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THE MAIN PRINCIPLES OF THE STRUCTURAL CLASSIFICATION OF ETHNOTOPONYMS IN THE SHAHBUZ DISTRICT

ŞAHBUZ RAYONU ETNOTOPONİMLƏRİNİN STRUKTUR TƏSNİFATININ BAŞLICA PRİNSİPLƏRİ

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ABSTRACT

The article investigates the main features of the structural analysis of ethnotoponyms and its significance from a linguistic perspective, focusing primarily on geographical names formed on the basis of ethnonyms (tribal, ethnic, or clan names) in the territory of the Shahbuz district. The study discusses existing problems in linguistics related to the structural classification of toponyms and classifies the ethnotoponyms of the Shahbuz district according to four principal structural types: simple, derived, compound, and phrase-based forms. The research concludes that simple ethnotoponyms (such as *Biçənək*, *Kolanı*) represent the oldest layer in which tribal names were directly transformed into geographical names. Derived ethnotoponyms are based on the suffixation model of the Azerbaijani language, with suffixes such as *-lı*, *-lıq*, and *-lər* indicating affiliation and ethnic characteristics. Compound ethnotoponyms are formed through the combination of two or more lexical units. From this perspective, the article provides a structural analysis of toponyms such as *Külüs* and *Sələsüz* as place names with compound structures. The study also pays special attention to toponyms such as *Şada*, *Tirkeş*, and *Gecəzor*, which have lost their original forms as a result of historical phonetic changes.

Keywords: *ethnotoponym, ethnonym, structural classification, Shahbuz district, word formation, synharmonism.*

XÜLASƏ

Məqalədə etnotoponimlərin struktur təhlilinin başlıca xüsusiyyətləri və onun dilçilik baxımından əhəmiyyəti tədqiq edilmiş, başlıca diqqət Şahbuz rayonu ərazisində etnonim (tayfa, xalq, nəsil adı) əsasında yaranan coğrafi adlara yönəldilmişdir. Tədqiqatda toponimlərin strukturuna görə təsnifi sahəsində dilçilikdə mövcud problemlərdən bəhs olunmuş, Şahbuz rayonu ərazisindəki etnotoponimlərin dörd əsas struktur tipə görə (sadə, düzəltmə, mürəkkəb, birləşmə) təsnifatı aparılmışdır. Tədqiqat zamanı belə bir qənaətə gəlinmişdir ki, sadə etnotoponimlər (*Biçənək*, *Kolanı*, və s.) tayfa adının bilavasitə coğrafi ada çevrilməsinin ən qədim qatını təmsil edir. Düzəltmə etnotoponimlər Azərbaycan dilinin şəkildəşmə modelinə əsaslanır, *-lı*, *-lıq*, *-lər* şəkilçiləri mənsubluq və etnik xüsusiyyət bildirir. Mürəkkəb etnotoponimlər iki və ya daha artıq leksik vahidin birləşməsindən yaranır. Bu cəhətdən məqalədə *Külüs*, *Sələsüz*, kimi toponimlərin mürəkkəb quruluşlu yer adları kimi struktur təhlili aparılmışdır. Məqalədə həmçinin tarixi fonetik dəyişmələr nəticəsində ilkin formasını itirmiş toponimlərə (*Şada*, *Tirkeş*, *Gecəzor*) də xüsusi diqqət yetirilmişdir.

Açar sözlər: *etnotoponim, etnonim, struktur təsnifat, Şahbuz rayonu, sözyaradıcılığı, sinharmonizm.*

INTRODUCTION

Toponymy, formed at the intersection of linguistics, history, and geography, studies geographical names that preserve the oldest and most persistent traces of the collective memory of humanity and the societies that constitute it. Within these traces, ethnotoponyms – geographical names derived from ethnonyms – form a distinct category. Geographical names based on ethnonyms encapsulate elements related to both the history of linguistics and language development, as well as ethnic history. In some cases, toponyms of this category preserve traces of pre-literate or prehistoric periods, ref-

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lecting numerous facts that traditional sources have failed to document. This is particularly significant for the Turkic peoples, who have left profound imprints across the vast Eurasian space over centuries and have shaped history, yet often prioritized creating history over documenting it in written records.

MAIN BODY

A review of the developmental history of Azerbaijani linguistics reveals that the emergence of toponymy as an independent field of science dates back to the mid-20th century. During the 1980s and 1990 s, scholars such as Musa Adilov, Aydın Pashayev, A.A.Gurbanov, B.A.Budagov, and G.A.Geybullayev made significant contributions to the systematic study of Azerbaijani toponyms. However, the study of ethnotoponyms – specifically those located within the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic – using specific methodologies has gained particular importance in recent decades. Contemporary research in this field is directed not only toward achieving new findings but also toward re-evaluating the characteristics of onomastic units that were, in some cases, intentionally misinterpreted in previous years, particularly during the Soviet era.

The concept of an “ethnotoponym” emerges when an ethnonym, as an independent lexeme, plays a primary role in the formation of geographical names, particularly those of settlements, mountains, rivers, and valleys. In other words, an ethnotoponym is a geographical name derived from an ethnonym (the name of a tribe, nation, or lineage). V.A.Zhuchkevich, who systematically integrated this concept into research, noted that “toponyms of ethnonymic origin belong to the oldest strata of geographical names, as they are directly connected to the initial settlement history of peoples” [Zhuchkevich, 1980: 87].

While the semantic study of ethnotoponyms relies heavily on the fields of history, ethnography, and geography, their structural investigation and classification are primarily matters of linguistic inquiry. Determining the structure, word-formation models, and morphological characteristics of each group of toponyms is essential from both theoretical and applied perspectives. This is because, since toponyms are formed according to various structural models, an accurate interpretation of their historical, semantic, and ethnic meanings is only possible through rigorous structural analysis.

The structural classification of toponyms in onomastics has undergone a long developmental trajectory. Various schools of world linguistics have proposed their own models in this field. French linguist Albert Dauzat distinguished three types of toponyms based on their structure-simple, derivative, and compound-a classification that subsequently became widely adopted in European onomastics [Dauzat, 1926: 42].

In Azerbaijani onomastics, the structural approach gained a strong theoretical foundation through the research of Afad Gurbanov. Gurbanov categorized Azerbaijani toponyms into four primary groups based on their word-formation methods: simple (root form), derivative (affixed), compound (consisting of two or more words), and those formed through syntactic combinations (phrasal toponyms). This classification has served as a methodological basis for subsequent research.

In his fundamental study on the ancient history and ethnography of Azerbaijan, Giyasaddin Geybullayev explained the mechanism by which ethnonyms transform into toponyms, demonstrating that tribal names play a primary role in this process, while geographical terms play a secondary role.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that despite numerous approaches, principles, and criteria proposed regarding the structural classification of ethnotoponyms, a unified classification has yet to be established. There remains a divergence of opinion among researchers on this matter. Our analyses indicate that, methodologically, the principle of structural-semantic analysis requires meeting several key criteria: first, toponyms must be morphologically segmented (root + suffix, or components of a compound/phrase), and the meaning of each component must be clarified; second, the structural

model must be evaluated within a historical context; and third, the relationship between the semantic load and the structure must be systematically tracked.

Consistent with the broader Turkic and Azerbaijani linguistic landscapes, the toponyms prevalent in the Nakhchivan region, and particularly within the Shahbuz district, can be grouped into four primary structural categories:

- Simple ethnotoponyms,
- Derivative (affixed) ethnotoponyms,
- Compound ethnotoponyms,
- Ethnotoponyms formed through syntactic combination (phrasal toponyms).

Simple ethnotoponyms are place names consisting solely of a single root (an ethnonymic root) that have not undergone any word-formation suffixation. These toponyms represent the oldest stratum of onomastics, as the direct evolution of a tribal name into a geographical name pertains to the primary stage of word formation. Toponyms such as *Biçənək* and *Kolanı* in the Shahbuz district can be categorized under this group. It is essential to note that when discussing simple toponyms in linguistics, two sub-categories should be distinguished: a) Purely simple toponyms consisting exclusively of an ethnonymic root; b) “Lexicalized” toponyms formed on an ethnonymic base that have either lost their original form or undergone modifications over time. The first category comprises fully transparent examples; when observing these toponyms, the underlying ethnonym is clearly discernible. In the second category, however, the ethnonymic root has been subjected to historical phonetic shifts.

As noted above, the toponyms *Kolanı* and *Biçənək* serve as clear examples of simple ethnotoponyms within the geographical environment of Nakhchivan. These names are directly derived from the names of Turkic-speaking tribes – the Pechenegs (*Beçənəks*) and the *Kolanıs*, who were part of the Kangarli tribal union; these ethnonyms evolved into place names without the addition of any suffixes. The *Kolanıs* were Turkic tribes that settled across a vast geography, including Karabakh, Nakhchivan, Iravan, Shirvan, and other regions [Hacıheydərli, 2018: 7].

Simultaneously, there are ethnotoponyms that are simple in nature but have undergone certain modifications over time, necessitating a detailed analysis. Within the Nakhchivan region, and specifically the Shahbuz geographical area, such place names are encountered, which are typically associated with the names of the As, Sak, Sabir, and Hun Turkic peoples. Geographical names bearing these ancient ethnonymic traces can also be classified under the group of simple ethnotoponyms; however, they require careful attention during research due to their reduced etymological transparency. The ethnotoponym *Şada*, which preserves the name of the *Şato/Şadaq* Turks (White Tatars), should be analyzed as a simple oikonym that has undergone certain changes. It is no coincidence that the name of this village, located in the Shahbuz district, was recorded in its original form as *Şadaq* in some medieval sources [Detailed Register of the Nakhchivan Sanjak, 2001: 115-116]. Similarly, the ethno-oikonym *Tirkeş* is a simple toponym that has undergone phonetic modification and is associated with the name of the *Türkeş* tribe.

Analyses have demonstrated that simple ethnotoponyms, possessing the most compact morphological structure, are considered historically the most resilient toponyms. The reason for this is their lack of morphological “transparency” in terms of word formation; suffixless forms are less susceptible to phonetic shifts, thereby preserving their original phonetic appearance.

Derivative ethnotoponyms are place names formed by appending word-forming suffixes to an ethnonymic root. Although this represents the most widespread structural model in Azerbaijani toponymy, including the Nakhchivan region [Budagov & Geybullayev, 1998: 15], the number of such ethnotoponyms recorded in the Shahbuz district is relatively limited. These affixed toponyms can denote possession, location, and ethnic characteristics simultaneously. Among the most productive suffixes for toponyms in the Azerbaijani language are *-lı*⁴ and *-lıq*⁴. Both of these suffixes signify a

“place belonging to a particular lineage, tribe, nation, or ethnic group”. The oronym Təkəlik, recorded within the Shahbuz district, exemplifies this specific structure.

Structurally, compound ethnotoponyms are place names formed through the combination of two or more lexical units. A key characteristic of this type is that the ethnonym combines either with another ethnonym, a geographical term, or another lexical unit. Because compound toponyms are structurally more informative, they provide richer material for both linguistic and historical-geographical research. A vast majority of the toponyms we have recorded in the Shahbuz district, particularly those formed in earlier periods, possess this compound structure. Examples of such toponyms include Külüs and Sələsüz.

The primary structural models of compound ethnotoponyms can be listed as follows:

Ethnonym + Geographical Term: This model is the most prevalent compound structural type within the onomastic system of the Shahbuz district. Here, the ethnonym appears in the initial position, while the geographical term (mountain, river, village, plain, fortress, bridge, etc.) denotes the nature of the location. Şahbuzkənd and Külüsün düzü are examples of this type of ethnotoponym.

Ethnonym + Ethnonym: A portion of compound ethnotoponyms is formed based on the “ethnonym + ethnonym” model – the combination of the names of two tribes, nations, or ethnic groups. Historically, such toponyms indicate areas where two ethnic groups converged. It is noteworthy that while this type of ethnotoponym is characteristic of Turkic toponymy in Central Asia, it is not widely distributed in the Azerbaijani landscape. However, our research has enabled us to identify several such toponyms within the territory of the Shahbuz district. Oikonyms such as Külüs (combining the Kol Turks and the Uz tribe) and Sələsüz encapsulate the characteristics mentioned above.

In toponymy, complex-structured toponyms are sometimes formed based on the “ethnonym + noun” (e.g., proper name, location indicator) model. A number of toponyms emerge from the combination of ethnonyms with terms denoting their status or geographical positioning. A structural analysis of the Külüs toponym demonstrates that it was formed precisely in this manner.

Compound ethnotoponyms often undergo reduction (shortening) during their phonetic evolution. Over time, one or more components forming the toponym may be dropped, or the components may entirely lose their phonetic identity. In such instances, they adopt entirely new word forms. Many toponyms prevalent across Azerbaijan appear as shortened or reduced variants of the compound forms recorded in historical sources. As this process spans many centuries, their structural analysis requires in-depth onomastic scrutiny. Difficulties can also arise in the semantic and etymological interpretation of such toponyms. Folk etymology often leads to inaccurate interpretations or attempts to explain these toponyms through languages to which they do not belong. Such distortions are particularly characteristic of toponyms within the Nakhchivan ethnotoponymic landscape. The absurd claims regarding the interpretation of certain toponyms in the Nakhchivan region propagated by Armenians who were resettled in the South Caucasus in the 19th century and who held territorial claims against Nakhchivan—an ancestral Turkic land—originate from this very context. For example, the toponym Gecəzor, which semantically signifies the “pass of the Uz/Oghuz braves”, was for many years misrepresented as having Armenian origins, eventually leading to this historical toponym being replaced by another.

Within the pan-Turkic and Azerbaijani ethnotoponymic landscapes, a series of complex toponyms are formed through syntactic combination (phrasal construction). In this process, several words integrate through syntactic relations and become stabilized as a geographical name. In many instances, the syntactic structure is preserved within the toponym; in other words, such toponyms have become fixed in the form of a complete phrase or word combination. This can be observed when examining ethnotoponyms such as Qazangöl aşırımı (Qazangöl Pass), Biçənək aşırımı (Biçənək Pass), and Qazanyurdu (Qazan’s Homeland).

Ethnotoponyms formed through combination typically become stabilized at a later stage in written history. This stems from the fact that they are products of a more “conscious” phase of word formation. For comparison, simple ethnotoponyms generally emerge as the result of unconscious word formation, reflecting a natural linguistic process. In contrast, toponyms formed through syntactic combination primarily manifest as acts of conscious naming by the collective memory of the community.

CONCLUSION

The study of the structural classification principles of ethnotoponyms demonstrates that this category occupies a unique position in Azerbaijani onomastics, both in terms of its rich empirical material and the profound theoretical challenges it presents. Each of the four primary structural types (simple, derivative, compound, and those formed via syntactic combination) is distinguished by its specific morpho-semantic features. Simple ethnotoponyms represent the historically oldest stratum, bearing the traces of the direct evolution of tribal names into geographical ones. Derivative ethnotoponyms serve as evidence of the high productivity of suffixation—the dominant model of word formation in the Azerbaijani language. Compound ethnotoponyms possess a rich semantic structure derived from the synthesis of two lexical units; such toponyms convey ethnic, geographical, and social information simultaneously. Finally, ethnotoponyms formed through syntactic combination reflect the intriguing word-formation process of stabilizing syntactic structures into permanent geographical names.

In conclusion, it can be stated that the structural classification of ethnotoponyms is not merely a morphological procedure, but a method of interpreting historical and ethnic information through linguistic means. Each structural model reflects an internal historical truth. Based on this, we can formulate hypotheses regarding tribal and lineage migrations, settlement processes, assimilation phenomena, and ethnic neighborliness within the Shahbuz district. Taking all these factors into account, it is definitive that structural-semantic analysis serves not only as the methodological foundation of ethnotonymy but also as its philosophical objective.

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