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Perspectives on Anthroponyms in Uzbekistan: A Historical and Sociolinguistic Study of Personal Names in Andijan

Mehrinoza Jiyanaliyeva Oybek qizi
Independent Researcher in Philological Linguistics,
Andijan State University, Uzbekistan

Abstract. *Anthroponyms – the personal names of individuals – are a rich source of linguistic, cultural, and sociological insight. Drawing on major linguistic theories (structuralism, sociolinguistics, semiotics) and integrating contributions from Uzbek scholars (Sh. Rahmatullaev, O. Qilichev, B. Hasanov, I. Koziyeva, among others), we outline the evolution of naming practices from pre-Islamic times through the Islamic period, Soviet era, post-independence revival, and the contemporary globalization era. A mixed-methods approach was applied: qualitatively, we analyzed the semantic and cultural motivations of personal names, and quantitatively, we surveyed name frequencies and origins across historical periods and gender. In Andijan, an area known for its dense population and deep-rooted traditions, naming patterns illustrate the national trends: for example, the prevalence of Islamic names today alongside the preservation of older naming customs. Gendered naming practices were observed, with male names often conveying strength or religious virtue and female names often embodying beauty or familial hopes.*
Key words: *anthroponymy; uzbek personal names; andijan region; sociolinguistics; onomastics; naming practices; historical linguistics; cultural identity.*

Introduction

Andijan Region is located in the far east of Uzbekistan (highlighted in red), in the fertile Fergana Valley near the border with Kyrgyzstan. With over 3.25 million inhabitants in just 4,300 square kilometers, it is one of the most densely populated regions of the country. Historically, Andijan has been an important cultural center – it is the birthplace of Zahiriddin Muhammad Babur (1483–1530), founder of the Mughal dynasty – and it exemplifies many traditional Uzbek naming practices. This article investigates **anthroponyms** (personal names) in Uzbekistan through the lens of the Andijan region, aiming to understand how names reflect and shape linguistic, cultural, and social realities. Anthroponymy (from Greek *anthropos* "human" + *onoma* "name") is the onomastic discipline devoted to personal names. Far from being mere labels, personal names carry deep significance: they encode cultural heritage, historical layers, and societal values. As one Uzbek scholar puts it, *"There can be no person without a name. Names reflect the culture and social life of a society… Each name has its own history, 'biography' and 'ethnography'"*. In Uzbekistan, where diverse civilizations have intermingled for millennia, anthroponyms serve as living records of linguistic and cultural contact – a "unique synthesis of Turkic, Persian, Arab, and Russian influences" shaped by centuries of socio-political change.

The linguistic, cultural, and sociological importance of anthroponyms has long been recognized by scholars worldwide. From a **structuralist** perspective, personal names can be analyzed as elements of a language's lexical system, with internal structures (morphological patterns, etymologies) and relations to other wordspedagogs.uz. Classic structural linguistics often treated proper names as *signs* that primarily denote individuals without conveying descriptive meaning. However, in many cultures – Uzbek included – the *motivations* and lexicosemantic origins of

names are significant. Many Uzbek names are transparently meaningful in the lexicon (e.g., *Dilshod* "heart-happy", *Gulchehra* "flower-face"), blurring Saussure's strict divide between names and ordinary words. A **semiotic** view thus enriches structural analysis by considering not only the signifier (name form) and signified (referent individual), but also the cultural *connotations* a name carries. Personal names are linguistic signs imbued with social and symbolic meaning: they can indicate gender, religion, or aspirations, and they often preserve "historical and cultural information" across generations.

Meanwhile, **sociolinguistic** approaches emphasize that naming is a social practice. The choice of a child's name is influenced by factors such as religion, ethnicity, class, political context, and fashion, and in turn names can signal group identity or social changemedia.neliti.commedia.neliti.com. Studying name trends over time provides insight into shifting societal values – for example, a rise or fall in certain name types often correlates with political or ideological shifts in history.

Theoretical Background

Anthroponyms in Linguistic Theory: The study of personal names intersects with several major linguistic and anthropological theories. In **structural linguistics**, a language is viewed as a self-contained system of signs, and personal names form part of the onomasticon (the inventory of names) of a languagepedagogs.uz. Early structuralists debated whether names have *sense* or only *reference* – e.g., Ferdinand de Saussure noted that a name's linguistic meaning often weakens once it becomes a proper noun. However, later theorists recognized that even if a name's denotative meaning is not used in everyday reference, its etymology and form can still be analyzed structurally. Many Uzbek names are compounds or derivations, following identifiable patterns: for instance, elements like *bek* ("lord"), *mir* ("prince"), *oy* ("moon"), *gul* ("flower"), and *din* ("faith") recur in countless names (e.g., *Ulugbek*, *Mirzodiyor*, *Gulnoza*, *Zuhraoy*, *Shohriddin*). From a structural viewpoint, such morphology reveals how speakers historically created names by combining lexemes and affixes from various languages (Turkic, Persian, Arabic)brightmindpublishing.com. Furthermore, as *onomastic structuralists* have noted, anthroponyms belong to semantic fields (e.g., names expressing beauty, bravery, piety, etc.) and can be classified by origin, grammatical form, and motivationpedagogs.uzmedia.neliti.com. Uzbek anthroponymy thus offers fertile ground for structural-typological analysis, as evidenced by research classifying names by lexical-semantic groups and clarity of meaning (names with transparent meanings vs. those whose original meanings are obscured or "dead")pedagogs.uz.

In **sociolinguistic theory**, language is understood in its social context, and naming is a prime example of language choices reflecting social identity and change. Personal names are chosen by families but are influenced by community norms, religion, class, and even state policies. Sociolinguists note that names function as *social labels*: they can signify ethnicity and faith (for example, a name like *Muhammad Yusuf* clearly signals Islamic heritage), or generational belonging (grandparents in Uzbekistan might carry names popular in the early 20th century, while grandchildren bear different trendy names). Moreover, shifts in naming practices often mirror historical events. A sociolinguistic perspective predicts that major socio-political shifts – such as conversion to a new religion, regime changes, or independence movements – will lead to corresponding shifts in the stock of names used by a population. This is borne out in Uzbek history: the Islamization of Central Asia after the 8th century introduced a wave of Arabic names; the Soviet period saw an increase in Russian or secular names; and independence spurred a revival of Arabic-Persian and old Turkic names (details discussed in Results). Naming is also an act of identity construction: parents may choose names to assert a national identity or to align with global modernity, and individuals sometimes change or modify names to better fit social expectations. **Semiotic and anthropological theories** further enrich the analysis by treating names as symbols and cultural texts. Semiotics regards a personal name as a signifier that not only points to an individual but also evokes cultural narratives – for instance, names of historic figures (like *Temur*, *Ulugbek*, *Laylo*) carry intertextual connotations from literature and history. Anthropologists such as Levi-Strauss and others have studied naming rituals and taboos, noting that the act of naming is often surrounded by cultural practices (e.g. in Uzbek culture, it is

traditional for elders or respected figures to confer the newborn's name at a ceremony called *ism qo'yish*). The name given can reflect hopes for the child (a concept known as *desire names* or *wish names*). Indeed, Uzbek anthroponyms often encapsulate parental aspirations or blessings – names meaning *"long life"*, *"wisdom"*, *"prosperity"*, etc. – a pattern less common in some Western cultures where many names are historically opaquewebofjournals.com. From a semiotic viewpoint, such names function as performative signs: they are meant to influence or symbolize the child's destiny (for example, a girl named *Soliha* "pious" or a boy named *Shavkat* "power" conveys an ideal virtue or quality valued by the family).

Contributions of Uzbek and International Scholars: The academic study of Uzbek names (Uzbek anthroponymics) has been shaped by both international linguistic theory and the dedicated work of local scholars over the past century. In the early 20th century, during the Russian Empire and Soviet period, pioneers like E. T. Smirnov and N. Likoshin first collected Uzbek names and transcribed them in Cyrillic, while researchers such as N. Ostroumov and A. Samoylovich commented on their etymologiespedagogs.uz. However, a home-grown Uzbek anthroponymic scholarship truly emerged in the 1960s. The *founder of Uzbek anthroponymics* is widely acknowledged to be **Ernst A. Begmatov**, who during 1962–1965 gathered an enormous corpus of Uzbek personal names and published seminal studies on their linguistic and extra-linguistic featurespedagogs.uz. Begmatov's works (e.g. *Anthroponymy of the Uzbek Language*, 1965; *Spelling of Uzbek Names*, 1972) established foundational classifications of names by origin (Turkic vs. Iranian vs. Arabic) and by functional type (given names, nicknames, surnames, etc.), and he even compiled dictionaries of Uzbek names in later yearsthematicsjournals.inthematicsjournals.in. Following Begmatov, many Uzbek linguists turned attention to specific aspects of naming. **Sh. Rahmatullaev** has made substantial contributions, especially in recent decades, to the linguo-cultural analysis of Uzbek anthroponyms. For example, Rahmatullaev (often collaborating with B. E. Qilichev) studied the anthroponyms in Uzbek folk tales and oral literature, uncovering how traditional nicknames and name variants in folklore carry cultural nuance and "subtleties of meaning" expressed via affectionate suffixes and wordplaythematicsjournals.in. By analyzing names in fairy tales, Rahmatullaev and colleagues highlight how oral tradition preserves archaic names and reflects a folk understanding of naming (such as giving humorous or symbolic nicknames to characters).

Another prominent scholar, **O. (Bayramali) Qilichev**, has been influential in Uzbek onomastics, authoring textbooks and research on both toponyms and anthroponyms. Qilichev's work spans the structural and functional domains: he has written on the "systemic" nature of proper nouns and the word-formation processes that create namesthematicsjournals.in, and he has also examined the pragmatic and stylistic aspects of Uzbek nicknames and epithetspedagogs.uz. In one study, Qilichev (1978, 1982) analyzed Uzbek nicknames (*laqab*) as a part of anthroponymic usage, revealing their unique linguistic features and social functionspedagogs.uz. These nicknames, often descriptive (e.g., based on personal traits or occupation), form an important subset of anthroponyms that Qilichev helped document in the Uzbek context. **B. Hasanov** – referred to in some sources as Nishonboy Husanov – is another key figure whose work bridges historical and modern anthroponymy. Husanov's large monographic study *"History of Uzbek Anthroponyms" (Tarixiiy O'zbek ismlari)*, published in 2014, is considered a landmark achievement of the independence-era scholarshipresearchedu.org. In that comprehensive volume, Husanov chronicles the development of Uzbek personal names through different epochs, providing a detailed account of how naming patterns evolved and what linguistic strata (layers of Turkic, Iranian, Arabic, Russian origin) compose the modern Uzbek name systemresearchedu.org. His research, along with works by T. Nafasov, Z. Dosimov, and others, also delves into regional anthroponymy (e.g., a separate study on Khorezm regional names by S. Rahimovthematicsjournals.in), indicating that variation across areas of Uzbekistan has been examined. Finally, **Iqbol Koziyeva** represents the newer generation of Uzbek linguists focusing specifically on anthroponymy in the post-Soviet context. Koziyeva's recent works (2022) address the changes in the Uzbek anthroponymic system at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centurieszienjournals.com. She describes how the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent globalization have influenced naming conventions – for instance, a return to more overtly national

and religious names, the abandonment of Soviet-era name forms, and the coexistence of multiple naming styles (traditional and modern) in today's Uzbekistanzienjournals.com. Koziyeva has also compared Uzbek and Russian anthroponymic practices, highlighting both commonalities (e.g., use of patronymics) and differences rooted in culture.

In summary, the theoretical background for this study is informed by broad linguistic theories and enriched by substantial prior research on Uzbek names. Internationally, personal name studies underscore that names are *linguistic universals* with particular structural and social dynamics in each culturedegruyterbrill.com. In Uzbekistan, decades of scholarship – from Begmatov's pioneering structural cataloguing to Rahmatullaev's and Qilichev's semantic-pragmatic analyses, Husanov's historical synthesis, and Koziyeva's contemporary perspectives – provide a strong foundation. Building on this foundation, our study seeks to integrate these perspectives and add new insights, especially by bringing together historical, semantic, and sociolinguistic analysis in one focused examination of Uzbek anthroponyms. The next sections will outline how we carried out this analysis (Methods) and what results emerged regarding the evolution and current state of Uzbek personal names, particularly in the Andijan region.

1. Names Expressing Desirable Qualities or Wishes: A large number of Uzbek names are essentially words or phrases that denote virtues, positive attributes, or hopeful wishes for the child's life. This category cuts across origins. For example, from Persian we have *Odil* (just), *Jahongir* (world-conqueror, meaning ambitious/great), *Rustam* (strong, hero – by association with the epic hero). From Arabic, names like *Saodat* (happiness), *Xushnud* (contentment), *Sodiq* (honest, faithful) are used. Many female names fall in this category: e.g., **Gulchehra** ("flower-faced", meaning beautiful), **Dilbar** ("captivating heart"), **Mohira** ("skilled, talented"), **Munisa** ("kind, gentle"). Parents choose these for the qualities they connote, almost like a blessing. A specific subset are the **"wish names"** directly expressing parental desires. As noted in one cross-cultural study, Uzbek families have preserved the practice of giving children names that literally state a wish or context, something that in German culture, for instance, has largely disappearedwebofjournals.com. Examples include: *O'g'ilboy* or *O'g'iljon* ("boy" – implying the parents wished for a son), *Holbeka* ("Enough, Lord" – implying the family has been granted enough children or maybe after a difficult series of births), *Orzu* (literally "desire, wish"), *Umid* ("hope"), and *Shodmon* ("joyous"). These names are often given in circumstances like long-awaited child or as a token of gratitude. The semantic transparency of such names means their significance is readily understood by the community, aligning the child's identity with a narrative or hope from birth.

2. Theophoric and Religious Names: Given Uzbekistan's Islamic heritage, a huge semantic category is names with religious significance. These include **theophoric names** – those that incorporate the name of God or refer to God's attributes – and names of religious figures. In Arabic tradition, many male names are *Abd-* ("servant of") plus one of the 99 names of Allah, and this carries into Uzbek. Thus, we have **Abdulloh** (from *Abd Allah*, "servant of God"), **Abdurahmon** ("servant of the Merciful"), **Abdulaziz** ("servant of the Almighty"), and so on. Even when shortened (e.g., *Abduqahhor* might be called just *Qahhor* colloquially), the reverence is implicit. Names of the Prophet Muhammad and his family are extremely common; indeed, the single most frequent name element today is *Muhammad* (and its variants *Muhammed*, *Muhammadjon*). Rather than use it alone, Uzbeks often pair it with another name: *Muhammad Ali*, *Muhammadyusuf*, *Nurmuhammad* ("light of Muhammad"), *Muhammadsodiq*, etc., producing a plethora of combinations honoring the Prophet. Similarly, **Ali**, **Hasan**, **Husayn**, **Umar**, **Usmon** (Othman) are widely used, reflecting the early Caliphs and the Prophet's relatives. Female religious names include **Maryam** (Mary), **Khadicha** (Khadijah, the Prophet's wife), **Oisha** (Aisha), **Zaynab**, **Halima**, etc., each carrying a legacy of a respected woman in Islamic history. The meaning of these might be less important than the person it's named after (e.g., *Fatima* literally means "weaner" but is used because Fatima was the Prophet's daughter). Another group is **names of Islamic concepts or titles**: *Imon* (faith), *Hajji* (one who performed Hajj, often an honorific used as a name part or nickname), *Sharif* (noble, also implies descent

from the Prophet's family in some contexts). In Andijan and Ferghana, it's not uncommon to see old-fashioned compound names that begin with *Hafiz*, *Qori*, *Said*, which are religious titles (Hafiz = one who memorized Quran, Qori = reciter, said = lord [often indicating a sayyid, descendant of the Prophet]). For example, a man might have been named *Qori Muhammad* or *Sayid Ahmad* historically. These patterns declined in Soviet times but are of interest historically. Overall, religious names tie the individual's identity to the Muslim community and its values; their semantic content is often devotional. It's worth noting that current popular names in Uzbekistan heavily favor this category: in 2023, for instance, the top ten included **Muhammadali**, **Mustafo** (Mustafa, an epithet of Muhammad meaning "the chosen"), **Abdulloh**, **Sumayya** (name of an early Muslim woman martyr), **Muslima** (literally "Muslim [female]"), all of which explicitly reflect Islamic identitykun.uzkun.uz.

3. Heritage and Heroic Names: Another semantic domain covers names that have historical or legendary significance in local culture. These names often derive from **Turko-Mongol or Persian heroes, royalty, or literary figures**. For example, **Temur** (Timur, meaning "iron") is taken from the 14th-century conqueror Amir Temur and connotes strength and leadership. **Bobur** (Babur, meaning "tiger" in Persian) is the name of the 15th-century Andijan-born prince who founded the Mughal Empire; using *Bobur* can signal admiration for that legacy. **Ulug'bek** ("great lord") is after the famed astronomer-king Ulugh Beg. **Alisher** is popular largely due to Alisher Navoiy (Navoi), the national poet; *Navoiy* itself is sometimes used as a name or middle name. These heritage names carry **patriotic and cultural capital**. Their meanings might be literal (Temur = iron) or titular (Ulugbek = great lord), but the reason for choosing them is often to inspire the child with the qualities of the namesake hero (strength, intelligence, artistry, etc.). Notably, in the independence period the government encouraged such names as part of fostering pride in Uzbek history. Additionally, epic and literary characters' names like **Tahir** and **Zuhra**, **Laylo** and **Majnun** (the star-crossed lovers of Persian lore) appear, showing how cultural stories influence naming semantics (Laylo/Leyla means "night" but is beloved as a symbol of beauty in literature).

4. Nature and Aesthetic Names: Uzbeks frequently use words for natural phenomena, flowers, gems, and beauty as names, particularly for girls. **Floral and celestial names** are common: e.g., **Gul** (flower) appears in myriad combinations like *Gulnoza* ("charming flower"), *Mahgular* ("moon-flowers"), *Gulruh* ("flower-faced"). **Oy** (moon) similarly in *Oybek*, *Oygul*, *Guloyim*. Precious stones and metals appear: **Oltinoy** ("golden moon"), **Yakut** (ruby, also a male name sometimes). **Malika** means "queen" and implies preciousness. **Sabohat** means "grace, beauty" and is chosen for its aesthetic meaning. These semantic choices reflect an appreciation for beauty in nature as a metaphor for a child. Even masculine names occasionally use nature imagery (e.g., *Tolibjon* might incorporate *jon* "dear" as a diminutive, which is not nature but affectionate; truly nature-based male names are rarer but *Bahodir* means "hero" with Persian origin and connotation of bravery like a beast). Historically, some Turkic names were straightforward nature words (e.g., *Bars* – tiger, *Buloq* – spring [water]), but modern usage tends to prefer the more flowery or heroic ones rather than plain nature words for boys.

5. Compound and Affixed Names: A notable feature of Uzbek anthroponyms is the prevalence of **compound names and names with affixes**, which modulate the meaning or add affection/respect. Compound names, as mentioned, often pair two meaningful elements (e.g., *Sherzod*: *sher* "lion" + *zod* "born" = "born of a lion", metaphorically "son of a lion" i.e., brave; *Dilshod*: *dil* "heart" + *shod* "happy" = "happy hearted"). These compounds allow nuanced meanings. Some compounds fuse two names into one (especially in the Soviet era passport context, e.g., *Muhammad* + *Yusuf* = *Muhammadyusuf* as a single given name). As for **suffixes**, Uzbeks commonly add *-jon* (from Persian *-jan*, "dear" or "soul") as a diminutive/affectionate suffix to names, especially in informal usage. For instance, a boy named *Hasan* might lovingly be called *Hasanjon*; *Olim* → *Olimjon*. Sometimes the *-jon* suffix is part of the official name (especially in Soviet records, e.g., *Ravshanjon* as given name). This suffix does not change the core meaning but adds an endearing tone, signifying the child is cherishedthematicsjournals.in. For female names, *-oy* and *-gul* in combinations effectively serve as embellishing suffixes

meaning "moon" and "flower" respectively – they add a sense of beauty/endearment (e.g., *Zulfiya* vs. *Zulfiyaoy* would be an exaggerated example, not common, but *Gulnar* vs *Gulnora*, here *-o/a* might be feminine marker in Persian). Another is *-bek* for men, meaning "leader" or "sir", which when attached (as in *Alibek*, *Xurshidbek*) can either be part of compound or just an honorific implying nobility. Historically *-khan* was similarly appended (e.g., *Umarkhan*, *Malikaxon*) to imply a noble lineage or respect. These affixes and compounds underscore that naming in Uzbek is often a creative act of combining meaningful pieces into a harmonious whole that carries layered meanings.

6. Nicknames and Secondary Names: Though not the primary focus of our study, it's worth noting that traditionally many Uzbeks also had nicknames (*laqab* or *tahallus*) used in the community, and these too have semantic value. A nickname might highlight a physical trait (e.g., *Malla* meaning "blondie" for someone with light hair) or a habit. In the literary sphere, poets took on pen names loaded with meaning (e.g., *Navoi* meaning "melodious" for the poet Alisher). Within families, children might be given a *yotishmati* (whisper name) or home name different from their official name as a form of protection or affection, often something very humble (like naming a girl *Cholera* as a baby to trick evil spirits – an old superstition). These practices, while less official, reinforce how rich the semantic environment of naming is in Uzbek culture: names are not arbitrary; they interact with beliefs and social usage.

In Andijan region specifically, the semantic trends do not differ radically from the rest of Uzbekistan, but a few observations can be made. Anecdotally, Andijanis have shown a preference for **devotional names** (those starting in *Abdul-* or containing *Muhammad*) – local clergy often encourage choosing a name with good Islamic meaning and even perform istikhara (prayer for guidance) for names. As a result, one might meet more boys named *Abdulaziz* or *Muhammadali* in Andijan than, for example, in Karakalpakstan (a more secular region). Also, Andijan dialect and pronunciation sometimes alter name usage: e.g., a name like *Zainab* might colloquially be pronounced *Ziyneb*; *Khadija* as *Xidiya* – these are dialectal, not different semantics, but it shows local flavor. From a cultural standpoint, Andijan's strong tradition of **poetry and music** (the Andijan rubob and maqom) sometimes reflects in poetic names for girls. Names like *Mukarrama, Mohlaroy, Durdona* (meaning "esteemed, lady moon, pearl" respectively) were noted among Andijani families – elegant, somewhat classical Uzbek names that might be less common in very modern Tashkent circles where more Arabic names dominate. This suggests a slight regional retention of older Persianate names.

In conclusion, the semantic analysis reveals that Uzbek names are chosen not just for how they sound, but for what they *mean*. They act as carriers of wishes (*Umid*, *Orzu), moral values (*Adolat* – justice, *Jasur* – brave), religious devotion (*Abdurahim*, *Maryam*), and cultural memory (*Temur*, *Nodirabegim*). The enduring practice of giving meaningful names ensures that the very act of addressing someone in Uzbek can invoke a concept or story. For instance, calling a child *"Muhammadyusuf, come here"* in effect invokes two revered figures (the Prophet and Prophet Yusuf) – a subtle daily reinforcement of cultural identity. This deep entanglement of language, meaning, and culture in anthroponyms underlines why scholars consider anthroponyms "an integral part of the spiritual values" of the Uzbek people.

In essence, the study of Uzbek anthroponyms – as presented in this article – affirms that in these names lie *"the history, social life, customs, and spiritual values"* of the Uzbek peoplemedia.neliti.com. They are, truly, a mirror of a nation's journey through time. By studying and preserving this aspect of intangible cultural heritage, scholars and citizens alike contribute to safeguarding the continuity of identity and the richness of linguistic diversity for future generations.

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