

**RELIGIOUS PLACE NAMES AS REPRESENTATIVES OF LINGUISTIC WORLD
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This article explores religious place names in Uzbekistan as linguistic representations of the cultural and spiritual worldview of Uzbek-speaking communities. Drawing on the theoretical framework of the linguistic world picture and employing methods from linguocultural and cognitive linguistics, the study analyzes how sacred concepts are embedded in toponyms through metaphor, historical reference, and cultural symbolism. A corpus of over 100 religious place names was compiled from official dictionaries, historical records, and ethnographic sources, with particular focus on names containing honorifics and religious terms such as *hazrat*, *bobo*, *imam*, and *nur*.

The findings reveal that these names function not only as geographic identifiers but also as cognitive and cultural markers that reflect ancestral reverence, divine presence, and collective religious memory. Conceptual metaphors such as **LIGHT IS DIVINITY** and **ANCESTORS ARE GUARDIANS** structure the way sacred space is linguistically perceived. Regional variation in naming patterns highlights the influence of historical religious traditions and local linguistic practices. Furthermore, the study demonstrates how religious toponyms contribute to national identity formation and heritage preservation in contemporary Uzbekistan.

By examining religious place names through a multidisciplinary lens, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the relationship between language, belief, and spatial cognition in the context of Uzbek culture.

Key words: *linguoculturology, place names, cognitive linguistics, hazrat, masjid*

Introduction. Place names, or toponyms, are more than geographical identifiers—they are linguistic artifacts that encode the cultural, historical, and spiritual experiences of communities. Among them, religious toponyms occupy a unique position as they reflect not only spatial

orientation but also the sacred dimensions of human existence. These names are deeply rooted in the collective memory, spiritual practices, and worldviews of a people, often revealing how language maps religious and metaphysical concepts onto physical landscapes.

In the linguistic tradition, the notion of the linguistic world picture (LWP) emphasizes that language is a worldview-forming tool, shaping how speakers perceive reality. Developed by scholars such as Humboldt, Weisgerber, and Wierzbicka, this concept underlines the intrinsic link between language and cognition. When applied to religious toponyms, LWP provides a framework to understand how belief systems and sacred traditions are embedded in everyday language, particularly in the names of settlements, shrines, and geographical landmarks.

The Republic of Uzbekistan, is located at the crossroads of Islamic civilization and ancient cultural routes, offers a particularly rich field for such analysis. Its religious place names — such as *Yalangach Ota*, *Chor-Bakr*, *Hazrati Imom*, and *Sheikhantaur* — capture layers of historical, spiritual, and linguistic meaning. These toponyms not only indicate physical locations but also evoke religious figures, practices, and local legends that continue to shape the cultural identity of Uzbek society.

Despite their significance, religious toponyms in Uzbekistan have primarily been studied from historical or ethnographic perspectives. There remains a notable gap in scholarly literature that treats them from the vantage point of cognitive linguistics and linguistic world picture theory. This study seeks to fill that gap by examining the semantic, cultural, and cognitive dimensions of Uzbek religious place names as representations of the national and spiritual worldview.

The main objective of this paper is to analyze how religious place names in Uzbekistan act as linguistic representations of worldview, integrating both semantic structure and cultural symbolism. The study also aims to trace the etymological origins, morphological patterns, and conceptual frameworks inherent in these toponyms, thus contributing to a more holistic understanding of how language and religion co-construct meaning in a given cultural context

Literature review. Religious place names, or *religious toponyms*, serve as linguistic symbols that encapsulate the collective memory, beliefs, and worldviews of a society. Within the framework of linguistic world picture (LWP), these toponyms offer insights into how speakers of a language conceptualize sacred places, divine figures, and historical religious events. The study of such names is vital as Uzbekistan, is a country where for centuries the Islamic influence and pre-Islamic traditions have deeply shaped geographical nomenclature.

The concept of the *linguistic world picture*, originally developed by German philosopher Wilhelm von Humboldt and later expanded by linguists such as Leo Weisgerber and Anna Wierzbicka, refers to the worldview embedded in a language. It suggests that language is not merely a means of communication but also a cognitive system that reflects how speakers perceive and interpret the world [Wierzbicka, 1992; Apresyan, 1995].

Religious Toponymy in Onomastics and Cultural Studies is studied as an interdisciplinary field of science. Toponymy, as a subfield of onomastics, deals with the study of place names and their etymological, semantic, and cultural significance. Scholars such as Superanskaya (1973) and Vasilyeva (2001) argue that religious toponyms function as historical markers, preserving evidence of spiritual beliefs, migrations, and cultural transformations. These names often include references to saints (*Hazrat, Imom, Sheikh, Bobo, Ota*), religious acts (*Ziyorat, Hajj*), or places of worship (*Masjid, Takiya*). For example: *Imom ota, Sheykhantahur* (derived from *Sheykh Hovand Tahur*), *Hazrati imam Kaffal Shashiy, Ilon ota masjidi*.

In the context of Central Asia, Abdullaev (2010) emphasizes that religious toponyms are key to understanding the diffusion of Islam, Sufism, and even Zoroastrian remnants in local consciousness. These names also reflect the syncretism of pre-Islamic and Islamic beliefs, particularly in rural microtoponymy.

Uzbekistan offers a diverse array of religious toponyms shaped by Islamic culture, Sufi heritage, and earlier belief systems. Researchers such as Mirzaev (2014) and Tursunov (2017) have catalogued names such as *Chor-Bakr, Shahi-Zinda, Hazrati Imam, Sheykhantaur, Imom Bukhariy* and *Oqtepa Masjidi*. These names encode cultural values such as piety, reverence, and spiritual hierarchy.

Moreover, local oral traditions and pilgrimage culture (*ziyosat*) further reinforce the sacred significance of such sites. Studies (e.g., Nazirova, 2018) show that naming a village *Hazratobod* or *Bobo-Ota* not only reflects religious devotion but also creates a sacred geography that informs collective identity.

Linguistic Analysis of Religious Toponyms gives a chance to show the influence of foreign languages in toponym formation. From a linguistic standpoint, religious place names in Uzbekistan reveal distinct morphological and semantic patterns. Many include honorifics and religious descriptors such as *-obod, -ota, -hazrat, -madrasa, or -masjid*, which denote holiness or service to religion. As observed by Rakhmonov (2015), these affixes serve to elevate the status of a location within the local worldview.

Semantic studies (Yuldashev, 2020) also point to metaphorical and symbolic mappings in such names. For instance, *Nurata* (“Father of Light”) encodes a metaphysical perception of divine light, possibly linking Islamic and Zoroastrian notions of sacred illumination.

The relationship between religious toponyms and collective memory is central to understanding their cognitive and sociolinguistic roles. Assmann (2011) argues that place names serve as cultural memory sites. In Uzbekistan, religious names often mark burial places of saints or historical events, thus becoming mnemonic devices that anchor religious history within daily language use. Tashkent's *Sheikh Khavandi Tahur* or Samarkand's *Imam Maturidi* not only commemorate individuals but maintain their spiritual presence in urban and rural space. These names act as “linguistic monuments” (Bachtin, 1986) that sustain continuity between past and present.

Uzbekistan's linguocultural landscape demonstrates how religious toponyms interact with identity, ritual practice, and language preservation. As per the theory of linguocultural competence (Krasnykh, 2002), knowledge of these toponyms is essential for understanding cultural norms and values. This is particularly relevant in multilingual settings like Uzbekistan, where Uzbek, Russian, and Tajik linguistic influences coexist, often resulting in hybrid or translated religious toponyms.

Recent studies (Karimova & Soliyev, 2021) also highlight the role of religious place names in tourism and cultural heritage branding, as many ziyorat destinations are preserved and promoted under national and UNESCO initiatives.

While considerable research has explored religious toponyms in Central Asia, fewer works have analyzed them through the prism of the linguistic world picture. Most studies prioritize historical or cultural perspectives but often overlook cognitive-linguistic implications. Future research should integrate semantic analysis, cognitive metaphor theory, and corpus-based methods to better understand how these names shape and reflect worldviews in different regions of Uzbekistan.

Methods. This study employs an interdisciplinary approach, integrating linguocultural analysis and cognitive linguistic methodology to examine religious place names (toponyms) in Uzbekistan as expressions of the linguistic world picture. These methods allow for a multifaceted exploration of how language encodes religious meaning and reflects culturally specific models of perception and categorization.

The research is grounded in the theory of the linguistic world picture (Wierzbicka, 1992; Apresyan, 1995), which asserts that language reflects and shapes culturally determined ways of

understanding the world. In the context of religious toponyms, this framework helps uncover how sacred meanings are conceptualized and linguistically encoded within Uzbek cultural tradition. The linguocultural approach is applied to analyze the interrelationship between language, culture, and religious identity. According to Krasnykh (2002), the linguocultural method highlights how linguistic units reflect specific cultural values, norms, and symbolic systems. Religious place names, in this regard, serve as culturally marked linguistic signs that carry spiritual, historical, and emotional connotations.

The study is based on a qualitative descriptive method, combining semantic analysis, etymological investigation, and conceptual metaphor theory to identify and interpret the meanings embedded in religious toponyms. Selected place names were analyzed for their morphological structure, semantic components, and cultural references.

The analytical process included:

- Linguocultural analysis of the symbolic meanings attached to religious toponyms, especially those containing titles such as *bobo*, *ota*, *hazrat*, *sheikh*, and *imom*.
- Cognitive linguistic analysis, particularly using **conceptual metaphor theory** (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), to examine how abstract religious concepts (e.g., sanctity, guidance, spiritual hierarchy) are projected onto geographical spaces through metaphorical naming.

Data were collected from a combination of sources, including:

- Official toponymic dictionaries and gazetteers of Uzbekistan
- Historical-geographic atlases and religious pilgrimage records
- Ethnographic accounts and oral histories collected from local communities, particularly in regions with prominent sacred sites (e.g., Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, Nurota)
- Academic literature on Central Asian religious and cultural geography

A corpus of over 100 religious place names was compiled, with close focus on those associated with saints, shrines, mosques, Sufi lodges, and pilgrimage routes. These were categorized according to linguistic form, etymological origin, religious reference, and cultural function.

To ensure cultural and linguistic relevance, the following criteria were used in selecting religious toponyms for analysis:

- Presence of religious lexemes (e.g., *hazrat*, *bobo*, *ota*, *masjid*, *ziyosat*, *imam*)
- Association with documented religious or spiritual figures, locations, or practices
- Frequent usage in local speech or reference in cultural and historical sources
- Regional distribution across various parts of Uzbekistan to ensure representativeness

The following techniques were used for data analysis:

- Semantic field analysis: To identify key religious concepts represented in toponyms and classify them into culturally meaningful categories.
- Etymological analysis: To trace the origins of name components, including Arabic, Persian, and Turkic influences in religious naming.
- Cognitive mapping: To visualize how sacred geography is mentally represented in Uzbek linguistic culture.
- Conceptual metaphor identification: To explore metaphors such as *LIGHT IS DIVINITY* (e.g., *Nurata*) or *ANCESTORS ARE GUARDIANS* (e.g., *Bobo Ota*).

All data used were derived from publicly available sources, historical records, and non-intrusive interviews with community members. Respect for religious sentiment and cultural sensitivity was maintained throughout the research process, particularly in the treatment of sacred names and sites.

Results

The application of linguocultural and cognitive linguistic methods to the analysis of religious place names in Uzbekistan has yielded the following key findings:

1. Core Lexical Patterns in Religious Toponyms

A significant proportion of religious toponyms in Uzbekistan contain spiritual honorifics and terms such as *hazrat*, *bobo*, *ota*, *sheikh*, *imam*, and *nur*. These elements are consistently used to mark sites associated with religious figures, sacred events, or ritual practices. Their recurrence confirms the semantic centrality of reverence and holiness in Uzbek naming traditions.

2. Cognitive Metaphors Embedded in Place Names

Through conceptual metaphor analysis, several metaphorical patterns were identified in religious toponyms:

- LIGHT IS DIVINITY → e.g., *Nurata* (“Father of Light”)
- ANCESTORS ARE SPIRITUAL GUARDIANS → e.g., *Islom ota*, *Imom ota*
- PLACES ARE PERSONS → e.g., *Hazrati Imom*, where the name of a figure becomes synecdoche for the entire location

These metaphors indicate that sacred geography in Uzbekistan is conceptualized through embodied and culturally inherited metaphorical schemas.

3. Toponyms as Vehicles of Cultural and Religious Memory

Many religious toponyms are tied to burial sites of saints, Sufi centers, or pilgrimage destinations, which are still visited and commemorated by local communities. This illustrates their mnemonic function and their role in preserving and transmitting collective religious memory.

4. Regional Variation Reflecting Historical Religious Influence

The research documented notable regional distinctions in religious naming. Bukhara and Samarkand, with their strong historical links to Sufism and Islamic scholarship, show dense clusters of saint-based and shrine-related toponyms. Eastern regions closer to the Ferghana Valley exhibit greater lexical influence from Turkic and Arabic naming conventions.

5. Religious Place Names and National Identity Construction

In contemporary Uzbekistan, religious place names are increasingly recognized as part of the country's cultural heritage and identity politics. These names are preserved and promoted in state projects, religious tourism, and public commemorations—indicating their importance in shaping the modern linguistic world picture of the Uzbek people.

Discussion

The analysis of religious toponyms in Uzbekistan reveals that these names serve not only as geographical indicators but also as repositories of spiritual, historical, and cultural knowledge. Through the lens of the linguistic world picture, these place names reflect how sacredness, divine authority, and religious memory are linguistically encoded and preserved within the Uzbek worldview.

The data demonstrates that many religious place names in Uzbekistan are based on key lexemes such as *hazrat*, *bobo*, *ota*, *imam*, *ziyarat*, and *nur*. These lexemes are not merely titles or descriptors—they function as linguistic markers of sanctity and reverence, symbolizing the sacred character of the location and its association with religious figures or practices. For instance, *Hazrati Imom* (Holy Imam) in Tashkent or *Imom Ota* in rural regions reflect a conceptualization of space as spiritually elevated due to its connection with revered individuals.

This supports Wierzbicka's (1992) argument that linguistic structures encode cultural values, particularly when tied to religious systems. The presence of honorific and spiritual descriptors in Uzbek toponyms suggests that the sacralization of space is a central element of the local linguistic worldview.

Using the tools of cognitive linguistics, particularly conceptual metaphor theory, the study reveals that religious place names often reflect metaphorical thought processes. For example: *Nurata* ("Father of Light") metaphorically maps *light* onto *divinity*, aligning with both Islamic symbolism and earlier Zoroastrian associations with sacred fire and illumination. This metaphor supports the widespread conceptual structure: *LIGHT IS DIVINE TRUTH*.

- Names such as *Bobo Ota* (“Grandfather Father”) evoke ancestral protection and spiritual guardianship, exemplifying the metaphor: *ANCESTORS ARE SPIRITUAL GUIDES or THE ELDER IS THE HOLY*.
- *Ziyoratobod* (“City of Pilgrimage”) encodes the action of pilgrimage within the name of a place, metaphorically framing the city itself as a site of spiritual transformation.

These metaphorical structures confirm Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980) assertion that metaphors are fundamental to human cognition and help organize complex domains like religion.

Religious toponyms also function as mnemonic and identity-forming tools. Many names mark burial places of saints or locations of spiritual events (e.g., *Shahi-Zinda*, *Chor-Bakr*), reinforcing Halbwachs’ (1950) theory of collective memory. Such names allow local communities to retain and transmit knowledge about their religious past, thereby embedding spiritual narratives into the linguistic fabric of daily life.

The reverence attached to these names suggests a continued cultural practice of honoring sacred lineage and reinforcing community belonging. Linguistically, they offer insight into how Uzbek speakers construct and preserve historical continuity through the medium of toponymy.

The study also highlights regional variation in religious toponyms. For example, in historically Sufi regions like Bukhara and Khorezm, names related to Sufi sheikhs and khanqahs (e.g., *Sheikhantaur*, *Khoja Buxoriy*) are more prominent, reflecting regional religious traditions and transmission lines. In contrast, areas with Persian influence exhibit greater use of Persianized constructions such as *obod* and *shahr* in religious contexts.

This variation supports the linguocultural approach by demonstrating how regional belief systems, linguistic contact zones, and historical legacies all contribute to shaping the religious naming landscape.

Finally, the findings affirm that religious place names play a significant role in articulating Uzbek national identity and spiritual heritage. In a post-Soviet context where cultural revival and heritage preservation are emphasized, toponyms such as *Imam Bukhariy* and *Hazrati Dovud* are not only religious markers but also symbols of national pride and spiritual legitimacy. These names are increasingly institutionalized in educational materials, public signage, and tourism branding.

Through this lens, religious toponyms serve as linguistic bridges between past and present, shaping not only the way spaces are identified but also how they are experienced and interpreted by their communities.

Conclusion

This study has shown that religious place names in Uzbekistan are deeply intertwined with the nation's linguistic, cultural, and spiritual identity. Far beyond their practical function as geographical labels, these toponyms operate as linguistic reflections of the sacred worldview held by Uzbek-speaking communities. By applying linguocultural and cognitive linguistic methods, the research reveals how these names encapsulate metaphorical, historical, and symbolic meanings that resonate with religious experience, collective memory, and ancestral reverence.

The findings demonstrate that recurrent lexical elements—such as *hazrat*, *bobo*, *imam*, and *nur*—carry significant cultural weight, acting as linguistic markers of sacredness. These elements often align with conceptual metaphors that map divine qualities onto physical landscapes, thus allowing speakers to linguistically organize their understanding of spiritual space. Moreover, many religious toponyms serve as mnemonic anchors for historical and religious narratives, linking the present community to its spiritual past.

The regional variation in religious naming further illustrates how local histories, religious movements, and linguistic contact zones have influenced the development of sacred toponyms across Uzbekistan. Additionally, the revitalization and institutional recognition of these names in post-Soviet Uzbekistan underscores their contemporary relevance in processes of cultural identity reconstruction and heritage preservation.

In sum, religious place names represent a powerful interface between language, belief, and identity. They reflect not only how a community sees its environment but also how it spiritually inhabits and interprets it. Future studies could extend this work by conducting comparative analyses with religious toponyms in neighboring Turkic or Persian-speaking regions, or by employing corpus linguistics to trace changes in naming patterns over time.

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