

CLASSIFICATION OF TOPONYMS AND REFLECTION OF HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Shakhzod Eshankulov

Associate Professor of the Department of History

Samarkand State Pedagogical Institute

Abstract: The article examines the classification of toponyms and the reflection of historical information within them. It provides a comprehensive analysis of the main typological categories of geographical names, their linguistic and semantic features, as well as the historical, ethnographic, and cultural data encoded in toponymic structures. The study highlights how toponyms serve as reliable historical sources that preserve information about ancient settlements, ethnic composition, social relations, and economic activities of different periods. Special attention is given to methodological approaches in the classification of toponyms according to their origin, structure, and meaning.

Keywords: Toponymy, toponym classification, historical geography, linguistic heritage, ethnolinguistics, historical source, cultural memory, regional history.

Introduction. An examination of the ethnic composition of the Zarafshan Valley population in the twentieth century—particularly that of the Uzbek inhabitants—shows that the valley's toponymy reflects the outcome of centuries-long ethnopolitical and ethnocultural processes. The coexistence of sedentary farming communities and nomadic pastoral groups, who have inhabited the region since ancient times, is widely and distinctly manifested in the valley's system of place names.

In the course of studying the toponymy of the valley, it becomes evident that applying the methodological principles and techniques of toponymic science is crucial. Within the discipline of history, toponymic data serve as valuable sources in ethnographic, ethnological, and ethnotoponymic research, offering insights into settlement patterns, cultural transformations, and linguistic history.

The term toponymy derives from the Greek words *topos* (place) and *onoma/onomae* (name) and literally means “the study of place names.” According to the geographer S. Qoraev in his textbook “The Meaning of Geographical Names,” toponymy is the science that studies place names, while toponyms refer to the totality of geographical names within a given area. He classifies and defines a number of important toponymic terms and concepts as follows:

Abbreviated names (abbreviations): shortened forms of compound names, e.g., PRC (People's Republic of China), USA, UAE.

Antonymous names: place names with opposite meanings, such as *Oqto'g* (White Mountain) and *Qarato'g* (Black Mountain), *Oqdarë* (White River) and *Qoradarë* (Black River).

Anthroponymic names: names derived from personal names, surnames, or pseudonyms, e.g., Navoiy, Beruniy, Washington.

Areal names: names formed with recurring suffixes or topoformants indicating geographical features, such as kent (village), tepa (hill), qo'rg'on (fortress), e.g., Guzalkent, Zarkent, Qo'rg'ontepa.

Primary and secondary names: primary names are original (e.g., the Chirchiq river), whereas secondary names arise through transference (e.g., Chirchiq city, named after the river).

Hybrid names: composite names formed from elements of different languages, such as Kuhitangtog', Gugurttog', Morguzar.

Hydronyms: names of water bodies—seas, rivers, lakes, springs, and wells—such as Syrdarya, Amudarya, Zarafshan, Qorako'l.

Detonymization: the process by which place names become general nouns or technical terms (e.g., geyser from "Geyser Spring," volcano from "Volcano Island").

Dromonyms: names associated with roads or routes, e.g., Yangiyo'l (New Road), Tashkent–Termiz Highway.

Microtoponyms: minor local names related to neighborhoods, streets, or small sites.

Macrotoponyms: large-scale or widely known place names, such as Tian Shan, Asia, Europe.

Metaphoric names: figurative or symbolic names like Quytosh (Wind Stone), Qirqqiz (Forty Girls), Odamtosh (Human Stone).

Oikonyms, polionyms, and urbanonyms: derived from the Greek oikos (house), polis (city), and Latin urbos (city), these terms refer to the names of villages, towns, and cities.

Toponyms: proper names denoting specific geographical features, from the Latin topos (place) and onoma (name).

Toponyms-derived words (toponomes): common nouns that originate from place names, such as tulle, poplin, cambric, crepe de chine.

Ethnotoponyms: place names derived from the names of tribes, clans, or ethnic groups.

Thus, the classification of toponyms not only reveals linguistic diversity but also serves as a crucial source for reconstructing the historical and cultural development of a region. The analysis of such names enables scholars to identify traces of ancient ethnic groups, settlement systems, and sociocultural interactions that have shaped the historical landscape of the Zarafshan Valley.

In historical studies, despite occasional overlaps in terminology, researchers typically investigate toponymy within the framework of the following categories:

Toponyms – proper names of specific locations, derived from the Latin topos (place) and onoma (name).

Ethnonyms – names originating from ethnic groups, tribes, or clans.

Anthroponyms – names related to individuals.

Memorial names – names commemorating prominent figures or major historical events.

Microtoponyms – minor local names associated with neighborhoods, streets, or specific small sites.

Macrotoponyms – widely recognized names frequently referenced in speech or writing; their historical significance, origin, and chronological development are often studied.

Place names frequently reflect the social characteristics of history. Thus, events occurring within a society are often first observable through its toponymy.

It is widely acknowledged among specialists that there are multiple approaches to the study of geographical names. The most commonly employed method is the cataloging approach, which can be adapted depending on the objectives and desired outcomes of the study. For instance, linguists often classify toponyms semantically, based on their lexical structure, whereas geographers tend to organize them by types of geographical features—such as landforms (cliffs, valleys, hills, plains, terraces), water bodies (streams, rivers, canals, springs, wells, reservoirs), and human settlements (villages, hamlets, towns).

E. M. Chernyakhovskaya emphasizes that “principles for toponymic classification must be developed with consideration of the research objectives and the characteristics specific to the region’s toponymy,” highlighting the necessity of adapting classification to the study area.

When grouping regional toponyms for historical analysis, it is essential to account for the type, composition, and particular characteristics of the region’s toponymy. For example, in Uzbekistan, irrigated agricultural lands, deserts, and mountainous areas exhibit distinctly different naming patterns. Although historical toponymic classification principles differ from traditional classification systems, they can incorporate certain elements of conventional methods, such as identifying the linguistic origin of toponyms, distinguishing ethnonyms from substratum toponyms, and segregating toponymic layers.

Contemporary Uzbek toponymy is primarily composed of lexemes and formative elements derived from Sogdian, ancient Khwarezmian, Old Turkic, Arabic, Mongolian, Persian (Tajik), Uzbek, Kazakh, Karakalpak, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, Russian, and other linguistic sources. For linguists, determining the language affiliation of toponyms and their formative elements is critical. For historians and ethnographers, however, the emphasis is not on linguistic origin per se, but on identifying the specific people or ethnic groups to whom the place names historically belong.

Within Uzbek toponymy in Uzbekistan, a notable number of place names are derived from Arabic and Persian loanwords. Similarly, Tajik toponyms frequently incorporate Arabic and Turkic formative elements. A. Khromov emphasizes that some names in Central Asian toponymy, which certain toponymists mistakenly identify as Arabic, actually belong to purely Turkic or Iranian linguistic origins. This phenomenon is explained by the historical adoption of Arabic terms into local languages due to religious, political, cultural, and administrative influences; these terms were gradually integrated into toponymic usage after initial assimilation.

The significance and practical functions of toponymy have been outlined by geographer E. M. Murzaev as follows:

Educational and informational significance – informing state and non-state organizations as well as citizens about the origin and meaning of place names.

Pedagogical significance – fostering a sense of identity and patriotism in younger generations through the study of the history and meaning of place names.

Toponymic regulation – guiding the naming, renaming, or modification of settlements in accordance with regional history and linguistic norms.

Locational precision – ensuring unique identifiers for settlements, particularly where multiple locations share similar names.

Standardization – maintaining accurate spelling and pronunciation while harmonizing borrowed words with the local language.

Toponyms, ethnonyms, and anthroponyms play interconnected roles in state and societal development: toponyms provide precise identifiers for locations; ethnonyms preserve and protect historically settled peoples' names within state territories; anthroponyms facilitate citizen registration and administrative organization.

C. D. Nominkhanov, in his study of Mongol elements in Uzbek toponymy, highlights the influence of the Mongol language on the formation of place names. U. Toychiev further notes that from a historical perspective, many toponyms in the Zarafshan Valley—such as Bayroqchi, Bulungur, Darga, Darkhon, Saorun, Toshogunbel, Temirboqcha, Tergovchi, Togachi, Ulach, Ulus, Kharakuduk, and Chirikqishloq—may appear Mongolic in origin. However, names like Shurbuloq and Shurquduq, though containing Mongolic phonemes, are actually derived from Uzbek words “shur” (salty), “buloq” (spring), and “quduq” (well).

According to Toychiev, many toponyms historically associated with Mongolic ethnonyms—such as Durman, Qong'iro't, Mongol, Jaloyir, Qatag'on, Mang'it, Burqut, Qalmoq, Chig'atoy, Kenagas, Qovchin, Barlos, Arlot (Alot, Olot), Chaqar, and Uyrat—should be considered Uzbek in origin, as these settlements emerged following the sedentarization of Uzbek clans associated with these ethnonyms from the 16th century onward.

Moreover, a closer linguistic analysis reveals that not all of these ethnotoponyms are genuinely Mongolic. Many were formed from ancient Turkic roots, later influenced by Mongolic elements, such as the plural suffix -t. For example, the ethnonym Qong'iro't originates from the Turkic qong'ir (a color descriptor) with the Mongolic plural suffix -t, forming “Qong'iro't” (literally “the Qong'irs”). Similarly, the ethnonym Uyrat derives from the ancient Turkic ethnonym Uighur, subsequently adapted by Mongols as “Uyrat” to denote the Uighur people.

Furthermore, many toponyms listed by Nominkhanov and Toychiev, including Bayroqchi, Darkhon, Toshogunbel, Temirboqcha, Tergovchi, Togachi, Ulus, Kharakuduk, and Chirikqishloq, are fundamentally of Turkic origin. Their components—bayroq (flag), tarxon (noble title), tosh (stone), bel (ridge), temir (iron), boqcha (bull), tergovchi (inspector), tog'a (mountain pass), ulus/ulush (tribe/territory), qora (black), quduq (well), chirik/cherik (troop), qishloq (village)—are documented in Turkic epigraphic sources from the 8th–9th centuries and later in Mahmud al-Kashgari's Diwan Lughat al-Turk (11th century) and other Turkic lexicons, predating the Mongol political presence by several centuries.

Conclusions. The study of Uzbek toponymy reveals a rich and multilayered linguistic and historical heritage. Place names in Uzbekistan encompass elements from Turkic, Persian, Arabic, Mongolic, and other languages, reflecting centuries of cultural interaction, migration, and political influence. While some toponyms appear to be of Mongolic or Arabic origin, detailed linguistic and historical analysis shows that many are rooted in ancient Turkic words, later influenced or adapted through contact with other languages and peoples.

Toponyms, ethnonyms, and anthroponyms are not only markers of geographic and administrative organization but also preserve the social, cultural, and historical memory of the region. Their study provides insights into settlement patterns, ethnic composition, and linguistic evolution, highlighting the importance of accurate classification and contextual analysis. Furthermore, the educational, informational, and regulatory functions of toponyms underscore their continuing relevance in contemporary Uzbekistan, both in scholarly research and in state administration.



In sum, Uzbek toponymy reflects a complex interplay between language, history, and society, emphasizing that the true origins of place names can often only be understood through careful historical-linguistic investigation rather than superficial classification.

References

1. Qoraev S. Geografik nomlar ma'nosi. Toshkent: O'zbekiston, 1978.
2. Doshimov Z., Egamov X. Joy nomlarining qisqacha izohli lug'ati. Toshkent: O'qituvchi, 1977.
3. G'oyibov B. O'zbekiston toponimiyasi tarixi. Toshkent: Samarqand Davlat Universiteti nashri.
4. O'zbekiston Milliy Ensiklopediyasi, 12 tom. Toshkent, 2005. Tom 11.
5. Nominxanov C.D. Etnonimlar va toponimlardagi mo'g'ulcha elementlar. (maqola)
6. To'ychiyev U. O'zbek va turk tillarida joy nomlarining ifodalanishi. (maqola)
7. Baxtiyarova Z.K., Xoliqova G.A. Onomastic Units and Their Thematic Classification. Proceedia of Theoretical and Applied Sciences, 2023.
8. Usmonova S., Juraeva R. Ethnotoponyms in Toponymy. International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research, 2025.
9. Begmatov A. Formation Patterns of Toponymic Units in English and Uzbek: A Comparative Study, 2025.
10. Jumaniyozova F. Place Names of the Cities of the Republic of Karakalpakstan and the Khorezm Region, 2025.