

GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF TOPONYMY

Shodiyeva Hulkar Ismoil qizi

National University of Uzbekistan named after

Mirzo Ulugbek, Tashkent

shodiyevahulkar01@gmail.com

Abstract: This article explores the general principles of toponymy—the study of place names and highlights its significance in understanding the relationship between language, history, and geography. It outlines key aspects such as the classification of toponyms, their structural elements, the influence of physical geography, and the role of linguistic and historical factors. Through the lens of toponymy, researchers can gain valuable insights into the historical processes, cultural identities, and environmental characteristics that shape human settlements and landscapes.

Key words: toponyms, linguistics, geography, history, macrotoponym, microtoponym

Toponymy, a major branch of onomastics, is concerned with the study of place names, examining their meanings, formation, origins, and patterns of use. These names embody the cultural identity of a region, revealing its historical background, natural landscape, and environmental context. Through the analysis of toponyms, researchers can trace the development and movements of ethnic groups, understand the geographic spread of particular cultures, and identify various landmarks. Place names consistently reflect historical events and offer meaningful information about specific locations.

Toponymy is the study of geographical names and place names associated with personal names. The term toponymy comes from the Greek words "topos" meaning "place" and "onom" meaning "name." In other words, it is the science of studying place names. Toponyms are a part of a language's vocabulary and follow its linguistic rules which means it is a branch of onomastics, the study of proper names, and thus belongs to the field of linguistics.

On the other hand, geographical names are also one of the most important elements of maps, as they often reflect the characteristics of a country's or region's natural environment. For example, the term "volcano" expressing volcanic mountains is derived from the name of Mount Vesuvius in Italy. This is because volcanoes are frequently observed in this mountain. From this perspective, toponymy can also be considered a geographical science. In addition, place names are closely connected to the history of society. Without understanding the historical background of place names, the study of toponymy cannot yield meaningful results. Therefore, toponymy is closely linked to three major fields: linguistics, geography, and history.

Toponyms are divided into macro and micro toponyms based on whether they refer to large or small geographical features. Names of large features such as

mountains, rivers, valleys, cities, and villages are considered macro toponyms whereas micro toponyms refer to smaller features like ravines, wells, neighborhoods, streets, and so on.

Toponyms can also be categorized into several other groups. For example,

Hydronymy – names of rivers, lakes, seas, streams, canals, and straits: Lake Baykal, Aral Sea, Atlantica, Thames.

Orography (or Oronymy) – names of landform features such as mountains, hills, peaks, and plains: Mount Everest, Tian Shan, Alps.

Oikonymy (from the Greek oikos – house), polionymy (from the Greek polis – city), and urbanonymy (from the Greek urbos – city) – names of villages and cities: Paris, Tashkent, Bukhara, Thailand, Berlin.

Besides, place names derived from ethnic groups or tribes are called ethnotoponyms, while those based on personal names are known as anthroponyms.

Toponymy, as the study of place names, plays a crucial role in unveiling the intricate connections between language, history, and geography. It not only reflects the linguistic characteristics of a society but also preserves the historical experiences and geographic realities of different regions. The classification and analysis of toponyms—whether macro or micro, natural or cultural—offer a unique perspective on how human communities interact with their environment and pass down their heritage through names. As a result, toponymy is not just a linguistic discipline, but a window into the collective memory and identity of civilizations.

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