# LINGUOCULTURAL POTENTIAL OF TRANSPORT VEHICLE NAMES WITH DIRECTLY EXPRESSED NATIONAL-CULTURAL CONTENT

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**Abstract.** This thesis examines the linguocultural potential of transport vehicle names (transportonyms and related lexical units) whose semantics directly encodes national-cultural content. Drawing on the principles of linguoculturology, the study argues that names of vehicles function not merely as labels for technical objects but as condensed carriers of a community's history, values, landscape, social structure and worldview. The analysis covers traditional, modern and brand-related vehicle names in English, Uzbek and several other languages. Four types of cultural loading are identified: realia-based, symbolic-associative, toponymic-commemorative and metaphorical-evaluative. The findings show that vehicle names preserve cultural memory, shape national and urban identity, and pose specific challenges for translation and intercultural communication.

**Keywords:** linguoculturology, transportonym, realia, national-cultural semantics, cultural memory, vehicle names, translation.

## 1. Introduction

Language is not only a means of communication but also a repository of culture. Since Wilhelm von Humboldt’s claim that every language contains a distinctive worldview, the relationship between language, thought and culture has remained one of the central problems of linguistics. In the twentieth century this idea was developed in the works of Edward Sapir and, later, in cognitive and cultural linguistics. Within this broad tradition, linguoculturology emerged as an independent field that studies how cultural meanings are fixed, stored and transmitted in linguistic units (Vorobyov, 1997; Maslova, 2001; Telia, 1996).

Among the many lexical fields that reflect cultural experience, the vocabulary of transport occupies a special place. Means of transport accompany a community through its whole history: from caravans, carts and boats to railways, automobiles and high-speed trains. Each vehicle is embedded in a particular geography, economy, set of customs and social relations, and its name inevitably absorbs these conditions. A word such as gondola, troika, rickshaw or caravan immediately evokes a specific place, era and way of life, even for speakers who have never used the vehicle itself.

The relevance of the topic is determined by three factors. First, globalization has intensified contact between cultures, and vehicle names frequently travel across languages as loanwords or exoticisms, retaining their cultural aura. Second, transport brands and public transport systems actively use national-cultural symbols in naming, turning culture into a marketing and identity resource. Third, translators and language learners regularly face difficulties when vehicle names with strong cultural content have no equivalent in the target language. Despite this, vehicle names have been studied mostly in terminology, onomastics and lexicography, while their linguocultural potential remains insufficiently explored.

The aim of this study is to reveal the linguocultural potential of vehicle names whose national-cultural content is expressed directly, that is, where the cultural meaning is part of the name’s semantic structure or its immediate associations rather than being inferred from context. The objectives are: (1) to



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clarify the theoretical notions of linguocultural potential and national-cultural semantics; (2) to classify vehicle names according to the way cultural content is encoded; (3) to describe the cultural functions performed by such names; and (4) to outline problems of their translation and intercultural transfer.

**2. Theoretical Background**

Linguoculturology views language units as signs of culture. A key concept is linguocultural potential, understood as the capacity of a linguistic unit to accumulate, preserve and convey culturally significant information about a nation's history, traditions, values and perception of the world. Units with high linguocultural potential are characterized by a rich cultural connotative field: besides the denotative meaning (what the object is), they carry a cultural component (what the object means for the community).

The notion of national-cultural semantics is closely related to the notion of realia. Realia are words and phrases that denote objects, phenomena and concepts specific to the life, culture and history of a particular people and that often lack exact equivalents in other languages. Vehicle names are a typical group of material realia: the Venetian gondola, the Russian troika, the Indian rickshaw and the Philippine jeepney are inseparable from the cultures that produced them. Anna Wierzbicka's work on key words further shows that certain lexical items serve as focal points of a culture and that, through them, one can understand how a community categorizes its experience (Wierzbicka, 1997).

It is also important to distinguish between the denotative and the connotative levels. At the denotative level, a name such as taxi or train refers to a universal class of objects. At the connotative level, the same units may acquire culture-specific associations, as in the London black cab, the New York yellow cab or the Soviet-era "Zhiguli". The linguocultural potential of a vehicle name therefore depends on the strength of its cultural connotations and on how directly they are represented in the name.

Finally, the study relies on the cognitive-cultural idea that metaphor and symbolism are culturally conditioned (Kövecses, 2005). Naming a train after a legendary city or a car after a mythical animal is not an arbitrary act: it activates a cultural frame and links a modern technical object with the collective memory of the people.

**3. Methods and Material**

The research combines descriptive, componential and contextual methods. The descriptive method was used to collect and systematize vehicle names from dictionaries, travel and media texts, and official transport-related sources. Componential analysis made it possible to separate the denotative core of each name from its cultural component. Contextual analysis helped to determine how the cultural meaning is actualized in discourse, and comparative analysis revealed similarities and differences between English, Uzbek and several other linguistic cultures.

The material comprises traditional animal-drawn and water vehicles, urban public transport, railway and aviation names, and automobile brands and nicknames. Only those units were selected in which the national-cultural element is directly manifested, either in the form of the name itself, in its etymology, or in its stable cultural associations.

**4. Analysis**

The analysis shows that the cultural content of vehicle names can be encoded in four main ways.

4.1. Realia-based names. This group includes names of vehicles that emerged within a specific natural and social environment and became its emblem. Examples are the Venetian gondola, adapted to the canals of the city; the Russian troika, a carriage drawn by three horses and widely used as a symbol of Russian life in literature and folklore; the rickshaw, which came to represent urban life in East and South Asia; and the tuk-tuk, associated with Thailand and South Asia. In Uzbek culture, the words arava (a traditional two-wheeled cart) and tuya karvon (a camel caravan) belong to this group. The caravan in particular is closely connected with the Great Silk Road and evokes images of trade, hospitality and the



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cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. Such names are highly resistant to translation: they are usually borrowed, transliterated or explained, and in the process they carry a distinctive “exotic” flavour into the target language.

4.2. Toponymic-commemorative names. In this group the national-cultural content is expressed by place names, historical figures or historical states embedded in the name. A clear Uzbek example is the high-speed train Afrosiyob, named after the ancient settlement in Samarkand, and the express train Sharq (“East”), which connects the cities of the country along the historic route. By choosing such names, the naming authority links modern infrastructure with the ancient cultural heritage of the region and presents technological progress as a continuation of tradition. Similar practices can be observed elsewhere: the Orient Express brings associations of European luxury travel, while the Trans-Siberian expresses the scale of the Russian landscape. Toponymic names therefore perform a commemorative and identity-forming function.

4.3. Symbolic-associative names. Many vehicles are named after animals, legendary beings, natural phenomena or cultural symbols that embody ideals such as speed, strength, freedom or endurance. Names like Mustang, Jaguar or Bronco evoke the natural and mythological imagery of particular cultures, while names derived from national heroes, flowers or mythic creatures function similarly in other languages. Here the linguocultural potential lies in the capacity of the name to transfer positive cultural values onto a technical object. In Turkic cultures, the horse has traditionally been a symbol of speed, loyalty and honour, so names based on the horse imagery for cars, trains or aircraft actualize deeply rooted cultural meanings.

4.4. Metaphorical-evaluative and colloquial names. Speakers often coin informal names that reflect their attitude to a vehicle and the social conditions of its use. The London “black cab” and the New York “yellow cab” are examples of how colour became a cultural marker of a whole urban transport tradition. The Philippine jeepney, a vehicle converted from military jeeps and decorated with bright colours and inscriptions, reflects creativity and post-war social history. In Uzbek colloquial usage, car models popular in the country have acquired nicknames and associations that reveal social realities: affordable microvans and sedans such as Damas, Matiz or Nexia are perceived not just as models but as part of everyday life, family economy and small business. Similarly, Soviet-era car names such as Zhiguli or Volga are remembered with nostalgia by older generations and function as markers of a historical period.

In terms of cultural functions, the analyzed names perform at least five roles. The first is the accumulative function: they store information about historical technology, trade routes and everyday practices. The second is the identifying function: they mark the belonging of a vehicle, a city or a community to a particular culture. The third is the axiological function: they express evaluations, such as prestige, reliability, speed or modesty. The fourth is the symbolic function: they turn the vehicle into a sign of the nation, the era or the landscape. The fifth is the communicative and marketing function: in modern discourse, culturally loaded names create emotional engagement among consumers and tourists.

A comparative look at English and Uzbek material reveals both universal and specific features. Universally, speakers of both languages use toponyms and symbolic names to create prestige, and both cultures preserve names of historical vehicles as nostalgic or touristic symbols. The specific features lie in the sources of cultural imagery: English-language names often rely on the imagery of empire, urban life and the automobile industry, while Uzbek names more frequently draw on the heritage of the Silk Road, ancient cities and Eastern hospitality. At the same time, modern Uzbek transport names illustrate the process of cultural hybridization, where international brand names exist alongside local ones and acquire local meanings through usage.



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The role of folklore and literature deserves separate attention. Many vehicle names became culturally significant through their appearance in songs, proverbs, poems and novels, which fixed their symbolic value in the collective consciousness. The troika in Russian literature, the gondola in Venetian art, and the caravan in Eastern poetry and travel writing are not only objects but literary images, and their names activate whole chains of associations. Consequently, the linguocultural potential of a vehicle name is determined both by the object’s real history and by its representation in the national artistic tradition. This also explains why such names are readily used in titles, slogans and brand narratives, where a single word is expected to evoke an entire cultural scene.

The material also shows that the cultural loading of a vehicle name may change over time. A name that once denoted an ordinary means of transport may later become a heritage symbol, while a modern brand name may gradually acquire cultural associations through decades of everyday use. Such semantic development confirms that national-cultural content is not only inherited but continually created by speakers in the course of social life.

**5. Translation and Intercultural Aspects**

The transfer of vehicle names with national-cultural content poses several problems. When the target culture lacks the corresponding realia, a translator may choose between transliteration, calque, descriptive translation, functional equivalent or adaptation. Each of these strategies involves a loss or a shift of cultural meaning. For instance, rendering troika as “three-horse carriage” conveys the denotation but loses the connotations of Russian folk culture, while using the original word preserves the cultural aura but requires the reader’s background knowledge. Similarly, translating the Uzbek arava as “cart” may erase the specific cultural and rural associations the word has for its native speakers.

Names such as Afrosiyob demonstrate another difficulty: the cultural meaning is carried by the proper name, which is usually transliterated and therefore opaque to foreign readers. In such cases, translators and guides often add an explanatory comment that reveals the historical connection and thereby restores the lost linguocultural information. In tourism and international communication, this approach can make vehicle names an effective tool for promoting national heritage.

From the educational point of view, vehicle names with strong cultural content are valuable material for teaching foreign languages. They allow learners to move from isolated vocabulary to cultural competence, comparing how different nations name similar objects and what values they attach to them. Tasks based on comparing the Uzbek tuya karvon, the English caravan and the Arabic-Persian etymological source of the word help students understand how cultural contacts shape vocabulary.

**6. Discussion: Cultural Memory and Modern Identity**

The examined material suggests that vehicle names operate as a bridge between past and present. Names of traditional vehicles, even when the vehicles themselves have disappeared from everyday use, remain active in proverbs, literature, folklore and tourism discourse. The image of the caravan, for example, continues to symbolize endurance, trade and the meeting of civilizations, and it is frequently reused in modern advertising and in the names of hotels, routes and festivals. In this way, the linguocultural potential of a name is not a fixed property but a dynamic resource that can be reactivated in new communicative situations.

Another important observation concerns the role of institutions. Names of trains, airlines and public transport lines are usually chosen deliberately, and this choice reflects the cultural policy and the image that a country wishes to project. When a state or company selects a name rooted in national history, it simultaneously addresses two audiences: domestic users, who recognize the cultural reference as part of their own heritage, and foreign visitors, for whom the name serves as an introduction to the country. The effectiveness of such naming depends on the degree to which the cultural meaning is transparent, which



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explains why explanatory slogans and bilingual information are often placed next to culturally marked names.

Finally, the study indicates that the linguocultural potential of vehicle names is closely connected with emotions. Nostalgic attitudes toward old vehicles, pride in national railway achievements and humour in colloquial nicknames show that these names are charged with evaluative and emotional meanings that are difficult to capture in dictionary definitions. This underlines the need for an interdisciplinary approach combining linguistics, cultural studies and communication theory.

**7. Conclusion**

The study demonstrates that transport vehicle names with directly expressed national-cultural content possess a high linguocultural potential. They accumulate information about a people's history, geography, economy, beliefs and values, and they function as signs of national and urban identity. Four types of cultural encoding were distinguished: realia-based, toponymic-commemorative, symbolic-associative and metaphorical-evaluative. Each type performs specific accumulative, identifying, axiological, symbolic and communicative functions.

The analysis also shows that these names are sensitive to intercultural transfer: the stronger the cultural loading, the greater the risk of semantic loss in translation, and the more important commentary and background knowledge become. In the modern globalized world, culturally marked vehicle names are an important resource for preserving cultural memory, promoting national heritage in tourism and enriching foreign language education. Further research may focus on large-scale corpus studies of transportonyms, on the dynamics of their cultural connotations, and on comparative studies of more languages, particularly the Turkic languages.

From a practical standpoint, the results may be applied in several areas. In lexicography, they justify the inclusion of cultural commentary in dictionary entries for transportonyms. In translation studies, they provide a basis for choosing strategies that preserve cultural meaning. In tourism and public communication, they suggest that explanatory naming, bilingual signage and storytelling around vehicle names can strengthen the representation of national heritage. In education, they offer authentic material for developing learners' intercultural competence. Thus, the study of vehicle names contributes not only to theoretical linguoculturology but also to applied linguistics and cultural communication.

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