

ABSTRACT

of the dissertation submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)
in the educational program *6D021300 – Linguistics*

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"The Linguistic Landscape of Kazakhstan: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of
Eventonyms"

General Description of the Research. In the contemporary globalized and postmodern world, we are increasingly confronted with a complex sociolinguistic reality characterized by heterogeneity, fragmentation, multimodality, and hybridity. These shifting conditions under which languages operate call for a critical reassessment of traditional methodological paradigms and underscore the need for innovative approaches to the study of language in society. One such contemporary approach is the study of the linguistic landscape (LL), which offers new perspectives for analyzing and describing communicative patterns, as well as for understanding the everyday existence of languages, language practices and ideologies, language policy, the management of visual space, multilingualism, and language contact.

The LL method has been developed within the framework of sociocultural theory, which views language not only as a system of signs governed by internal rules but also as a form of social practice. From this perspective, uncovering the informative and symbolic functions of linguistic signs provides an opportunity for a more nuanced description of social reality—particularly in relation to the dynamics of language and power and the discursive construction of public space. Research on linguistic landscapes highlights the importance of material and cultural processes and demonstrates the analytical potential of bridging the material and the discursive through the examination of linguistic signs and naming practices.

Classical studies on the linguistic landscape (Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Backhaus, 2007) have traditionally focused on the synchronic analysis of signage use in urban environments. However, several scholars (e.g., Pavlenko & Mullen, 2015) have critiqued this approach, arguing that a comprehensive understanding of socio-onomastic processes requires a diachronic perspective—an examination of signage over time. The present study employs a combined approach that integrates both diachronic (1989–2020) and synchronic (2021–2024) analyses. This enables the researcher to trace the evolution of eventonyms within the context of Kazakhstan's sociopolitical transformations and to identify shifts in language practices and ideologies over the years of national independence.

The dissertation examines shifts in the naming of eventonyms—titles of cultural, sporting, and political events—documented across various mediums, including print media, public announcements, urban billboards, posters, and online platforms. The scholarly interest in eventonyms stems from two key considerations. First, eventonyms represent a distinct category of proper names, the analysis of which enables the identification of local naming practices and their broader sociocultural significance. Second, unlike many other elements of the linguistic landscape (e.g., commercial signage or informal notices), eventonyms are often recorded in printed and digital sources, making it possible to trace changes in naming conventions diachronically and

to investigate sociolinguistic transformations based on empirical data rather than self-reported perceptions from surveys or interviews.

The empirical material of this study consists of proper names of diverse cultural, sporting, and public events. Due to their regularity and functional diversity, these names serve as valuable indicators of language dynamics and reflect broader sociocultural shifts in Kazakhstan's society. Specifically, the study focuses on event names across various functional domains, including cultural events (e.g., festivals, competitions, concerts, parties), sporting events (e.g., tournaments, marathons, contests), and mass public gatherings (e.g., national celebrations, demonstrations).

The relevance of the study is determined by several interrelated factors. Firstly, there remains a notable lack of scholarly attention to the contemporary linguistic landscape of Kazakhstan, despite increasing interest among sociolinguists (e.g., A. Pavlenko, O. Bever, among others) in the study of post-Soviet contexts characterized by dynamic and complex sociolinguistic transformations. These include shifts in the functional status of the state and Russian languages, the evolving roles of national languages, and the growing influence of English as a language of globalization. Understanding these changes necessitates in-depth investigation of the linguistic landscape (LL) as a medium through which discursive constructions of social reality are realized.

Secondly, the urgency of developing innovative methodological approaches capable of adequately capturing and analyzing sociolinguistic and symbolic transformations in the postmodern era further underscores the theoretical and practical significance of this research. Additionally, despite their active presence in public communication, eventonyms — the names of various public events — have not previously been the subject of focused linguistic inquiry, and thus remain underexplored in both Kazakhstani and international linguistic scholarship.

The object of the study is the linguistic landscape of the multilingual space of Kazakhstan's urban environments.

The subject of the study is eventonyms (names of public urban events) functioning as elements of Kazakhstan's linguistic landscape.

The purpose of the study is to identify and describe sociolinguistic changes within Kazakhstan's linguistic landscape through the analysis of eventonym usage over time (1989–2020) and in its current state (2021–2024).

Achieving this goal involves solving **the following tasks**:

- to define and specify the scope of the term *linguistic landscape*;
- to examine the history of LL research and its core methodological approaches;
- to conceptualize the linguistic landscape as a mechanism for the symbolic construction of public space and identity;
- to analyze the structure and features of eventonyms used in Kazakhstan's multilingual urban contexts;
- to conduct a sociolinguistic analysis of eventonyms and identify key factors shaping the linguistic landscape of the contemporary Kazakhstani metropolis.

The methodological basis of the study is based on a wide range of fundamental works in the fields of onomastics, linguistic landscape, sociolinguistics, and constructivist theory. Among the key contributions to onomastics are the works of

T. Zhanuzakov, E.A. Kerimbaev, G.B. Madiyeva, K.K. Rysbergen, E. Hoffmann, A.V. Superanskaya, V.D. Bondaletov, V.I. Suprun, M.V. Golomidova, N.V. Podolskaya, V.G. Gak, P.N. Donets, I.V. Kryukova and D.M. Pashan. Studies in the linguistic landscape approach include research by E. Ben-Rafael, P. Backhaus, J. Blommaert, T. Huebner, J. Cenoz and D. Gorter, A. Pavlenko, E. Shohamy, as well as Kazakhstani scholars such as Sh. Zharkynbekova, A. Akzhigitova, A. Kulbayeva, M. Tusupbekova and others. In the field of sociolinguistics, this study draws on the work of B. Spolsky, R.L. Cooper, S. Gal, J. Irvine, P. Kroskrity, E.D. Suleimenova, Zh.S. Smagulova, R. Matuszkiewicz, and K. Woolard. The constructivist perspective is informed by the ideas of J. Piaget, G. Kelly, M. Weber, P. Berger, T. Luckmann, W. James, W. Thomas, G.H. Mead, A. Schütz, J. Searle, L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontiev, V.P. Zinchenko, G.M. Andreeva, A.G. Asmolov and others.

The research employs a combination of **qualitative and quantitative methods**.

Qualitative methods include content analysis applied to linguistic material (eventonyms) collected from newspapers, official reports, and online event posters. This approach facilitated the identification of thematic, lexical, and graphical characteristics of event naming practices.

Quantitative methods include a sociolinguistic survey and a range of statistical techniques, such as cross-tabulation, multinomial logistic regression, and data processing using the SPSS software. These tools enabled hypothesis testing concerning the relationship between language choice in eventonyms and socio-demographic factors, and allowed for the identification of statistically significant trends.

The theoretical significance of the research lies primarily in its contribution to understanding the dynamics of sociolinguistic processes through the lens of material onomastic artefacts within Kazakhstan's urban linguistic landscape. By analyzing real-life language usage in public spaces, the study offers insights into how languages evolve, interact, and symbolically function in a multilingual society.

Moreover, the linguistic landscape approach generates valuable empirical data on the interplay between language, identity, and power in a post-Soviet context shaped by a complex history and state language policies. It illuminates how linguistic landscapes are constructed at the intersection of nation-building, post-Soviet heritage, globalization, and market forces. The analysis of eventonyms, in particular, enables the identification of tensions and alignments between state-driven language policy—aimed at promoting Kazakh—and local naming practices, which reflect the expansion of the functional domains of Kazakh, the maintenance of Russian, and the symbolic presence of English.

The practical significance of the research is that its findings and materials may be used in academic settings for the development of theoretical and lecture courses in general linguistics, sociolinguistics, lexicology, word formation, and specialized courses in onomastics, intercultural communication, country studies, and related disciplines.

Additionally, the study offers practical recommendations for urban and municipal authorities involved in formulating language policy and shaping the visual design of multilingual urban environments. The results can also benefit professionals in naming and branding, assisting them in crafting event names that are culturally and

linguistically appropriate for diverse target audiences. Furthermore, the study is relevant for language planners and managers engaged in regulating language policy, particularly in the context of increasing the visibility and functionality of the Kazakh language in urban spaces and the growing role of English in the public sphere.

The scientific novelty of the study is determined by several key aspects. First, this is the first comprehensive analysis of Kazakhstan's linguistic landscape conducted through the lens of sociolinguistic change. Second, the linguistic landscape is examined both diachronically, over a 30-year period (1989–2020), and synchronically, through a contemporary snapshot (2021–2024). Third, the study offers an original analysis of naming practices for cultural and sports events, revealing their role in the discursive construction of a new linguistic hierarchy in Kazakhstan's public space.

The empirical material of the dissertation is a corpus of 2,843 eventonyms (names of public events), collected between 1989 and 2024. The corpus comprises names of cultural, sporting, and political events from Kazakh- and Russian-language press, regional cultural department reports, and visual and digital posters, gathered in the course of fieldwork. Specifically, 2,364 eventonyms were collected for the diachronic period (1989–2020), and 479 units for the synchronic stage (2021–2024). This distribution allows for an analysis of both the historical evolution of event naming practices and the current state of Kazakhstan's linguistic landscape, thereby providing a representative and robust empirical foundation for a comprehensive analysis of public onomastic practices.

The material was collected from the following sources:

1. Kazakh-language and Russian-language newspapers, Almaty Aqshamy and Vecherniy Almaty, respectively. A total of 7,500 issues were reviewed for the period 1989–2020;
2. Regulatory and official documents, including cultural and sports event reports from municipal (akimat) offices;
3. Event posters and physical advertising materials;
4. Online platforms covering city events and entertainment: www.sxodim.com/almaty, ticketon.kz, afisha.kz, festivali.kz.

The research was carried out in **several stages**:

The first stage (theoretical and exploratory), a critical review of scholarly literature on the research problem was carried out. During this stage, the conceptual framework was defined, the research goal and objectives were specified, the sources of empirical data were determined, and the instruments for data collection and analysis were developed.

At the second stage, empirical data were collected, inventoried, systematized, and classified. This stage included work with archived print issues of the newspapers Vecherniy Almaty and Almaty Aqshamy (1989–2020), reports from municipal administrations (akimats) on the organization of cultural and sporting events, and contemporary sources such as internet platforms (www.sxodim.com/almaty, ticketon.kz, afisha.kz, festivali.kz) and billboard advertisements from the period 2021–2024.

This research examined the names of events in the fields of culture, politics, and sports held in Kazakhstan from 1989 to 2024. The collection and analysis of eventonyms were approached from two analytical perspectives:

Diachronic analysis (1989–2020): aimed at tracing the evolution of language practices in the naming of public events;

Synchronic analysis (2021–2024): focused on describing the current sociolinguistic dynamics within Kazakhstan's linguistic landscape.

At the third stage, the corpus of empirical data was systematically organized, and both qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted.

Key Provisions for Defense:

1. The naming practices of eventonyms hold significant sociocultural weight, as they mirror ongoing social, cultural, and economic transformations and play a pivotal role in the discursive shaping of a new linguistic hierarchy.
2. The linguistic landscape functions as a diagnostic tool for tracing sociolinguistic processes. Its analysis offers a contemporary methodological alternative grounded in empirical, material evidence, rather than relying solely on subjective representations typically obtained through sociolinguistic interviews or surveys.
3. The linguistic landscape of Kazakhstan's urban centers is marked by dynamic shifts driven by social, political, and economic forces. The functional and symbolic reconfiguration of Kazakh, Russian, and English within this space results from the tension between nation-building imperatives and the pressures of globalization. Choices regarding language and script in eventonyms serve as symbolic acts that contribute to the construction of national and social identities.
4. Language policy in the public sphere, as articulated through eventonym selection, emerges from the interplay of cognitive, sociocultural, and political dynamics. In this context, language choice serves not only a referential or naming function, but also acts as a mechanism of social stratification, identity legitimization, and the representation of symbolic order within the post-Soviet transformation framework. The language used in eventonyms is shaped by the nature of the event, respondents' age, and their language proficiency.
5. The increasing use of Latin script in the eventonyms of Almaty's urban landscape functions as a salient marker of Kazakhstan's evolving language policy. It symbolizes the nation's transition to a new alphabet and aligns with broader processes of cultural modernization. Latin-script event names mediate between aspirations for modernization and the preservation of national identity.

Research Approbation. The main findings and theoretical contributions of this dissertation have been presented in 15 scholarly publications, including: 6 articles in journals recommended by the Committee for Quality Assurance in the Sphere of Education and Science of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan; 2 articles in peer-reviewed journals indexed in the Scopus database; 6 conference papers and 1 abstract in the proceedings of national and international academic conferences.

Structure of the Dissertation. The dissertation consists of an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion, 17 diagrams, 22 figures, and 14 tables, a list of references comprising 210 sources, and Appendices A, B, C, D and E.