

Zaynieva Yulduz Fakhriddinovna *

Izafet-Based Toponyms In *Baburnama*: A Comparative Study Of English Translations

Abstract

*This article examines the translation of toponyms formed with izafet constructions in Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur's historical work Baburnama. The study focuses on valley and settlement toponyms such as **Darai Nur, Darai Bai, Darai Gaz, Deh-i Ghulaman, and Deh-i Afghan**, and analyzes how these names are rendered in the English translations by J. Leyden–W. Erskine, Annette Susannah Beveridge, and W. M. Thackston. Using comparative translation analysis, the research investigates the main strategies employed by the translators, including transliteration, literal translation, and descriptive translation. Particular attention is given to the way the Persian–Tajik izafet construction is preserved, modified, or omitted in English translations. The findings demonstrate that different translation approaches lead to certain semantic and structural shifts, including the loss of grammatical form or the disappearance of the original toponym. The study suggests that the most effective approach is to combine phonetic transliteration with explanatory translation in order to preserve both the original structure and the semantic meaning of the place names.*

Keywords: *Baburnama*, toponyms, izafet construction, translation strategies, English translation, transliteration

Introduction: Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur's *Baburnama* is a unique historical and literary work that has attracted considerable scholarly interest worldwide. It has been translated into numerous languages, including Persian, Dutch, English, German, French, Hindi, Russian, Spanish, Arabic, Uyghur, Turkish, Chinese, Kazakh, Pashto, Urdu, and Japanese, and more recently into Italian and Kyrgyz. These translations continue to be published regularly, creating new opportunities for expanding the scope of scholarly research on the work.

In Europe, broader recognition of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur dates back to the first half of the nineteenth century. Alongside the translation of *Baburnama*, scholars began to examine his personality and literary works in greater depth. The English translation by John Leyden and William Erskine was published in London in 1826. Subsequently, additional English translations of *Baburnama* were produced by R. Caldecott (based on the Leyden–Erskine version, 1844), F. Talbot (1909), L. King (1921), Annette Susannah Beveridge (1922), and W. M. Thackston, Professor at Harvard University (1996, 2002). These translations have significantly broadened the horizons of research and facilitated comparative and interdisciplinary studies. The present article draws upon the translations of J. Leyden–Erskine, Annette Susannah Beveridge, and W. M. Thackston.

* Zaynieva Yulduz Fakhriddinovna, PhD Researcher, Alisher Navoi Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature, Uzbekistan, Correspondence: zayniyevayulduz1@gmail.com, ORCID ID: 000-0002-5875-7765, +998998943116.

A translator must have an excellent command of their native language and a deep knowledge of the literature, history, culture, and mentality related to the source text. Thus, translating *Baburnama* requires not only linguistic competence but also a clear understanding of the socio-cultural context, geography, climate, and the traditions and worldview of the peoples described in the work.

In *Baburnama*, historical realities, national concepts, and particularly place names create certain difficulties in translation. This study focuses on toponyms formed with izafet constructions.

In the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, izafet is interpreted as a grammatical phenomenon characteristic of Persian, Arabic, and certain Turkic languages. The term izafet (Persian: “addition”), also referred to as ezafe, izafa, izafe, izafat, izafa, or ezafe (Tajik: izafet), occurs in Iranian languages. It can also be observed in Turkic and Indo-Urdu languages influenced by Persian, where it functions as a connective element between two words. In Persian, it consists of an unstressed short vowel –e or –i (–ye or –yi) placed between the linked words.

In several instances, Babur provides clarifications regarding specific place names and architectural sites. Overall, a significant proportion of the toponyms found in *Baburnama*—namely, about 90 examples—are constructed in the form of Persian-Tajik izafet combinations. Structurally, these units consist of lexical combinations such as Persian + Persian, Arabic + Persian, or Persian + Turkic elements, reflecting the multilingual and cultural interaction characteristic of the period¹.

Toponyms are an important source of information in any historical text, reflecting the geographical landscape, socio-economic conditions, and cultural environment of a particular period. In *Baburnama*, toponyms are formed through the interaction of Persian and Old Uzbek (Turkic) elements, and their adequate translation into other languages, particularly into English, represents an important issue. The present study analyzes how izafet-based place names are rendered in English translations and examines the approaches adopted by different translators.

Research Methodology

This study employs a comparative and descriptive approach to analyze the translation of izafet-based toponyms in *Baburnama*. The research is based on the comparison of the original Uzbek text (2002 edition) with three English translations by J. Leyden–W. Erskine, Annette Susannah Beveridge, and W. M. Thackston.

The analysis focuses on identifying the translation strategies used to render izafet constructions in English. Particular attention is given to transliteration, semantic translation, and contextual interpretation of place names. The study also examines how the grammatical structure of the Persian–Tajik izafet construction is preserved, modified, or omitted in different translations.

¹ Амонов М. “Бобурнома”да изофий бирикмаларнинг лисоний тадқиқи. Фил. фан. док (PhD) дисс – Фарғона, 2020.

Through comparative analysis, the research evaluates the advantages and limitations of each translation strategy and determines which approaches most effectively preserve the phonetic form and semantic meaning of the original toponyms.

Results and Discussion: Geographical terms such as *darayi*, which consists of *dara* and the izafet suffix *-yi* (*dara + yi*), require special attention in translation. Depending on the context, they may require either a direct translation or a context-based interpretation.

Below, the translation variants of the toponyms *Darayi Boy*, *Darayi Gaz*, and *Darayi Nur* are analyzed, and their problematic aspects are highlighted. The word *dara* in Persian means “a road between mountains” or “valley.”² This study examines the different English translation variants of the constructions *Dara+yi+Boy* (Noun + Izafet + Adjective), *Dara+yi+Gaz* (Noun + Izafet + Noun), and *Dara+yi+Nur* (Noun + Izafet + Noun). The analysis focuses on how these names are rendered in the translations, why different variants appear, and what problematic aspects arise in the translation process.

Table 1 presents the translation variants of these valley toponyms found in *Baburnama*.

Table 1. Translation variants of izafet-based toponyms in *Baburnama*

Original text	J.Leyden-W. Erskine	Susannah Beveridge	W.Thackston
<i>Дарайи Нур</i> [110]	the Dareh-Nur (the Valley of Light) [143]	the Nur-valley [212]	Dara-i-Nur [175]
<i>Дарайи Бай</i> [141]	the valley of Pai [200-201]	at the foot of the valley [296]	Dara-i-Bai [230]
<i>Дарайи Газ</i> [37]	the Dera-Gez [7]	the Tamarisk Valley [14]	Daragaz [40]
<i>Деҳи Фуломон</i> [107]	Deh-Gholaman. [277]	Dih-i-ghulaman (Basaul), [413]	Deh-i-Ghulaman [299]
<i>Деҳи Афгон</i> [174]	the Deh-Afghanan road [269]	Dih-i-afghan [402]	Deh-i-Afghan [267]

As shown in Table 1, the translation variants differ significantly and therefore require comparative analysis.

The toponym *Dara-yi Nūr* (a Persian–Tajik izafet construction) consists of three elements: *dara* (valley) + *-yi* (the izafet marker) + *nūr* (light). The literal

² O ‘zbek tili izohli lug’ati (2023). Toshkent: Ga’fur G’ulom nomidagi nashriyot-manbaa ijodiy uyi. www.ziyouz.com kutubxonasi

meaning of the toponym is “**Valley of Light.**” Different English translators of *Baburnama* use different methods to render this name.

J. Leyden and W. Erskine use transliteration with explanation: “This fruit is very abundant in **the Dareh-Nur (the Valley of Light)**, but is found nowhere else.” [143]. This version combines transliteration with semantic explanation. The form “Dareh” reflects the Persian pronunciation, while the explanatory phrase “the Valley of Light” conveys the meaning by replacing the izafet construction with an “of” structure.

Annette Susannah Beveridge uses partial translation: “Of the two buluks of Lamghan one is **the Nur-valley.**” [212]. In this version, the lexical meaning is translated, but the original izafet structure disappears, and the word order follows English grammatical rules.

W. M. Thackston uses full transliteration: “One of the other two districts is **Dara-i-Nur.**” [175]. This version preserves the izafet marker (-i) and maintains the original structure of the toponym, although additional explanation may be required for readers unfamiliar with the geographical term.

The next example is *Darayi Boy*: “Кўхи Софдин Дарайи Бойға тушганда мени келиб кўрди.” [141].

J. Leyden and W. Erskine translate this passage as: “...to leave the mountain of Saf, and to come down to **the valley of Pai**, to meet me and make his submissions.” [200–201].

Annette Susannah Beveridge renders it as: “He himself was forced to come at last; he saw me at **the foot of the valley** when I came down off Saf-hill.” [296].

W. M. Thackston translates it as: “Finally, there was nothing the mirza could do, so he came to see me when I went down from Koh-i-Saf and camped in **Dara-i-Bai.**” [230].

The word *Boy* is used here as a toponym and means “wealthy, rich, prosperous.”³ In this case, the original word *Boy* appears to have been replaced by *Pai*. The Persian word *poy* means “foot,” “heel,” or “base.”⁴ This substitution may represent a phonetic or semantic confusion. Since *poy* refers to the foot or lower part of a mountain or valley, the original meaning of the toponym is altered.

Annette Susannah Beveridge translates the toponym contextually as “at the foot of the valley.” In this version, the original place name disappears and is replaced with a general geographical description. As a result, the uniqueness of the toponym is lost, and the reader cannot identify the original name. From a translation perspective, this represents a case of semantic loss.

In contrast, W. M. Thackston preserves the toponym through transliteration as *Dara-i-Bai*. This approach maintains phonetic proximity to the original name and retains the izafet marker *-i*, which reflects the grammatical structure of the

³ O‘zbek tilining izohli lug‘ati (2023). Toshkent: Ga‘fur G‘ulom nomidagi nashriyot-manbaa ijodiy uyi. www.ziyouz.com kutubxonasi 568 p.

⁴ O‘zbek tilining izohli lug‘ati (2023). Toshkent: Ga‘fur G‘ulom nomidagi nashriyot-manbaa ijodiy uyi. www.ziyouz.com kutubxonasi 785 p.

Persian–Tajik construction. As a result, the original form of the place name is preserved more accurately than in the other translations. However, the lexical meaning of the element *dara* (“valley”) is not explicitly explained in the translation. For readers unfamiliar with Persian geographical terminology, the meaning of the toponym may therefore remain unclear. Nevertheless, from a linguistic and scholarly perspective, this strategy is closer to the original structure of the toponym and is more suitable for academic texts.

Our next example is *Darayi Gaz*. The form *Darayi Gaz* is also mentioned in the *Babur Encyclopedia* as “Darayi Gez” (Дарайи Геэ)⁵. The word *gaz* in Persian means “tamarisk,” a shrub with small, fine, whitish leaves.⁶ Therefore, the toponym *Darayi Gaz* can be interpreted as “Valley of Tamarisk.”

Original text (2002): *Мирзоларни суннат қилур тўйи жиҳатидин Дарайи Газдин ёндуруб, Самарқанд элтти.* [37]

J. Leyden and W. Erskine translate it as: “He, however, recalled him to Samarkand, when he had reached **the Dera-Gez**, in order that he might be present at the festival of the circumcision of the Mirzas.” [7].

Annette Susannah Beveridge renders the toponym as “**the Tamarisk Valley**”: “His father first gave him Kabul and, with Baba-i-Kabul for his guardian, had allowed him to set out, but recalled him from the Tamarisk Valley to Samarkand, on account of the Mirzas’ Circumcision Feast.” [14].

W. M. Thackston translates the place name as *Daragaz*: “He recalled him from **Daragaz** to Samarkand for the mirzas’ circumcision feast.” [40].

In the translation by J. Leyden and W. Erskine, the form *Dera-Gez* represents transliteration of the original toponym. Although the phonetic form is partly preserved, the lexical meaning of the element *gaz* (“tamarisk”) is not explained.

Annette Susannah Beveridge, on the other hand, translates the toponym semantically as “the Tamarisk Valley.” This approach conveys the meaning of the name but removes the phonetic form of the original toponym and eliminates the izafet structure.

In W. M. Thackston’s version, the form *Daragaz* represents phonetic transliteration of the original name. While the semantic meaning is not explained, the phonetic appearance of the toponym is preserved more closely than in Beveridge’s translation. However, the izafet construction is not explicitly reflected in this form.

Recommended translation variants

• *Darayi Nur* → *Darai Nūr* (“Valley of Light”) — phonetic transliteration combined with explanatory translation.

⁵ “Boburnoma ensiklopediyasi” (2017). Toshkent. «Sharq» нашриёт-матбаа Акциядорлик компанияси

Бош таҳририяти

⁶ Qishloq xo‘jalik izohli lug‘ati (2023) Toshkent “O‘zbekiston” 488 p.

- *Darayi Boy* → *Darai Bāi* (“Valley of Bāi”) — phonetic transliteration with explanatory clarification.

- *Darayi Gaz* → *Darai Gaz* (“Tamarisk Valley”) — the phonetic form of the toponym is preserved and supplemented with a lexical explanation.

Similarly, other toponyms such as *Deh-i Ghulaman* and *Deh-i Afghan* also appear in *Baburnama*. *Deh-i Ghulaman* refers to a village located on the route leading from India to Kabul, while *Deh-i Afghan* denotes a village situated in the province of Kabul (Bobur Encyclopedia, p. 200)⁷. Structurally, these toponyms consist of three elements: *deh* (village) + *-i* (the izafet marker) + a proper name.

The analysis of the toponym *Deh-i Ghulaman* shows that the three translators adopt different approaches: J. Leyden and W. Erskine render it as *Deh-Gholaman*, Annette Susannah Beveridge as *Dih-i-ghulaman (Basaul)*, and W. M. Thackston as *Deh-i-Ghulaman*.

J. Leyden and W. Erskine write the name as *Deh-Gholaman*. In this version, the izafet marker (*-i*) is not indicated. The spelling “Gholaman” reflects early transliteration practices. While this form is relatively easy for English readers to read, it does not fully preserve the original grammatical structure of the toponym.

Annette Susannah Beveridge uses the form *Dih-i-ghulaman*. She retains the izafet marker (*-i*), which makes the structure closer to the original Persian form. The spelling “Dih” instead of “Deh” reflects a different transliteration system. The addition “(Basaul)” provides additional geographical information, making this version both linguistically accurate and informative.

W. M. Thackston renders the toponym as *Deh-i-Ghulaman*. In this version, the izafet marker (*-i*) is preserved, and a consistent transliteration system is applied. As a result, the grammatical connection between the elements of the toponym is clearly reflected. This approach is both accurate and systematic, making it particularly suitable for academic research.

The three translations demonstrate different approaches. J. Leyden and W. Erskine simplify the structure and omit the izafet marker. In contrast, Annette Susannah Beveridge and W. M. Thackston preserve the izafet construction and reflect the original grammatical form of the toponym. Among them, Thackston’s version appears to be the most consistent, while Beveridge’s translation provides additional geographical clarification.

The original form of the toponym is *Deh-i Afghan*. It consists of three elements: *deh* (village), the izafet marker *-i*, and *Afghan*. The meaning of the name is “Village of the Afghans.” The three translators render this toponym in different ways.

J. Leyden and W. Erskine do not translate the place name directly. Instead, they render it as *the Deh-Afghanan road*, which changes the original structure. First, the izafet marker (*-i*) is omitted. Second, the word “road” is added, although it is not part of the original toponym. Third, the form “Afghanan” reflects early transliteration practices. As a result, this version adapts the name to English usage

⁷ Zahiriddin Muhammad Bobur Encyclopedia, Toshkent-2017. 244 p.

but alters the original grammatical structure and slightly shifts its meaning. From a linguistic perspective, this translation is therefore less accurate.

Annette Susannah Beveridge preserves the izafet marker (-i), which maintains the original Persian–Tajik structure. The spelling “Dih” instead of “Deh” reflects a different transliteration system. Her version is structurally accurate and closer to the original form; however, the lowercase spelling of “afghan” may indicate less consistency in capitalization.

W. M. Thackston also preserves the izafet marker and applies a consistent transliteration system with proper capitalization. His version clearly reflects the grammatical structure of the original toponym, making it more suitable for academic writing.

From a linguistic perspective, the translations by Annette Susannah Beveridge and W. M. Thackston are more accurate because they preserve the izafet construction. Among them, Thackston’s version appears to be the most consistent and academically reliable.

Conclusion:

The analysis of izafet-based toponyms in *Baburnama* demonstrates that their translation into English presents several linguistic and structural challenges. Since English does not possess a grammatical construction equivalent to the Persian–Tajik izafet, translators adopt different strategies when rendering such place names.

The comparative analysis of the translations by J. Leyden and W. Erskine, Annette Susannah Beveridge, and W. M. Thackston shows that the translators employ various methods, including transliteration, semantic translation, and contextual interpretation. Each approach has certain advantages and limitations. Transliteration preserves the phonetic form and grammatical structure of the original toponym, while semantic translation conveys the meaning but may lead to the loss of the original form.

The study also reveals that some translations modify the original structure of the toponyms or replace them with descriptive expressions, which can result in semantic loss. In contrast, translations that preserve the izafet marker and the phonetic structure of the name provide a closer representation of the original form.

Therefore, the most effective strategy for translating izafet-based toponyms is to combine phonetic transliteration with explanatory translation. This approach allows the translator to retain the original linguistic structure while also making the meaning clear to the reader. Such a method is particularly suitable for academic and scholarly translations of historical texts such as *Baburnama*. The findings of this study may contribute to further research on the translation of culturally specific toponyms in historical texts.

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