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Urbanonymics And Linguoculturology: Evolution Of Terms And Concepts

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Abstract: This article examines the emergence and development of two interrelated research domains: "urbanonymics" (the study of names in the urban space) and "linguoculturology" (the study of how language and culture interact to construct shared meanings). The paper argues that modern cities function simultaneously as linguistic, cultural, and semiotic environments, and therefore require an integrated methodological lens. After outlining theoretical foundations in onomastics, semiotics of space, and linguoculture studies, the article proposes an analytical model for interpreting urban names (street names, district names, commercial names, memorial names, etc.) as culturally marked signs. The discussion shows how urban naming practices index ideology, identity, and historical memory. The article concludes that urbanonymics is shifting from a purely descriptive sub-branch of onomastics toward an interpretive, discourse-oriented field aligned with linguoculturology and critical sociolinguistics.

Keywords: Urbanonymics; urbanonymy; toponymy; linguoculturology; semiotic landscape; naming policy; linguistic identity.

Introduction: Urban space is not silent. It "speaks" through street names, metro station names, neighborhood labels, commemorative plaques, slogans on shopfronts, and branded districts such as "Old Town," "New City," or "Silk Street." These verbal signs do more than orient citizens geographically; they encode political power, collective memory, prestige, nostalgia, and aspirations for modernity. The systematic study of such names is commonly referred to as "urbanonymics" (also called "urbanonymy" in some traditions), which may be defined as the branch of onomastics that analyzes proper names specific to the built environment (streets, avenues, parks, squares, microdistricts, residential complexes, commercial centers, etc.). In parallel, "linguoculturology" has developed as a field that studies the interdependence of language and culture, emphasizing how linguistic units embody culturally specific meanings, values, and worldviews. Linguoculturology is not only descriptive; it is interpretive and axiological. It asks: What cultural codes are activated by a word, and how do speakers position themselves toward those codes?

Although these two fields emerged from different scholarly lineages — onomastics for urbanonymics, and cultural linguistics / ethnolinguistics for linguoculturology — their intersection has become increasingly productive. Scholars now speak of the "semiotic landscape" or "linguistic landscape" of the city, where language-in-place is analyzed as social action, identity performance, and ideological display. This move positions the city as a layered text, and naming as discourse. In other words, the evolution of terminology from "street names" to "urbanonyms," and from "linguistic data" to "linguocultural codes," reflects a broader conceptual shift: from naming as inventory to naming as ideology.

The present study pursues two aims: to trace how the core terms ("urbanonymics / urbanonymy", "linguoculturology") have developed, and to propose an integrated conceptual frame in which urban names are treated as linguocultural signs within an urban semiotic ecology.

METHODOLOGY

This article uses a qualitative, integrative methodology

with three components:

Terminological-historical review

First, we review how key terms have been defined in core scholarly traditions. The term "urbanonym" (and its umbrella field "urbanonymics") entered Slavic and Central/Eastern European onomastics to distinguish intra-urban names (e.g. street names, bridge names, square names) from broader toponymy (names of natural and large geographic objects). Meanwhile, "linguoculturology" was elaborated in Russian and post-Soviet linguistics in the 1990s–2000s as a response to perceived limits of structural linguistics, arguing that language cannot be divorced from national cultural mentality, value systems, and symbolic capital. By comparing definitions across these traditions, we reconstruct how both fields have moved from structural classification toward discourse interpretation.

Semiotic-locational analysis

Second, we adopt the notion of the "semiotic landscape," which treats visible verbal signs in physical space as communicative acts. Following Scollon & Scollon's geosemiotics framework, spatial placement and materiality (a street sign on an official pole vs. a sticker on a wall) are treated as meaningful, not accidental. This allows us to consider an "urbanonym" not just as a lexical form ("Navoi Street," "Liberty Square") but as an index of who has the right to inscribe meaning into urban space, under what historical conditions, and with which ideological effect.

Linguocultural interpretation

Finally, we interpret selected classes of urban names (e.g. commemorative names after poets, heroes, political leaders; prestige branding names like "Royal Residence," "Silk Way Plaza") as carriers of cultural values and narratives. This step follows linguoculturology in assuming that linguistic signs are saturated with national, regional, or local cultural codes — for instance, glorification of heroic past, emphasis on modernization, or promotion of cosmopolitan/global identity.

Because the present paper is primarily theoretical, it does not present a quantitative corpus of street names from a specific city. Instead, it develops an analytical model that can later be applied to comparative material (e.g. Uzbek cities vs. English-speaking cities).

RESULTS

This section presents three key findings from the integrative analysis.

Urbanonymics has expanded from taxonomy to ideology

Traditional onomastics treated urban names mostly as categories to be classified: odonyms (street names), hodonyms (road names), chrematonyms (commercial names), etc. The dominant task was etymological description — for example, explaining that a street was named after a historical figure, a local landmark, or a Soviet hero. However, recent scholarship reframes these names as instruments of symbolic power. Renaming streets after political transitions (for example, postcolonial or post-Soviet renaming) is analyzed not merely as lexical replacement, but as discursive reterritorialization of memory. The term "urbanonymic policy" has thus entered the literature to highlight that naming is governed, negotiated, contested, and sometimes resisted by local communities. Within this frame, "urbanonymy" no longer looks like a static list. It looks like an arena of struggle. In other words, the concept of "urbanonymics" has evolved from "the study of city names" to "the study of how city names enact identity, authority, and historical narrative in public space." This is a major conceptual shift.

Linguoculturology provides an interpretive grammar for urban space

Linguoculturology argues that linguistic units are culturally "loaded": they carry evaluative, symbolic, and axiological meanings that reflect a community's worldview. When applied to urbanonymics, this means that a street named after a national poet is not only commemorative. It is an instruction for how to remember, how to feel pride, and how to locate oneself inside a cultural lineage. This approach also helps interpret prestige-oriented or globalized names. For example, "Royal Park Residence," "City Plaza," "Silk Road Mall," or "Oxford Tower" may index aspirations toward luxury, internationalism, or historical continuity. Such names encode imaginaries of modernity, wealth, global English prestige, or Silk Road heritage. They are thus linguocultural markers of desired identity, not neutral marketing labels. In this way, linguoculturology supplies vocabulary — "axiological load", "value marker", "cultural code" — that urbanonymics can use to interpret why such names "feel appropriate" or "sell well" in a certain city at a certain time.

The city as a semiotic-ideological text

By bringing geosemiotics and semiotic landscape theory into dialogue with linguoculturology, we obtain a layered model of urban space:

Lexical layer (what the sign says):e.g. "Independence Square."

Spatial layer (where and how it is displayed): central avenue with official signage vs. a marginal alley with

improvised paint.

Cultural-ideological layer (what values it encodes): national sovereignty, post-colonial pride, sacred memory, luxury consumption, global modernity, etc.

In this model, "urbanonyms are readable as condensed narratives about who we are, who we were, and who we want to become as a city". The development of terminology from "street names" → "urbanonyms," and from "semantics" → "linguocultural code," mirrors the movement of the research agenda from surface description toward deep cultural interpretation.

DISCUSSION

The combined analysis shows that the evolution of terms is not cosmetic. It tracks the evolution of research priorities.

From object to discourse

Earlier urbanonymic studies often approached city names as objects: list them, group them, trace their etymology. This is valuable groundwork, but limited in explanatory power. The integration with linguoculturology reframes names as discourse — as speech acts performed by institutions (city councils, developers, branding agencies) and sometimes contested by residents. Renaming a street is then seen as rewriting collective memory, not just updating maps.

This discursive view aligns urbanonymics with critical sociolinguistics and linguistic landscape studies, where questions of voice, legitimacy, and power are central. Who is authorized to "speak" on the walls, poles, billboards, and maps of the city? Which languages are elevated to prestige signage? Which historical figures are erased, and which are elevated to emblematic status? Such questions reveal that urban naming is inseparable from identity politics, language policy, and cultural planning.

Urbanonymics as applied linguoculturology

A second implication is methodological. Linguoculturology traditionally focused on culturally marked lexemes, metaphors, phraseologisms, and discourse fragments that reflect a nation's "collective mentality." Urbanonymics now extends that focus into spatial reality. In other words, we can describe urbanonymics as "applied linguoculturology in physical space": it tracks how value-laden linguistic signs are materialized on street corners, maps, navigation apps, tourist brochures, and real estate advertisements.

This perspective also opens room for cross-linguistic comparison. For instance, an Uzbek city may display a high density of commemorative names referencing poets, martyrs, independence symbols, medieval scholars, or Silk Road heritage. An English-speaking city, in contrast, may show heavier use of commercial branding, Anglo-historical figures, colonial-era elites, or neutral grid numbers ("4th Avenue," "32nd Street"). Both systems are meaningful. Both are culturally marked. But they project different identities and different narratives of legitimacy. Comparing them becomes a linguocultural act, not just a geographic one. Finally, the findings suggest that we need a more unified and precise conceptual apparatus. At minimum, four terms should be distinguished and then linked:

Urbanonym / urbanonymy / urbanonymics: The system and study of proper names in the urban environment (streets, squares, districts, infrastructure, commercial complexes). The term signals an onomastic base.

Linguoculturology: The study of how linguistic forms embody cultural values, collective memory, and worldview. The term signals an interpretive, axiological base.

Semiotic landscape / linguistic landscape: The visual display of language in public space, analyzed as social action. The term signals a spatial-pragmatic base.

Geosemiotics: The study of the meaning of signs in relation to their physical placement, materiality, and indexical force in space. The term signals a situated, interactional base.

When these are combined, we get an enriched framework: "Urbanonymics within a geosemiotic perspective, interpreted through linguoculturology, produces a culturally and politically sensitive reading of the city as text." This integrated model is, arguably, where contemporary research on city naming is heading.

CONCLUSION

The development of the terms "urbanonymics" and "linguoculturology" reflects a deeper conceptual turn in the humanities and social sciences. Both fields are moving away from static description and toward interpretive, identity-oriented analysis. Urbanonymics is no longer satisfied with cataloguing street names. It now asks how names encode ideology, assert ownership over memory, and shape the imagined identity of the city. Linguoculturology, once focused on culturally marked lexical items, is increasingly spatial: it explains how values and worldviews are physically inscribed into streetscapes, districts, shopping centers, and memorial squares. The synthesis of these approaches — supported by semiotic landscape and geosemiotics — allows us to read the city itself as a linguocultural statement. This view is especially useful for comparative urban studies (for example, comparing Uzbek and English-speaking cities), language policy analysis, and heritage branding. Future empirical work can apply this integrated model to concrete datasets of

street names, renaming campaigns, and commercial toponyms to map how linguistic identity is performed in different urban contexts.

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