

The Research on the Standardization of English Translation of Geographical Names in Zhangjiajie from the Perspective of Skopostheorie

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ABSTRACT. *Geographical name, referring to a place, is given to the natural or human and geographical proper name in a particular spatial location. It is not only the symbol of national territory and sovereignty, the epitome of history and national culture, but also the product of social phenomena and development. In recent years, the rapid development of tourism industry has further accelerated the internationalization process of Zhangjiajie and attracted more and more foreigners to come to Zhangjiajie for tourism, cultural exchanges and shooting films and televisions, etc. Therefore, the standardized use of English translation of geographical names is essential to improve the cultural connotation and establish a good image for the city. When it comes to the current situation of the English translation of geographical names in Zhangjiajie, this paper, based on the perspective of Skopostheorie, lists four basic principles that should be followed in the process of translating geographical names into English, including the principle of unification, convention and economic efficiency as well as the principle of name subordinated to owner. Besides, the paper puts forward targeted "translations" in order to promote further standardization and unification of the English translation of geographical names in Zhangjiajie.*

KEYWORDS: *Skopostheorie, English translation, geographical names, Zhangjiajie*

1. Introduction

Under the background of economic globalization and "One Belt and One Road Initiative", domestic tourism industry has made great progress as inbound tourism is thriving. Thanks to Zhangjiajie's unique natural scenery, long history, cultural customs and great revolutionary years, they are attracting more and more foreign travelers to visit and learn. With the rapid development in tourism, it has brought

both opportunities and new challenges to Zhangjiajie. It is undeniable that tourism has greatly promoted the growth of the local economy, but the growing number of overseas tourists has put forward new challenges to our city's tourism reception ability and service level. The most prominent problem is the quality of language service, especially the English translation of geographical names. The author has found it is quite common to witness too many problems and shortcomings in the English translation of geographical names, such as grammatical errors, inappropriate expressions and multiple translations for one name. For example, there are three translation versions of the scenic spot "宝峰湖" including "Baofenghu Lake", "Baofenghu" and "Baofeng Lake". The same situation happens to "天门山景区" with totally different translations on different map manuals or signboards. Its translation includes "Tianmen Mountain Scenic Area", "Tianmenshan Scenic Area", "Tianmenshan Mountain Scenic Area", etc. It's no doubt that such translations will cause inconvenience and troubles to foreign tourists, meanwhile, are not good for Zhangjiajie, an international tourist metropolis, to maintain its sound image and status.

In recent years, more and more people, including government departments, scholars of University, management offices of scenic areas and people from all walks of life, have begun to pay extensive attention to the language use in the public areas. The English translation of geographical names has become one of the important contents of the construction of our city. It undertakes the construction of city image and human environment, becomes a "business card" of the city's external propaganda and contains historical and cultural connotations and spiritual qualities. There are various reasons for the confusion in the English translation of toponyms. Up to now, China has not formulated and issued a set of universal and unified criteria for the translation of toponyms. Therefore, the author holds that it is of great practical significance to explore the translation of geographical names in Zhangjiajie. In order to promote the standardization of the translation of place names in Zhangjiajie, it is necessary to solve the contradictions, distinguish the relations, and determine the theoretical basis and basic principles in the translation of geographical names.

2. The history and current situation of English translation on Geographical Names

Wade-Giles romanization has long been the dominant in translation, but due to its own shortcomings, it has resulted in an embarrassing situation of disorderly English translation in geographical names in China. As far as the national level is concerned, the Chinese government has put many efforts into the standardization and unification of geographical names and issued a series of laws and regulations, which have constructive significance for translators in China, but has a positive impact on Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. In 1978, the State Council approved the report on the *Conversion of the Chinese Pinyin Scheme as a Uniform Standard for the Roman Spelling of Personal Names and Geographical Names in China*. In 1979, the Third United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names

adopted a resolution "The use of Chinese Pinyin as an international standard for the Roman alphabet spelling of Chinese geographical names." In 1983, the Chinese Geographical Names Committee issued the *General Principles for Translating and Writing Chinese Characters of Foreign Geographical Names*, pointing that the unification and standardization of the translation and writing of foreign geographical names is directly related to the political, economic, military and diplomatic work China, as well as the culture and science and technology. Meanwhile, it put forward the basic principles of translating and writing foreign geographical names: "Transliteration-oriented, one name for one translation, and conventional principle [1]. In 1984, *World Geographic List* was published by China Encyclopedia Publishing House. In 1987, the State Geographical Names Commission and the State Language Commission jointly issued the notice that the old spelling methods and foreign languages like Wade-Giles romanization should be forbidden, which aimed to regulate the transliteration of geographical names. The Chinese phonetic alphabet has been established as the only norm for the international romanization of Chinese geographical names. For example, the translation of "北京" has transited from Peking to Beijing, and the translation of "南京" from Nanking to Nanjing. In 2000, the National People's Congress announced the law "The People's Republic of China on National Common Languages and Characters", whose 18th article clearly stipulated that the National Common Languages and Characters shall use *Chinese Phonetic Alphabet Scheme* as a tool for spelling and pronunciation. *Chinese Phonetic Alphabet Scheme* served as a unified standard for Chinese personal names, geographical names and Roman alphabet spelling in Chinese documents, which shall be used in areas where Chinese characters are inconvenient or impossible to use [2].

According to the research survey, there are no any laws and regulations that have been issued on the standard of English translation of geographical names in Zhangjiajie so far. It is one of the most important reasons for the disorder in English translation. Thus, the author searched all relevant articles via CNKI with "translation of geographical names" as the subject, totaling 314 articles, all of which were Chinese documents and none of them were foreign documents. Figure 1 will show more details. From the quantitative analysis of published articles, obviously, there were only a few articles before 2006. From then on, more and more scholars put efforts into this field and 34 articles were published in 2015. From the perspective of research contents, scholars mainly focus on the criteria, strategies and principles of translation in geographical names. Also, some articles refer to the translation of geographical names and teaching, the construction of city image and the promotion of cultural soft power. Figure 2 will show more details. A series of fruitful research results benefit the public society including papers, monographs, Chinese-English public signs dictionaries, etc. From the perspective of fund projects, the number of projects of the national social science fund and the natural science fund are 7 and 1 respectively. Meanwhile, there are only a few studies on the English translation of Zhangjiajie's geographical names, to be more precise, the author found out that only one master's thesis has mentioned translation of geographical names on Zhangjiajie via CNKI, focusing mainly on the translation of scenic spots.

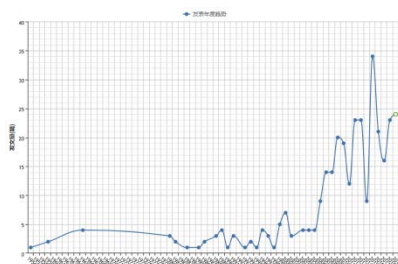


Figure. 1 Published articles

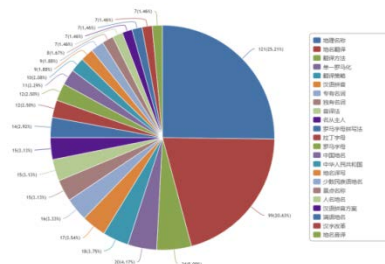


Figure. 2 Search contents

3. Skopostheorie and translation principles

Since 1970s, functionalist translation theory firstly emerged in Germany, which regards translation as an intentional communicative activity whose core is the purpose/function of translation. Functional translation theory mainly consists of four parts: Catherine Rice's Text Typology, Hans Vermeer's Skopostheorie, Jaster Manterey's Theory of Translational Action and Christian Nord's Function plus Loyalty. Based on the Karl Burhler's Linguistic Functionalism, Reiss connects the three functions of language with the corresponding text types and divides them into three text types: informative text, expressive/expressive text, and operational/inspirational/vocative text [3]. Newmark further explains three types of texts in *About Translation*. He thinks that "The function of expressive texts is to express the author's personality; the function of informative texts is to state objective facts; and the function of appealing texts is to affect readers [4]." Obviously, the translation of geographical names is typically informative texts, which are mainly used to provide tourists at home and abroad with the necessary information guide and indicative function.

Hans Vermeer considers that Skopos rule should be followed as the first principle for any translation as translation strategies and specific translation methods are determined by the purpose of translation. Actually, Skopos is a Greek word with the meaning of "purpose, function and intention". According to the theory that translation strategies are determined by the purpose of translation, translation should get rid of the form and content of the original text. In other words, the translators should give priority to the expected function of the target text and carefully choose expressions that conform to the cultural concepts and the comprehension category of the target language, as a result, it enables the target text to fulfill its expected function and purpose in the context of the target language. One scholars put forward six methods about how to translate geographical names in his book named *The Dialectics of English Translation of Chinese Geographical Names*. They were including following the customs and understanding, dividing into administrative names and geographical names, systematicness and isolation, context and separate language use, history and reality, cultural identity of the native language and language habits of the target language [5]. According to the Skopostheorie, the

author puts forward the following translation principles for the different classification of geographical names in Zhangjiajie: the principle of unification, convention and economic efficiency as well as the principle of name subordinated to owner.

4. Translation principles and specific examples

According to Xiaoning Yuan, There are two basic functions of geographical names and their English translations. For one thing, it serves as the function of distinguishing, prompting and showing historical and cultural meanings for another, it is used to display the superiority of Chinese characters and cultures [6]. Since the end of 2017, the author, as one of the core members of the drafting group of the project "Guidelines for English Translations of Tourism Related Public Signs in Zhangjiajie", has set up a research team to visit streets and alleys in person. The group interviewed about 100 foreign tourists from the United States, Britain, Australia, India and other parts of the world through questionnaires face to face. They were required to fill in questionnaires on the spot and put forward suggestions for unsatisfactory translations. According to the national laws and regulations as well as the spirit of documents, the author combines with the previous research basis and results from questionnaire, making the following elaboration on the translation of some names in Zhangjiajie.

4.1 Principle of unification

The principle of unification emphasizes that all English translations of geographical names such as scenic spot names, organization names, streets and alleys, etc. should be consistent or single whenever and wherever we use, including capital letter, singular and plural numbers and punctuation symbols. Only in this way, can we avoid any ambiguity and confusion as much as possible. In the process of investigation, the author found that it was very common for one scenic spot name to be translated several versions. The translation of proper and general names is freely translated without following unified rules, which leads to inaccurate information transmission and loss of the cultural connotation of the source language.

For example, "杨家界" has been translated into three versions including "Yangjiajie Highland", "Yangjiajie Scenic Area" and "Yangjiajie Scenic Zone". The author says that if we just refer to "杨家界景区", it is better to choose the second translation. If we simply refer to a geographical location, it will be better to translate it into "Yangjiajie" instead of further translating "界", which shows no practical significance. Also, there are more than two translations of "十里画廊" like "Ten-mile Gallery", "Ten-mile Natural Gallery" and "ten-mile gallery". Actually, "十里画廊" is nothing but a name of a scenic spot rather than a real gallery. It is investigated that "十里" does not represent the actual length, let alone the so-called natural Gallery in the second translation version. Therefore, the author suggests that it might

be better to directly translate it into "Shilihualang" with Chinese Pinyin, which not only ensures its directional function, but preserves its cultural characteristics as well.

Similarly, according to the statistical table of administrative divisions of Zhangjiajie City, the city is divided into two districts and double counties——Yongding District and Wulingyuan District, Cili County and Sangzhi County. Besides, there are too many streets, towns and villages, etc. In terms of those geographical name that does not mark out its specific location or property and ends with the words"坪", "垭", "溪", "桥", "潭", "湖", "湾", if necessary, it should be translated its additional meaning like district, street, town or village. On the whole, we can follow the method of transliterating proper names and general names with free translation instead of arbitrarily translating the former. That means the translation can be standardized and unified to the greatest extent. Table 1 will show more examples about the principle of unification.

Table 1 Examples about the principle of unification

Number	Source text	Suggesting translation	Note
1	永定区	Yongding District	...
2	慈利县	Cili County	...
3	大庸桥街道	Dayongqiao Street	...
4	教字垭	Jiaoziya Town	One of the towns in Yongding District
5	桥自湾	Qiaoziwan Town	One of the towns in Sangzhi County
6	中湖	Zhonghu Township	One of the townships in Wulingyuan District
7	青鱼潭村	Qingyutan Village	One of the villages in Dayongqiao Street

4.2 Principle of convention

As we can see, the principle of convention means some geographical names have been widely used in the society for a long time and accepted by most people. Meng Mei has pointed out that the principle of convention refers to a translation name generally accepted by society does not conform to the principle of Chinese Pinyin. If necessary, it can remain original translation or revise it according to the standard translation issued by the state. Moreover, the conventional nomenclature and social habits are often formed by yeas of social practice [7]. In other words, some translations simply adopt existing ones. For instance, the well-known "黄河", "长江" and "长城" are respectively translated into "the Yellow River", "the Yangtze River" and "the Great Wall". Obviously, the river with yellow color has nothing to do with Huanghe, the Yangtze River is only a small part of the Changjiang, nor does the Great Wall refer to Changcheng. Actually, above translations are completely different from the original meanings. To some extent, they may violate the other translation principles, but it is no necessary to translate them again currently since they are well known and widely accepted by the public,

Similarly, the word "张家界" has been transliterated directly into "Zhangjiajie", which has been widely accepted by the outside world for many years. There are two

versions about the name of Zhangjiajie. The first is recorded in the preface of *Zhang's Genealogy* in the fourth year of Chongzhen in the Ming Dynasty in 1631. The second is a legend that Zhang Liang who served as an officer in the Western Han Dynasty lived in seclusion for a long time until he passed away and was buried in the Shuiraosimen, so this place was called Zhangjiajie many years ago. Given the long history and rich culture of Zhangjiajie, we should adopt the principle of "name subordinated to owner" and translate the cultural connotation behind it. Another example is that "天门山景区" has been translated into "Tianmen Mountain Scenic Area" and been used widely since it was rated as 5A level and enjoyed a good reputation at home and abroad. Out of practical purpose, it might be better to maintain the original translation people are accustomed to.

4.3 Principle of name subordinated to owner

The principle of name subordinate to owner refers to one of the principles that should be followed in the translation of proper names including personal and geographical names, moreover, the principle is applicable to both Chinese-English and English-Chinese translations. Generally speaking, the English translation of Chinese place names is based on the pronunciation and spelling of Chinese characters. For those ethnic minority areas, we should adopt its special pronunciation of minority languages to translate. Phonetic alphabet transliteration spelling should retain its original name of Chinese phonetically in the target language [8]. The original English names of foreign enterprises and institutions in Zhangjiajie should be used as before without any change. For example, "阳光酒店" and "韦斯特大酒店" are respectively translated into "Sunshine Hotel" and "Best Western", which can be directly followed by their existing names. It is no point re-translating without special circumstances. At the same time, place names with special cultural background and historical origin should be translated by Chinese Pinyin + generic names, such as "Zhang Liang's Tomb" should be translated into "Zhang Liang's Tomb", "Military Academy of Painting" should be translated into "Jun Sheng Hua Yuan". Therefore, "Military Academy" refers to the famous painter Li Junsheng, and "Flower Academy" refers to the display. Where his works are written, the author suggests translating them into "Li Junsheng's Art Exhibition", which not only respects the writers, but also helps foreign tourists to better understand their cultural connotations.

4.4 Principle of economic efficiency

The principle of economic efficiency means minimizing unnecessary annotations or explanatory information on the premise of ensuring the faithfulness of the translation, especially for those that appear on the signboards should be short enough. In other words, we simply ensure that the basic information can be conveyed accurately. Table 2 will show more examples about the principle of economic efficiency. Xinsheng Niu argued that in order to keep the dynamic balance between cultural heterogeneity and informativeness, the translation principle of

tourist attractions should focus on preserving their cultural values and identifying functions, meanwhile, pay attention to transmitting necessary information [9].

Table 2 Examples about the principle of economic efficiency

Number	Source text	Original translation	Suggesting translation
1	水绕四门	Stream Winding Four Gates (Shuiraoximen)	Shuiraoximen
2	半脸八戒	Banlianzhubajie (Half Face of Zhu Bajie is one of the main character in the novel The Pilgrimage to the West)	Banlianzhubajie
3	定海神针	Iron Rod of the Eastern Sea	Dinghaishenzhen
4	千里相会	One couple meeting from afar	Qianlixianghui
5	仙女照镜	Fairy Lady Looking into the Mirror	Xiannvzhaojing

5. Conclusion

To conclude, where there are no fixed or absolutely right translation methods, there are just more suitable answers. Different people hold different opinions and wise people have different opinions. In terms of translation of geographical names, there is an arduous and long way to go before a unified translation method is put into practice. Neither free translation nor transliteration can completely solve the existing problem. For scenic areas and spots, we should fully consider their original cultural factors, mysterious legends and informative functions rather than freely translate the proper name, otherwise, it is the consequence as an old saying goes "One general lose both his wife and the whole army". The same is true for geographical names of administrative divisions. It is particularly important to find out the geographical space and scope they refer to before we start to translate. If necessary, we can add the translation of general name to make its information more complete. Above translation principles discussed in this paper may not be comprehensive, since there is no a unified standard for the translation of geographical names in Zhangjiajie. The above points may be useful for reference, especially the principle of unification which is quite effective in solving the current confusion in translation.

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Research on standardization of bilingual signs in public service areas from the perspective of Skopostheorie: A case study of English translation of geographical names of scenic areas and spots in Zhangjiajie

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