

Conceptual Content and Worldview in The Geographical Names of The Orkhon-Yenisei Monuments

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Abstract: In this article, geographical names are investigated as complex mental structures and conceptual content that reflect the linguistic picture of the world, as well as the mythological and philosophical worldview of a specific ethnos. The ancient toponymic layers found in the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions (7th–11th centuries), Old Uyghur texts, and Mahmud al-Kashgari's "Diwan Lughat al-Turk" are taken as the object of research. The article analyzes cognitive models such as anthropocentric codes in toponymy, the perception of space based on patterns of human body parts (gestalt structures), and the conceptualization of the four cardinal directions through color symbolism. The toponymic space in the Orkhon inscriptions is categorized into conceptual fields such as the "Sacred Center" (Otukan), "Foreign Space", "Vital Support", and "Cosmological Direction". Furthermore, it is proven from a linguocognitive perspective that the ancient Turkic peoples perceived the world through bipolar cognitive frames such as "Ours" and "Theirs".

Keywords: Toponymy, cognitive linguistics, linguistic picture of the world, conceptual field, anthropocentric code, gestalt structure, Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions, Otukan, color symbolism, linguistic consciousness.

Introduction: Ancient written monuments, particularly the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions dating back to the 7th–11th centuries, Old Uyghur texts, and Mahmud al-Kashgari's "Diwan Lughat al-Turk," serve as invaluable sources that preserve the oldest toponymic layers of our language. The geographical names within these texts do not merely designate territories; rather, they reflect how our ancestors perceived space, as well as illustrating their statehood thinking and geopolitical worldview. In these ancient inscriptions, place names primarily comprise systems of mountains, rivers, deserts, and sacred territories that formed the core of the socio-political life of that era. For instance, in the Kultegin, Bilga Kaghan, and Tonyuquq inscriptions, Mount Otukan (Ötüken yış) is frequently mentioned as the sacred core of Turkic statehood, the capital, and a locus of divine blessing (qut). Within these stone inscriptions, the kaghans repeatedly address their people, emphasizing that to survive and preserve the state, they must remain in the Otukan forest and never abandon this sacred space.

Likewise, in ancient inscriptions, the names of major

rivers and lakes that represent military campaigns and territorial borders appear as strategic concepts. River names occurring in the texts, such as the Yenisey (Enez), Irtysh (Ertish), and Amu Darya (Ögüz), demonstrate the movement areas and spatial expansion of Turkic tribes. Cognitive models are also noticeable in the naming of desert and steppe regions; for instance, names like the Shantung Steppe or Yashil Oguz often form territorial frames in the text where enemies were encountered or that served as borderlands.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions stand as a fundamental source for understanding not only the linguistic and historical landscape of the ancient Turks but also their geopolitical and mythological worldviews. Within these inscriptions, geographical names (toponyms) serve as more than simple locational markers; they operate as linguistic vessels reflecting ancient Turkic conceptualizations of space, time, and cosmic order.

Since the late 19th century, pioneering scholars like V. Thomsen, V. Radlov, and S. Malov laid the groundwork

by deciphering the texts and identifying their toponymic layers. Later, the study of ancient Turkic toponymy shifted toward ethnolinguistic and cultural perspectives through the works of S. Klyashtorny, I. Kormushin, and E. Tryjarski. In particular, Klyashtorny thoroughly analyzed geographical names in direct relation to historical geography and ethnic migrations. In Uzbek Turkology, the linguistic, mythopoetic, and historical contexts of these monuments have been extensively researched by scholars such as G. Abdurahmanov, A. Rustamov, N. Rakhmonov, and Q. Sodiqov. Sodiqov's works, for instance, heavily emphasized the conceptual nature of space and territoriality in ancient Turkic thinking. However, while previous scholarship has predominantly focused on the etymological, phonetic, or purely historical aspects of these toponyms, a comprehensive cognitive and linguacultural analysis remains limited. This study aims to fill that gap by examining geographical names as key components of the ancient Turkic "linguistic picture of the world" and their broader ideological worldview.

RESULTS

In the work "Diwan Lughat al-Turk", which is considered the first encyclopedia of the Turkic peoples, toponyms are presented in a more systematic and comprehensive scope. In his map and entries, Kashgari includes the names of cities such as Balasagun, Tashkent (Chach/Shosh), Ispijab, Osh, and Kashgar, explaining their etymology and geographical location. It can be observed that by this period, urban foundational words such as "kent/kat" (city, village), sedentary life, and urban culture became highly productive within the structure of toponyms.

The semantics of place names in ancient monuments were, in most cases, associated with the natural features of the terrain, color symbolism, and the animal kingdom. The character of mountains and rivers was often expressed through components like "altun" (as a symbol of wealth and sacredness, e.g., Altun Yis - the Altai Mountains) or the nature of the water. Toponyms in ancient inscriptions serve as a unique geographical map of the past linguistic consciousness; they are the most reliable evidence demonstrating how our ancient ancestors shaped the world into cognitive templates and transformed space into a political-cultural concept.

The process of naming geographical objects is the result of a specific ethnic group's activity in adapting to, understanding, and transferring the environment into a linguistic form within the consciousness. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, toponyms are mental structures that embody complex conceptual content, forming a constituent part of the national picture of the world (the toponymic picture of the

world). Geographical names (toponyms) constitute a linguistic corpus in which a specific ethnic group's process of mastering space, its psyche, and its mythological and philosophical worldview are imprinted. Viewed through the prism of cognitive linguistics, toponymy is one of the most stable domains reflecting the nation's "linguistic picture of the world" and linguistic consciousness through the nominative (naming) system of language.

Anthropocentric Codes in Toponymy. Anthropocentric and corporal codes in toponymy represent the way humans understand and name the environment through the patterns of their own bodies. One of the core principles of cognitive linguistics is that humans perceive the world based on their own physical existence. This method of naming geographical space is explained in cognitive semantics through gestalt structures and phase-space metaphors.

Since humans view the surrounding mountains, rivers, and canyons as an extension of their own bodies, they transfer the names of human organs to them. For instance, in linguistic consciousness, the head (bosh) - as the highest part of the human body - serves as the basis for naming the highest peaks of mountains or the starting points of rivers. Phrases we use in daily speech, such as tog' boshi (mountain head/peak) and daryo boshi (river head/source), or toponyms like Bashkortostan, emerged precisely on the basis of this "head" concept. All of these toponymic metaphors bear witness to the presence of a highly potent psycholinguistic connection between humans and space. Humans do not perceive the environment they inhabit as an alien entity; rather, they intimately feel it as a logical extension of their own body and project it into language accordingly.

Transformation of the Mythological Worldview. In the worldview of ancient peoples, particularly ancient Turkic ethnic groups, the concepts of space and time were intrinsically linked, forming a distinct mythopoetic spatial model where geographical names acquired a deeply sacral-that is, sacred-meaning. One of the most vivid manifestations of this worldview is the conceptualization of geographical directions through specific colors. In ancient Turkic thought, the four cardinal directions and the center of the world were perceived through explicit color symbolism, and over time, this linguistic model became permanently imprinted within the structure of stable toponyms.

In the linguistic consciousness of the people, the east-the direction of the rising sun-was considered the center of life, awakening, and sacredness, and was associated with the color blue or green (ko'k/yashil). This concept was reflected not only in the divine sphere

but also in terrestrial geographical names such as the Ko'k daryo (Blue/Green River). Conversely, the west-where the sun sets-was linked to the color white (oq). In the traditional geographical map of the Turkic peoples, the naming of today's Mediterranean Sea as the Oq dengiz (White Sea) is explained precisely by its location in the western territory.

The northern direction was traditionally represented by the color black (qora), which symbolized darkness, mysterious power, and majesty. This cognitive model is preserved in the name of the Black Sea (Qora dengiz) or within the territorial concepts of the Karakhanid civilization. At the same time, the concept of "black" (qora) in toponymy did not always denote actual color; in linguistic consciousness, it also carried semantic meanings such as great, majestic, dense, or powerful. For instance, the name Qoradaryo did not signify the color of the water, but rather indicated that the river was high-volume, deep, and mighty, while the toponym Qoratorov served to demonstrate the majesty of the mountain.

Finally, the central territories, which were considered the center of the earth and the core of statehood, were conceptualized with the color yellow (sariq). This color was deemed a symbol of stability and the Golden Horde civilization, and it subsequently served as the foundation for the formation of diverse spatial names such as the Sariq daryo (Yellow River) or Saricho'l (Yellow Desert).

The place names preserved in ancient Turkic inscriptions do not merely denote geographical points; rather, they constitute a deeply systematized conceptual field within the linguistic consciousness of our ancestors. From the perspective of cognitive linguistics, the toponymic space in these inscriptions is divided into several interconnected major conceptual fields, reflecting the geopolitical, mythological, and existential perceptions of the nation.

DISCUSSION

The most central and vital pole within this toponymic system is the conceptual field of the "Sacred Center." The core and primary cognitive pillar of this field is the toponym Ötüken (Ötüken yış). In the inscriptions, Ötüken is conceptualized as the heart of the state, the source of divine blessing (qut), security, and the foundation of the empire. The recurring linguistic formulas in the texts, such as "If you remain in the land of Ötüken, you will preserve your eternal empire," demonstrate that this space was elevated to the level of a "sacred homeland" mythologeme and a source of life in the popular consciousness.

The second crucial layer is the conceptual field of the "Alien / Hostile Space" (Periphery). In the geopolitical

worldview of the Turkic Khaganate, the space outside their own territory was perceived as a realm of danger, deception, and infinity. Toponyms frequently mentioned in the texts, such as the Shantung Plain (Chinese territories), the lands of the Toquz Oghuz, or the Iron Gate (Temir qapig') in the west, constitute this field. These place names often appear in the inscriptions within the context of negative cognitive scripts-such as "being deceived by wealth," "perishing," or "fields of fierce battles"-and are evaluated as zones of chaos that stand in direct opposition to one's own pole.

Thirdly, the conceptual field of the "Vital Pillar / Border" (Hydronymic and Oronymic) can be distinguished. Hydronyms in the inscriptions, such as the Yenisey, Irtysh, Yashil Oguz, and the Pearl River (Inju daryo / Syr Darya), alongside oronyms like the Altai (Altun yış), functioned both as economic-natural borders and as trajectories of military triumphs in the life of the Turkic ethnic group. For instance, crossing rivers or traversing mountains is intrinsically linked in the inscriptions to the concepts of "conquering space" and "expanding borders". Water bodies and mountains are linguistically encoded as the source of sustenance and the measure of geopolitical power for the tribes.

CONCLUSION

Finally, the place names in the inscriptions are inextricably linked with the "Cosmological / Directional" conceptual field. Toponyms representing the four cardinal directions are presented in the text through precise cognitive coordinates: the East, which carries a divine weight; the North, symbolizing power and darkness; and the West, symbolizing sunset and conclusion. Toponyms are situated within this field of directions, bringing the ancient Turkic person's philosophical-mythological model of the universe into a complete composition. The conceptual field of place names in the inscriptions proves that the ancient Turks perceived the world by dividing it into bipolar cognitive templates such as "Ours" (sacred, safe, center) and "The Other's" (alien, dangerous, periphery), and that toponyms were the most stable instruments that permanently imprinted this national worldview map into language.

Geographical names-that is, toponyms-constitute a unique linguistic mirror in which each nation's philosophical, mythological, social, and cultural views during the process of understanding, adapting to, and transforming their inhabited space are imprinted. In human history, every river, mountain, village, or city has been named based on a specific worldview scenario. In cognitive linguistics, this process is referred to as the linguistic encoding of space and the formation

of a comprehensive linguistic picture of the world.

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