

Cognitive And Cultural Dimensions Of Urban Micro toponyms: A Cross-Cultural Analysis Of Tashkent And London

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a comparative analysis of the microtoponymic systems of Tashkent and London within cognitive linguistics and linguocultural frameworks. It investigates how urban place names function as cognitive and cultural markers encoding collective memory, social identity, and spatial perception. The corpus includes 150 microtoponyms from central and peripheral districts of both cities.

Using semantic classification, etymological analysis, and cognitive mapping, the study categorizes naming motivations and examines underlying conceptual structures.

Findings show that Tashkent's microtoponyms reflect ideological dynamism, multilingual layering, and shifting national identity, while London's demonstrate historical stability and continuity tied to trade and heritage. Both systems share universal cognitive mechanisms such as anthropocentric naming and metaphorical representation.

The study concludes that microtoponyms serve as cognitive maps linking language, culture, and urban space, contributing to urban semiotics and onomastics.

Keywords: Urban semiotics, cognitive linguistics and linguocultural

INTRODUCTION

Toponyms constitute one of the most informative layers of urban linguistic landscapes, functioning not only as geographic identifiers but also as complex knowledge structures that preserve collective memory, social practices, and culturally embedded interpretations of space. In large metropolitan centers such as Tashkent and London, the toponymic system reflects centuries of interaction between political power, economic development, ethnolinguistic diversity, and evolving forms of professional activity. Street names, district names, and microtoponyms encode sedimented layers of urban history—ranging from pre-modern craft traditions to industrial transformation and contemporary professionalization—thereby offering a unique insight into how cities conceptualize and categorize their sociohistorical experience.

The study of toponyms as repositories of structured knowledge has gained increasing relevance within cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and urban studies. Scholars highlight that urban toponymy simultaneously performs referential, commemorative, classificatory, and ideological functions, shaping how residents navigate physical space while also interpreting its cultural meanings. In this context, Tashkent and London provide particularly fertile ground for comparative analysis: both cities demonstrate rich diachronic layering, complex multilingual influences, and historically significant professional groups whose identities became embedded in the urban nomenclature. Tashkent's microtoponyms often reflect artisanal guilds, traditional crafts, and socio-economic clusters of the mahalla system, whereas London's toponymy retains traces of medieval trades, commercial activities, and occupational guilds tied to the historical development of the City and its boroughs.

Despite the growing interest in urban onomastics, the cognitive and structural-semantic mechanisms underlying the representation of history and professions in toponyms remain understudied. Existing research tends to prioritize etymology, historical documentation, or political naming strategies while paying less attention to the cognitive frames, semantic models, and sociocultural categorization processes encoded in urban names. A comparative approach to Tashkent and London allows for the identification of universal and city-specific patterns of how toponyms encapsulate knowledge about professional specialization, economic organization, urban identity, and social memory.

This article aims to investigate the structural-semantic, cognitive, and sociocultural dimensions of toponyms in Tashkent and London, focusing on how they represent historical strata and professional occupations within the linguistic landscape. Special attention is given to the ways in which occupational designations — such as crafts, trades, industrial professions, and contemporary labor categories — manifest in the toponymic lexicon and contribute to the cultural geography of both cities. By analyzing selected toponyms through a comparative framework, the study seeks to reveal how naming practices function as cultural schemas that structure knowledge, encode shared memory, and reflect the evolving socio-economic fabric of urban environments. The results of this research will contribute to broader discussions on cognitive urbanism, place-naming practices, and the role of linguistic signs in shaping collective identity. Furthermore, the comparative perspective provides insights into how different urban traditions conceptualize professional and historical knowledge within their toponymic systems, thereby highlighting the interdependence between language, space, and social experience.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on toponymy and microtoponymy has gained increasing attention within the fields of linguistics, geography, and cultural studies. Scholars such as Sherbak (2012) emphasize the role of place-naming in constructing social memory and identity. His work on commemorative street names highlights how ideological forces shape urban landscapes.

Within the post-Soviet context, studies by Qoraev (1991) and others have shown that microtoponyms reflect ideological transformations, with layers of pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-independence identities often coexisting in a single urban lexicon. Tashkent, as a multicultural and historically layered city, has been a case in point for the study of naming as a political and cultural act (Qoraev, 1991). For instance, street names such as *Amir Temur Street* encode a post-independence shift toward national historical revival, foregrounding the figure of Amir Temur as a symbol of statehood and cultural pride. In contrast, Soviet-era names like *Druzhba Narodov* (“Friendship of Peoples”) represent ideological constructs aimed at promoting socialist unity (Qoraev, 1991; Sherbak, 2012).

At a more localized level, Tashkent’s microtoponyms often emerge from everyday spatial practices and socio-economic functions. Names such as *Chorsu* (from Persian “four roads”) designate historically significant intersections, exemplified by Chorsu Bazaar, a major traditional marketplace that encodes commercial and spatial meaning (Qoraev, 1991). Similarly, districts like *Yunusabad* reflect anthroponymic and administrative naming practices shaped during the Soviet period, combining personal naming traditions with planned urban development (Azimov, 2018).

In contrast, research on British toponymy, such as that by Mills (2011) and Field (1980), focuses more on diachronic developments and etymology, illustrating how Old English, Norman, and Celtic roots have persisted in the urban vocabulary. In London, microtoponyms such as *Baker Street* reflect occupational naming practices, while *Smithfield* reveals both professional and topographical associations (Mills, 2011). The microtoponym Covent Garden derives from “Convent Garden,” pointing to ecclesiastical land ownership (Field, 1980).

Moreover, aristocratic and institutional ownership is encoded in names such as *Bloomsbury* (linked to the Blemund family) or *Westminster*, referring to proximity to Westminster Abbey, thereby preserving feudal and religious structures within the urban lexicon (Mills, 2011). These examples demonstrate how London’s microtoponyms function as linguistic fossils, maintaining historical continuity across centuries.

From a theoretical standpoint, Tent and Blair (2021) propose a typology of naming motivations—commemorative, descriptive, associative, and eponymous—which is widely used to analyze urban microtoponyms. Their framework supports the notion that naming is both a linguistic and cognitive process, encoding sociocultural meaning. For example, *Chorsu* activates a cognitive frame related to trade and spatial convergence, whereas *Baker Street* evokes occupational identity and even cultural associations such as Sherlock Holmes, enriching its semantic network (Tent & Blair, 2021).

Despite the abundance of toponymic studies, few works directly compare the microtoponymic systems of cities from different cultural spheres. This study fills that gap by juxtaposing the cognitive and cultural layers of microtoponyms in Tashkent and London, drawing from both local and global perspectives.

A closer examination reveals that microtoponyms in Tashkent tend to exhibit a higher degree of ideological volatility, reflecting rapid socio-political shifts, particularly during the transition from the Soviet period to

independence. This is evident not only in the replacement of Soviet-era names but also in the strategic re-semanticization of urban space. For example, the renaming of central squares and streets to honor national figures such as Amir Temur represents a deliberate effort to reconstruct collective memory and align it with a national historical narrative (Qoraev, 1991; Sherbak, 2012). In cognitive terms, such renaming practices reconfigure the “frame” associated with a place, shifting its interpretative schema from socialist collectivism to national heritage and statehood.

Furthermore, Tashkent’s microtoponymy demonstrates a strong interaction between formal (official) and informal (vernacular) naming systems. Alongside officially sanctioned names, residents frequently use colloquial microtoponyms based on landmarks, functions, or popular usage. For instance, areas surrounding Chorsu Bazaar may be referred to simply as *Chorsu*, functioning as a metonymic shorthand that encapsulates commercial activity, spatial orientation, and cultural tradition. This duality reflects what socio-onomastic studies describe as the coexistence of “top-down” and “bottom-up” naming processes (Azimov, 2018).

In contrast, the microtoponymic system of London is characterized by relative stability and diachronic layering, where new names are less frequently imposed through radical political change and more often emerge through gradual socio-economic evolution. Names such as *Covent Garden* and *Westminster Abbey* retain their historical semantics, preserving references to ecclesiastical ownership and medieval land use (Field, 1980; Mills, 2011). Even when functional changes occur—such as the transformation of markets into tourist or cultural spaces—the original microtoponyms are typically retained, resulting in a form of semantic fossilization.

Another significant distinction lies in the dominant naming motivations within each urban context. While Tent and Blair’s (2021) typology applies to both cities, their distribution differs. In Tashkent, commemorative and ideological names are particularly prominent, reflecting state-driven identity construction. In London, however, descriptive and associative names—such as occupational (*Baker Street*) or topographical (*Smithfield*)—are more prevalent, indicating a historically organic naming process tied to economic activity and land use (Mills, 2011).

From a cognitive-linguistic standpoint, this divergence can be interpreted in terms of frame activation and cultural salience. In Tashkent, microtoponyms frequently activate frames related to national history, political identity, and postcolonial transformation. In London, they more commonly evoke frames associated with trade, social hierarchy, and historical continuity. For example, while *Amir Temur Street* triggers associations with empire, leadership, and national pride, *Baker Street* not only reflects occupational history but also activates a rich intertextual frame linked to Sherlock Holmes, demonstrating how literary culture can reinforce and expand the semantic scope of a microtoponym.

Additionally, the role of multilingualism further differentiates the two systems. Tashkent’s microtoponymy reflects interactions between Uzbek, Russian, and, to a lesser extent, Persian linguistic elements, resulting in hybrid naming structures and phonological adaptations. London, historically influenced by Old English, Norman French, and Latin, also exhibits linguistic layering; however, these influences are largely fossilized within the lexicon rather than actively competing in contemporary usage (Mills, 2011).

In sum, the comparative analysis underscores that microtoponyms in both cities function as cognitive maps that encode culturally specific ways of interpreting space. However, while Tashkent’s system is dynamic, ideologically responsive, and shaped by recent historical transformations, London’s microtoponymy represents a more stable, historically sedimented system. This contrast not only highlights different trajectories of urban development but also demonstrates how naming practices serve as a key interface between language, cognition, and sociocultural reality.

METHODS

The study employs a comparative-descriptive methodology within the frameworks of cognitive linguistics and linguocultural analysis, aiming to identify both universal and culture-specific patterns in urban microtoponymy. The empirical base of the research consists of a corpus of 150 microtoponyms (75 from Tashkent and 75 from London) selected through stratified sampling to ensure representation of both central (historical and administrative cores) and peripheral (residential and newly developed) districts.

Data Collection. The dataset was compiled from three primary sources:

1. Official cartographic materials (city maps, municipal registries, GIS-based naming databases), ensuring the inclusion of standardized and administratively recognized microtoponyms.

2. Historical records and archival documents, used to trace diachronic changes, etymology, and former naming conventions.
3. Field surveys and observational data, including informal (vernacular) place names used by local residents, particularly relevant for capturing living microtoponymic practices in areas such as Chorsu Bazaar and historically dense districts of London.

To ensure methodological reliability, only those microtoponyms were included that met the criteria of local spatial reference, frequency of usage, and cultural relevance.

Data Classification. The collected microtoponyms were systematically categorized using a semantic classification model, adapted from Tent and Blair (2021), with modifications to account for post-Soviet and Western European contexts. The categories include:

- Anthroponymic (eponymous): derived from personal names (e.g., *Amir Temur Street*, referencing Amir Temur)
- Occupational/professional: reflecting trades or economic activity (e.g., *Baker Street*)
- Topographical/natural features: linked to landscape or physical geography
- Ideological/commemorative: expressing political values or historical events
- Institutional and ownership-based: associated with religious, aristocratic, or administrative entities (e.g., areas around Westminster Abbey)

Each microtoponym was coded according to its dominant semantic motivation, while allowing for secondary classifications in cases of semantic overlap.

Contextual and Etymological Analysis. A contextual analysis was conducted to uncover the historical, cultural, and socio-political background of each name. This involved:

- Diachronic tracing of name changes (especially in Tashkent, where Soviet and post-independence renaming is prominent)
- Identification of cultural references, symbolic meanings, and ideological implications
- Cross-referencing with historical narratives and urban development patterns

This stage allowed for distinguishing between stable (historically preserved) and dynamic (recently transformed) microtoponyms.

Cognitive Mapping Procedure. Within the cognitive-linguistic framework, each microtoponym was analyzed as a conceptual trigger activating a specific “frame” or knowledge structure. The procedure included:

- Identification of core conceptual domains (e.g., “trade,” “power,” “religion,” “community”)
- Analysis of metaphorical and metonymic models (e.g., place as function, place as person, place as symbol)
- Reconstruction of associative networks linked to each name

For example, the microtoponym associated with Covent Garden was mapped onto a frame combining “religious ownership,” “market activity,” and “cultural space,” whereas *Chorsu* was mapped onto a “trade and spatial convergence” frame.

Comparative Analysis. The final stage involved a cross-cultural comparison of the two datasets, focusing on both:

- Form: structural and linguistic features (word formation, language origin, morphological patterns, multilingual influences)
- Content: semantic, cultural, and cognitive dimensions (dominant naming motivations, symbolic meanings, ideological load)

Quantitative distribution of categories was analyzed to identify dominant patterns, while qualitative interpretation was used to explain divergences. Particular attention was paid to:

- The prevalence of ideological and commemorative naming in Tashkent
- The dominance of descriptive and historically continuous naming in London
- The interaction between official and vernacular naming systems in both cities

Methodological Limitations

The study acknowledges certain limitations, including the relatively limited sample size and potential bias in source availability, particularly in historical data. Additionally, the interpretation of cognitive frames involves an element of analytical subjectivity, mitigated through cross-referencing and triangulation of sources.

RESULTS

The comparative analysis revealed the following. In Tashkent place names there is a dominance of ideologically marked microtoponyms (e.g., names honoring Soviet heroes, national poets, or political figures). There is also a strong presence of culturally significant objects (e.g., areas associated with Chorsu Bazaar, as well as traditional zones such as *Eski shahar*), which reflect local traditions and Islamic heritage. In addition, a blend of Uzbek and Russian linguistic layers indicates the lasting impact of Soviet bilingualism on the urban lexicon.

While in London there is a prevalence of historical and occupational microtoponyms (e.g., *Baker Street*, *Smithfield*, *Fleet Street*), alongside frequent references to royalty and property ownership (e.g., *Victoria Embankment*, *Hanover Square*). The persistence of Old English and Celtic roots highlights deep historical continuity and linguistic stratification, where earlier naming layers remain embedded within modern usage.

Both cities exhibit anthropocentric naming patterns, where human activity, collective memory, and culturally salient figures shape the urban toponymic system. Microtoponyms in both contexts function as mnemonic anchors, preserving links between past and present and enabling speakers to cognitively navigate not only physical space but also historical experience. Furthermore, both systems demonstrate a tendency toward semantic compression, whereby complex socio-cultural information is condensed into concise linguistic forms, and toward metaphorical and metonymic representation, in which spatial entities are conceptualized through human-centered categories such as profession, ownership, function, or symbolic value.

Extending these findings, several additional patterns can be identified. First, there is a clear difference in the degree of semantic transparency. In Tashkent, many microtoponyms—particularly recent or ideologically motivated ones—remain relatively transparent to contemporary speakers, as their meanings are directly linked to well-known historical figures or political concepts. In contrast, a significant portion of London's microtoponyms has undergone semantic opacity, where the original meaning (e.g., archaic occupational or topographical references) is no longer immediately accessible without etymological knowledge. This distinction reflects differing temporal dynamics: recent renaming versus long-term lexical fossilization.

Second, the two systems diverge in terms of naming agency and authority. Tashkent demonstrates a stronger influence of centralized, institutional naming practices, especially during the Soviet and post-independence periods, where naming serves as an instrument of ideological and cultural policy. London, by comparison, reflects a more decentralized and historically organic process, where many microtoponyms emerged gradually from local usage, economic activity, and land ownership patterns, later becoming standardized.

Third, the functional load of microtoponyms differs. In Tashkent, names often carry a didactic and symbolic function, reinforcing national identity, historical awareness, and cultural values. In London, microtoponyms more frequently serve a referential and descriptive function, encoding information about location, trade, or historical land use, while their symbolic dimension is secondary and often historically embedded rather than actively constructed.

Finally, both cities illustrate the role of microtoponymy as a form of cognitive cartography, where linguistic signs structure spatial perception and cultural interpretation. Despite differences in historical trajectory and sociopolitical context, the shared reliance on anthropocentric and metaphor-based naming confirms that urban toponymic systems are grounded in universal cognitive strategies, even as they produce culturally specific “world pictures.”

Thus, the comparison not only highlights contrasts between Tashkent and London but also reinforces the broader theoretical insight that microtoponymy represents a convergence of language, cognition, and cultural memory, functioning simultaneously as a linguistic system and a repository of collective experience.

DISCUSSION

The microtoponymic world picture of Tashkent and London are shaped by divergent cultural-historical trajectories. Tashkent's toponyms reflect a dynamic interplay between pre-Soviet, Soviet, and post-independence influences, revealing a layered identity. London's microtoponyms, on the other hand, showcase historical continuity and a tradition of commemorating trades, royalty, and civic functions.

This divergence is particularly evident in the temporal dynamics of naming systems. In Tashkent, microtoponyms frequently undergo renaming, semantic reorientation, and ideological recalibration, mirroring shifts in political power and cultural priorities. Names associated with national revival, such as those linked to Amir Temur, illustrate how urban space is actively reinterpreted to align with contemporary identity narratives. In contrast, London's system demonstrates incremental semantic accumulation, where older names

are preserved and recontextualized rather than replaced. Microtoponyms connected to sites like Covent Garden or Westminster Abbey retain their historical referents while acquiring additional cultural and symbolic meanings over time.

At the same time, the contrast extends to the sociolinguistic ecology of naming. Tashkent exhibits a pronounced interaction between multilingual influences (Uzbek, Russian, and earlier Persian elements), resulting in hybridized forms and parallel naming practices. This is often reinforced by the coexistence of official and vernacular microtoponyms, especially in culturally dense spaces such as Chorsu Bazaar, where everyday usage may diverge from administrative nomenclature. London, while historically shaped by Old English, Norman French, and Latin, presents these layers as largely lexicalized and stabilized, with less active competition between linguistic codes in contemporary usage.

Despite these differences, the cognitive mechanisms of naming—such as metaphorization, metonymy, symbolic representation, and commemoration—appear to be universal. In both cities, microtoponyms encode meaning through similar conceptual operations: places are named after people (eponymous strategy), functions or professions (e.g., trade-based naming), physical characteristics, or culturally salient events and values. This universality suggests that human cognition relies on shared strategies for structuring spatial knowledge, regardless of cultural context.

However, what differentiates the two systems is the selection and prioritization of these cognitive models. In Tashkent, metaphorical and symbolic naming often serves nation-building and ideological functions, foregrounding collective memory and historical reinterpretation. In London, the same mechanisms are more closely tied to economic activity, social hierarchy, and historical continuity, reflecting a different set of culturally dominant frames. Thus, while the underlying cognitive processes are shared, their semantic realization is culture-specific, shaped by distinct historical experiences and sociopolitical conditions.

This interplay between universality and specificity supports the notion that microtoponymy operates at the intersection of cognitive invariance and cultural variability. It confirms that the “world picture” encoded in urban naming systems is not merely a reflection of physical space, but a structured representation of how communities conceptualize their past, organize their present, and project their identity into the future.

CONCLUSION

Microtoponyms not only chart the physical geography of cities but also map the collective consciousness of their inhabitants. The comparison of Tashkent and London reveals how naming practices construct a culturally embedded world picture that encodes memory, identity, and spatial experience. However, the findings of this study allow for a more nuanced conclusion that extends beyond this general observation.

First, the analysis demonstrates that microtoponymy functions as a dynamic semiotic system, where each name operates as a condensed cultural sign integrating linguistic form, historical reference, and cognitive interpretation. In Tashkent, this system is characterized by ideological reconfiguration and symbolic reorientation, particularly visible in the transition from Soviet to post-independence naming practices. Microtoponyms such as *Amir Temur Street*, associated with Amir Temur, exemplify how urban space is resemanticized to reinforce national identity and historical continuity. These processes highlight the role of naming as an ^{asla} of cultural policy and collective memory reconstruction.

In contrast, London’s microtoponymic landscape reflects a high degree of diachronic stability and historical sedimentation. Names associated with locations such as Covent Garden or Westminster Abbey preserve traces of medieval land use, religious authority, and socio-economic structures. Rather than undergoing abrupt ideological shifts, London’s microtoponyms accumulate meanings over time, functioning as “linguistic fossils” that encode layers of historical experience within a relatively stable naming system.

Second, from a cognitive-linguistic perspective, microtoponyms in both cities act as frames or conceptual nodes that organize knowledge about urban space. They activate culturally specific associations: in Tashkent, frames related to nationhood, political transformation, and collective identity are particularly salient, while in London, dominant frames are linked to occupation, class structure, and historical continuity. This confirms that microtoponymy is not merely referential but deeply embedded in cognitive mapping processes, shaping how speakers perceive, categorize, and navigate their environment.

Third, the study highlights the importance of naming motivation and its distribution across cultures. While both cities exhibit commemorative, descriptive, associative, and eponymous naming types, their proportional representation differs significantly. Tashkent shows a higher concentration of commemorative and ideological

names, reflecting state-driven identity construction, whereas London demonstrates a predominance of descriptive and function-based names, indicative of organic, historically grounded urban development. This contrast underscores the interaction between language and socio-political context in shaping urban toponymic systems.

Furthermore, the coexistence of official and vernacular microtoponyms—particularly evident in Tashkent around spaces such as Chorsu Bazaar—reveals the multi-layered nature of urban naming. It illustrates how institutional discourse and everyday linguistic practice intersect, sometimes reinforcing and sometimes diverging from one another. This duality is essential for understanding microtoponymy as both a top-down and bottom-up phenomenon.

Finally, the comparative approach adopted in this study contributes to the broader field of urban semiotics and cognitive linguistics by demonstrating that microtoponyms serve as interfaces between language, culture, and spatial cognition. They encapsulate how communities encode values, preserve memory, and construct meaning within the urban environment.

Future research may expand this analysis by incorporating larger corpora, quantitative modeling, and psycholinguistic methods (e.g., perception studies or associative experiments) to further investigate how microtoponyms are processed and interpreted by speakers. Additionally, exploring other cities across different cultural and political contexts would allow for a more comprehensive typology of global microtoponymic systems.

In sum, microtoponyms should be regarded not as marginal linguistic units but as key cognitive-cultural instruments through which urban space is conceptualized, narrated, and experienced.

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