UDC 81'373.2

# VERBAL EXPRESSION OF LINGUOCULTURAL CODES IN UZBEK, ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN TOPONYMS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Safarov Raxmatullo Hasan o'g'li**
Master's graduate of Samarkand
State Institute of Foreign Languages
https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23232395

**Abstract.** The article comparatively analyzes toponymic units in Uzbek, English and Russian from the perspectives of linguocultural code, collective memory and territorial identity. The central idea of the study is to interpret a geographical name as a multilayered linguistic unit consisting of denotative, motivational, historical, and associative-cultural levels. Uzbek names such as Qizilqum, Oqtosh, Yangiyo'l, Uchqo'rg'on and historical city names are compared with the English toponyms Oxford and Newcastle and with historical toponymic formants, as well as with structurally transparent Russian units such as Новгород and Белгород. The results show that nominative models based on colour, number, landscape, settlement, structure, and temporal features recur across languages, while their historical semantics and contemporary cultural connotations remain language- and culture-specific. The role of toponyms in preserving cultural heritage and identity is also discussed in relation to UNGEGN approaches.

**Keywords:** toponym, onomastics, linguocultural code, collective memory, national identity, nomination, semantic motivation, Uzbek, English, Russian, cultural heritage.

## VERBAL EXPRESSION OF LINGUOCULTURAL CODES IN UZBEK, ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN TOPONYMS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

**Abstract.** The article analyzes toponymic units in Uzbek, English and Russian through the concepts of linguocultural code, collective memory and territorial identity. It proposes a four-layer model of toponymic analysis comprising denotative, motivational, historical, and associative-cultural levels. Uzbek place names such as Qizilqum, Oqtosh, Yangiyo'l and Uchqo'rg'on are compared with the English names Oxford and Newcastle and historical toponymic elements, as well as with structurally transparent Russian examples such as Novgorod and Belgorod. The comparative analysis demonstrates that colour, number, landscape, settlement type, built environment, and temporal oppositions are recurrent naming motivations across languages, whereas their linguistic realization and cultural connotations are historically specific. The article also discusses the role of geographical names in cultural heritage and identity in connection with UNGEGN principles. The findings support an integrated approach combining etymology, semantics, historical documentation, and contemporary cultural associations.

**Keywords:** toponym, onomastics, linguocultural code, collective memory, identity, naming, semantic motivation, Uzbek, English, Russian, cultural heritage.

## INTRODUCTION

Proper names serve the human need to individualize entities within the linguistic system. Among them, geographical names—toponyms—not only designate a particular territory, settlement, body of water, landform, or other spatial unit, but also preserve multilayered historical and cultural information. For this reason, toponymy has developed not merely as an auxiliary branch of lexicology, but as an interdisciplinary field at the intersection of linguistics, history, geography, ethnography, sociology, and cultural studies.

Modern onomastics views a proper name not as a static label, but as a dynamic linguistic and cultural artefact that changes together with society. Taylor (2016) emphasizes the need to collect historical records, oral forms, maps, and electronic data comprehensively in place-name research. Hough (2016) notes that many settlement names are based on descriptions of the natural environment, the built environment, or the inhabitants, while other groups arise associatively from personal names, events, or transferred names. These theoretical perspectives make it possible to compare Uzbek, English, and Russian toponymic systems using the same analytical criteria.

In Uzbek linguistics, S. Qorayev's work Toponimika is one of the major sources that systematizes the theoretical foundations of Uzbekistan's geographical names. In the Russian toponymic tradition, V. A. Nikonov and A. V. Superanskaya examined the place of geographical names in the language system, their historical development, and their social functions. In English toponymic studies, historical forms and settlement names have been investigated using large corpora, demonstrating the value of place names as evidence for language history.

The relevance of this study is determined by three factors. First, under conditions of globalization and urbanization, the semantic memory of local historical names may weaken. Second, renaming and standardization processes intensify the political and cultural functions of toponyms. Third, comparative study of toponyms across languages allows the relationship between universal naming mechanisms and national-cultural features to be identified. UNGEGN also interprets geographical names as heritage connected with national history, language, culture, and identity, and pays particular attention to collecting, standardizing, and recording local forms.

The aim of the article is to determine how linguocultural codes are verbally expressed in Uzbek, English, and Russian toponyms; to analyze the semantic motivation and historical layers of names in relation to contemporary cultural associations; and to propose a comparative model based on material from the three languages.

## LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three main approaches can be distinguished in toponymic research: etymological-historical, structural-semantic, and linguocultural-social. The etymological approach identifies the earliest recorded forms of a name, its phonetic changes, and its original lexical source. The structural-semantic approach analyzes the components of names, word-formation models, and nominative motivations. The linguocultural approach examines the functions of toponyms in social memory, identity, symbolic geography, and cultural associations.

Qorayev (2006) particularly emphasizes the interrelationship of linguistics, geography, and history in the study of Uzbekistan's toponymy. This approach is important for

understanding the multilayered nature of Uzbek toponyms because place names in Central Asia preserve traces of different historical periods and languages. Nikonov (1965), within the Russian toponymic tradition, investigated the historical patterns, motivations, and territorial-systemic characteristics of geographical names. Superanskaya (1985) described geographical names as special words that perform important social functions and emphasized the need for their regulation and preservation.

The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming, edited by Hough, summarizes major theoretical and methodological achievements in modern onomastics. It presents research methodology for place names, settlement names, river names, street names, and socio-onomastics as distinct areas. Taylor (2016) treats the toponym as a "dynamic cultural and linguistic artefact" that changes across time and space and argues that researchers should document the evolution of historical forms. Hough (2016) distinguishes descriptive and associative types of settlement names and notes their considerable evidential value for settlement history, chronology, and language history.

Within Uzbek-English comparative studies, Safura Xudoyorova's research compares the historical and cultural sources of phraseological units containing toponymic components. Her work shows that place names activate national memory and historical events not only within the toponymic system itself but also in phraseology. Toshmamatova (2026) examines linguistic and cultural connections between Uzbek and English toponyms, incorporating phonetic, morphological, lexical, and ethnolinguistic factors into comparative analysis.

UNGEGN materials reinforce the practical and cultural-policy dimension of toponymy. In addition to standardizing geographical names nationally and internationally, the organization supports the recording and preservation of names that reflect local languages, traditions, and cultural heritage. The fact that Information Bulletin No. 68 (2024) was devoted to "The Role of Geographical Names in Preserving Cultural Heritage" confirms the significance of toponyms within the framework of intangible cultural heritage.

On the basis of these theoretical premises, the article proposes analyzing the toponym not only through the relationship "name + object," but through the chain "object – nominative feature – historical form – contemporary cultural association."

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research material consists of selected toponymic units from three languages. Uzbek examples include semantically relatively transparent names such as Qizilqum, Oqtosh, Yangiyo'l, and Uchqo'rg'on, as well as Samarqand and Buxoro, which carry strong contemporary cultural associations. From English, Oxford, Newcastle, and the historical elements -ford, -ton, -ham, -bury/-borough, and -chester were selected; from Russian, structurally transparent modern examples such as Новгород and Белгород were used for comparison. The examples were selected purposively so that they would allow semantic models observable in all three languages to be compared.

Five methods were applied in the analysis. First, the descriptive method was used to record the structural and semantic features of the names. Second, the comparative-typological method served to identify similar nominative categories in the three languages. Third, the etymological approach relied on reliable dictionaries and onomastic sources for historical forms. Fourth, contextual-associative analysis helped describe the symbolic load of a

toponym in contemporary cultural consciousness. Fifth, linguocultural analysis evaluated the toponym as a unit connected with national memory and territorial identity.

The study followed the principle of not conflating historical etymology with modern "folk" interpretation. A toponym may resemble a modern word in its surface form, while its actual origin may have developed from a different historical unit. Therefore, only cases supported by reliable etymological sources are presented as examples of origin; for other units, cautious formulations such as "structurally transparent" or "the following components can be distinguished in the modern form" are used.

## A FOUR-LAYER LINGUOCULTURAL MODEL OF THE TOPONYM

A four-layer model is proposed for the comprehensive analysis of toponymic units. The first layer is the denotative layer. It indicates the real geographical object to which the toponym refers. At this level, the name identifies a city, village, river, mountain, desert, or another object.

The second layer is the motivational layer. It identifies which feature was selected at the time of naming. Colour, relief, water, number, settlement type, person, occupation, or the new/old opposition may function as naming motivations. The linguistic structure of a name often reveals this layer.

The third layer is the historical layer. This level takes into account the earliest attestations of the name, its phonetic and morphological changes, contact with other languages, and the historical circumstances in which naming occurred. This layer is especially important in English and Uzbek toponymy in order to avoid equating historical formants with modern vocabulary.

The fourth layer is the associative-cultural layer. It reflects the historical, symbolic, emotional, or institutional knowledge activated by the name in present-day society. For example, while the original etymology of Oxford is connected with a river crossing, in contemporary global discourse it is also associated with the university and academic prestige. Samarqand denotes a city as a geographical object, yet in modern cultural consciousness it evokes a broad conceptual field including the Silk Road, Registan, the Timurid period, and historical architecture.

This model demonstrates the expanded functional nature of a toponym over time without reducing its meaning to a single etymological formula. For linguocultural analysis, the distinction between the third and fourth layers is particularly important: historical origin explains how the name emerged, whereas cultural association shows how the name functions today.

## NATURAL AND SOCIAL CODES IN UZBEK TOPONYMS

Names based on the natural environment are widespread in the Uzbek toponymic system. Components such as -soy, -ko‘l, -buloq, -qum, -tepa, and -tosh incorporate the geographical type or a salient characteristic of an object into the name. In Qizilqum, the components qizil ‘red’ and qum ‘sand’ are semantically transparent in modern Uzbek. Oqtosh likewise illustrates a naming model based on colour and material/relief. In such names, the visual category of colour becomes a means of classifying geographical space.

The toponymic function of colour is not limited to indicating physical colour. In the historical cultures of Turkic peoples, certain colours may also have been associated with spatial direction, political units, or symbolic classification. Therefore, the historical semantics of colour in each specific toponym must be established through separate sources. From a linguocultural perspective, however, the key point is that colour becomes a primary perceptual feature selected for naming an object.

Names such as Yangiyo‘l display a temporal code. The component yangi ‘new’ indicates that, at the time of naming, the object emerged later than another object or was newly established. Even after the object itself becomes historical, the feature ‘new’ remains in the name. This illustrates the capacity of a toponym to ‘freeze’ time. A name may preserve not the present state of an object but the relationship that existed when the name was given.

Uchqo‘rg‘on is noteworthy from the perspective of the number + structure/settlement model. The numeral expresses a quantitative feature of the object’s structure, while qo‘rg‘on activates the historical concept of a built or fortified space. In this model, a social-construction code rather than a natural code predominates. Historical elements such as -obod, -qo‘rg‘on, and -kent/-kand in Uzbek toponymy likewise reflect a long tradition of categorizing inhabited space.

Historical city names such as Samarqand and Buxoro clearly demonstrate the associative-cultural layer of the toponym. Their contemporary semantic value extends far beyond etymological origin. In Uzbek and international tourism discourse, Samarqand is associated with the Silk Road, Registan, historical architecture, and Timurid heritage. Buxoro evokes associations with an ancient city, trade, Islamic scholarly tradition, and architectural heritage. Thus, in national culture a toponym may develop from a ‘place name’ into a ‘cultural symbol.’

## THE HISTORICAL-LINGUISTIC CODE IN ENGLISH TOPONYMS

English toponymy is the product of multilayered historical language contact. The successive and parallel presence of Celtic, Old English, Scandinavian, Latin, and Norman French elements in Britain has left clear traces in geographical names. In modern English, many toponymic elements are no longer perceived as independent productive words, but their meanings can be recovered through historical onomastic analysis.

The element -ford historically denoted a shallow place where a river or stream could be crossed. Oxford is a well-known example. In the Ashmolean Museum’s Anglo-Saxon Discovery materials, the Old English form Oxnaford is related to ‘oxen’ and ‘ford’ and is interpreted as a river crossing used by oxen. The name originally represented a point where economic activity and natural landscape intersected. Later, as Oxford developed into a university city, it acquired an entirely new layer of cultural connotation. As a result, the historical code and the modern institutional code coexist within one toponym.

Elements such as -ton, -ham, -bury/-borough, and -chester are also important in the English system of settlement names as historical markers of inhabited and built environments. Their functions in language history are not etymologically equivalent to Uzbek elements such as -qo‘rg‘on, -kent, and -obod; however, typologically they can be compared in terms of the function of naming inhabited or fortified spaces.

The name Newcastle remains structurally transparent in modern English: ‘new’ + ‘castle’. This unit combines temporal and construction-related codes. The model resembles structures such as Uzbek Yangiqo‘rg‘on. The purpose of the comparison is not to claim that these names are historically related, but to show that speakers of different languages may use similar cognitive strategies when naming a newly built or newly established place in relation to an earlier object.

**STRUCTURAL-SEMANTIC AND CULTURAL CODES IN RUSSIAN TOPONYMS**

The Russian toponymic tradition has studied the historical and systemic nature of geographical names in considerable depth. Nikonov (1965) demonstrates the need to analyze toponymic systems in terms of territorial, historical, and linguistic regularities. Superanskaya (1985) emphasizes that geographical names perform communicative and cultural functions in society. The modern forms of many Russian toponyms also make their naming models visible.

The name Новгород can be treated as an example of the semantic model ‘new + city.’ In modern Russian, the components нов- and город are transparent and illustrate a strategy of distinguishing a new settlement from an earlier spatial entity. In this respect, it can be compared with English Newcastle and Uzbek temporal naming patterns such as Yangiyo‘l/Yangiqo‘rg‘on. In all three languages, ‘newness’ records a relationship that existed at the time of naming and later becomes a marker of historical memory.

In the modern structure of Белгород, colour and city components are identifiable. The model colour + settlement shares a general cognitive mechanism with Uzbek colour-based toponyms such as Oqtosh and Qizilqum, even though the specific historical motivation and type of object differ. This comparison shows that colour is a convenient perceptual category for individualizing geographical space.

The linguocultural layer of Russian toponyms cannot be reduced to morphemic analysis. Names such as Москва and Санкт-Петербург generate broad associative fields in contemporary Russian cultural space involving history, politics, literature, art, and state symbolism. This is comparable to the process observed with Samarqand, Buxoro, and Oxford: over time, a historical name may develop into a cultural concept.

**A COMPARATIVE SYSTEM OF TOPONYMIC CODES IN THREE LANGUAGES**

| Code / naming motivation | Uzbek | English | Russian | Comparative interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Colour | Qizilqum, Oqtosh | historical colour-based place names | Белгород | A perceptual feature becomes a means of distinguishing one place from another. |
| Newness / time | Yangiyo‘l, Yangiqo‘rg‘on | Newcastle | Новгород | A temporal relation at the time of naming remains as a |

| Code / naming motivation | Uzbek | English | Russian | Comparative interpretation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | historical trace for later periods. |
| Number | Uchqo‘rg‘on | number-based place-name models | number-based toponyms exist | Quantity or a structural feature may become central to nomination. |
| Settlement / structure | -qo‘rg‘on, -kent, -obod | -ton, -bury, -chester | -город / -град | Built space and type of habitation are preserved in historical-linguistic formants. |
| Landscape / route of movement | -soy, -ko‘l, -buloq | -ford | hydronymic and relief-based models | The natural environment, together with human movement and economic activity, becomes a source of naming. |
| Cultural symbol | Samarqand, Buxoro | Oxford | Москва, Санкт-Петербург | A denotative name accumulates secondary historical and symbolic connotations. |

**LINGUOCULTURAL CODE, COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND IDENTITY**

The concept of a ‘linguocultural code’ refers to the activation, through a linguistic unit, of historical, symbolic, or value-based knowledge familiar to a particular community. A toponym can serve as a compact form of such a code. It designates the same geographical object for several generations and thereby becomes a stable anchor of collective memory.

Territorial identity is important in expressing where a person comes from and where they belong. The name of a neighbourhood, village, city, or region participates in an individual’s social self-identification. In everyday speech, a toponym may function as an address element, while in cultural discourse it can activate concepts such as ‘home,’ ‘belonging to the homeland,’ ‘historical centre,’ ‘sacred place,’ or ‘heritage.’ For this reason, changes in geographical names can also affect a society’s historical memory and political self-representation.

UNGEGN’s treatment of geographical names as cultural heritage is based on precisely this principle. Since the 1980s, the organization has emphasized the importance of

geographical names in the historical and cultural heritage of nations; more recent documents interpret toponyms in connection with intangible cultural heritage and identity. This approach yields two conclusions for research. First, preserving a historical toponym is not only a linguistic issue but also a matter of cultural policy. Second, standardization requires the documentation of local pronunciation, spelling, and historical forms.

**REFERENCES**

1. Qorayev, S. Toponimika. Toshkent: O‘zbekiston faylasuflari milliy jamiyati nashriyoti, 2006. 318 b.
2. Никонов, В. А. Введение в топонимику. Москва: Наука, 1965. 179 с.
3. Суперанская, А. В. Что такое топонимика? Москва: Наука, 1985. 175 с.
4. Hough, C. (ed.). The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199656431.001.0001.
5. Taylor, S. Methodologies in Place-name Research. In: C. Hough (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming. Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 69–86. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199656431.013.17.
6. Hough, C. Settlement Names. In: C. Hough (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of Names and Naming. Oxford University Press, 2016, pp. 87–103. DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199656431.013.37.
7. Mills, A. D. A Dictionary of British Place-Names. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
8. Xudoyorova, S. English and Uzbek Toponymic Phraseological Units: Linguocultural and Historical Aspects. International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Culture, 2021, 7(4), 201–208. DOI: 10.21744/ijllc.v7n4.1426.
9. Toshmamatova, U. O‘. Linguistic and Cultural Connections in Uzbek and English Toponyms. World of Philology, 2026, 5(3), 449–454. DOI: 10.70728/phil.v05.i03.067.
10. United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). Information Bulletin No. 68: The Role of Geographical Names in Preserving Cultural Heritage. United Nations Statistics Division, 2024.
11. United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names (UNGEGN). About UNGEGN and Geographical Names Standardization. United Nations Statistics Division.
12. Ashmolean Museum. Anglo-Saxon Discovery: Place Names. University of Oxford educational resource.