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## A THEMATIC REVIEW ON FACTORS INFLUENCING TOPONYM TRANSLATION

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### Abstract:

Toponym translation is an interdisciplinary research field that integrates toponymy, linguistics, translation studies, literature, and sociology. While research on translation methods, strategies, and influencing factors has grown, there remains a lack of systematic reviews examining the key factors shaping toponym translation and the ways in which these factors influence translation practices. This study analyzes the research trends and mechanisms of influential factors in toponym translation as reflected in current literature. A thematic literature review method was employed in this study. Employing the keywords "toponyms" and "translation," 21 studies were selected from Scopus and Web of Science. Thematic analysis identified six primary factors: (1) cultural, historical, and geographical context; (2) political and ideological influences; (3) linguistic challenges; (4) norms and standards; (5) contextual and communicative factors; and (6) translation process and practice. Findings reveal that toponym translation is not merely a linguistic process but a complex interplay of social, political, and communicative forces. This review provides a structured framework for understanding these dynamics and highlights the need for further interdisciplinary research on the standardization and contextualization of toponym translation in global discourse.

### Keywords:

Thematic Review, Toponym, Translation, Factors

## Introduction

Toponyms, as essential carriers of cultural heritage (Hakala et al., 2015), are inherently complex in both their structure and formation processes. The act of naming places is embedded in specific historical contexts, guided by distinct motivations and expressive intentions (Blair & Tent, 2021). **While identifying geographic locations, toponyms also convey cultural meaning and preserve historical memory.** From a linguistic perspective, toponyms exhibit phonological features, lexical structures, and semantic patterns—factors that pose immediate challenges to their translation. Interdisciplinary research at the intersection of linguistics and geography further reveals a close relationship between toponymic meaning and local social structures (Radding & Western, 2010). This inherent connection complicates the preservation of semantic fidelity in cross-linguistic transfer.

In addition to the linguistic complexity of toponyms themselves, broader social, political, and cultural dynamics further intensify the challenges of toponym translation. From a sociolinguistic standpoint, naming practices reflect prevailing social norms while simultaneously shaping identity and power relations (Bakhtiyarovna, 2024). This socially constructed nature of toponyms implies that translation is not merely a linguistic operation, but a socially embedded process shaped by competing interests. At the macro level, government policies (Cui & Chia, 2022), geopolitical concerns, and ideological agendas (Ayyad, 2012) play a decisive role in guiding translation practices. At the micro level, structural differences between source and target languages (Saidova, 2023) also require careful attention. These intersecting factors contribute to the systemic complexity of toponym translation (Safarova & Khasanova, 2022).

These complexities underscore the evolution in translation studies from purely linguistic analyses to culturally embedded frameworks (Forsdick & Spadaro, 2019). This shift is well captured in their observation that translation is no longer viewed merely as a linguistic operation between languages, but as a cultural and political act embedded in wider systems of meaning. The rise of thematic and interdisciplinary approaches has repositioned translation as a lens through which we can understand identity, migration, memory, and power. This broader understanding is particularly relevant to toponym translation, which often lies at the intersection of language policy, cultural preservation, and audience reception.

Despite these insights, existing studies often focus on isolated aspects of toponym translation, either emphasizing linguistic constraints or examining sociopolitical influences separately. A comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach that synthesizes linguistic, cultural, and institutional factors remains underexplored. Therefore, this study aims to critically analyze the key factors influencing toponym translation, focusing on publications from 2020 to 2024. This five-year range was chosen to capture the most recent trends and scholarly perspectives in the field. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the current trends regarding the key factors influencing toponym translation as discussed in the literature from 2020 to 2024?
2. How do these factors influence toponym translation?

## Methodology

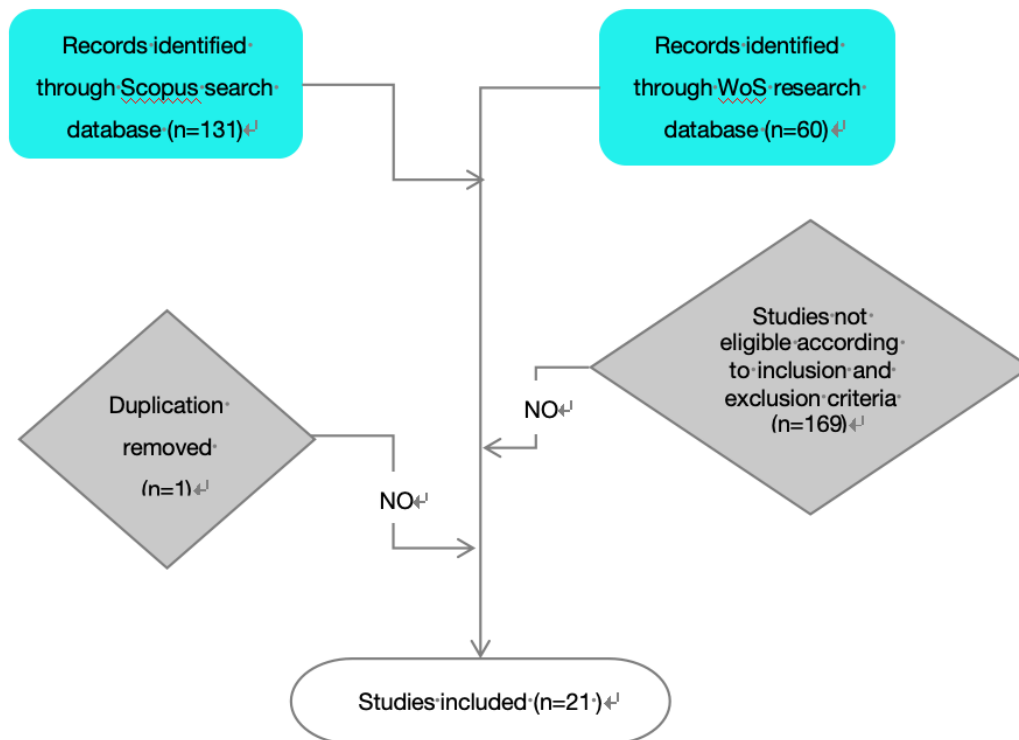
This study employs ATLAS.ti 24 qualitative analysis software to conduct a systematic literature review, following the terminological thematic analysis approach proposed by Zairul (2020). The literature selection process adheres to the following inclusion criteria: (1) publication between 2020 and 2024; (2) the content must be thematically relevant, containing keywords related to toponym translation; (3) the research focus must center on factors influencing toponym translation; and (4) only literature published in English is considered. Following Zairul (2020), this study adopted an inductive coding approach, starting with open coding of each individual study. Coding was conducted in multiple cycles, during which initial codes were compared, grouped, and refined to develop coherent themes that accurately reflected the recurring patterns in the literature. This methodological framework tries to ensure a comprehensive and structured analysis of recent scholarly contributions to the study of toponym translation. The search strings are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Search Strings from Scopus and WoS**

SCOPUS	( TITLE-ABS-KEY ( "toponyms " OR "topony*" OR "geonym*" OR " geographical names" OR landmarks OR "destination names" ) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY ( translat* ) ) AND PUBYEAR > 2019 AND ( LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "ARTS" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "SOC" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( SUBJAREA , "PSYC" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( LANGUAGE , "English" ) ) AND ( LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "ar" ) OR LIMIT-TO ( DOCTYPE , "cp" ) )	131 results
WoS	"toponyms " OR "topony*" OR "geonym*" OR " geographical names" OR landmarks OR "destination names" (Topic) AND translat* (Topic) and Preprint Citation Index (Exclude – Database) and English (Languages)	60 results

This study conducted literature searches in two major databases: Scopus and Web of Science (WoS). The initial search came out with 131 articles from (SCOPUS) and 60 (WoS) articles. After a rigorous screening process, 21 studies were ultimately included for analysis (see Figure 1). Exclusion criteria involved studies that did not address translation factors, were not published in English, or lacked full-text accessibility, resulting in the elimination of 169 articles.

The selected 21 articles were subsequently imported into ATLAS.ti 24 for systematic coding and analysis. The coding framework encompassed the following core categories:1) author; 2) issue number; 3) periodical, 4) publisher, 5) volume and 6) year of publication.



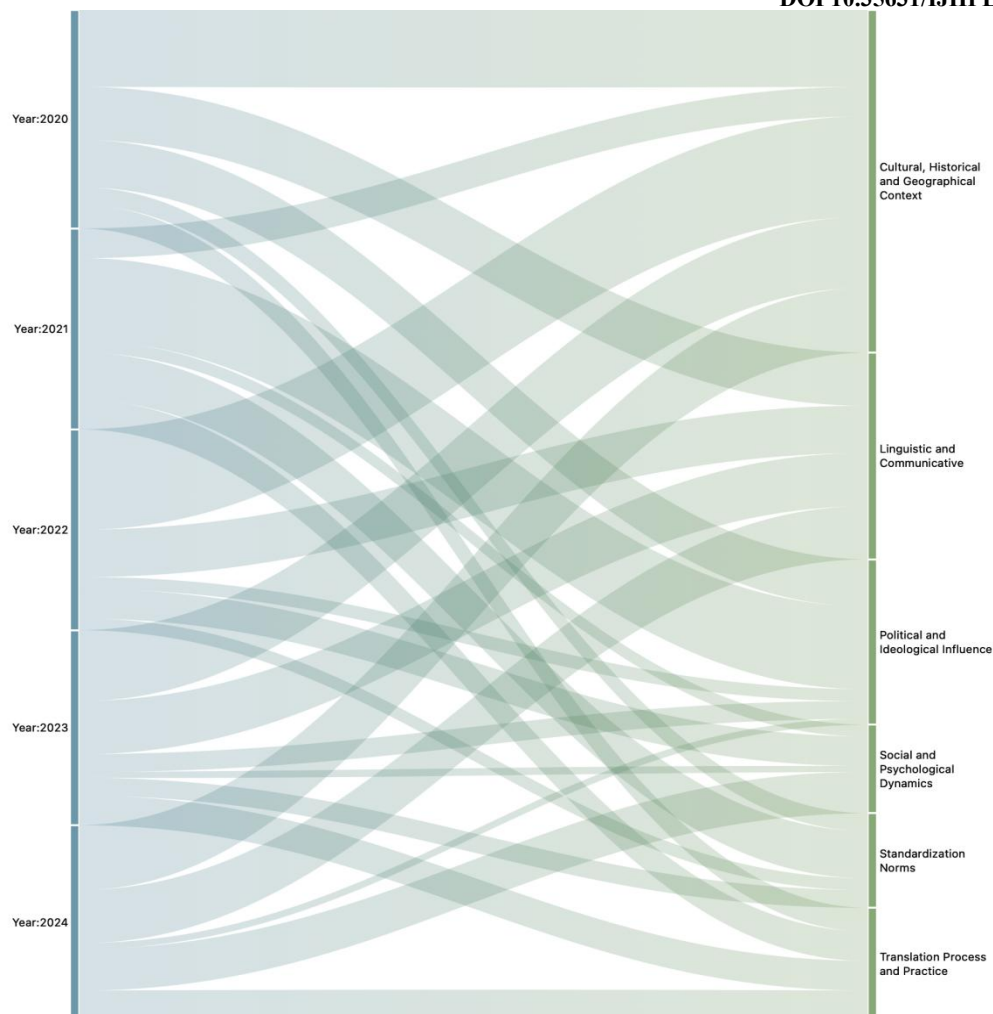
**Figure 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria in the Thematic Review**

The thematic analysis in this study is anchored in a functionalist framework, drawing on Nida's (1964) concept of dynamic equivalence and Skopos theory to inform the framing of key themes and to contextualize the interpretation of influencing factors.

## Results and Discussion

### *Research Trends on Factors Influencing Toponym Translation*

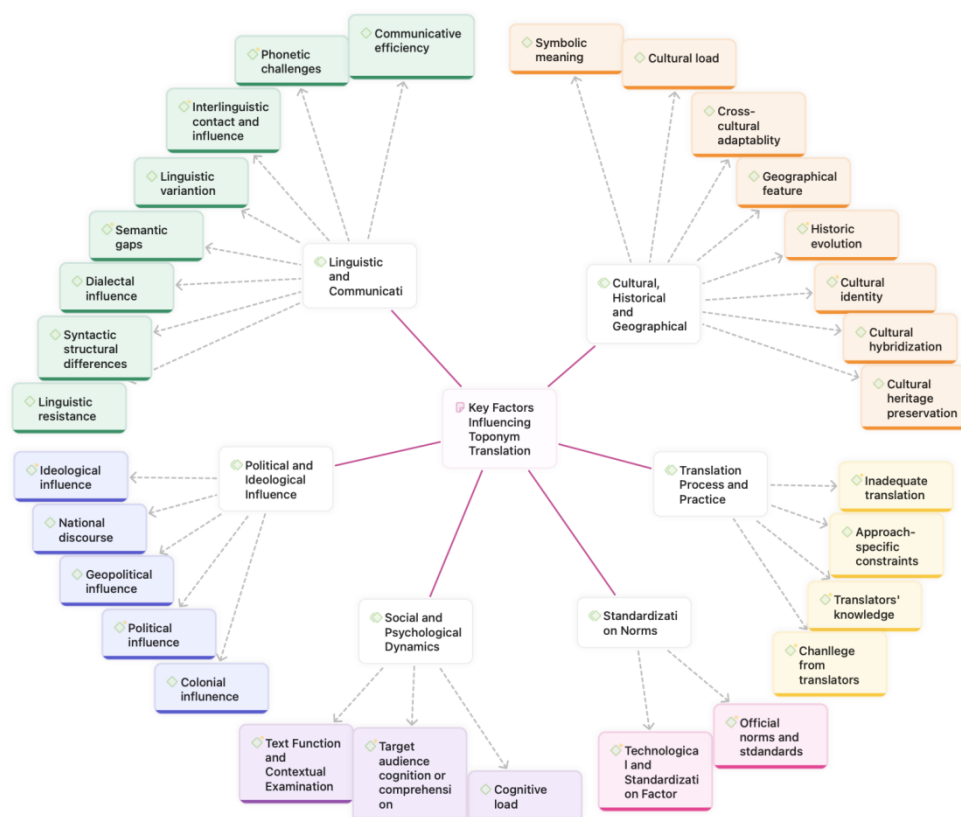
Through the coding and analysis of 21 selected articles, this study identified six primary factors influencing toponym translation between 2021 and 2024: cultural, historical and geographical context, political and ideological influences, linguistic challenges, norms and standards, contextual and communicative factors, and translation process and practice. Each of these themes encompasses various sub-factors, which are collectively visualized in the overall network of factors influencing toponym translation is shown in Figure 4. The current trends in the factors affecting toponym translation, as reflected in publications from 2020 to 2024, are illustrated in **Figure 2**. Additionally, a word cloud generated from the 21 analyzed articles is presented in **Figure 3**.



**Figure 2: Trends in Scholarly Publications (2020–2024) on Factors Influencing Toponym Translation**



**Figure 3: Word Cloud Generated from 21 Articles**



**Figure 4: Overall Network of Factors Influencing Toponym Translation**

### ***Factors Influencing Toponym Translation***

#### ***Theme 1: Cultural, Historical, and Geographical Context***

Toponyms function not only as spatial markers but also as vehicles for cultural identity, historical memory, and collective representation. Blair and Tent (2021) argue that place names are embedded with cultural symbolism and serve to reflect both physical geography and societal values. Their significance often lies beyond mere locational reference.

In the context of translation, toponyms demand particular sensitivity to cultural dimensions. As Zaçellari and Shabani (2023) emphasize, toponyms frequently carry symbolic meanings and are closely associated with local heritage. This is especially salient in regions inhabited by indigenous or minority communities, where place names are deeply intertwined with ancestral knowledge and identity narratives (Wong, 2022). In such contexts, mistranslation or oversimplification may lead to a loss of cultural nuance and even contribute to symbolic erasure.

Cross-cultural adaptability constitutes another important consideration. In multilingual or multicultural environments, naming practices are often shaped by the interaction of dominant and minority cultures. Jett (2020) notes that urban centers frequently exhibit hybrid naming



patterns, which blend mainstream linguistic norms with local naming conventions. For translators, the challenge lies in preserving recognizability and cultural specificity while ensuring intelligibility for diverse audiences.

Toponyms are also subject to historical shifts. A single place name may undergo phonetic, orthographic, or semantic changes due to political realignment, demographic movement, or shifts in sociocultural ideology. Costa (2020) observes that historical transformation complicates the translation of toponyms, as translators must consider both diachronic evolution and current referential function.

Finally, geographical characteristics remain foundational in toponym formation and translation. Many place names originate from prominent natural features—rivers, mountains, valleys—and retain this referential function across languages and periods. These physical features often shape naming conventions in both source and target cultures, necessitating context-sensitive translation approaches.

Figure 5 provides a visual summary of the key concepts discussed above, mapping the interconnections among cultural symbolism, historical transformation, and geographical reference in the translation of toponyms.

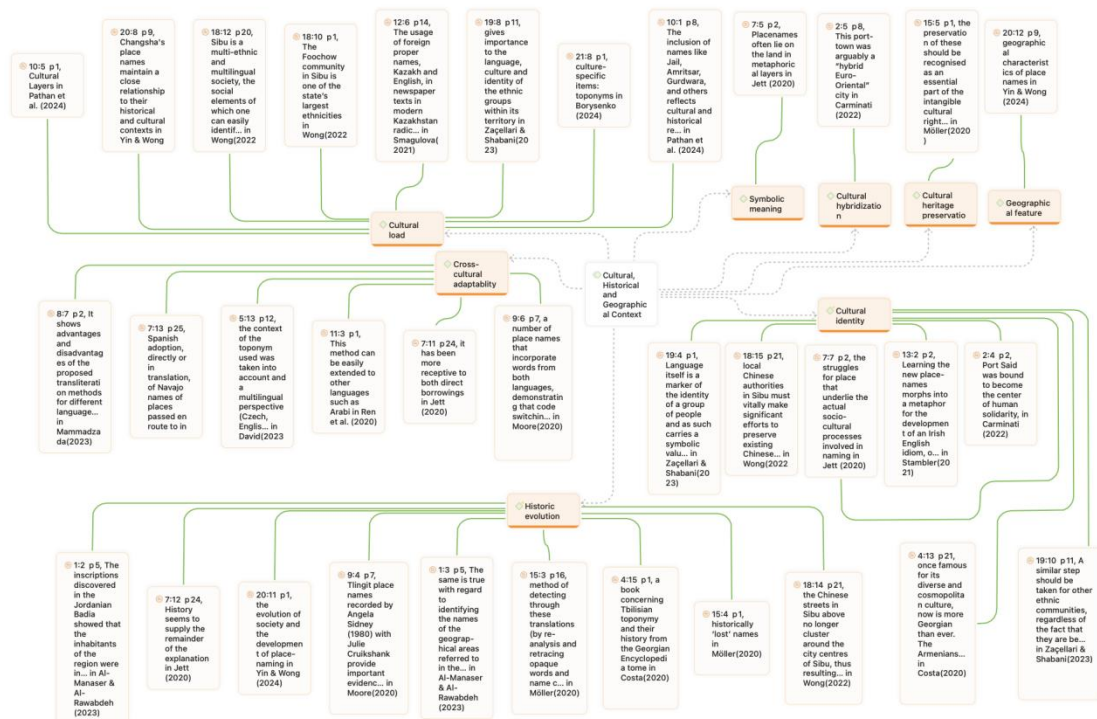


Figure 5: Cultural, Historical and Geography Factors

### Theme 2: Political and Ideological Influences

Toponym translation is often profoundly influenced by political governance and ideological discourse. State policies, national discourse, and colonial influence shape naming conventions and their translation, affecting how toponyms are adapted across languages and cultures.

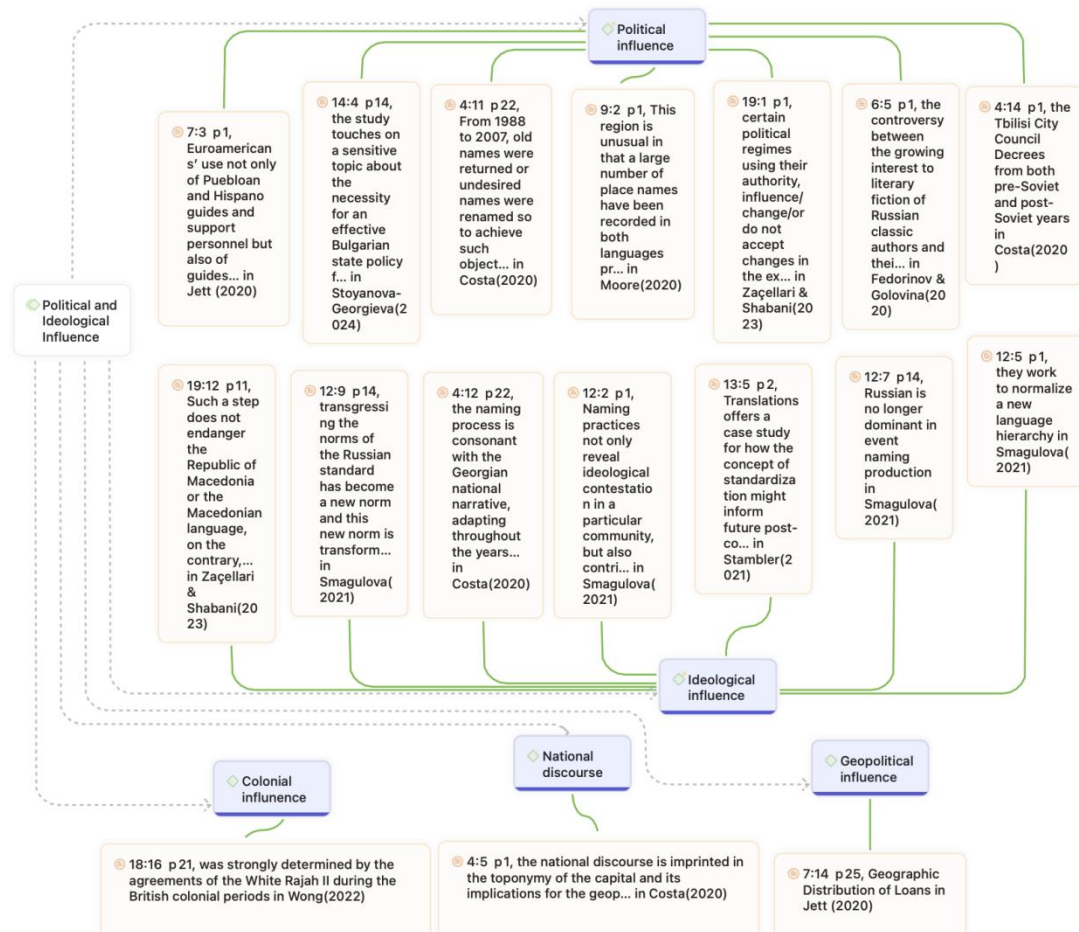
From a political perspective, national policies play a direct role in regulating and guiding the translation of toponym. For instance, Stoyanova-Georgieva (2024), through a case study of

Bulgaria, reveals the political sensitivity and the necessity of standardization that governments consider when managing toponym translation. This political influence is also evident in the power struggles over toponym changes. Zaçellari and Shabani (2023) point out that certain regimes may leverage their authority to resist specific toponym changes, a process that can be linked to broader political or historical narratives. **Beyond national policy interventions,** Costa (2020) examines how state discourse influences the political framing of capital city toponyms, highlighting the political implications embedded in translation decisions. This influence extends beyond official administrative policies, shaping cultural representations of toponyms. Fedorinov and Golovina (2020) demonstrate that political factors can even shape the use and translation choices of toponyms in literary works, illustrating how naming conventions interact with cultural and ideological narratives.

From an ideological perspective, the influence is more profound and subtle. Smagulova (2021) uncovers how ideology shapes the establishment of language standards, subsequently affecting the standardization and translation strategies of toponyms. Particularly in post-colonial contexts, Wong (2022) notes that agreements established during British colonial rule continue to influence toponyms and their translations, underscoring the connection between historical ideological imprints and toponym translation. Besides, Jett (2020) highlights how the **distribution of linguistic loans in toponym formation reflects geopolitical influences.**

Figure 6 provides a schematic overview of the complex interplay between political and ideological influences, summarizing their impact on translation policies, cultural narratives, and naming conventions across contexts.





**Figure 6: Political and Ideological Influences**

### *Theme 3: Linguistic Challenges*

Toponym translation presents multiple linguistic challenges, arising from phonological, semantic, syntactic, and dialectal variations. From a phonological perspective, differences in phoneme systems and tonal features between the source and target languages can affect the accuracy and acceptability of transliteration (Cheung, 2024). Such discrepancies may lead to variations in pronunciation and orthographic inconsistencies, complicating the transliteration process. At the semantic level, the descriptive or symbolic meanings embedded in toponym may be difficult to fully preserve during cross-linguistic translation (Zhou & Wong, 2024). Syntactic structure differences also influence the handling of word order in toponym (Mammadzada, 2023), as structural variations between languages influence word order and grammatical integration.

Beyond phonology, semantics and syntactic structure, dialectal variations introduce additional complexities in toponym translation. The same name may have different pronunciations, spellings, or interpretations across dialect regions (Wong, 2022), leading to inconsistencies in transliteration and meaning. Furthermore, Rawabdeh (2023) points out that prolonged language contact can impact the evolution of toponym and the choices made in translation. Over time, linguistic convergence and borrowing from dominant languages can reshape how toponyms are translated and adapted across cultures. Besides, Jett's (2020) concept of linguistic resistance

further reveals the systemic obstacles that toponym may encounter during cross-linguistic transfer.

Figure 7 illustrates the various linguistic influences on toponym translation, such as phonological adaptation, semantic preservation, syntactic restructuring, and dialectal variability.

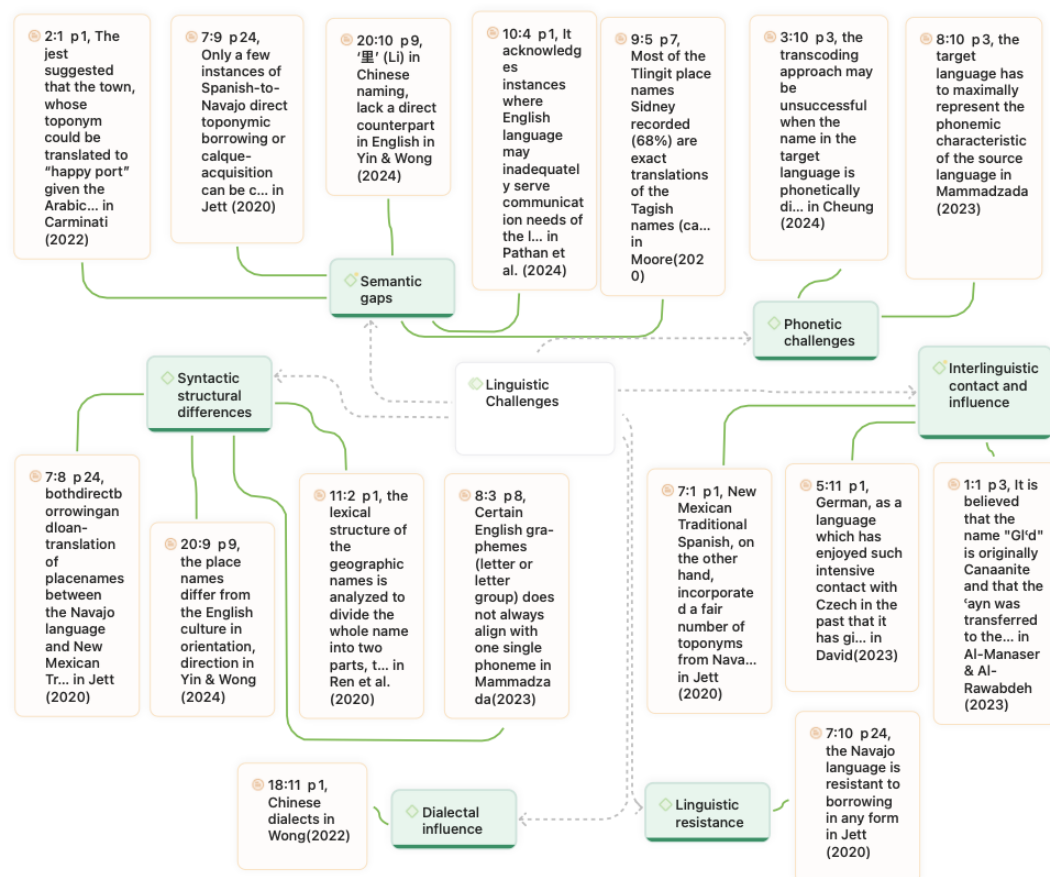
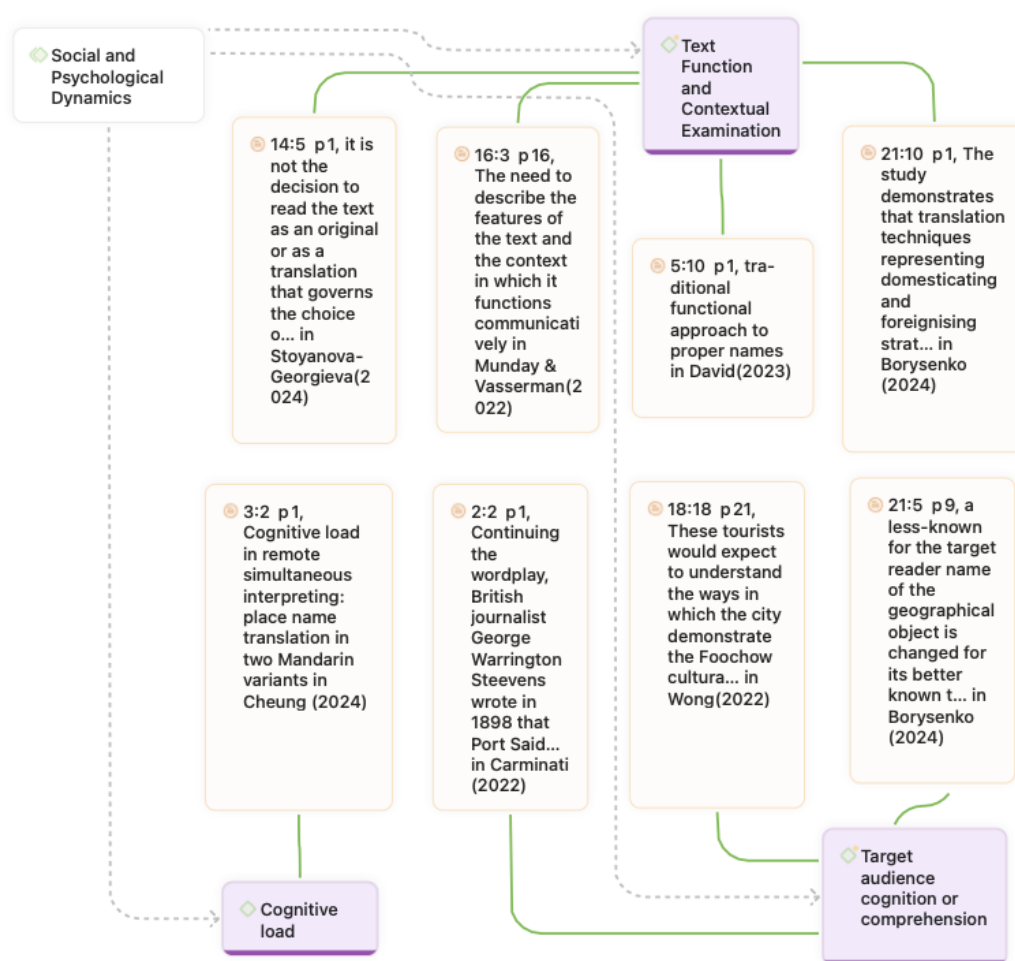


Figure 7: Linguistic Challenges

#### Theme 4: Contextual and Communicative Factors

In toponym translation, both the function of the text and the characteristics of the target audience play a crucial role. As Munday and Vasserman (2022) argue, the communicative function of a text not only determines the choice of translation strategies but also influences the degree of adaptation required. This influence becomes evident across different text types. In travel guides, translators must ensure accessibility for tourists while maintaining cultural relevance; in historical documents, preserving historical accuracy and documentary value takes precedence; whereas in commercial texts, translators often need to strike a balance between linguistic fidelity and market-driven adaptation. Given these variations, Borysenko (2024) examines the decision-making process between foreignization and domestication, exploring how translators negotiate the tension between preserving a toponym's original form and adapting it to the target culture.

The cognitive characteristics of the target audience also significantly impact translation decisions. Wong (2022) **demonstrates that tourists' ability to interpret urban cultural representations directly influences translation strategies.** In some cases, prioritizing comprehensibility over strict linguistic accuracy is necessary. **For instance, Borysenko (2024) suggests that, to facilitate understanding, translators may need to substitute unfamiliar toponyms with expressions more recognizable to the target audience.** This adaptation process, however, raises a fundamental challenge: how to balance cultural authenticity with cognitive accessibility. From a cognitive load perspective, translators should carefully balance cultural accuracy with the cognitive processing demands imposed by translated names (Cheung, 2024). Figure 8 provides an overview of the key contextual and communicative factors influencing toponym translation, including text function, audience comprehension, and cognitive processing constraints.



**Figure 8: Contextual and Communicative Factors**

### *Theme 5 : Norms and Standards*

The findings related to Theme 5 are illustrated in Figure 9. In terms of official regulations and standards, government policies, legal frameworks, and language standardization collectively form the institutional framework for toponym translation. Wong (2022) found that certain local governments explicitly mandate the use of official languages (such as Malay and English) for

the translation of toponym. On a broader scale, Zaçellari and Shabani (2023) analyzed how national language policies align with regional frameworks, such as the European Union's language policies. Yang et al. (2020) further explored the specific regulatory requirements for the use of toponym, particularly English toponym, under national laws. From a theoretical perspective, Munday and Vasserman (2022) provided an in-depth discussion on how these regulations and laws function in translation practices. Meanwhile, Stambler (2021), through the unique lens of literary works, revealed the deeper complexities involved in the establishment of language norms.

These practical implementations also highlight the broader significance of toponym standardization. The study by Zaçellari and Shabani (2023) emphasizes the crucial role of standardization in facilitating cross-cultural communication. On the methodological level, Ren et al. (2020) investigated how translation strategies can be optimized based on international translation standards. It is worth noting that although toponym research has expanded into various fields—such as literature, linguistics, toponymy, and even machine translation—Munday and Vasserman (2022) point out that interdisciplinary collaboration in existing studies remains insufficient. This observation suggests the need for future research to deepen interdisciplinary engagement and further explore the development of a comprehensive framework for regulations and standards.

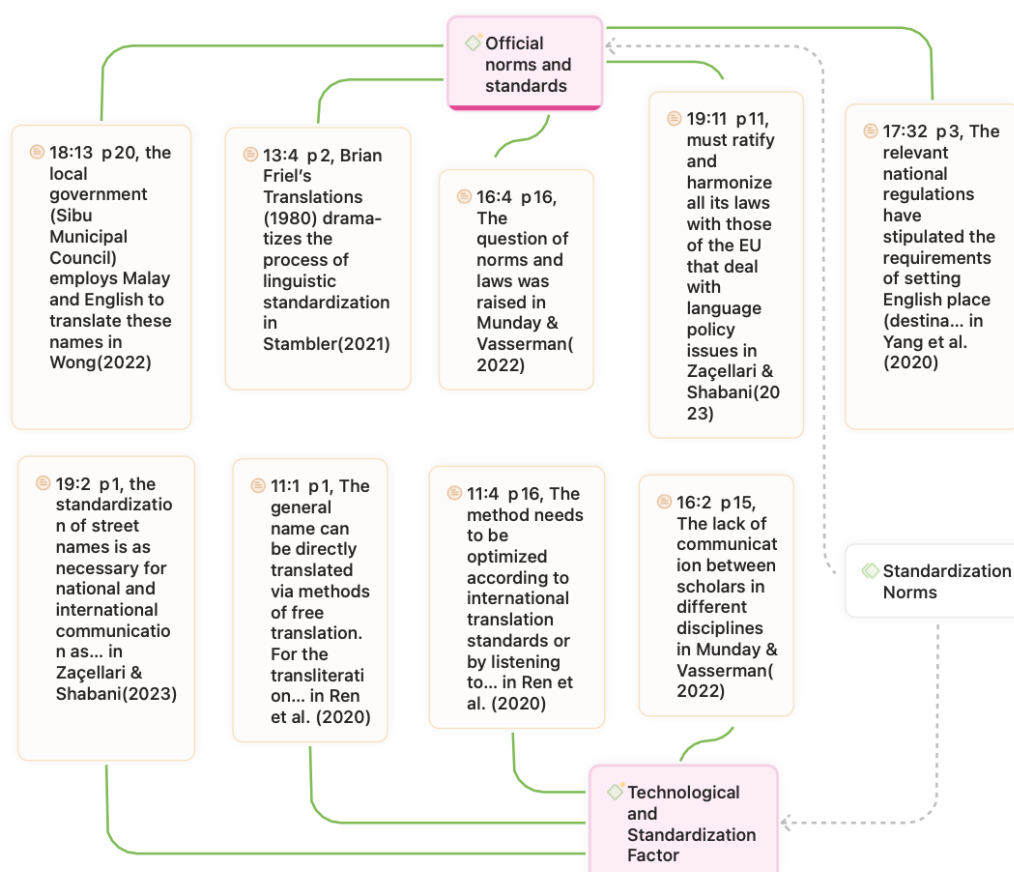


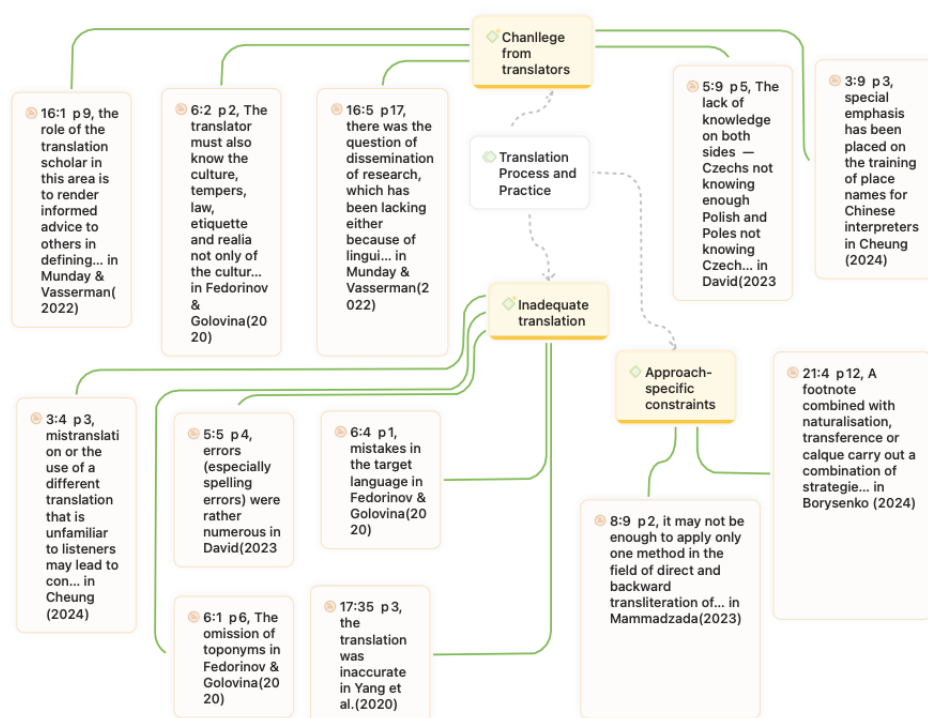
Figure 9: Norms and Standards

**Theme 6 : Translation Process and Practice**

The quality and effectiveness of translation are influenced by multiple factors. Firstly, the translator's own characteristics have a direct impact on the translation of toponyms. Munday and Vasserman (2022) thoroughly discuss the importance of the translator's role, while several studies (Fedorinov & Golovina, 2020; Munday & Vasserman, 2022; David, 2023) emphasize the decisive role of the translator's knowledge base in determining translation quality.

Secondly, inadequate translation remains a major issue in current toponym translation practices. These issues include mistranslation (Cheung, 2024), errors (David, 2023), inaccuracies (Yang et al., 2020), and omissions (Fedorinov & Golovina, 2020). Although most of these problems are avoidable, their presence significantly undermines translation quality.

Regarding approach-specific constraints, a single translation method often struggles to convey the rich historical and cultural connotations of toponyms. Mammadzada (2023) emphasizes that relying on one translation method may be insufficient to address the complex demands of translation. This highlights that different translation strategies are subject to the limitations of specific methods and contextual factors during their application. This perspective is supported by other studies; for instance, Borysenko (2024) explores how flexibly combining multiple strategies—such as footnotes, domestication, borrowing, and literal translation—can optimize translation outcomes. These studies indicate that the selection and application of translation strategies must carefully consider both the limitations of specific methods and the unique requirements of the translation context. For specific details related to Theme 6, see Figure 10.



**Figure 10: Translation Process and Practice**



Rather than treating these factors in isolation, the analysis draws on functionalist theories to interpret their interrelated impact on translation processes and strategies. This theoretical perspective not only clarifies the foundations of the field but also aligns with the functionalist view of translation as a form of cultural communication. Consistent with this, translation studies suggest that language and culture cannot be separated. Nida (2001, p.13) emphasizes that effective translators must understand that the meanings of words are deeply rooted in their cultural contexts. This principle positions culture, history, and geographical contexts (theme 1) as essential to translation practice. Nord (2001, p.11) similarly stresses the importance of situational contexts, including non-verbal elements, which are deeply cultural, requiring translators to look beyond linguistic elements alone. Vermeer (1987) also supports this, arguing that translation is primarily a cultural activity rather than purely linguistic (theme 5).

In practical translation contexts, when cultural differences limit the target audience's comprehension of metaphors or implicit meanings, translators must carefully consider political ideologies (theme 2) and translation norms and standards (theme 4). Munday (2016, p.177) underscores how these norms represent broader socio cultural constraints. Within this functionalist framework, Skopos Theory becomes particularly pertinent by positing that translation strategies should align with specific communicative purposes guided by target cultural conventions and practical audience needs (Nord, 2001, p.54).

Therefore, translation emerges as a balanced and dynamic process. Translators need effectively handle linguistic challenges (theme 3) and possess strong intercultural communication skills. As Nida (2001, p.166) points out, dynamic equivalence in translation prioritizes the naturalness and appropriateness of the target language expression, emphasizing the importance of receptor response over literal replication of source forms. Translators should balance linguistic accuracy with broader cultural, normative, and ideological considerations. This skill includes the ability to recognize various constraints, such as standardized formats in official texts and implicit ideological influences, like national image construction. For example, translating culturally significant terms requires translators to assess both the source text's nuances and the target audience's expectations, applying appropriate strategies (theme 6) to effectively meet social norms and specific communication goals. This multifaceted ability underscores translators' critical role as cultural mediators, facilitating effective intercultural communication.

## Conclusion

This study reviewed key factors influencing toponym translation and identified emerging research patterns based on literature published between 2020 and 2024. Employing thematic analysis with ATLAS.ti 24, the review shows that research on toponym translation evolves from a linguistic orientation toward a diversified interdisciplinary approach involving cultural studies, political science, and communication studies. An important shift is the growing emphasis on audience cognition and cultural adaptability in translation decision making.

The reviewed literature suggests that toponym translation involves complex interactions among multiple factors, including cultural, historical, and geographical contexts, political ideologies, communicative functions, and norms and standards. Rather than being treated as a purely linguistic process, these interrelated elements are widely acknowledged to shape distinctive translation patterns across different regions and sociocultural contexts. These patterns often emerge within institutional frameworks that reflect broader political and communicative dynamics.



By synthesizing recent research, this review offers a perspective on how these factors have been discussed and applied in translation practice. The summary provides translators, policymakers, and tourism agencies with practical insights into developing translation strategies responsive to specific social, cultural, and political contexts. Further research could consider empirical reception studies or corpus-based comparative analyses, particularly addressing audience responses and translation effectiveness in multilingual urban contexts.

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