



TOPONYMIC UNITS AS MARKERS OF CULTURAL MEMORY: A SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

Usmonova Mohinir Bakhtiyorovna

Senior Lecturer, Karshi University of Economics and Pedagogy

E-mail: M.M.M.U@mail.ru

Abstract

This article analyzes the semantic scope of toponymic units, their lexical-semantic features, and cultural-spiritual load from a linguocultural perspective. The internal form, external structure, and historical-spiritual content of toponyms in English and Uzbek are examined. The study demonstrates that toponyms are products of cultural thinking and are closely connected with the worldview, customs, traditions, and socio-legal relations of a people.

Keywords: Toponym, semantics, cultural semantics, linguoculturology, geographical names, lexical layer, historical motivation, ethnotoponymy.

Introduction

Toponymic units are directly connected with the historical memory, cultural thinking, and language of every nation. Through their semantic scope, it is possible to identify a people's traditions, religious beliefs, and lifestyle. Semantic analysis helps reveal the deep meanings of toponyms, their naming motivations, and their place in collective memory.

MAIN PART

The semantic scope of toponymic units is closely related to their internal structure, historical roots, linguocultural connotations, and the images formed in national consciousness. Each toponym is not merely a geographical label but also serves as an expression of historical memory, national identity, and ethnocultural heritage. In linguistic analysis, it is necessary to consider not only their lexical meaning but also their symbolic, connotative, and associative levels.



The semantic analysis of toponyms begins with their structural composition. Uzbek toponyms are mainly formed based on two factors: natural-geographical and socio-cultural elements. For example, the toponym **Chust** is interpreted as consisting of “chu” (lowland) and “ust” (upper part), reflecting the relief features of the area. Similarly, **Termiz** is believed to derive from the ancient Greek “Demetria,” indicating historical contacts and cultural transformations.

English toponyms such as **Newcastle**, **Oxford**, and **Cambridge** are named according to the function or location of geographical objects (e.g., “ox” – ox, “ford” – river crossing), and their semantic structure remains transparent even in the modern language system.

Toponyms can be classified semantically as follows:

- **Descriptive toponyms** (indicating characteristics of a place): *Qizilqum, Greenland*
- **Memorial toponyms** (related to historical figures or events): *Washington, Amir Temur Park*
- **Ethnotoponyms** (related to ethnic groups): *Qo‘ng‘irot, Tatarstan*
- **Topographic toponyms** (related to relief features): *Tog‘kent, Lake District*

From a semantic perspective, toponyms are divided into descriptive, memorial, transferential, eponymic, and metaphorical units. For example, **Qo‘qon** is considered descriptive, meaning “a place where many cuckoo birds lived.”

Stratford-upon-Avon combines a settlement name with a river name and has both descriptive and locational characteristics.

Toponyms also reflect national culture, worldview, customs, and beliefs through linguocultural components. In Uzbek toponyms, elements such as “obod,” “ota,” “bobo,” “hazrat,” and “pir” demonstrate religious and spiritual values. Similarly, English toponyms such as **Saint Albans** and **St. Andrews** are associated with religious or historical figures.

Toponyms preserve meanings connected with folklore, historical events, and migration processes. For example, **Jizzakh** derives from the Persian “Dizak” (fortress), indicating its historical role as a military settlement. **Tashkent** combines “tosh” (stone) and “kent” (city), reflecting both geographical and urban characteristics.



The well-known Uzbek linguist B. Khudoyorov has extensively studied the semantic and historical layers of toponymic units in works such as “*Semantic-Historical Features of Toponymic Units*” (2011) and “*Language and Territory: Semantic Layers in Toponymic Systems*” (2017). According to him, toponyms function not only as naming tools but also as important carriers of conceptual information within the language system.

In modern linguoculturology, the concept of **semantic layering** is particularly relevant. For instance, **Bukhara** represents not only a geographical location but also Islamic culture, a scientific center, and a historical trade hub.

Both languages demonstrate universal naming tendencies, yet cultural specificity shapes their semantic structures differently.

Uzbek toponyms often emphasize:

- Natural environment
- Spiritual-religious components
- Clan and tribal identity
- Agricultural and settlement expansion

English toponyms frequently reflect:

- Feudal land ownership
- Christian ecclesiastical tradition
- Settlement morphology
- Celtic and Anglo-Saxon linguistic substrata

In English, generic elements such as *-ton*, *-ham*, *-ford*, *-chester*, *-bury* function as productive morphological markers. Uzbek equivalents include *-kent*, *-obod*, *-qishloq*, *-tepa*, *-soy*.

Comparative Semantic Features of Uzbek and English Toponyms

Semantic Category	Uzbek Naming Patterns	English Naming Patterns	Dominant Motivational Feature
Landscape-based Names	Qiziltepa, Sho'rchi	Blackpool, Riverdale	Physical-geographical description
Historical/Commemorative	Amir Temur, Ulug'bek	Washington, Lincoln	Memorialization of individuals
Historical/Commemorative	Amir Temur, Ulug'bek	Washington, Lincoln	Memorialization of individuals
Religious-Spiritual	Hazratobod, Otaqishloq	St. Andrews, St. Albans	Sacred or ecclesiastical influence
Ethnic/Tribal Origin	Qo'ng'iro't	Essex (East Saxons)	Ethnic identity marker
Settlement/Urban Structure	Yangiyer, Guliston	Newcastle, Hilltown	Settlement expansion or function

Toponyms evolve semantically over time. Political changes may lead to renaming, such as the transformation of **Leninobod** into **Khujand**. Globalization introduces new names like "New City" or "Business Town." Urbanization also generates modern toponyms reflecting economic and social identity.

Semantic Classification and Functional Dimensions

From a semantic perspective, toponymic units can be understood through their functional orientation. Many place names originate from descriptive motivation, indicating natural features such as mountains, rivers, plains, or climate conditions. Others emerge from commemorative practices, honoring rulers, saints, or historical events. Ethnotoponyms reflect tribal or ethnic identity and often preserve evidence of ancient settlement patterns. Economic or occupational toponyms indicate agricultural production, trade routes, or craft specialization. Political and ideological toponyms arise during regime changes and symbolize new power structures or national narratives.

The semantic diversity of toponymic units demonstrates that naming is never arbitrary. Rather, it reflects selective perception and cultural evaluation of spatial reality. In Uzbek, numerous place names contain components associated with spirituality, such as references to saints, elders, or sacred figures. These elements indicate the integration of religious worldview into spatial organization. In



English, recurring morphological elements such as suffixes denoting settlements, hills, valleys, or fortifications reveal systematic morphological productivity and historical settlement structures.

The semantic range of toponyms evolves over time due to historical, political, and socio-economic factors. Migration, colonization, urban expansion, and globalization contribute to the emergence of new place names or reinterpretation of existing ones. Language contact may result in phonetic adaptation or semantic modification, gradually altering the internal structure of a toponym. Urbanization introduces commercially motivated names reflecting modern identity, economic aspiration, or global integration.

Despite these changes, older semantic layers often remain embedded within collective awareness, creating a complex interaction between past and present meanings. This diachronic accumulation transforms toponyms into linguistic archives that preserve traces of cultural transformation. Therefore, the study of semantic change in toponymy provides insight into broader patterns of historical development and sociocultural evolution.

Overall, the semantic scope of toponymic units demonstrates their rich historical, connotative, and linguocultural layers. Therefore, they should be studied not only as linguistic units but also as socio-cultural codes.

CONCLUSION

The semantic range of toponymic units extends far beyond their primary function of geographical identification. Toponyms are multidimensional linguistic signs integrating denotative reference, cultural symbolism, historical memory, and ideological transformation. Comparative analysis of Uzbek and English toponymic systems reveals universal cognitive principles of spatial naming alongside culturally specific semantic strategies shaped by religion, social organization, and historical experience.

Ultimately, toponymic research requires an interdisciplinary methodology that combines semantic analysis, cognitive linguistics, cultural studies, and historical investigation. Only through such an integrated approach can the full complexity of place-name systems and their role in shaping collective identity be comprehensively understood.



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