reports); and clean water and Covid-19 ritual. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Concept structure



As seen from all mentioned above, the part of the concept reflecting the national cultural specificity is broader than the one representing the main feature. WATER is a dynamic concept shaping its content in response to the challenges of modern life. Ecological safety development of the country is a national priority striving to take a more central place in the concept sphere of Belarusian language native speakers.

Acknowledgements

The article was written during the fellowship at PIASt (Polish Institute for Advanced Studies, Warsaw, Poland).

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