ISSN NO: 2769-996X
November 2026

Epistemic And Evidential Functions Of Units With The "Water" Concept

Muminova Masuma Golib kizi
Associate Professor at the Shakhrisabz State Pedagogical Institute,
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Philology
ORCID: 0009-0003-2111-0460

Abstract: This article analyzes the linguistic means used to indicate the degree of certainty and the source of a speaker's knowledge within contexts involving terms related to the concept of "water" in the Uzbek language. The research material consists of excerpts taken from Uzbek media texts focused on water resources. The analysis identifies four categories of epistemic and evidential markers: direct assertion, reportative (quotative) expression, inferential expression, and reliance on general knowledge. It was found that predictions regarding water scarcity are primarily conveyed through markers of probability and references to expert sources, while ideas concerning the value of water are expressed through proverbs and aphorisms – forms of "general knowledge". Furthermore, the study demonstrates how meanings related to the degree of certainty, uncertainty, and the source of knowledge have become lexicalized within certain phraseological and paremiologically units containing the component "water".

Keywords: the concept of "water," epistemic modality, evidentiality, reportativity, inferentiality, modal word, mass media discourse, Uzbek language.

Introduction. In recent years, the limited nature of water resources has become a central topic of public discourse in Uzbekistan. In texts addressing this subject, the speaker or author does not merely provide information; they are also compelled to indicate the reliability of that information and its source – for instance, by attributing a forecast to an expert, citing statistical data from an official agency, or grounding an observation about the value of water in folk wisdom. Consequently, contexts involving linguistic units that represent the concept of "water" serve as an excellent basis for examining the categories of epistemic modality and evidentiality.

Epistemic modality reflects the speaker's judgment regarding the truth of a proposition, while evidentiality pertains to the source of knowledge upon which that judgment is based. Distinguishing between these two categories, F. Palmer notes that the former involves the speaker making a judgment about the validity of a proposition, whereas the latter indicates the evidence available to support that judgment [11, p. 8]. J. Nuyts interprets epistemic modality as an assessment of the likelihood that a given state of affairs will occur [10, p. 21], while A. Aikhenvald defines evidentiality as a linguistic category whose primary function is to specify the source of information [8, p. 3]. The purpose of this study is to identify and classify the linguistic means used to express epistemic evaluation and the source of knowledge within Uzbek mass media texts involving the concept of "water," as well as to reveal the patterns of their distribution according to the type of subject matter.

Literature analysis. In Turkic studies, the linguistic means used to express the source of knowledge in the Uzbek language are being actively investigated from the perspective of evidentiality. L. Johanson, labeling forms such as "-mIş" and "ekan" in Turkic languages as "indirective", argues that they signify that the speaker has learned of an event indirectly – through hearsay, inference, or perception [9: 61–87]. M. Üzüm notes that while the Uzbek language possesses several grammatical markers indicating the source of knowledge – such as "-ibdi", "ekan", and "emish"—their use is not mandatory for the speaker. The researcher further points out that certain newer markers (e.g., "chog'i") have evolved into units that express specific subtypes of evidentiality [12: 109]. In another study, the author argues that the markers "shekilli" and "-(i)bdi" distinguish between two types of inferential evidentiality: "-(i)bdi" denotes an inference

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(retrospective) based on traces left after an event has occurred, whereas “shekilli” denotes an inference (synchronous) based on signs present at the time of speech [13: 89].

In Uzbek linguistics, modal words are studied as a distinct part of speech. Comparing modal words in the Uzbek and Kazakh languages, N. Habibullaev states that the word “ehtimol” (perhaps/possibly) “functions as a modal word expressing uncertainty” [1: 29], while “ko‘rinadi” (it appears/seems) in Uzbek “conveys meanings of uncertainty or supposition” [1: 30]. The researcher also notes that the word “kerak” (necessary/needed) can express a sense of uncertainty [1: 29]. In their work on the pragmatics of the Uzbek language, Sh. Safarov and M. Hakimov focus specifically on the speaker’s attitude toward information and how this is expressed linguistically [6: 2].

The concept of “water” (suv) in the Uzbek language has primarily been studied from a nominative perspective. M. Numonova compared the concept of “water” in English and Uzbek based on nominative and communicative domains [4: 363–372]. M. Muminova’s research reveals that the component “water” (suv) appears in a total of 1,480 linguistic units in Uzbek – comprising 46 lexemes, 1,368-word forms, 29 phrasemes, 27 proverbs, 6 descriptive expressions, and 4 compound (paired) words [7: 20]. This study demonstrates that the semantic structure of the lexeme “water” consists of 62 semes; seven of these – “source of life”, “cleansing”, “purity”, “clarity”, “intensity”, “information storage”, and “information transmission” – are identified as active semes linked to the role of water within human society [7: 17]. Previously, Kh. Jabborov identified 30 semes for the lexeme “water” and described its function within proverbs, sayings, and idioms [15: 7, 12]. Although these studies have explored the nominative and linguacultural characteristics of units containing the component “water”, the expression of epistemic evaluation and the source of knowledge within the contexts in which they appear has not yet been the subject of specific analysis.

Research material and methods. Four texts dedicated to water resources, published in Uzbek mass media between 2023 and 2026, were selected as research material:

Conventional symbol	Source	Genre	Main topic
M1	Kun.uz, July 8, 2026	Information (based on an interview)	Forecast of water scarcity, state policy
M2	Kun.uz, October 14, 2023	Analytical article	Drinking water tariffs and conservation
M3	Yuz.uz (“New Uzbekistan”), October 29, 2025	Journalistic article	The Value of Water, Health, and Nature
M4	Spot.uz, April 28, 2023	Information	Forecast of water scarcity

From the texts, 11 contexts were extracted in which a unit related to the concept of “water” (water, water scarcity, water management, water stress, flash flood, drought) appears alongside an epistemic or evidential marker. The examples are presented using the original orthography found in the source.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. In the first stage, the epistemic and evidential markers in each context were identified. In the second stage, these markers were classified according to the source of knowledge. This classification drew upon the distinctions between direct, reportative, and inferential knowledge – standard in evidentiality research [8, p. 3] – as well as the category of “general knowledge”, which was identified during the text analysis process. In the third stage, each marker was evaluated based on its position on an epistemic scale, ranging from firm certainty and probability to the degree of responsibility attributed to the source.

Given the small size of the sample, the results are presented not as statistical generalizations, but as preliminary conclusions based on qualitative analysis. Verifying these findings against a larger corpus of material remains a task for future research.

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Analysis and Results. The extracted contexts and the epistemic-evidential markers contained within them are presented in the following table:

№	Source	Context (in the form found in the source)	Tool	Source of knowledge	Epistemic evaluation
1	M1	"…it was stated that by 2030, water scarcity in the country would reach 15 billion cubic meters."	*stated*	Reportative (named official)	Firm
2	M1	It has been reported that 4-4.2 percent of the state budget has been earmarked specifically for the water management sector this year.	*as it turns out*	Reportative (source unspecified)	Firm
3	M1	"The UN has identified Uzbekistan as one of the leading countries that has reduced water stress." (citing the minister)	*found that*	Reportative (institutional source)	Firm
4	M2	"Therefore, to ensure there is enough water for everyone, it is first necessary to conserve it on a national scale."	*therefore*	Concluding (the author's logical conclusion)	Firm
5	M2	"Only market prices can encourage, motivate, and compel people to conserve water."	*can*	Author's judgment	Probability
6	M2	"And the forecasts show just how precarious the situation is."	*forecasts … indicate*	Concluding (evidence-based)	Firm
7	M2	"However, it must be admitted that, with the current tariffs, it is not possible to foster a culture of conservation among the population."	*It must be acknowledged that*	Author's judgment	Strict (intensified)
8	M3	"We have all heard the wise saying, 'Water is life.'"	*a piece of wisdom; we have all heard it*	General knowledge	Definitive, requires no proof
9	M3	According to experts, a person needs to drink 4-5 liters of water a day to meet their daily requirements.	*it is said that …*	Reportative (double-marked)	Responsibility lies with the source
10	M3	"That is why scientists say that the frequent and abundant occurrence of mudflows is a sign of drought."	*scientists say …*	Reportative (generalized expert source)	Firm
11	M4	"Water scarcity could emerge in Uzbekistan by 2030 — experts"	*possible; — experts*	Reportative (link in the headline)	Probability

Reportative markers are the most frequent in the sample (appearing in 6 out of 11 contexts). They vary based on the specificity with which the source is identified: a named official (Example 1), an institutional source – the UN (Example 3), a generalized group of experts – specialists, scholars, or experts (Examples 9, 10, 11), and cases where the source is not specified at all – indicated by phrases like "as it turns out" (Example 2).

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A comparison between Examples 1 and 11 is particularly noteworthy. Both concern the same prediction: water scarcity by the year 2030. In Example 1, however, the prediction is presented categorically – without any markers of probability – because the source (a government minister) is both specific and authoritative. In Example 11, because the source is vague (experts), the prediction is softened by the use of a modal word indicating possibility. This phenomenon can be termed "epistemic compensation": the higher the authority of the source, the less the author relies on markers of probability, and vice versa.

The form "ekan" appears in three contexts within the sample (4, 6, and 9), yet it functions as an evidential marker in only one of them:

- **In Example 9**, "ekan" functions as a reportative marker. Although the source of information is already indicated by the phrase "according to experts", the author employs "ekan" once again at the end of the sentence. This double marking reinforces the author's stance of not assuming responsibility for the information, signaling a detached perspective toward it. M. Üzüm has noted that the use of evidential markers in the Uzbek language is not obligatory [12, p. 109]; therefore, in this instance, "ekan" is a pragmatic device chosen deliberately by the author.
- **In Example 4**, the phrase "shunday ekan" does not function as an evidential marker but rather as a logical connective, introducing a conclusion derived from preceding points.
- **In Example 6**, the form "ekanini" serves to link a subordinate complement clause to the main clause (indicating the precarious nature of the situation). Here, it does not denote a source of information; instead, it functions to nominalize the proposition.

Consequently, the mere presence of the form "ekan" does not imply an evidential meaning; its function is determined solely by its syntactic position and context. This observation highlights the necessity of manually verifying the results of automated searches when studying evidential markers in the Uzbek language using a corpus.

In the sample, the meaning of probability is expressed through the modal word "mumkin" (possible) (5: 11). N. Habibullaev identifies terms such as "ehtimol" (perhaps/likely), "ko'rinadi" (it appears), and "kerak" (should/must) as modal words that convey a sense of uncertainty or supposition [1: 29-30]. It is noteworthy that "ehtimol" and "shekilli" (apparently/it seems) do not appear in the analyzed texts. This may indicate that, in mass media texts, "mumkin" – which presents probability as an objective possibility – is preferred over linguistic devices that express the speaker's personal uncertainty. This hypothesis should be tested against a larger corpus.

In Example 7, an inverse strategy is observed: the phrase "tan olib aytish kerakki" (it must be admitted that) reinforces the author's judgment, presenting the idea as an undeniable – albeit perhaps unwelcome – truth. In text M2, the epistemic markers form a coherent argumentative chain: a conclusion based on information (6) → a logical consequence (4) → a reinforced authorial judgment (7) → a proposal framed as a possibility, serving as a solution (5).

In Example 8, the reflection on the value of water is presented as a piece of "wisdom", devoid of any reference to a source or markers of probability. The phrase "barchamiz eshitganmiz" (we have all heard) characterizes this knowledge as collective and inclusive; both the author and the reader are considered to possess it. As a result, the idea becomes a self-evident foundation, serving as a basis for the appeals made in the subsequent parts of the text. This demonstrates that the value-laden layer of the "water" concept attains the status of shared knowledge within discourse. In a previous study, the author noted that water has long been revered and exalted in the consciousness of the Uzbek people – an attitude reflected in their proverbs [7: 19].

The linguistic devices analyzed above, when used in conjunction with units incorporating the "water" concept, establish this status of "knowledge." Furthermore, in certain units containing the component "water", concepts such as knowledge, conviction, and the source of knowledge have become lexicalized. This indicates that the epistemic potential of the "water" concept exists not merely at the contextual level, but also within the language system itself.

Level of knowledge: ***to know like water (i.e., to know something thoroughly or inside out).*** This unit conveys the meaning of "knowing something very well – possessing a deep, thorough, and solid grasp of it". As noted in the author's PhD research, this simile is rooted in the notion that water possesses memory and perception, and that it can store and transmit information; it is precisely this perspective that establishes

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a connection to knowledge within the concept of "water" [7: 14]. From an epistemic standpoint, the expression "to know [something] like water" serves as a lexicalized device denoting the highest, unquestionable level of knowledge: in the sentence "He knows these rules like water," the speaker affirms that the subject's knowledge is both complete and reliable.

Distrust: ***to tell one's dream to running water.*** This idiom is linked to the custom of recounting one's dreams to water – a practice originally intended to ensure that bad dreams would not come true, but instead be washed away by the current. Over time, a skeptical attitude toward this process emerged in the minds of speakers, who came to view it as a futile endeavor. Consequently, the expression acquired meanings such as "harboring a pipe dream", "contemplating an unachievable goal," or "holding a misguided notion" [7: 18; 14]. Thus, in the course of its semantic evolution, the idiom shifted from the pole of belief (associated with a ritual) to the pole of disbelief (a negative epistemic evaluation). This serves as a striking example of a diachronic shift in epistemic evaluation within a lexical unit centered on the concept of "water."

Source of knowledge: ***Knowledge — the spring of the intellect.*** In this proverb, the lexeme "buloq" (spring) denotes the concept of "water" through metonymy, embodying the semantic features of "breaking forth" and "abundance"; in proverbs featuring "buloq", water is portrayed as a source of intellect and reason [7: 20]. From an epistemic perspective, this proverb conceptualizes the source of knowledge – and its inexhaustible nature – through the imagery of a water source.

Epistemic norm: ***Don't take off your boots before seeing the water.*** This proverb, recorded in the collection "Uzbek Folk Proverbs" [16], embodies an evidential norm: one should not take action (remove one's boots) without direct evidence (seeing the water). Used in discourse as a warning against hasty conclusions, the proverb prioritizes knowledge based on direct observation over indirect knowledge.

Together, these four units constitute the epistemic layer of the concept of "water": the level of knowledge ("to know [something] as clearly as water"), uncertainty ("telling a dream to the water"), the source of knowledge ("knowledge is the spring of intellect"), and the criterion for acquiring knowledge ("do not remove your boots before seeing the water"). These can be viewed as extensions – at the phraseological and paremiologically levels – of the active schemas of "information storage" and "information transmission" identified in M. Muminova's research [7: 17].

The distribution of the linguistic means found in the 11 analyzed contexts, categorized by their source of knowledge, is as follows:

Type of knowledge source	Contexts	Quantity	Fixed assets
Reportative	1, 2, 3, 9, 10, 11	6	*ma'lum qildi, ma'lum bo'lishicha, deb topdi, aytishicha, deydi, — ekspertlar, ekan*
Concluding	4, 6	2	*shunday ekan; prognozlar ... ko'rsatmoqda*
Author's judgment	5, 7	2	*mumkin; tan olib aytish kerakki*
General knowledge	8	1	*hikmat; barchamiz eshitganmiz*
Total		**11**	

Based on the results obtained, the following patterns can be identified:

1. The relationship between the type of subject matter and the source of knowledge. Predictions and statistical data regarding water scarcity (1, 2, 3, 11) are presented entirely through reportative means: the author attributes responsibility for this information to an official, an international organization, or experts. In contrast, the notion regarding the value of water (8) is presented without a specified source, as general knowledge. Thus, the conceptual-informational layer of the "water" concept is expressed in discourse as knowledge rooted in an external source, while its value-based layer is expressed as collective knowledge that requires no proof.

2. Epistemic compensation. In contexts involving predictions, the authority of the source and the use of markers of probability exhibit an inverse relationship: an authoritative and precise source (1) allows for a categorical statement, whereas an ambiguous source (11) necessitates a hedging device, such as

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"possible". This pattern demonstrates that epistemic modality and evidential modality – distinguished by F. Palmer [11: 8] – function as a mutually complementary system within discourse.

3. Mismatch between form and function. Although the form "ekan" appears three times in the sample, it performs a reportative evidential function in only one instance (9). In the remaining two cases, it functions as a logical connector (4) and a nominalizer (6). This finding provides empirical confirmation of the need to strictly distinguish the evidential "ekan" – as described in the works of L. Johanson [9] and M. Üzüm [12] – from "ekan" used in other functions.

4. Specifics of mass media discourse. In the dataset, markers expressing the speaker's personal conjecture – such as "ehtimol", "shekilli", and "chog'i", as well as the form "-ibdi" – did not appear. This can be explained by the tendency of mass media texts toward objectivity: the author presents information from external sources or objective possibilities (e.g., "mumkin"), rather than their own personal conjectures. It is likely that the inferential "shekilli" and "-(i)bdi" – as described by M. Üzüm [13: 89] – are more characteristic of conversational or literary discourse; this hypothesis should be tested using a corpus that encompasses a variety of genres.

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5. Lexicalized epistemics. In certain phraseological and paremiologically units centered on the concept of "water", notions such as the degree of knowledge, uncertainty, the source of knowledge, and the norms for acquiring knowledge have become lexicalized (e.g., "suvday bilmoq" [to know as clearly as water], "tushni suvga aytmoq" [to tell a dream to water], "Ilm — aql bulog'I" [Knowledge is the spring of the intellect], "Suvni ko'rmay etik yechma" [Do not take off your boots before seeing the water]). The epistemic meaning of these units is rooted in the "information storage" and "information transmission" semes of the lexeme "water" [7: 17]. Thus, the concept of "water" connects to the epistemic category at two levels: at the level of context (through its use alongside epistemic-evidential markers) and at the level of the language system (through the presence of epistemic semes within the meaning of the units themselves).

Conclusion

1. In Uzbek mass media texts concerning water resources, four types of markers indicating the source of knowledge were identified within contexts involving the concept of "water": reportative, inferential, authorial judgment, and general knowledge. Out of the 11 contexts analyzed, 6 employed reportative markers.

2. The choice of knowledge source depends on the nature of the topic: forecasts and statistical data are attributed to external sources (officials, international organizations, experts), whereas ideas regarding the value of water are presented as general knowledge that requires no proof. This demonstrates that the conceptual-informational and value-based layers of the "water" concept possess distinct epistemic statuses within discourse.

3. In contexts involving forecasts, an inverse relationship – termed "epistemic compensation" – is observed between the authority of the source and the use of markers of probability: an authoritative and precise source tends to be associated with categorical (definitive) statements, while a less precise source is accompanied by hedging markers (such as "possible").

4. The form "ekan" is multifunctional; it serves an evidential (reportative) function only in specific syntactic positions. When functioning as a logical connector or a nominalizer, "ekan" does not convey an evidential meaning. Consequently, contextual analysis is essential when studying evidential markers based on a corpus. 5. The concept of "water" (suv) connects to the epistemic category on two levels: at the contextual level, through its use alongside epistemic-evidential markers; and at the level of the language system, through the lexicalization of meanings – such as the degree of knowledge, uncertainty, the source of knowledge, or the criteria for acquiring knowledge– within specific linguistic units (e.g., "suvday bilmoq" "to know [something] as clearly as water", "tushni suvga aytmoq", "to tell a dream to water", "ilm — aql bulog'i", "knowledge is the spring of the intellect", and "suvni ko'rmay etik yechma" "do not take off your boots before seeing the water").

Future research will aim to verify these findings using the National Corpus of the Uzbek Language and texts from various genres (literary, conversational, and popular-scientific). Additionally, there are plans to investigate the use of inferential/evidential markers – such as "shekilli", "-(i)bdi", and "chog'i" – within contexts related to the theme of "water".

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