

**SEMANTIC EXPANSION OF TOPOLEXEMES IN OLD TURKIC TEXTS: THE CASE OF *yär* AND *sub***

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**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the semantic development and expansion of meaning of topolexemes occurring in Old Turkic texts, particularly through the examples of *yär* and *sub*. Based on materials from historical texts, the study elucidates the initial cosmological and geographical meanings of these topolexemes and their subsequent enrichment with political, social, and mythological senses. The research identifies the multifaceted meanings of the lexeme *yär*, including “earth,” “territory,” “state domain,” “homeland,” and “borderland,” and reveals its conceptual significance within the Old Turkic worldview. Furthermore, the article analyzes the meanings of the lexeme *sub*, such as “water,” “river,” “water basin,” “land and water,” and “homeland,” as well as the historical-semantic characteristics of other geographical terms associated with these lexical units, including *ılay*, *tarıylay*, *kögmän*, *bältir*, *baş*, *köl*, *ögüz*, *özäk*, and *özän*. The study also demonstrates the processes of metaphorical and metonymic expansion of topolexemes, their continuity throughout the history of Turkic languages, and the preservation of certain lexical units in modern Turkic languages and toponyms. The findings serve as an important source for understanding the semantic evolution of Old Turkic vocabulary and the spatial perceptions of Turkic peoples.

**KEYWORDS:** Old Turkic language, topolexeme, semantic expansion, *yär*, *sub*.

Indeed, according to the Old Turkic worldview, the universe consisted of three layers: the blue sky (*kök*), the dark earth (*yayız yär*), and the intermediate realm inhabited by human beings. This conception is reflected in the opening lines of the runic inscriptions:

“Üzä Kök Täñri asra yayız yär qilinduqda ikin ara kişi oylı qilinmiş. Kişi oylinta üzä äçüm apam Bumın qağan, İstami qağan oturmış.”

Translation:

“When the Blue Sky above and the Dark Earth below were created, between them humankind was created. Over humankind my ancestors, Bumin Qaghan and Istemi Qaghan, ascended the throne” (KT 1).

An internal classification of the lexical units belonging to this group can therefore be established.

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The mountain cult reflected in the written monuments represents a symbolic manifestation of ancient Turkic myths. In antiquity, people regarded themselves as powerless before lofty mountains and believed that deities and spirits dwelled on their peaks. For this reason, they ascended mountain summits to perform acts of worship, sacred rituals, and sacrificial ceremonies<sup>7</sup>. For example, one of the Old Turkic written monuments, the runic manuscript \*Irk Bitig\*, contains the following narrative in its twelfth folio:

“(ä)r: (a)bqa: b(a)rmış: tayda: q(a)ml(a)mış t(ä)ñridä: (ä)rkl(i)g: tir: anča: biliñl(ä)r: j(a)b(i)z : ol”

Translation:

“A man went hunting, became trapped in the mountains. ‘It is Erklig among the gods,’ they say. Know from this that it is evil” (IB 12).

Topolexemes in ancient texts acquired various contextual meanings, thereby enhancing the stylistic power of the narrative. This tendency is particularly evident in the use of the lexeme \*yär\* (“earth, land; soil”). Depending on the context, \*yär\* conveyed political, social, religious, and mythological meanings. In almost all Old Turkic monuments, unless endowed with sacred significance, the word primarily denoted the “surface of the earth,” while simultaneously developing additional semantic layers. Through various manifestations of polysemy in the inscriptions, the lexeme \*yär\* expressed the following meanings in Old Turkic:

1. “The Earth” in a general sense

In this meaning, the concept is invested with sacred significance. The expression \*yayız yär\* (“dark earth”) emphasizes the entirety of the world, thereby legitimizing the divine sovereignty of the ancient Turks over the whole spatial realm:

“üzä kök täñri yarılqaduq üçün asra yayız yär igitük üçün älimän törümün ätintim”

Translation:

“Because the Blue Heaven above bestowed its blessing, and with the protection of the Dark Earth below, I established order in my realm and government” (Tar W 1).

“atimän üzä kök täñri asra yayız yär yana...ntar atantim”

Translation:

“A year passed. My name was once again proclaimed under the Blue Heaven above and the Dark Earth below” (Tar E 4–5).

In the following example, the phrase \*yär ayu bärti\* (“the earth gave an order”) demonstrates that, according to ancient Turkic ideology, the earth possessed a sacred authority comparable to that of the Blue Sky:

“(täñri) yär ayu bärti anta šančdım yazıqlıy atlıy ... täñri tuta bärti”

Translation:

“(Heaven) and Earth gave the command. Then I slew them. The guilty horsemen were seized by Heaven” (ShU East 2).

These examples indicate that the lexeme \*yär\* functioned not merely as a nominative lexical item in Old Turkic texts but as a conceptual-cosmological category. Simultaneously, it represented the lower layer of the universe within the cosmological system, served as a political and ideological symbol legitimizing the ruler’s authority over space, and embodied a force associated with divine will. In particular, the expression \*yayız yär\* signifies the universality and totality of space, whereas the construction \*yär ayu bärti\* confirms the sacred interpretation of natural elements within the ancient Turkic worldview.

<sup>7</sup> Жүрақұзиев Н. Қадимги туркий ёзма ёдгорликлар ва туркий фольклорда космогоник мифология. – Т. 2018 – Б. 89.

2. “A specific geographical territory, area, or settlement”

The meaning of “a specific place” is especially evident in the expression \*ötükän yär\*:

“ögdüni qanuy künüy biz ... qičlayım ötükan yäri”

Translation:

“To the east are the Qanuy and Kunuy rivers ... my winter settlement is the land of Ötüken” (Tar W 5).

The designation of Ötüken by means of the word \*yär\* is noteworthy. These examples suggest that the lexeme could also be interpreted in the sense of “city” or “inhabited place.” Here, \*yär\* does not denote cosmic space in general but functions as a toponymic unit referring to a concrete local territory. In the phrase \*ötükän yär\*, it performs a geographical-specifying function by identifying a clearly delimited area of habitation. Consequently, the semantic scope of the lexeme expands to encompass the meanings of “place,” “settlement,” “administrative territory,” and even notions close to “city” or “residential center.”

3. “A political territory belonging to a particular state or ethnic group; borderland, frontier”

The examples cited below demonstrate that the lexeme \*yär\* also functioned as a political-territorial term in Old Turkic. In such contexts, it denoted not merely a place but a territorial unit under the possession and control of a particular people, tribe, or state. In expressions such as \*Uyyur yärintä\*, \*äš yäri\*, and \*yärin tapa\*, the lexeme carries ethnic and political connotations, conveying ideas of ownership, control, and territorial delimitation. As a result, it acquires the meanings of “frontier,” “national territory,” and “state domain,” confirming that the concept of space in ancient Turkic political thought was inseparably linked with authority and military-strategic control:

“Uyyur yärintä Yaylaqar qan ata käligmä”

Translation:

“He came seeking Yaghaqar Khan in the land of the Uyghurs” (Suj 1).

“äši yär tapa az är itdim kör tädim qırqız qanı kögmän irintä”

Translation:

“I sent a guide to investigate the land of the allies. I said, ‘Observe.’ The Kyrgyz khan was in the land of Kögmän” (ShU N 11).

“yälmasin äš yäriñärü idmiş”

Translation:

“He sent his vanguard to the land of the allies” (ShU N 12).

“yayı bol... turup yärin tapa bardı”

Translation:

“They became enemies and then returned directly to their own land” (ShU S 6).

In the Orkhon inscriptions, the expressions \*yär bayırqu\* and \*az yär\* likewise denote the territories or countries inhabited by the tribes and states mentioned. While the form \*yärgärü\* is used in a narrower sense, the phrase \*ötükän yär\* conveys the meaning of a specific territory. Moreover, the fact that Ötüken is designated both as \*yär\* (“land”) and \*yış\* (“forest, wooded region”) provides valuable material for semantic analysis, indicating the coexistence of geographical, political, and cultural perceptions within the conceptualization of space in Old Turkic<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Karaman A. Orhon Türkçesinde Yerleşim Birimi Adları. Korkut Ata Türkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi, 2024. – S. 478.

In line 4 of the Taryat inscription, the word *yär* occurs together with *sub* (“water”), forming a broader semantic unit that denotes the entire “country,” “land,” or “homeland”:

“ötükän äli tägräs äli äkin ara ilayım tariylayım : säkiz sälänä : orqun toyla : säbin : tälädü : qaraya : boryu : ol yärimin subumın qonar köçär bän”

Translation:

“The lands of Ötüken and Tegres, the valleys and cultivated fields between them, the Eight Selenga, Orkhon, Tula, Sevin, Teledu, Qaragha, and Borgu rivers—upon these lands and by these waters I settle and migrate; these are the territories of my summer pastures, winter camps, and settlements” (Tar W 4).

In this passage, the terms *Ötüken* and *Tegres* are expressed through the word *äl* (“realm, country”). After the mention of terrestrial features such as valleys and agricultural lands, a series of water bodies is listed. Subsequently, all of these geographical elements are collectively summarized through the expression *yär sub*, and the narrative continues on this basis. Thus, it becomes evident that the concept being conveyed refers to the entire homeland encompassing both land and water resources, that is, the total territorial domain and natural wealth of a country.

From a semantic perspective, the combination *yär sub* represents a stable conceptual unit in Old Turkic. Rather than simply denoting “land and water” as separate geographical entities, it functions as a comprehensive designation for a homeland, native territory, or sovereign domain. In this context, *yär* symbolizes terrestrial space, while *sub* represents rivers, lakes, and other water resources. Together, they create a holistic image of a territory suitable for habitation, migration, economic activity, and political control. Consequently, the expression reflects the ancient Turkic perception of space as an integrated unity of land and water, both of which constituted the material foundation of statehood, prosperity, and ethnic identity<sup>9</sup>.

There are also instances where the word *yär* is used synonymously and in parallel with *äl*, which means “country,” “state,” or “realm.” Such usage can be observed in the Yenisei inscriptions:

“öz yärim idöq yärim äsiz ä äsiz älim qanım kün ay äsiz ä n astägi ö<z> yärimin bäg<i> ögür”

Translation:

“My homeland, my sacred land, alas! My sacred country, my khan, the sun and the moon, alas! ... I praise the lord of my native land” (Y 42/1).

In this example, *yär* (“land, homeland”) and *äl* (“country, state, realm”) are employed in a synonymous and parallel manner. The passage demonstrates that the lexeme *yär* extends beyond its primary geographical meaning and acquires the semantic sense of “homeland” or “country,” thus approaching the meaning of *äl*. This parallel usage reflects the close conceptual relationship between territory and political community in the worldview of the ancient Turks. Consequently, *yär* functions not merely as a geographical term but also as a designation of homeland, statehood, and collective identity<sup>10</sup>. This passage demonstrates that the lexeme *yär* forms a synonymous parallel construction with *äl*, a lexical unit denoting a socio-political entity such as a “country” or “state,” thereby expressing the concept of “homeland” or “statehood.” Consequently, parallel usages such as *öz yärim – älim* (“my homeland – my country”) function as a stylistic device that reinforces semantic emphasis and enhances expressiveness. Such representations indicate that ancient Turkic rhetorical tradition employed lexical pairings as a means of strengthening and elaborating conceptual meaning.

Although the lexeme *yär* originally denoted a cosmological and spatial concept, over time it expanded to encompass social, political, administrative, and even everyday semantic domains. In Karakhanid Turkic, *yär* was primarily used in the meanings of “place,” “earth,” “territory,” “region,” “country,” “city,” and “soil.” In certain texts, it also referred to more specific local entities such as a “shelter,” “spring,” or “the source of a stream.” This semantic

<sup>9</sup> O’sha asar. – S. 482.

<sup>10</sup> Aydın E. Sibiryä’da Türk İzleri Yenisey Yazıtları. İstanbul: Kronik Kitap. 2019 – S. 142.

diversification illustrates the gradual broadening of the lexeme's functional scope, transforming it from a general designation of space into a multifaceted concept capable of representing geographical, political, social, and practical realities<sup>11</sup>. This process reflects the metaphorical expansion of the concept of space, that is, its transition into a socio-cultural and socio-political category. In general, the semantic evolution of the lexeme *yär* throughout different historical stages demonstrates that, while preserving its original cosmological and spatial core, it gradually acquired additional social, political, administrative, and everyday meanings through metaphorical enrichment.

The lexeme *su(b)*, whose primary meaning is “water,” is used in the inscriptions in the sense of “river” or “body of water”:

“ötükän äli tägräs äli äkin ara olurmuş subı sälänjä ärmiş anta äli ärmiş barmış”

Translation:

“He ruled between the lands of Ötüken and Tegres; its water was the Selenga River. His territory was there, and then he departed” (ShU East 2).

Within the historical lexical layer of the Turkic languages, *su* is one of the oldest and most stable hydronymic units. In the inscriptional texts, this lexeme is frequently employed in a narrowed contextual meaning, referring not merely to water as a liquid but to specific geographical entities such as a “river,” “water basin,” or “water source.” In certain contexts, it also conveys the meanings of “homeland” or “territory under political control.” The lexeme retained both its form and meaning in Karakhanid and Chagatai Turkic. Notably, it appears in the *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* and survives in Modern Uzbek as *suv* (“water”), where it continues to function as a geographical term.

It may therefore be concluded that the ruling dynasties of northern and northeastern Asia—beginning with the Ashina clan and later including the Yaghlaqar (Toquz Oghuz) and other dynasties—considered themselves the legitimate hereditary owners of the *yer-sub* (“land-and-water”), that is, the entire homeland encompassing both terrestrial and aquatic domains under their sovereignty.

The inscriptions also contain the lexeme *ilay* (“valley”), attested in the Taryat inscription (Tar W 4), although it appears only rarely in the corpus:

“(ötükän äli tägräs äli) äkin ara ilayım tarıylayım säkiz sälänjä orqun toyla säbin tälädü qaraya borıu ol yärimin subumın qonar köçär bän”

Translation:

“The lands of Ötüken and Tegres, the valleys and cultivated fields between them, the Eight Selenga, Orkhon, Tula, Sevin, Teledu, Qaragha, and Borgu rivers—upon these lands and by these waters I settle and migrate; these are the territories of my summer pastures, winter camps, and settlements” (Tar W 4).

This example demonstrates that the lexeme *ilay* occupied a relatively limited position within the Old Turkic lexical system but functioned as a semantically specialized geographical term. In the text, it occurs together with *tarıylayım* (“my cultivated fields”). While *ilay* denotes a natural geographical formation, namely a “valley,” *tarıylayım* refers to an “agricultural field” or “cultivated land” associated with human economic activity. The pairing of these two lexemes portrays the natural and cultural dimensions of space not as opposing categories but as complementary elements that together constitute the inhabited landscape. This usage reflects the ancient Turkic perception of territory as an integrated environment where natural geographical features and human-managed agricultural spaces coexist within a unified spatial framework.

The lexeme *ilay* (Tar W 4) is derived from the Old Turkic word *i*,<sup>12</sup> meaning “tree” or “forest,” through the addition of the suffix *-lay*, which denotes “a place characterized by” or “an area covered with.” Consequently, the word originally signified “woodland,” “forest-covered area,” or “grove,” and subsequently developed the meaning of

<sup>11</sup> Ünlü S. Karahanlı Türkçesi Sözlüğü. Konya: Eğitim Yayınevi. 2012a – S. 989-990.

<sup>12</sup> Tekin T. Orhon Türkçesi Grameri, Sanat Kitabevi. – Ankara. 2000. – 244 s.

“valley.” This derivational structure indicates that the term was initially associated with a natural landscape distinguished by dense vegetation.

From a historical-linguistic perspective, *ilay* represents an archaic geographical term of Old Turkic. Notably, it does not appear in any of the later historical stages of the Turkic languages, nor is it attested in the lexical inventories of Karakhanid, Chagatai, or modern Turkic languages. Therefore, the lexeme may be regarded as an obsolete topographical designation that disappeared from active usage after the Old Turkic period. Its occurrence in the inscriptions nevertheless provides valuable evidence for reconstructing the geographical vocabulary and landscape perception of the ancient Turks, reflecting the close relationship between natural vegetation and spatial classification in the early Turkic linguistic worldview.

The lexeme *tariylay* is derived from the Old Turkic verb *tari-* (“to sow, to cultivate”) through a two-stage word-formation process. First, the noun-forming suffix *-γ* is added to produce *tariγ* (“crop, cultivated plant”), and subsequently the locative suffix *-lay*, which was highly productive in Old Turkic for forming place names and location nouns, is attached to yield *tariylay*, meaning “cultivated field,” “farmland,” or “arable land.”

Both the lexeme itself and its constituent forms remained actively used in Karakhanid Turkish texts. In particular, the following forms are attested in the *Kutadgu Bilig*: *tari-* (“to sow”) (QBN, 11113; QBN, 4378), *tariγ* (“crop”) (QBK, 33315), and *tariylay / tarlay* (“cultivated field, farmland”) (QBN, 3413; QBN, 4629; QBK, 3887). The work also mentions a distinct social group associated with agriculture, namely the *tariγčilar* (“farmers, cultivators”) (QBK, 33315). In modern Turkic languages, including Uzbek, the word *tariq* has undergone semantic narrowing and now refers only to a particular cereal crop (millet), rather than to crops in general.

It should also be noted that in historical Uzbek literary texts the term *tarlon* was used as a personal name or designation for individuals belonging to the ordinary agricultural or lower social strata, including peasants and servants. For example:

“Qul Tarlon shodligidan, To‘xtolmadi yig‘idan” (“Oygul bilan Baxtiyor”)

In our view, the Old Uzbek word *tarlon* may represent a phonologically reduced and semantically transformed form of the Old Turkic lexeme *tariylay*. Such a development is consistent with known phonetic processes in Uzbek, where the medial consonant *-(i)γ-* is frequently lost (e.g., *o‘g‘il > ul*, *og‘ir > our*). Accordingly, the following historical development may be proposed:

*tariylay* → *tariylan* → *tarlan* → *tarlon*

Under this interpretation, the original meaning “cultivated field” gradually gave rise, through the suffix *-n* and contextual reinterpretation, to the meaning “a person working in cultivated fields,” namely “farmer,” “agricultural laborer,” or even “servant.” Such semantic evolution corresponds well to common patterns of historical lexical-semantic development, whereby place names become associated with the people inhabiting or working within those places.

Furthermore, the Shine Usu and Taryat inscriptions mention the toponym *Kögmän*, which appears to denote a “mountain valley” or “mountainous region” within the geographical context of the texts. A closer examination of the sources reveals that this topolexeme bears a striking formal resemblance to the word *kökmön*, meaning “a two-year-old male deer.” This lexical item is still attested in the Chüy dialects of Kyrgyz, where it occurs with the same meaning, as illustrated by the expression:

“Kökmöndü körüp kubanıp ketet eken”

“They say he became delighted upon seeing a two-year-old male deer.”

The phonetic similarity between *Kögmän* and *kökmön* may point to an ancient lexical connection, suggesting that the toponym could originally have been associated with the fauna or ecological characteristics of the region. Although further etymological investigation is required, such evidence demonstrates the close relationship between

geographical nomenclature and the natural environment in the linguistic worldview of the ancient Turkic peoples<sup>13</sup>. Of particular interest is the fact that the word *kökmä* occurs in the Yenisei inscriptions, where it clearly denotes a deer:

“Yäti böri ölürdim, barsıq, kökmäkig ölürmädim.”

Translation:

“I killed seven wolves, but I did not kill either the tiger or the deer” (Y 11, 4).

This example demonstrates that the lexeme *kökmä* functioned as a zoological term referring to a deer or stag in Old Turkic. Its phonetic proximity to *kökmön* and, potentially, to the toponym *Kögmän* deserves attention from an etymological perspective.

Turning to the references concerning *Kögmän* in the Taryat inscription, it becomes apparent that this place name generally refers to wooded foothill or mountainous regions characterized by abundant vegetation:

“yaylayım : ötükan : quzı kädin uçı täz başı öñdüni qanuy : künüy : biz ... qıçlayım ötükan yäri”<sup>14</sup>

Translation:

“My summer pasture is Ötüken; its northern boundary extends to the source of the Tez River. To the east are the Qanuy and Kunuy rivers ... my winter settlement is the land of Ötüken.”

In this context, *Kögmän* appears not merely as a mountain range but as a broader geographical area encompassing forested mountain slopes, foothills, valleys, and seasonal grazing lands. The environmental characteristics associated with the region correspond closely to habitats suitable for wild deer and other forest animals. Therefore, the formal similarity between *Kögmän* and the animal name *kökmä* / *kökmön* may not be coincidental. It is plausible that the toponym originally emerged from the ecological features of the landscape, particularly its association with deer-populated wooded mountain zones.

From a semantic standpoint, *Kögmän* thus represents a topolexeme whose meaning extends beyond a simple geographical designation. It encapsulates a complex environmental concept combining mountainous terrain, forest vegetation, wildlife habitats, and seasonal pastoral use. Such naming practices reflect the ancient Turkic tendency to derive place names from salient natural features and fauna, illustrating the close interconnection between language, landscape, and traditional ecological knowledge.

“ötükan yäri : onyı tarqan süyü yayı : bodunqa (qaya)ñi bärigärü uçı : altun : yış kädin üçü : kögmän : iligärü uçü költi”

Translation:

“My summer pasture is in the land of Ötüken; its northern boundary lies at a tributary of the Tes River. To the east are the Qanuy and Kunuy rivers ... my winter settlement is in the land of Ötüken. To the north is Öngi Tarqan Suy; the khan of the hostile people occupies the southern frontier. The southern boundary reaches Altun Yış (the Altai Mountains), the western boundary extends to Kögmän, and the eastern boundary reaches Költi(?)” (Tar W 5).

Furthermore, considering that this area was characterized by forests and extensive pastures, it is reasonable to associate the toponym with the abundance of deer inhabiting the region. Therefore, it may be suggested that the designation *Kögmän* originated from the dense presence of this species of deer. In this respect, the expression *Kögmän yış* may have originally conveyed a meaning similar to “Valley of Deer” or “Deer Woodland.”

The formation of toponyms on the basis of zoonymic elements is a historically characteristic feature of Turkic languages. A comparable example is *suqaq*, which originally denoted “deer,” “stag,” or “white deer,” and

<sup>13</sup> Mukambaev, Ceenbay, Kırgız Tilinin Dialektologiyalıq Sözdüğü (yayına haz. Prof. Dr. Kadıralı Konkobaev), Bıшкеk, 2009 – B. 535.

<sup>14</sup> Э.Айдинда іç(і)layım – ич ўтлоғим. Бу учун қаранғ: Аудин Е. Уғур язатлари. 2 басım. – İstanbul: Bilge kültür sanat. 2021 – S. 45.

subsequently developed into a place name. It should be emphasized that Turkic place names are frequently derived from zoonyms, phytonyms, and, most commonly, distinctive landscape features.

The preservation of this historical lexeme in modern Turkic languages in the form *kökmön* can be explained by the process of progressive dissimilation, motivated by ease of pronunciation:

*kögmän* → *kökmän* → *kökmön*

This phonological development reflects the adaptation of the word to more convenient patterns of speech production.

It is also noteworthy that the toponym *Kokman* still exists today. It refers to a village in the Krasnogorsk District of Udmurtia (Russia), situated at the confluence of the Kokmanka and Pester rivers. Although a direct historical connection remains to be demonstrated, the preservation of a formally similar place name may provide valuable material for future comparative toponymic research.

The inscriptions also mention the topolexeme *bältir* (MCh S 10; MCh E 9), which appears to denote “a confluence of watercourses” or “a pasture located at the junction of rivers”:

“ötükän yış başı anta öngüz başı anta İdoq baş kädintä yabaş toquş bältirintä anta yayladım”

Translation:

“At the summit of the Ötüken Mountains, at Öngüz Başı, and west of İduq Başı, I spent the summer at the confluence (pasture area) of the Yabash and Toqush rivers” (ShU E 9).

The lexeme *bältir* appears to be derived from *bäl* (“waist,” “ridge,” or metaphorically “the middle course of a river”) together with *-tir*, possibly a phonetic variant of a plural or locative-forming element. In Old Turkic, the term seems to have been used in the sense of “a crossroads of routes” or “a river junction.” Significantly, no direct equivalent of this word has so far been identified in the lexical records of later historical stages of the Turkic languages. Consequently, *bältir* may be regarded as an archaic geographical term specific to the Old Turkic inscriptional tradition, referring to strategically and economically important locations where waterways or migration routes converged<sup>15</sup>.

In the inscriptions, when occurring in geographical contexts and in association with water bodies, the topolexeme *baş* generally conveys the meanings of “head,” “source,” “upper course,” “bank,” or “slope.” Its usage is illustrated in the following examples:

“täz başinta : örügün ... (çit) anta yaratıtdım”

Translation:

“At the Tes River headwaters (or along the Tes River), I had the royal tent and its surrounding camp fortifications constructed there” (Tar W 1).

“ötükän yış başı: anta: öngüz başı anta İdoq baş: kädintä: yabaş toquş: bältirintä: anta yayladım”

Translation:

“At the summit of the Ötüken Mountains, at Öngüz Başı, and west of İduq Başı, I spent the summer in the pasturelands at the confluence of the Yabash and Toqush rivers” (ShU E 9).

These examples demonstrate that *baş* functions as a geographical term denoting the upper part, source, beginning, or prominent point of a natural feature such as a mountain, river, or valley. In toponymic constructions such as *Täz Başı*, *Öngüz Başı*, and *Ötüken Yış Başı*, the lexeme serves to identify a specific section or extremity of a landscape feature, often corresponding to a river source, mountain summit, or upper slope.

<sup>15</sup> Caferoğlu A. Eski Uygur Türkçesi Sözlüğü. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları. 2015. S. – 39.

According to Sir Gerard Clauson, the primary meaning of *baş* was originally “head,” referring to the human body part. Through semantic extension, it also came to denote a “leader,” “chief,” or “commander of an army.” This figurative meaning was already well established in the Old Turkic period and continued to be employed in subsequent stages of Turkic linguistic history.

From a semantic perspective, the geographical usage of *baş* represents a clear metaphorical transfer from the human body to the natural landscape. Just as the head constitutes the uppermost and most important part of the body, *baş* in geographical terminology came to signify the beginning, highest point, or most prominent section of a natural feature. This anthropomorphic conceptualization of space is characteristic of Turkic geographical nomenclature and reflects the tendency to interpret landscape elements through analogies with the human body.

Consequently, the topolexeme *baş* occupies an important place in the Old Turkic geographical lexicon, functioning as a productive term for naming river sources, mountain peaks, upper valleys, and other prominent topographical features while preserving its original semantic association with the concept of “head” and “leadership.”<sup>16</sup> H. Şirin states that the word *baş* denotes “the leader of a tribe, clan, community, or military force”<sup>17</sup>. The word *baş* is reflected in the inscriptions as follows:

“täŋri älimkä başda bägimkä bökmädim” – “I was not satisfied with my heavenly state and my leading beg (commander)” (Y, 14/3).

In this sentence, the lexeme *baş* is used in the meaning of “military leader,” “chief,” or “commander.”

Mahmud al-Kashgari notes that the word occurs in the meanings of “a person’s head” and, more generally, “head” (of animals, plants, objects, and mountains) (DLT, III, 165; I, 365).

In the *Kutadgu Bilig*, the word *baş* is employed both in its primary and figurative meanings:

“Biligsiz sözi öz başını yäyür” – “The words of an ignorant person consume his own head” (QBN, 253; QBN, 167);

“Nägü tär äšitgil ay älcü başı” – “Listen to what the chief of the envoys says” (QBK, 24719).

The use of the Old Turkic word *baş* in the meanings of “hill,” “summit,” “peak,” or “mountain top” remained<sup>18</sup> actively attested only in Chagatai Turkic among the historical stages of the Turkic languages<sup>19</sup>. In Uzbek as well, the word *bosh* is defined in certain contexts as “leader” or “chief,” as well as in the sense of the “anatomical head” (O‘TIL, I, 332).

“... bodunı aqıza barmış : uçuz kölkä : atlıyın tükä barmış qadır qaşar äbdi bärsil : yäti : oğuz”

“... he defeated the people and drove them, together with their horses, into Lake Uchuz. Qadir Qashar, Ebdı Barsil, Yatız Oghuz” (Tar E 2).

In such examples, the word *köl*, which denotes a body of water, is considered to have been derived in Old Turkic from the root *kö-*, meaning “to gather” or “to accumulate.”<sup>20</sup>

The lexeme *ögüz*, which was used in Old Turkic in the meanings of “stream,” “river,” and “sea,” appears frequently in the inscriptions:

“orqun : ögüzdä ... yätmiş yıl olumiş”<sup>21</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Clauson G. An Etymological Dictionary of Pre-Thirteenth-Century Turkish. – Oxford, 1972 – P. 375-376.

<sup>17</sup> Şirin H. Eski Türk Yazıtları Söz Varlığı İncelemesi. TDK yayınları. – Ankara. 2016. – S. 358.

<sup>18</sup> Ergin, M. Orhun Abideleri. İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları. 1999 – S. 87.

<sup>19</sup> Ünlü S. Çağatay Türkçesi Sözlüğü. Konya: Eğitim Kitabevi. 2013 – S. 105.

<sup>20</sup> Gülensoy T. Türkiye Türkçesindeki Türkçe Sözcüklerin Köken Bilgisi Sözlüğü. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları. 2011 – S. 378.

<sup>21</sup> Ergin M. Orhun Abideleri. İstanbul: Boğaziçi Yayınları. 1999 – S. 108.

“He ruled for seventy years on the banks of the Orkhon River” (Tar E 3–4)<sup>22</sup>.

In the Köktürk inscriptions, the present-day Yellow River in northern China is referred to as *Yaşil Ögüz* (“Green River”), while the Syr Darya, one of the major rivers of Transoxiana, is mentioned as *Yinçü Ögüz* (“Pearl River”).

This word was also used with the same form and meaning in Karakhanid, Khwarazm-Golden Horde, and Kipchak Turkic. However, in modern Uzbek, it is no longer used as a geographical term<sup>23</sup>.

The lexeme *öz* is also attested in historical sources. In Old Turkic, this word was used in the meanings of “a stream between two mountains and its surrounding area” and “valley”<sup>24</sup>. There is a view that this lexeme originated as a result of the shortening of the word *ögüz* through the loss of sounds.<sup>25</sup> In particular, the word *özäk*, meaning “small stream,” which appears in Old Uyghur Turkic texts, is formed from *öz* (“a stream between two mountains”) and the diminutive suffix *-äk*. This lexeme is currently used in Oghuz Turkic dialects as a geographical term meaning “stream,” “small river,” or “a fertile and well-watered area”<sup>26</sup>. The *özak / özak* component is also widely used in Turkic toponymy and occurs in various place names within the territory of Uzbekistan<sup>27</sup>. For example, toponyms such as Qorao‘zak, Oqo‘zak, and Sario‘zak belong to this group. Sario‘zak (Saryözäk) is one of the toponyms found in Turkic-speaking regions, mainly recorded in Kazakhstan. In particular, it is known as the name of a settlement located in the Kerbulak district of the Zhetysu region.

The toponym consists of two components: *sarı* meaning “yellow” and *özek/özak* meaning “stream, valley, riverbed.” Accordingly, the name Sario‘zak semantically means “yellow valley” or “yellow riverbed.” In such place names, the element *özak/özäk* has preserved its original geographical meaning related to “stream, small riverbed, or valley” from Old Turkic.

In addition, the Uzbek language also contains the lexeme *özän*, which is closely related in both form and meaning to *özak/özäk* and denotes a “large flowing watercourse.” This noun is considered to have been derived from the Old Turkic verb *öz-* meaning “to flow” (ESTYA I, 511) through the Old Uzbek suffix *-(a)n* (CCTTH I, 134). Initially, this word expressed the meaning of “flowing water,” but over time, through semantic development, it came to mean “watercourse” or “river channel.”

In conclusion, the Old Turkic lexemes *ögüz*, *özäk*, and *özän* belong to an ancient lexical stratum of Turkic languages that denotes water and water-related geographical objects. These lexemes are semantically interconnected and form a unified lexical system expressing river flow and its geographical formations. In later periods, some of them fell out of active usage, while others have been preserved in modern Turkic languages or within toponymic systems.

Topolexemes in Old Turkic written monuments are not merely units naming geographical objects; they also function as important conceptual categories reflecting the cosmological, religious, and political worldview of the Turkic peoples. The results of this study show that the primary spatial meanings of the lexemes *yär* and *sub* gradually expanded over time to express complex socio-political concepts such as “homeland,” “state territory,” “domain of power,” and “land-and-water.” Likewise, units such as *ılay*, *tariyılay*, *kögmän*, *bältir*, *ögüz*, *özäk*, and *özän* constitute an important layer of ancient Turkic geographical terminology. While some of them disappeared from active use in later historical periods, others have been preserved in modern Turkic languages and toponymic systems.

Overall, the semantic evolution of topolexemes demonstrates that the concept of space in ancient Turkic thought

<sup>22</sup> Bulduk T. Eski türkçedeki coğrafya terimleri üzerine bir değerlendirme. Tarih Okulu Dergisi (TOD). Nisan 2019. Sayı XXXIX, ss.786-815

<sup>23</sup> Ünlü S. Harezmi-Altınordu Türkçesi Sözlüğü. Konya: Eğitim Kitabevi. 2012 – S. 606, 457.; Toparlı, R., Vural, H., & Karaatlı R. Kıpçak Türkçesi Sözlüğü. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları. 2014 – S. 209.

<sup>24</sup> Orkun H. N. Eski Türk Yazıtları. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları. 2011. – S. 831

<sup>25</sup> Berbercan M. T. Coğrafya Terimleri Sözlüğü Olarak Divanü Lugatit Türk. Dede Korkut Uluslararası Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Araştırmaları Dergisi, 1-12. 2017 – S. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Türk Dil Kurumu. Türkçe Sözlük. Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu Yayınları. 1998 – S. 1743.

<sup>27</sup> Qorao‘zak – O‘zbekistonning Qoraqalpog‘istondagi shahar tipidagi aholi punkti. U shu nomli tumanining markazi bo‘lib, Amudaryo suv havzasi qismi (deltasi)da joylashgan.

was closely intertwined with nature, society, and power. It also serves as an important scientific source for studying the historical lexicology and linguistic culture of Turkic languages.

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