



SEMANTIC TRANSFORMATIONS OF TOPONYMS IN THE PROCESS OF LITERARY TRANSLATION

Sayfiyeva Shakhlo Azamatovna

Assistant teacher of

Kimyo International University in Tashkent

e-mail: sayfiyevashakhlo@gmail.com

Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: 20th August 2025 Accepted: 14th September 2025</p>	<p>Toponyms in Uzbek literature carry deep cultural and historical meanings that often change during translation into English. This study explores how these place-names undergo semantic transformations such as transliteration, adaptation, or omission. It analyzes how meaning is preserved or altered through different translation strategies. The results highlight the importance of maintaining cultural authenticity while ensuring clarity for target readers.</p>
<p>Keywords toponyms, Uzbek literature, literary translation, semantic transformation, transliteration, adaptation, cultural meaning, intercultural communication.</p>	

INTRODUCTION. In translation theory, proper names including toponyms are recognized as challenging elements because they are not mere labels but often carry deep cultural, historical, and semantic significance. Toponyms, in particular, reflect the geographical identity, collective memory, and worldview of a community. When translated, they present a dilemma for translators: whether to preserve the original form to maintain authenticity, or to adapt it for better comprehension by the target audience. Such decisions can influence how readers perceive the cultural background of the text, making the translation of toponyms a crucial factor in conveying the essence of the source culture and ensuring intercultural understanding. Proper names serve as part of the semiotic network of a text, contributing not only to identification of place but also mood, symbol, cultural reference and narrative function [2, 14]. In the Uzbek linguistic and cultural context, toponyms represent complex historical and semantic structures that have evolved under the influence of various civilizations and languages — including *Persian, Turkic, Arabic, Soviet* and *local ethnonymic* traditions. Each of these layers contributes specific cultural, historical, and linguistic meanings, making direct translation into English a challenging task [3, 2]. Therefore, the methodological framework of this study emphasizes a *context-sensitive qualitative analysis* that accounts for the diachronic and sociolinguistic background of Uzbek toponyms.

To ensure accuracy and cultural depth, each selected toponym was analyzed not only from a linguistic perspective but also in terms of its historical evolution and cultural associations. For instance, toponyms such as

Farg'ona (Fergana) and *Marg'ilon* (Margilan) embody complex historical, ethnographic, and linguistic layers reflecting the region's multicultural past. As documented in a study on the toponyms of the Fergana Region, these names have undergone multiple semantic and phonetic transformations across different historical periods [1,1]. Accordingly, the methodological procedure involved tracing the etymological origins, semantic transformations, and translation strategies applied to these toponyms. This integrative approach enabled a nuanced understanding of how Uzbek place-names convey cultural meaning and how such meaning may be altered, preserved, or lost in the translation process.

METHODS. This study uses a qualitative descriptive and comparative method. A corpus of selected Uzbek toponyms from literary texts (and their English translations) was collected. Because of limited published translation examples, the study draws on previous research into Uzbek toponyms and translation issues [5,716].

The method comprises three main steps:

Identification and classification: Extracted toponyms from the source Uzbek literary text (for example cities, regions, natural places, ethnonyms embedded in place names). Toponyms were classified into types (e.g., urban settlements, natural geographic features, ethnonymic toponyms). The typology draws on Khayitova's classification of 19 types of toponyms in translation contexts. [4, 255]

Strategy identification: For each toponym, the strategy used in the translation (or proposed translation) was identified. Strategies include transliteration (retaining



original spelling or phonetic form), literal translation (rendering meaning), adaptation/domestication (modifying for target readers), omission or amplification (adding explanatory material).

Semantic-load analysis: For each toponym-pair (source/target) the semantic load (historical, cultural, locational, symbolic) was assessed: whether it is preserved (target conveys similar meaning), shifted (meaning changed), or lost (meaning omitted). The assessment draws both on textual function (in the literary work) and on toponymic scholarship. This multi-step approach allowed for a comprehensive examination of how Uzbek toponyms are represented and transformed in translation. The findings from these analyses provide insight into the balance between linguistic accuracy and cultural preservation in the translation of place-names.

Results. The analysis of Uzbek toponyms in literary translation revealed that translators apply a variety of strategies depending on the toponym's structure, recognizability, and cultural weight.

Firstly, transliteration was found to be the most common approach, especially for major cities and regions such as *Samarqand*, *Farg'ona*, or *Marg'ilon*. This method ensures that the cultural and historical authenticity of the place-name remains largely preserved, although minor phonetic nuances (such as diacritics) are sometimes lost.

Secondly, literal translation was less frequent and typically applied when the toponym contained descriptive components, as in *Yangi Marg'ilon* ("New Margilan"). While this strategy enhances clarity for the target reader, it can reduce the historical or cultural resonance embedded in the original name.

Thirdly, adaptation or domestication was occasionally used to make toponyms more accessible to English-speaking audiences for example, modifying suffixes or simplifying sounds unfamiliar to the target language. However, such adaptation may cause partial semantic shift, weakening the original linguistic identity of the toponym.

Finally, omission and amplification were rare but notable. Some translators added explanatory notes or glosses to clarify cultural meanings, while others shortened or simplified toponyms, which could lead to a loss of historical or ethnonymic information.

Overall, the findings indicate three major semantic outcomes. In most cases, the semantic load was preserved through transliteration, as the cultural essence remained recognizable (*Samarqand* → *Samarkand*). In some cases, the meaning shifted, especially when

descriptive elements were translated literally, changing part of the semantic nuance. In rare instances, the semantic load was lost, particularly when ethnotoponymic or historical layers were omitted or left unexplained, as seen in *Gaziag'lik* → *Gaziaglik* [6, 1]. These results highlight that the translation of Uzbek toponyms requires a balanced approach - maintaining linguistic and cultural fidelity while ensuring readability and comprehension for international audiences.

DISCUSSION. The results show that translation of Uzbek toponyms involves balancing competing priorities: retaining source-culture identity and meaning versus making the text comprehensible and accessible to target-language readers.

Transliteration was the dominant strategy, likely because it preserves the place-name's identity and maintains consistency with maps, global recognition, and historic name forms. However, while transliteration preserves form, it does not always convey the embedded cultural or historical meaning of the toponym to the target reader. For example, the suffixes in Uzbek toponyms (*-lik*, *-ag'li*, *-on*) often carry meanings of origin, belonging, etc., which remain opaque in transliteration alone [6,1]. Literal translation offers the potential to make meaning transparent ("New Margilan", "Valley of Fergana"), but it risks altering or flattening the meaning and may not reflect the conventional English form of the toponym. Adaptation/domestication can help readability but may reduce cultural specificity. For example, if *Gaziag'lik* were rendered as "Gaziaglik Region" and explained as "region of the Gaziag tribe", the reader would gain cultural information but such explanation is rarely provided. From a translation-studies perspective, the handling of toponyms in Uzbek literary translation exemplifies the tension between foreignization and domestication: keeping original names supports cultural authenticity, but may challenge target reader comprehension; adapting or explaining names supports readability but may dilute source-culture resonance. The study suggests several practical guidelines for translating Uzbek toponyms in literary texts. Transliteration should be prioritized for place-names with strong cultural or historical significance, accompanied by brief explanations or glossaries to preserve meaning for the target audience. [7,192] Literal or bilingual translations may be appropriate when the toponym's meaning is transparent and supports comprehension. Translators should always consider the toponym's function within the text whether it serves



merely as a setting or carries symbolic and ethnic connotations and adjust their strategy accordingly.

CONCLUSION. The translation of Uzbek toponyms in literary texts is a multifaceted process that goes beyond linguistic transfer, involving the careful negotiation of semantic, cultural, and historical meanings. Each toponym reflects layers of identity shaped by diverse influences Persian, Turkic, Arabic, Soviet, and local traditions which must be thoughtfully considered during translation. Translators face the challenge of balancing authenticity with accessibility: while transliteration preserves the original cultural identity, literal translation aids comprehension, and adaptation facilitates reader engagement. However, each strategy carries its own limitations and potential semantic shifts. Therefore, a nuanced and context-sensitive approach that acknowledges the symbolic, ethnographic, and historical value of Uzbek toponyms is essential for achieving both linguistic accuracy and cultural resonance in translation. Such awareness ultimately contributes to deeper intercultural understanding and the faithful representation of Uzbek literary heritage in global contexts.

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