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Research article

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THE ROLE OF GEOGRAPHICAL OBJECTS RENAMING IN BUILDING NATIONAL IDENTITY (TRANSLATION ASPECT)

Abstract. The study examines the role of toponymic (re)naming and translation standardization (harmonization) as a key mechanism in the construction of national identity, with a particular focus on Kazakhstan in a comparative international context. Drawing on approaches from onomastics, translation studies, and political geography, the research analyzes the structural and semantic features of proper names, as well as sociopolitical factors influencing naming and renaming practices. Special attention is paid to translation strategies, including transcription, transliteration, calquing, and hybrid forms, and to the inconsistencies arising from their coexistence. The methodology is based on qualitative analysis combining descriptive, structural, and comparative approaches. The findings demonstrate that the lack of standardization leads to variation in spelling, loss of semantic transparency, and reduced communicative efficiency of toponyms. At the same time, toponymic transformation is shown to be a structured process shaped by political change, cultural policy, and identity negotiation. The study argues for the adoption of Kazakh-oriented transliteration models that preserve both phonological and semantic integrity of proper names. On the examples of Қарағанды and Өскемен, it is proposed that forms such as Qaragandy and Oskemen more accurately reflect the internal logic of the Kazakh language. Thus, conscious renaming policies are essential for maintaining linguistic coherence and strengthening national identity in global communication.

Keywords: onomastics, nomination, renomination, translation standardization, proper name translation, national identity, toponymy.

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Introduction

Proper names constitute the fundamental element of linguistic system, functioning not only as referential markers but also as carriers of cultural, historical, and ideological meanings. In contemporary research, the focus has shifted toward understanding naming practices as embedded in broader sociopolitical processes, particularly in contexts of regime change. The processes of renaming and translation of toponyms play a crucial role in shaping national identity, especially in post-Soviet contexts such as Kazakhstan.

Toponymic renaming is widely recognized as a common feature of political transformation. Studies in critical toponymy demonstrate that changes in place names often follow shifts in political power and are used to legitimize new ideological frameworks.

Recent studies emphasize that inconsistencies in the translation of proper names lead to communicative distortions and fragmentation of linguistic representation. At the same time, translation studies reveal that the representation of proper names across languages is characterized by inconsistency, which may weaken their communicative and symbolic functions. As demonstrated in research on toponyms, the absence of unified translation strategies results in structural inconsistency and semantic ambiguity. Similarly, translation of onyms into English involves multiple competing strategies, including transcription, translation, and calquing, which may lead to variation and instability. Against this background, the present study aims to explore how renaming and translation practices function as instruments of identity, construction and to identify the need for standardization in the Kazakh context.

In Kazakhstan, these dynamics are particularly evident in the post-Soviet period. The transformation of the toponymic landscape reflects processes of cultural reorientation and identity reconstruction. As shown in research on the Kazakh-Russia borderland, toponymy functions as a 'space of meanings' through which states project power and shape social order (Vendina & Karpenko, 2023).

The aim of this study is to examine the interaction between renaming and translation practices and to demonstrate their role in constructing national identity in both local and comparative contexts.

Methods and materials

The present study employs a qualitative research design aimed at examining how toponymic renaming and translation function within linguistic and sociopolitical frameworks. The methodological approach combines three interrelated complementary procedures.

Firstly, descriptive and structural analysis is used to examine the formal composition of toponyms and to distinguish their recurrent components. Within this approach, particular attention is paid to the internal composition of proper names, which typically comprise a classifying (generic) component designating the category of geographical object and an individualizing component identifying a specific referent. This distinction is methodologically significant, as it determines the selection and application of translation strategies and allows for the identification of systematic deviations, such as semantic reduction, component duplication, or inconsistent rendering. The relevance of this structural principle has been substantiated in previous studies of toponym translation, which emphasize its role in ensuring consistency and semantic adequacy (Politova, 2022).

Secondly, the study applies a comparative analytical approach to investigating translation practices across different language pairs and scholarly traditions. This procedure enables identification of recurrent translation strategies, including transcription, transliteration, calquing,

and hybrid transformations, as well as the analysis of their distribution and functional variability. The comparative perspective is not aimed at establishing direct equivalence between languages, but rather at revealing patterns of variation and instability in the treatment of structurally similar toponyms. Empirical evidence suggests that analogous naming structures are frequently rendered through divergent strategies, resulting in inconsistency within and across linguistic systems (Politova, 2022).

Thirdly, the research incorporates contextual interpretation of sociopolitical factors, influencing naming and renaming practices. Within this framework, toponyms are treated as semiotic units embedded in broad discursive processes related to identity construction, cultural policy, and the reconfiguration of symbolic space. In line with recent studies in critical toponymy, the toponymic landscape is conceptualized as a “space of meanings” reflecting dominant, political, and cultural narratives (Vendina & Karpenko, 2023).

The empirical basis of the study consists of: (1) the analysis of translation practices involving toponyms across different language pairs, (2) the examination of their structural and semantic features, and (3) the interpretation of instances of translational inconsistency as indicators of underlying tensions between formal preservation, semantic transparency, and sociocultural representation. The integration of these analytical procedures makes it possible to demonstrate that translation strategies are determined not only by linguistic constraints but also by the functional and symbolic roles that toponyms perform within specific communicative and sociopolitical contexts.

Results and Discussion

The analysis confirms that toponyms are structured units consisting of generic (e.g., river, lake, mountain) and specific components, which determine the linguistic behavior and translation strategies. The use of transcription, transliteration, and calquing reflects different priorities - preservation of form versus transfer of meaning.

However, the coexistence of multiple strategies leads to variation and inconsistency, especially in multilingual contexts. This lack of standardization reduces clarity and creates instability in the representation of place names. For example, in Chinese-Russian translation, the same structural type may be rendered differently, combining translation and calque in inconsistent ways (Politova, 2022).

The analysis has demonstrated that the toponymic system of Kazakhstan represents a structurally complex and historically layered formation shaped by long-term linguistic interaction. Regional research indicates that contemporary toponymy is the result of the coexistence and interaction of Turkic (Kazakh), Slavic, and Mongolic elements, which together constitute a unified yet internally heterogeneous system. These layers are not independent, but function within a shared linguistic space, reflecting processes of borrowing, adaptation, and hybridization that have developed over centuries of cultural and political contact (Adilova, 2020).

At the structural level, toponyms exhibit considerable diversity in their formation. The analyzed materials confirm that place names can be classified according to the deviational patterns into simple, derived, and complex forms. These structural types correspond to different morphological and word-formation mechanisms, including compounding, suffocation, and analytical semantic constructions. For instance, numeral-based formations constitute a productive and systematic model, when numerical elements combine with nominal components to encode spatial, quantitative, or culturally relevant information. Such patterns demonstrate that toponyms are not arbitrary lexical units but are organized according to stable linguistic principles that govern their formation and evolution (Akhmetova, 2022; Baibossyn, 2024).

From a semantic perspective, the findings consistently show that toponyms function as carriers of ethnocultural knowledge. Their meanings are closely linked to environmental features, historical events, and social structures. Hydronyms and other geographically motivated names, for example, encode detailed information about landscape characteristics, natural resources, and ecological conditions. At the same time, many place names preserve references to historical figures, tribal affiliations, and significant events, thereby functioning as linguistic repositories of collective memory. Importantly, a substantial portion of the semantic content is implicit and no longer fully transparent to contemporary speakers, which indicates that toponyms retain layers of historical meaning even when the original motivation is obscured (Talaspayeva, Sabieva, & Kakimova, 2025).

The analysis further reveals that the formation of toponyms is grounded in cognitive processes of categorization and conceptualization (Abasilov, Tuyakbayev, & Saryshova, 2022). Proper names reflect how speakers perceive and structure their environment, selecting salient features of the landscape and encoding them linguistically. In this sense, naming practices can be understood as a form of conceptual mapping where linguistic units represent culturally specific models of spatial organization. The cognitive dimension of toponymy is particularly evident in cases where names emerge from metaphorical or associative interpretations of geographic features, demonstrating the interaction between perception, language, and cultural knowledge.

Another significant finding concerns the role of oral tradition in the preservation and transmission of toponyms. Many place names are closely associated with legends, myths, and historical narratives that explain their origin and meaning (Mamysheva & Seitova, 2022). These narratives function as interpretative frameworks that connect linguistic forms with cultural memory and collective identity. The persistence of such narrative structures indicates that toponyms operate, not only as linguistic units, but also as elements of broad, cultural discourse, where meaning is maintained and transmitted through storytelling practices.

The results also highlight the inherently interdisciplinary nature of toponymic research. The analyzed studies demonstrate that comprehensive understanding of place names requires the integration of linguistic, historical, and geographical approaches. For example, research on historical toponyms along the Silk Road emphasizes the necessity of combining linguistic analysis with historical documentation and spatial context in order to reconstruct the origins and functions of names (Abdualiuly & Alimkhan, 2023). This interdisciplinary perspective reflects the complex nature of toponymy as a field situated at the intersection of multiple domains of knowledge.

Recent research further supports the view that naming practices extend beyond territorial identification and play a crucial role in fostering social cohesion and collective identity. As demonstrated by Tur et al. (2026), symbolic elements associated with place, including naming and cultural representation, contribute to the construction of shared meanings and strengthen social integration within communities. The study shows that special symbols function not only as markers of location but also as instruments of social cohesion, enabling the reinforcement of collective belonging and cultural continuity. In this context, toponymic renaming and translation practices can be understood as parallel mechanisms that shape both symbolic space and social relations, particularly in societies undergoing political and cultural transformation.

Finally, the findings confirm that toponyms are dynamic rather than static entities. Their form, meaning, and usage may change over time due to linguistic evolution, immigration, and sociopolitical transformation. Variability is particularly evident in microtoponyms and in regions characterized by bilingualism or multilingualism, where multiple naming systems coexist

and interact. This instability contributes to the emergence of parallel forms and inconsistencies, which are especially relevant for translation practices and standardization efforts.

Taken together, the results demonstrate that toponymy constitutes a complex system in which linguistic structure, cultural meaning, cognitive processes, and historical change are closely interconnected. Proper names function simultaneously as linguistic units and as symbolic markers of identity, reflecting both the continuity and transformation of cultural and social realities.

According to Fedorov, four main strategies have been identified:

1. Transcription/transliteration
2. Calquing
3. Transposition
4. Mixed strategies

Among these, transcription remains the most widely used approach, while hybrid forms frequently occur in practice. However, the coexistence of multiple strategies leads to:

- variation in spelling
- loss of semantic transparency
- inconsistency across texts.

The analysis of translation practices in the Kazakhstani context confirms that the rendering of proper names is characterized by systematic variation, with a clear predominance of phonetic transfer strategies. Among these, transcription emerges as the most frequently applied method, as it allows for the preservation of phonological similarity while adapting the name to the target language system. Particularly, it preserves in the translation of personal names and major toponyms. For instance, the Kazakh toponym Алматы is commonly rendered as Almaty, preserving phonological proximity while adapting to Latin orthography. These cases demonstrate the dominance of transcription as a strategy ensuring recognizability, phonetic proximity and international usability.

In view of the identified inconsistencies, the present study advocates for the prioritization of Kazakh-oriented transliteration models that more accurately reflect the phonological structure and the semantic integrity of the source language. Such an approach ensures not only formal accuracy but also the preservation of culturally embedded meaning encoded in toponyms.

In particular, it is proposed to adopt forms that retain specific Kazakh phonemes through consistent Latin representation. A notable example is Қарағанды, which appears in English as Karaganda, reflecting Russian orthography. However, we argue that the toponym Қарағанды should be rendered as Qaragandy (closer to Kazakh phonology), where the letter q represents the Kazakh phoneme [q]. This choice preserves the original sound system of the name and avoids distortion associated with Russian-mediated variants such as Karaganda. At the same time, maintaining the original phonological structure contributes to preserving the semantic and etymological transparency of the toponym, which is often linked to historical and environmental features of the region.

A similar principle applies to the city name Өскемен, which is frequently represented by the Russian-derived exonym Ust-Kamenogorsk. The present study proposes the use of the transliterated form Oskemen, which reflects the Kazakh phonological system and restores the original linguistic form of the name. This approach eliminates intermediary influence and allows the toponym to function as an authentic marker of logical linguistic and cultural identity.

Thus, transliteration should not be limited to phonetic approximation alone but also account for the semantic dimension of proper names, as many toponyms encode culturally sig-

nificant meanings, historical references, and cognitive representations of space. The adoption of Kazakh-based transliteration standards therefore contributes to both linguistic accuracy and the preservation of national identity in global communication.

Conclusion

The present study has demonstrated that toponymic renaming and translation standardization constitute interrelated mechanisms through which national identity is constructed, negotiated, and represented in linguistic space. The findings confirm that proper names function not merely as referential units but as complex semiotic markers encoding historical memory, cultural meanings, and sociopolitical transformations.

The analysis reveals that the absence of unified translation practices leads to structural inconsistency, including duplication of generic components, loss of semantic transparency, and the coexistence of parallel naming forms. Such variation weakens the communicative efficiency of toponyms and undermines their role as stable identifiers both in national and international contexts. At the same time, the persistence of multiple translation strategies reflects deeper tensions between phonetic accuracy, semantic representation, and historical convention.

In the context of Kazakhstan, toponymic transformation is shown to be a structured and ideologically motivated process closely linked to post-Soviet nation-building. Renaming practices serve as instruments of symbolic decolonization, enabling restoration of national heritage and linguistic forms as well as the reconfiguration of cultural space. However, these processes are not unambiguous; they may generate competing interpretations and reveal underlying sociolinguistic complexities within multilingual environments.

A central contribution of this study lies in substantiating the need for Kazakh-oriented transliteration models that preserve both phonological and semantic integrity of proper names. The proposed use of forms such as Qaragandy and Oskemen reflects an attempt to eliminate intermediary influence and to align international representation with the internal logic of the Kazakh language. This approach ensures not only phonetic accuracy but also the preservation of culturally embedded meanings inherent in toponyms.

Overall, the study confirms that translation and renaming are not purely linguistic operations but are embedded in broader sociopolitical and cultural frameworks. The combination of systematic renaming and context-sensitive translation emerges as a coherent strategy for reinforcing national identity while maintaining linguistic consistency.

The findings highlight the necessity of developing unified and theoretically grounded guidelines for the translation of Kazakh proper names, taking into account their structural, semantic, and cultural specificity. Such unification is essential for ensuring clarity in global communication and for strengthening the symbolic representation of Kazakhstan in the international linguistic landscape.

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DA – project administration, conceptualization, writing – review & editing; MY – methodology, visualization, validation; AM – writing – original draft, formal analysis.

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Географиялық нысандарды қайта атаудың ұлттық бірегейлікті қалыптастырудағы рөлі (аударма аспектісі)

Аңдатпа. Зерттеуде ұлттық бірегейлікті қалыптастырудың негізгі механизмі ретінде географиялық объектілерді (қайта) атау және аударманы біріздендірудің рөлі қарастырылады.

Зерттеу Қазақстан объектілерін салыстырмалы халықаралық контекстінде қарастыруға бағытталған. Ономастика, аударма және саяси география тәсілдеріне сүйене отырып, зерттеуде жалқы есімдердің құрылымдық және семантикалық ерекшеліктерін, сондай-ақ атау беру мен қайта атау тәжірибесіне әсер ететін әлеуметтік-саяси факторлар талданады. Транскрипция, транслитерация, калька және гибриді формаларды қоса алғанда, аударма стратегияларына және топонимдер бірқатар аударма нұсқаларының қалыптасуынан туындайтын сәйкессіздіктерге ерекше назар аударылады. Әдістеме сипаттамалық, құрылымдық және салыстырмалы тәсілдерді біріктіретін сапалы талдауға негізделген. Нәтижелер бірізді аударма нұсқаларының болмауы емледегі айырмашылықтарға, семантикалық мағынаның жоғалуына және атаулардың коммуникативті қызмет тиімділігінің төмендеуіне әкелетінін көрсетеді. Топонимикалық трансформация – бұл саяси өзгерістерге, мәдени саясатқа және сәйкестікке негізделген құрылымдық процесс. Зерттеуде атауларының фонологиялық және семантикалық тұтастығын сақтайтын, қазақ тіліне негізделген транслитерация модельдерін қабылдау ұсынылады, оған дәлелдер келтіріледі. Мысалы, «Қарағанды», «Өскемен» топонимдерін ағылшын тіліне аударған кезде қазақ тілінің ішкі логикасын нақтырақ көрсететін Qaragandy және Oskemen сияқты нұсқаларымен беру ұсынылады. Осылайша, (қайта) атау берудің тиімді әрі саналы саясаты тілдік үйлесімділікті сақтау мен ұлттық бірегейлікті жаһандық коммуникацияда нығайтудың маңызды көрсетіледі.

Түйін сөздер: ономастика, атау беру, қайта атау, аударманы біріздендіру, жалқы есімдерді аудару, ұлттық бірегейлік, топонимия.

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Роль реноминации географических объектов в формировании национальной идентичности (аспекты перевода)

Аннотация. В исследовании рассматривается роль номинации (реноминации) географических объектов и стандартизации (унификации) перевода как ключевого механизма в формировании национальной идентичности с особым акцентом на Казахстан в сравнительном международном контексте. Опираясь на подходы ономастики, переводоведения и политической географии, в исследовании анализируются структурные и семантические особенности имен собственных, а также социально-политические факторы, влияющие на практику номинации и реноминации. Особое внимание уделяется стратегиям перевода, включая транскрипцию, транслитерацию, калькирование и гибридные формы, а также несоответствиям, возникающим в результате их сосуществования. Методология основана на качественном анализе, сочетающем описательный, структурный и сравнительный подходы. Полученные результаты показывают, что отсутствие стандартизации перевода приводит к различиям в написании, потере семантической прозрачности и снижению эффективности коммуникативной функции топонимов. В то же время показано, что топонимическая трансформация – это структурированный процесс, обусловленный политическими изменениями, культурной политикой и согласованием идентичности. В исследовании приводятся аргументы в пользу принятия моделей транслитерации, ориентированных на казахский язык, которые сохраняют как фонологическую, так и семантическую целостность имен собственных. На примерах топонимов «Қарағанды» (рус. Караганда) и «Өскемен» (рус. Усть-Каменгорск) предлагается передавать на английский язык такие формы, как Qaragandy и Oskemen, которые более точно отражают внутреннюю логику казахского языка. Таким образом, сознательная политика (ре)номинации имеет важное значение для поддержания языковой согласованности и укрепления национальной идентичности в глобальной коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: ономастика, номинация, реноминация, стандартизация перевода, перевод имени собственного, национальная идентичность, топоним.

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