

## The Semantic Function of the Component “Ob” in Uzbekistan Toponyms

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### ABSTRACT

*This article analyzes the semantic functions of the “ob” component in Uzbek toponymy. The study examines the etymological roots of this term, in particular, its connection with the Persian-Tajik meaning of “water,” and the features of its occurrence in geographical names in various regions of Uzbekistan. By analyzing various place names, the role of the “ob” component as a hydrographic indicator is revealed, its significance in reflecting historical water management, irrigation systems, and the relationship of the local population with nature. At the end of the article, conclusions are drawn on the cultural and geographical role of this linguistic unit in the national naming system.*

**Keywords:** Toponymy, “ob” component, semantics, etymology, Uzbek language, hydronyms, historical linguistics.

### INTRODUCTION

We can see that the first settlements and centers of culture were formed mainly around rivers, lakes and natural water sources. Therefore, the most ancient layer of names on earth is made up of toponyms, that is, the names of water bodies. The study of toponyms with the “water” component in the Uzbek onomastic system is of important methodological importance not only in linguistics, but also in determining the ancient history of the territory, ethnic composition and mythological views of the people. The relevance of the study is that the lexeme “suv”

(archaic form sub/suv) belongs to the most ancient and active lexical layer of Turkic languages, which has undergone various territorial and linguistic transformations over the centuries. Many place names such as Oksuv, Karasuv, Sariosuv, Muzsuv, which are found in Uzbek toponymy, are not just geographical identifiers, but also linguistic archives reflecting the stages of historical development of our language.

This article is to analyze the etymological roots of toponyms with the “suv” component, to shed light on their formation models and semantic features. By identifying the etymological layers of place names, the aim is to show the role of the vernacular and dialects in the formation of toponyms, as well as to reconstruct the historical and geographical landscape. This, in turn, serves to reveal the still unexplored aspects of Uzbek toponymy.

Toponymy is one of the oldest and richest layers of linguistics, reflecting not only linguistic units, but also the inextricable connection of the people with their past, culture, way of life and geographical environment. In the formation of place names in Uzbekistan, hydrographic terms, that is, names associated with water bodies, occupy a special strategic and social place. After all, water, which is the source of life in the Central Asian region, has always been considered sacred, and this concept has served as the semantic basis of place names in our language.

In particular, the component “ob,” which is actively used in the structure of toponyms, is a unique layer formed as a result of centuries-old interaction and cultural-linguistic ties between the Uzbek and Tajik languages. This unit, which means “water”, “river” or “stream” in the Persian-Tajik language, today in Uzbek toponymy, in addition to its purely hydronymic function, has an important semantic load, expressing the relief, climatic features and socio-economic status of the place.

Etymological and semantic study of place names containing the component “Ob” serves to restore the regional linguistic landscape and shed light on the history of ancient irrigation culture. The regularities of the occurrence of this lexeme in toponyms, its transformation in different dialects and dialects,

and its place in the national naming system are one of the important research areas of Uzbek onomastics.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

In forming the empirical basis of the study, more than 100 toponyms and hydronyms containing the “ob” component, widespread in the regions of Uzbekistan with a rich hydrographic network – in particular, the Zarafshan, Kashkadarya and Surkhandarya oases – serve as sources. The research materials include not only modern maps, but also medieval manuscripts, foundation documents, and historical military-topographic sources.

As lexicographic sources, explanatory dictionaries of such prominent toponymists as S. Karayev, H. Hasanov, T. Nafasov and the *Etymological Dictionary of the Uzbek Language* edited by Sh. Rahmatullayev are used. Cartographic information is also taken from administrative-territorial maps of Uzbekistan published in different years and the *National Atlas of Uzbekistan*. “Live” toponymic units collected as a result of questionnaires conducted among representatives of the older generation and local residents during field research also enrich the content of the materials.

The research process is based on a set of several scientific methods. The phonetic and semantic evolution of the “ob” component from ancient Iranian languages to the modern Uzbek language is studied using the method of linguistic reconstruction. The morphemic composition of toponyms is examined using structural-semantic analysis, and the role of the “ob” unit in word formation is analyzed. The comparative method allows us to compare this component in Uzbek toponymy with its alternative variants in Tajik, Persian and other Turkic languages, and to determine the degree of linguistic assimilation. Also, the frequency of territorial distribution and dialectal features of the “ob” component are systematized using the statistical method. The collected materials are classified into hydronyms, oyonyms and oronyms, and the semantic load of each type of “ob” is described separately.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As it is known, place names are a huge treasure, linguistic units that express the ancient history of our country, geographical conditions, the dreams and hopes of our people, cultural-spiritual, political, religious-philosophical, aesthetic views, methods of respecting the native language and preserving its wealth. Each of them is based on a certain historical event, pragmatic information, or some fact related to the indigenous population of that place. Toponyms with the “suv” component also contain similar facts.

In the Uzbek language, there are quite a few place names that contain the lexeme “suv.” In particular, about a thousand names are listed on the information web portal of names of geographical objects. However, it should be noted that the majority of them, although they denote a specific territory, are not accepted as specific toponyms. Therefore, we would like to analyze some of them.

The toponym “Karasuv” is given several times in the above-mentioned source as the name of settlements of Samarkand region and their components [1]. They are distinguished from each other by numbers, and these numbers are assigned to their location in order to distinguish them from each other. The inhabitants of Samarkand city, especially those living in newly built multi-storey buildings, are very familiar with such names. However, it is worth noting that although terms such as *Qarasuv-1*, *Qarasuv-2*, *Central Qarasuv* refer to residential areas, in fact their basic meaning is different.

**Karasuv** – River. Village names are derived from this hydronym. In hydronymy, *kora* means “underground, surface water.” Often, *Karasuv* and *Aqsuv* are compared. *Karasuv* – underground, spring water in the foothills and foothills of mountains, saturated with large volumes, bluish, clear water (stream, small river). *Aqsuv* – shallow, white water saturated with snow water on the mountain. *Karasuv* – water of the same amount in all seasons of the year. *Aqsuv*, on the other hand, increases in summer and decreases in other periods of the year [2: 369].

*Karasuv* as a geographical name, first of all, means “a river.” The classification of rivers as black or white is related to the area of their flow and composition. However, in the above definition, it can be seen that the terms “black” and “white” are used in completely opposite meanings. This, of course, can be explained by some characteristic of the period in which this name was given.

In toponymy, the word *qara* often means “water that seeps from under the ground,” “water that has a spring as its source,” or “water that does not freeze” [5; 4]. Unlike *Oksuv* (white water), which originates from glaciers, *Karasuv* is a body of water with a clear and constant temperature, formed as a result of the emergence of groundwater to the surface. Mahmud Kashgari’s *Devonu lug’atit turk* notes that the word *qara* also has the meanings of “great,” “strong” or “wide” [6: 156]. This refers not only to the source of *Karasuv*, but also to its hydrological capacity. Radlov showed in his dictionary that among the Turkic peoples the component “qara” is also used in the sense of “living water” that comes from under the ground, is clear and suitable for drinking [9: 131].

The explanatory dictionary of place names also lists several combinations, such as “*karasuv rural collective farm*” and “*karasuv stream*.” Among the information, you can also see facts explaining why the settlements in the Samarkand region called “*karasuv*” are called by this name.

**Siyob** – the name of many streams originating from underground seepage waters. In Uzbek it is called *Karasuv*. *Siyobibolo*, *Siyobituman* are streams in the Samarkand district. The *Siyob* canal, flowing in the north-west of the city of Samarkand, was called *Siyob Kaloni Puli Mirzo* at the beginning of the 19th century. According to V. L. Vyatkin, the southern branch of the *Zarafshan*, the current *Karadarya*, was also called *Siyob Kalon*. The *Siyob* canal in *Miyanqol* was called *Hazarai Siyob* and irrigated that place, which was later called *Hazara* [2: 439].

From this information it follows that the terms *Karasuv* and *Siyob* are geographical terms used in the same sense, hydronyms, and are interconnected with the names given to settlements

located in the city of Samarkand according to their territorial location, and even the famous Siyob market.

Another toponym with the “water” component is the settlements and their components in the Chirakchi and Kitab districts of the Kashkadarya region. On the web portal, they are listed under the names Zhilisuv, Yangi Zhilisuv, Eski Zhilisuv. These settlements are also named in a way that is related to hydronyms, such as the Karasuvu toponym. The term Zhilisuv is also found in the *Explanatory Dictionary of Place Names of Uzbekistan*. According to it, in some sources, the term *Jinnidaryo* may be related to the word *jin*. However, the explanatory dictionary notes that this information has no basis. A comparative linguistic analysis of the names of water bodies in Uzbekistan named several thousand years ago shows that the linguistic evidence that formed the basis for the creation of hydronyms such as *Jinnidaryo*, *Zhilisuv*, *Zhilikol*, and the factor that led to the naming of water bodies is another word... The word *yil/yul/yol* in the Qarluq dialect (dialect) meaning spring and stream – the form in the Kipchak dialect (dialect) is the word *jil /jul/jo'l*. The words *yil/yul/ yo' l* and *jil/jul/jo'l* are derived from the same root. Their meanings are the same, but their distribution areas are different. The word *jil /jul/ jo' l* is specific to the territory of Uzbekistan. The word *yil/yul/ yo' l* was used to create hydronyms in the regions inhabited by the Turkic peoples of Altai, Khakassia, and the Urals. In the territory of Uzbekistan, the word *jil/jul/jo'l* was combined with the words for water, lake, and river, forming the names of the watersheds [2: 168].

In addition to these arguments, it is appropriate to cite the etymological meaning of the word *gilga*. *Gilga* is a small flowing water. This word was formed by adding the suffix “g’a” meaning small to the word *gil*, which meant “water” in the Old Turkic language. In the Uzbek language, the consonant *y* at the beginning of the word became the consonant *jun*, and the vowel *i* lost its hardness [3: 102].

*Jili* comes from the Old Turkic word *yilig* (warm, hot) [6: 19] Mahmud Kashgari's *Devonu lug'atit turk* also contains variants of this lexeme in the meaning of “warm, having temperature.” In toponymy, *Jilisuv* is mainly used for areas with hot or warm

springs, mineral water sources [6: 31]. These waters are characterized by the fact that they maintain a constant warm temperature due to underground thermal energy.

V. V. Radlov's analysis: Radlov showed in his dictionary the forms of this term жили, јили, или in different dialects and their occurrence in hydronyms in the meaning of "non-freezing, constantly warm stream" [9].

Uzbek onomastics has rich linguistic and historical sources that are of fundamental importance in studying the etymological layers of toponyms with the "suv" component. In particular, Mahmud Kashgari's *Devonu lug'atit turk* is a primary scientific source for studying the formation of this lexeme in the ancient Turkic language, its archaic variants in the form of "suv" (sub) and the toponym-forming features. Also, in the onomastics of Turkic languages, such studies as E. V. Sevortyan's *Etymological Dictionary of Turkic Languages* [9] and V. V. Radlov's *Experience of the Dictionary of Turkic Dialects* [8] contain extensive factual information on the phonetic and semantic transformation of toponyms, in particular, more than 20 variants of the word "suv" in various Turkic languages. From a historical and geographical point of view, the names of rivers and lakes cited in Abulgazi Bahodirkhan's *Shajarayi Turk* also serve as important material for determining the historical etymology of toponyms.

S. Karaev's *Explanatory Dictionary of Place Names of Uzbekistan* [5], T. Nafasov's *Toponyms of Kashkadarya Region* [7] and H. Hasanov's studies on geographical names contain important theoretical views on the linguistic nature of toponyms, their formation models and ethnic foundations. More than 500 toponymic units such as "Oksuv," "Karasuv," "Sariosuv," "Muzsuv," "Loykasuv," "Koksuv," selected as the object of research, are reflected not only in toponymic dictionaries, but also in folk dialects, field notes and cartographic materials. These materials allow us to study toponyms not only as static units, but also as dynamically changing linguistic phenomena.

Are a number of scientific methods in analyzing these materials, which serve to comprehensively illuminate the problem. The comparative-historical method is used to determine

the linguistic status of the “suv” component in different periods and its common aspects with other Turkic languages (Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen). The etymological analysis method plays a key role in clarifying the original meaning of toponyms and the genesis of their components. The semantic classification method is used to group the physical properties, color-image and geographical location of water in the formation of place names. Also, component analysis to identify the patterns of combination of the “suv” lexeme with other word groups and methods of determining areals to study their territorial distribution are important in forming scientific conclusions of the study.

There are many place names with the component “suv” in the Uzbek language. In addition, due to the presence of words related to the layer that we have assimilated in our language, there are also lexemes with the component “ob”. “Ob” is borrowed from Persian and means “water” in Uzbek [3: 71]. For this reason, toponyms that include the word “ob” have the same meaning as the word “suv.”

In particular, in the explanatory dictionary of place names of Uzbekistan, such compound units are found very often. First of all, let's stop at the word *obod*, which has become a single lexeme in the Uzbek language.

**Akbarabad** – a village in the Kuva district of the Fergana region. It was named after Akbarali, the grandson of the Kokand Khan Khudoyorkhan. The word *obod* in Tajik means “ob – water, obod – watery, a place with enough water.” This word is used in relation to cities, villages, and settlements in general. Its main meaning is “blossoming” [2: 16]. In fact, the word *obod* has one meaning as a whole and is used in this form in our language. Even in the explanatory dictionary it is given as one word: Obod (Persian – inhabited, cultivated, flourishing) – beautiful with beautiful buildings, beautiful streets, gardens and paths, flourishing [3: 75].

All place names in the Uzbek language that contain the word *obod* express this very meaning. However, based on the information provided above, etymologically, the word “ob” is understood in a special sense, and the lexical meaning derived from the whole word is also based on this.

In the information web portal of names of geographical objects, place names with the component *obod* were used a total of 12,532 times, including street, neighborhood, settlement, cemetery, and village names. Although these words are not related to “water” in terms of form, they are semantically close lexical units [1].

The word *ob* in the word *Siyab*, which means the toponym *Qarasuv*, also means “water.” The Uzbek form of the hydronym *Siyab* is *Qarasuv*, and dozens of streams in Samarkand, Pakhtachi, Bulungur, Ishtikhan, Poyariq and other districts are called this way. Uzbekistan, in general, is the name of many streams and rivulets in Central Asia [2: 439]. That is, *Qarasuv* is a literal translation of this hydronym. The explanatory dictionary of the Uzbek language also states that the word *Siy* or *Siya* is borrowed from Persian and means “black, blackness” [3: 495]. It follows that the second part means “water”. This component, used in this and other places, is clearly seen to have a direct meaning when compared with the meaning of the word *Siyob* and the toponyms and hydronyms used as lexemes.

In the *Explanatory Dictionary of Place Names of Uzbekistan*, there are many place names with the “ob” component. It is repeatedly emphasized that they all mean “water”:

- **Obiravon** – a spring in the Urgut district of the Samarkand region. The term is derived from the Tajik words *ob* – water and *ravon* – flat, calm, straight.
- **Obirahmat** – a canal near the city of Samarkand in the 15th century; its name at the beginning was *Siyohob* (now *Siyob*).

In *Boburnoma*, the stream that separated from the *Siyohob* and flowed around the foot of *Pushtayi Kuhak* (Shepherd Father) was called *Obirakhmat*. “Again, on the foot of *Pushtayi Kuhak*, above the black water of *Konigil*, this water is also called *Obirakhmat*, [Temurbek] planted a garden in the *Naqshi Jahonga* season.”

Elsewhere, the name *Obirahmat* was used for the entire arik: “The black river is called Obirahmat, flowing through the middle of Konigil, it is as big as seven or eight millstones.”

**Obirakhmat** – B'ostlyk district of Tashkent region is also known as a mineral deposit and cave [2: 283].

The term *Obirakhmat* is used in various regions and districts, for various places, and appears 88 times in the state register of names of geographical objects.

All these and similar names, depending on the “ob” component, denoted the name of a certain hydronym, and were later used to represent various toponyms. In some cases, they were simply transferred due to territorial integrity and proximity, and in some places they were named based on the meaning of the word *obod*, the basis of which was *ob*.

#### CONCLUSION

“Water” component shows that this complex of names constitutes the oldest and most meaningful layer of Uzbek onomastics. The place names that are the object of the study were formed on the basis of ancient Turkic models that express not just a color or temperature sign, but also the complex natural-geographical and hydrological characteristics of the object. In particular, it was found that the “black” component, rather than its color meaning, refers to the source of water, that is, groundwater and springs, and is associated with its year-round non-freezing nature. This indicates that our ancestors were very observant in naming geographical objects and maintained the continuity between the name and essence.

*Jilisuv* demonstrates the incomparable role of regional dialects in the formation of place names, reflecting the sound changes and dialectal features in the ancient Turkic language. At the same time, the synonymous relationship of toponyms in some regions is the product of linguistic integration that arose as a result of the long-term coexistence of the Turkic and Persian languages in the same territory. The subsequent transformation of such hydronyms into oikonyms served to preserve the historical and ethnic image of the region for centuries.

Such a scientific-etymological analysis of toponyms allows us to restore the original meaning of place names and scientifically refute unfounded interpretations among the people. The study of toponyms with the “suv” component, while demonstrating the rich internal capabilities of the Uzbek language, is of significant theoretical and practical importance in organizing the national onomastic fund on a scientific basis.

The study of the toponymic system of Uzbekistan shows that hydrographic terms, in particular the acquired component *ob*, play a fundamental role in the formation of place names. The data collected during the study reveal not only the purely lexical meaning of this unit, but also its complex semantic transformations.

In particular, the widespread use (more than 12 thousand cases) of place names with the component *obod* indicates that this unit has become integrated in the public consciousness not only with the concept of “watery place,” but also with the concept of “prosperous, populated place.” Etymologically, this word, which goes back to the root “ob” (water), over time has become its own layer of the Uzbek language, becoming one of the most productive bases for the formation of new village, neighborhood and street names.

Also, the analysis of hydronyms such as *Siyob*, *Obiravon*, *Obirakhmat* confirms that the “ob” component has retained its primary semantic function (indicator of a water body) in the structure of place names. In particular, the repetition of a single name in different regions as a river, a cave, and a settlement demonstrates the regularity of the hydronym's transition to a toponym (place name) over time.

In conclusion, the *ob* component in Uzbek toponyms is not just a linguistic appropriation, but an important spiritual indicator that imprints the historical irrigation culture, socio-economic life, and geographical landscape of the region. The system of names with the participation of this component, while enriching the onomastic landscape of the Uzbek language, ensures the continuity of territorial naming traditions.

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