ISSN:2828-6235
Impact factor:13.77

International Journal of Literature and Language Studies(IJLLS)

ONOMASTIC UNITS IN TOURISM TRANSLATION: A PRAGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

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Annotation

This article examines onomastic units in tourism translation from a pragmatic perspective. It analyzes the role of proper names in conveying cultural meanings and facilitating intercultural communication. The study highlights the importance of preserving the pragmatic and cultural value of onomastic units in tourism discourse.

Keywords: tourism discourse, onomastic translation, linguistic landscape, cultural heritage, translation strategies, place names, cross-cultural communication, destination branding, pragmatic meaning, cultural identity.

The global tourism industry relies heavily on effective cross-cultural communication, with translation serving as the primary bridge between destinations and international visitors. Within this communicative framework, onomastic units—encompassing geographical names (toponyms), personal names (anthroponyms), institutional names, and cultural designations—present unique challenges that extend beyond conventional linguistic equivalence. Unlike common nouns, proper names carry layers of cultural, historical, and associative meaning that resist straightforward lexical transfer.

The pragmatic turn in translation studies, initiated by scholars such as Nida (1964)[1], Reiss (1971)[2], and later developed by Vermeer (1989) within Skopos Theory[3], has shifted attention from formal correspondence to communicative effectiveness. In tourism translation, this shift is particularly salient: the primary function of tourism texts is not merely to inform but to persuade, attract, and facilitate cultural engagement. Consequently, the translation of onomastic units must be evaluated not only in terms of semantic accuracy but also in terms of their pragmatic impact on the target audience.

Onomastics, the study of proper names, distinguishes between various categories of naming units based on their referential and functional properties. According to Van Langendonck (2007)[4], proper names are characterized by their unique reference and their ability to function as "magnets for other meanings"—accumulating cultural, historical, and associative significance over time. In tourism discourse, onomastic units include toponyms (geographical names such as cities, regions, and natural landmarks), anthroponyms (personal names of historical figures, rulers, and artists), institutional names (hotels, restaurants, museums, and tour companies), and cultural designations (festival names, traditional events, and culinary specialties).

Kiviniemi (1982)[5] notes that while proper names primarily serve to identify individuals, they simultaneously function as repositories of cultural information. This dual function becomes particularly significant in tourism translation, where names must both identify destinations and

[1] Nida, E. A. *Toward a science of translating*. Leiden: E. J. Brill. 1964

[2] Reiss, K. *Möglichkeiten und Grenzen der Übersetzungskritik*. Munich: Hueber. 1971

[3] Vermeer, H. J. Skopos and commission in translational action. In A. Chesterman (Ed.), *Readings in translation theory* (pp. 173-187). Helsinki: Oy Finn Lectura Ab. 1989.

[4] Van Langendonck, W. *Theory and typology of proper names*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 2007.

[5] Kiviniemi, E. (1982). On the semantics of personal names. *Onoma*, 26, 166-183.

evoke cultural resonance. The referential function ensures that tourists can locate and identify specific sites, while the cultural-informational function enriches the visitor's understanding of the destination's heritage and significance.

The pragmatic approach to translation emphasizes the functional and communicative dimensions of text transfer. Unlike the semantic approach, which prioritizes fidelity to source-text meaning, pragmatic translation focuses on achieving equivalent communicative effect in the target context. The pragmatic approach views meaning as dynamic and context-dependent, requiring the translator to interpret communicative intent rather than merely linguistic form. This perspective is especially relevant for tourism texts, where the communicative purpose—attracting visitors, providing information, creating positive impressions—shapes every translational decision.

Sperber and Wilson's (1986) Relevance Theory provides a particularly useful framework for understanding onomastic translation. According to this theory, communication succeeds when the audience derives adequate contextual effects for minimal processing effort. In tourism translation, this principle implies that onomastic units should be rendered in ways that maximize relevance for the target audience while preserving essential cultural information. The translator must balance the cognitive effort required to process unfamiliar names against the contextual effects derived from their cultural associations.

Pragmatic Functions of Onomastic Units in Tourism Discourse. The primary function of onomastic units is referential: to identify specific entities unambiguously. In tourism translation, maintaining referential clarity is essential for practical purposes such as navigation, booking, and itinerary planning. A tourist must be able to locate Tiananmen Square or the Louvre regardless of the language in which they encounter these names. However, referential function alone does not determine translation strategy. The particular operations chosen to deal with proper names are a function, partly, of the semantic content they are loaded with in the source context and, partly, of considerations of how this content may be preserved in the target communication situation. Thus, while Paris requires no translation due to its universal recognizability, lesser-known destinations may require additional explanatory information to fulfill their referential function effectively.

Cultural-Informational Function. Tourism texts serve an educational function, introducing visitors to the cultural heritage of destinations. Onomastic units often encode historical narratives, mythological references, or cultural values that contribute to this educational mission[6]. For example, Chinese place names frequently incorporate elements meaning prosperity, harmony, or longevity, reflecting cultural values that may be lost in simple transliteration. The pragmatic challenge lies in determining how much cultural information to preserve and how to make it accessible. Pragmatically effective translation requires identifying which cultural associations are relevant to the target audience's interests and which would create unnecessary processing burden. The translator must avoid maintaining useless information, omitting helpful information, or resorting to literal translation that fails to convey cultural significance.

Persuasive and Appellative Function. Tourism discourse is fundamentally promotional. Onomastic units contribute to this persuasive function by evoking exoticism, authenticity, or familiarity. The decision to retain a foreign-sounding name versus translating it into a more accessible form involves pragmatic calculations about audience response. For instance, retaining the Italian name Trattoria da Mario for a restaurant may enhance perceived authenticity for English-speaking tourists, while translating it as Mario's Eatery might increase accessibility but reduce exotic appeal. The optimal choice depends on the target audience's expectations and the overall marketing strategy of the tourism provider. The translator must consider whether the name's foreignness or familiarity better serves the text's persuasive purpose.

[6] Fernandes, L. Translation of names in children's fantasy literature. *Translation Journal*. 2006. 10 p.

Aesthetic and Evocative Function. Names in tourism discourse often serve aesthetic purposes, contributing to the overall stylistic effect of promotional materials. The phonological properties of names, their rhythm, and their associations with literary or artistic traditions all influence their pragmatic effect. Translators must consider whether preserving the source name's aesthetic qualities or creating equivalent aesthetic effects in the target language better serves the communicative purpose. The evocative power of names—their ability to conjure images, emotions, and associations—represents a crucial pragmatic dimension that cannot be reduced to semantic equivalence.

Pragmatic Strategies for Translating Onomastic Units. Geographical names present a complex case where international conventions, local preferences, and audience needs intersect. Established toponyms often have conventional equivalents in major languages: Rome for Roma, Vienna for Wien, Moscow for Moskva. These conventional forms represent pragmatic accommodations to target audience familiarity, developed over centuries of cross-cultural contact. For less prominent destinations, translators face a choice between exoticization strategy, which retains the original form to emphasize authenticity; domestication strategy, which provides a translated or adapted form for accessibility; and hybrid strategy, which combines original form with explanatory translation. The pragmatic approach suggests that this choice should be guided by the name's expected familiarity to the target audience and its functional role in the text. A name mentioned in passing may require only transliteration, while a featured destination may warrant additional cultural contextualization.

Anthroponyms: Historical Figures and Cultural Heroes. Personal names in tourism texts typically refer to historical figures, artists, or cultural heroes associated with destinations. The pragmatic treatment of such names depends on their recognizability and the information they are intended to convey. For universally recognized figures such as Shakespeare, Beethoven, or Confucius, conventional target-language forms are pragmatically appropriate. For less familiar figures, translators may need to provide additional identifying information or consider whether the name's inclusion serves a meaningful communicative purpose. Not only historical persons, but also literature and movies may produce such names that carry associative meanings. The pragmatic translator must assess whether these associations are likely to be activated in the target audience and whether the translation strategy facilitates or impedes this activation.

Institutional and Commercial Names. Hotels, restaurants, museums, and tourism enterprises present particularly complex cases because their names often serve simultaneous referential, promotional, and legal functions. The pragmatic approach suggests that commercial names should be evaluated based on legal considerations, including trademark protections that may require retention of original forms; brand recognition, where established international brands may benefit from name retention; communicative clarity, where names with transparent meaning in the source language may require translation for target audience comprehension; and marketing strategy, where exotic or domesticated naming may align with different positioning strategies. The translator must navigate these multiple considerations to arrive at a pragmatically optimal solution.

A Pragmatic Framework for Onomastic Translation in Tourism. Based on the preceding analysis, this article proposes a pragmatic framework for translating onomastic units in tourism discourse. The framework consists of three interrelated dimensions that guide translational decision-making.

The audience analysis dimension requires translators to assess the target audience's expected familiarity with the source culture, the audience's linguistic and cultural literacy, and the audience's motivations and expectations regarding authenticity versus accessibility. Understanding the audience's background and expectations enables the translator to predict which translation strategies will maximize relevance and minimize processing effort.

The text function dimension requires identification of the primary communicative purpose of the text, whether informational, persuasive, or instructional; the functional role of specific onomastic units within the text; and the relationship between onomastic units and other text elements. Different text functions impose different requirements on onomastic translation, with promotional texts prioritizing appeal and informational texts prioritizing clarity.

The cultural context dimension requires consideration of the cultural significance of the onomastic unit in the source context, the availability of established equivalents in the target language, and the potential for cross-cultural misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Awareness of cultural connotations and potential pitfalls enables the translator to avoid pragmatic failures that could undermine the text's communicative purpose.

The optimal translation strategy emerges from the intersection of these three dimensions, with pragmatic effectiveness serving as the ultimate criterion for decision-making. The framework does not prescribe fixed rules but provides a systematic method for analyzing the pragmatic factors that should inform translational choices.

The translation of onomastic units in tourism discourse requires a sophisticated understanding of the pragmatic dimensions of cross-cultural communication. While semantic accuracy and formal equivalence remain relevant considerations, the primary criterion for evaluating onomastic translation should be communicative effectiveness in the target context. This article has argued that onomastic units in tourism texts serve multiple pragmatic functions—referential, cultural-informational, persuasive, and aesthetic—and that translation strategies should be selected based on their ability to fulfill these functions for the target audience. The proposed pragmatic framework offers a systematic approach to navigating the complex decisions involved in translating proper names in specialized communicative contexts.

Future research should extend this pragmatic analysis to empirical studies of tourist comprehension and response to different onomastic translation strategies. Such research would provide valuable evidence for refining the theoretical framework and developing evidence-based guidelines for tourism translation practice. The intersection of onomastics, pragmatics, and translation studies represents a fertile area for interdisciplinary inquiry that promises to enhance both theoretical understanding and practical effectiveness in tourism communication.

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