



# A Corpus-based Study on C-E Translation of Street Names

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## Abstract

Street names, as important geographical identifiers, carry rich historical and cultural significance. Translation norms help ensure consistency and accuracy in translations, as well as enhance the efficiency and understanding of cross-cultural communication. With the development of globalization and the tourism industry, standardization of street name translation can not only promote international communication and cultural understanding but also enhance the urban image. This study, by establishing a parallel corpus for analysis, focuses on the C-E translation of street names in cities. Through analyzing lexical density, word length, and high-frequency vocabulary, it explores the linguistic characteristics and current status of C-E translation of street names. Furthermore, it explores the translation standardization of street names translation, including the norm of consistency, distinctiveness, and structural uniformity from the perspective of translation norms. It is hoped the corpus-based study on norms of C-E translation of street names may provide valuable references for C-E translation of urban street names.

## Keywords

Corpus; street names; C-E translation; translation norms

## 1. Introduction

With the deepening of globalization and international communication, the ongoing rise of the “China Travel” phenomenon has attracted an increasing number of foreigners and tourists to explore China’s economy, culture, and market. In this condition, the translation of street names has become increasingly important for navigation. Accurate translation of street names not only enhances travel convenience and safety but also fosters understanding and communication between different cultures, showcasing local historical and cultural characteristics, thereby enhancing the international image and attractiveness of cities. However, it was discovered through research that there are still numerous issues with C-E translation of street names associated with travel, such as inconsistencies and inaccuracies in certain translations, irregularity of translation methods, lack of uniformity in structural order and a lack of unified norms. These problems not only affect the orderly image of urban civilization but also cause significant inconvenience for foreign visitors. It is essential to address these issues promptly to enhance the convenience and safety of travel in international communication. Therefore, the C-E translation norms of street names are particularly crucial, they involve the unification and standardization of street names to ensure consistency and accuracy across different languages (Fu, Y., 2007). Previous studies on street name translations have mainly focused on analyzing the structure of street names to propose standardization strategies. This paper selects C-E translation of street names from cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Haikou and Shenzhen as research materials, establishes a parallel corpus, analyzes the linguistic characteristics of street names, and explores the C-E translation of street names and its standardization from the perspective of translation norms.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Translation of Street Names

Generally, the main components of street names include proper nouns, common nouns, and attributive terms. Proper nouns usually appear at the beginning of the street names, serving as the primary identifier for different streets. Common nouns typically come at the end of the street names and include terms such as “road,” “street,” “avenue,” “lane,” “highway,” “expressway,” “path,” and “alley.” Descriptive terms mainly consist of directional indicators like “east,” “west,” “south,” and “north,” as well as numerals such as “first,” “second,” and “third” (Qiao, J. K., & Yu, G. F., 2016). The translation of street names involves converting the names of roads and streets from one language to another, allowing speakers of different languages to understand and use them. This process entails not only translation methods and structural order but also takes into account cultural backgrounds, regional characteristics, and linguistic habits to ensure that the translation is accurate, comprehensible, and compliant with local usage norms.

In previous studies, scholars have typically focused on the translation of street names in specific cities or fields. For example, based on the study of the English signage for street names in Beijing and Guangdong Province, Xiao Zijian proposed a solution tailored to the specific circumstances of Anshun City, which involves marking all street names with their Pinyin representations alongside English translations, while also correcting some translation errors (Xiao, Z. J., 2018). Lin Yuanbiao applied translation convention theory to explore the translation norms of street names under language policy, asserting that the core focus lies in the structure of the names (Lin, Y. B., 2008). He further employed the method of “name analysis” to examine the fundamental components of street names and, in conjunction with existing translation methods, outlined potential translation norms, and he explored the C-E translation of street names in Shanghai from the perspective of name composition (Lin, Y. B., 2009). Meanwhile, Lin Yanli focused on the issues encountered in the translation of urban attractions and street names, as well as proposed solutions to these challenges (Lin, Y. L., 2008). These studies mainly concentrate on the analysis of the structure and current state of street names translation, proposing corresponding solutions. However, research on the linguistic characteristics of street names remains insufficient. Street names serve not only as geographical identifiers but also as significant carriers of cultural identity. An in-depth analysis can enhance our understanding of local culture and its transmission in the context of globalization. Therefore, this study aims to construct a parallel corpus to analyze the linguistic features of street names, specifically focusing on aspects such as lexical density, word length, and high-frequency vocabulary. This analysis will help identify issues in the C-E translation of street names and further explore the translation norms, with the goal of offering guidance and insights for street names translation in cross-cultural communication.

### 2.2 Translation Norms

The proponents of the Poly system theory believed that the social norms of the target language culture system and the literary conventions shaped the aesthetic perspectives of the translator, thereby influencing their choices in translation (Edwin, 1993). Toury defined “norms” as a category for descriptive analysis of translation, representing the shared values and concepts within a specific target language community, such as what was considered right or wrong and appropriate or inappropriate, which were translated into principles of correct and suitable translation behavior in particular contexts (Toury, 1980). Chesterman argued that people’s understanding of translation norms was not singular; rather, consensus on translation norms led to the establishment of such norms. He categorized these translation norms into two types: “expectancy norms” and “professional norms” (Chesterman, 1997). Expectancy norm reflects the target language audience’s anticipation of translation quality, including accuracy, fluency, and cultural appropriateness. This implies that the translators must take into account the readers’ understanding to ensure that the translation aligns with their expectations. Professional norm can be categorized into accountability norm, communication norm, and relation norm. Accountability norm emphasizes the translators should meet the client’s requirements to ensure that the translation meets specific intentions. Communication norm focuses on promoting effective communication through translation, influenced by social and cultural contexts. Relation norm emphasizes effective conversion between different languages. In the process of street names translation, it is necessary to consider cultural differences and contextual factors to ensure the localization and intelligibility of names, ultimately ensuring that the translation is not only accurate but also comprehensible to the foreigners, thus creating a more informative and friendlier image for the local places.

Through a review of relevant literature, it is found that previous studies have predominantly focused on specific literary works or particular types of texts, such as scientific documents and business contracts, with little attention given to the translation norms for daily directional signs like street names. This paper primarily focuses on the current state of C-E translation of street names in everyday life, aiming to propose corresponding translation norms to enhance consistency and standardization in translations, thereby preventing misinterpretations and communication barriers arising from translation errors.

### 2.3 Standardization of Street Names Translation

The standardization of street names translations is a crucial part of ensuring the effective operation of urban transportation systems and facilitating smooth international interactions. Standardization encompasses not only the accuracy of translations but also a comprehensive consideration of cultural context, linguistic habits, and geographical features. By establishing unified translation norms, confusion caused by improper translations can be minimized, thereby enhancing the navigation experience for both foreign visitors and residents. Additionally, standardized street names translations contribute to strengthening the city's image and increasing its international recognizability.

Through keyword searches, it has found that researches on the standardization of C-E translation of street names are relatively scarce, with more studies focusing on traffic signage and public information. Sun Kaijian's comparative study of local street names translation norms revealed that the majority of local standards employ the "generic name translation" method, which is inconsistent with national regulations and mandatory national standards (Sun, K. J., 2018). Meanwhile, Qiao Jun-kai and Yu Gao-feng took the publication of the Guidelines for the C-E Translation of Street Names in Shanghai as an opportunity to explore the translation standards and current status of street names in Shanghai (Qiao, J. L., & Yu, G. F., 2016). The two aforementioned studies primarily compare the current state of C-E translation of street names with the translation guidelines issued by the country but do not propose a unified norm.

In further literature searches, it can be seen that most studies related to "transportation translation norms" primarily focuses on rail transit, public transportation signage, and specific translation theories. For instance, Zhang Li conducted field visits to transportation hubs in Jinhua City, Zhejiang Province, including train stations, long-distance bus stations, airports, and bus stations, she classified and analyzed the types of errors found in the C-E translation of public signage and offered suggestions for revisions based on the Norms for C-E Translation in Public Service Areas, aiming to promote the standardization of public transportation signage translations in Jinhua City (Zhang, L., 2019). Ma Yu and Cao Youxuan conducted empirical research addressing the accuracy and standardization of C-E translations of public transportation signage in Wuxi, utilizing ecological translation theory (Ma, Y. & Cao, Y. X., 2019). From the perspective of ecological translation, Jin Min employed empirical methods to analyze the C-E translation of public signage in Lanzhou's rail transit and provided recommendations for improving these translations (Jin, M., 2020). Although transportation signage is common in urban life, street names are equally crucial for people's navigation. It was discovered that there are still errors in the current C-E translation of street names on relevant city transportation websites, negatively impacting the city's image. Therefore, establishing a unified and standardized set of norms for the C-E translation of street names is particularly important. This paper will analyze the linguistic characteristics of street names based on the corpus, thereby studying their C-E translation norms.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Corpus Construction

Streets are the lifelines of a city, especially in terms of transportation. Street names assist people in clearly identifying and locating themselves, thereby facilitating travel and providing essential information. Ensuring the standardization of street names translation is crucial for fulfilling their guiding function and enhancing the international image of both the city and the country.

It is noted that Beijing, Haikou, Shenzhen, and Shanghai represent different regional cultures and levels of economic development in China. As the capital city, Beijing is rich in historical and cultural significance. In contrast, Shanghai showcases a modern and international image as a global metropolis. Haikou, the capital of Hainan Province, boasts a unique tropical charm and abundant tourism resources, while Shenzhen stands as the frontier of reform and opening up, symbolizing innovation and vitality. This article selects the C-E translation of street names from these four cities as a corpus for statistical analysis. The diversity among these translations provides valuable case studies for exploring translation norms within different cultural contexts.

This study gathers data from relevant websites and saves it as a TXT file. First, the corpus is cleaned using EmEditor and followed by alignment with Tmxmall. Subsequently, this study utilizes the Corpus Word Parser to perform word segmentation and part-of-speech tagging on the collected corpus. After establishing the corpus, this study uses Word Smith and AntConc for data statistics to analyze the linguistic characteristics of street names and the current state of the C-E translation, which aims to explore the standardization of street name translations.

## 3.2 Corpus Analysis

### 3.2.1 Lexical Density

The overall characteristics of lexical density in a corpus text typically include tokens, types, the type/token ratio, and the standard type/token ratio. Here, “tokens” refer to the total number of words in the corpus, while “types” indicate the number of unique tokens (Zhang, X. R., Xing, Y. L., Zhang, P., et al., 2022). The type/token ratio is directly proportional to the richness of the text’s vocabulary, as illustrated in Table 1.

**Table 1. Basic Statistical Data of the Street Names Translations Corpus**

Names	Number
tokens	945
types	412
TTR	43.6

From this, it can be concluded that the lexical density of street names translation is relatively low, with a high frequency of repeated words. Although street name is a type of applied text that should be easily understandable and avoid complex vocabulary, excessive repetition can make it difficult to distinguish the characteristics of different streets, potentially leading to errors or deviations in street signage. Therefore, during the C-E translation process, we follow the norm of primarily using transliteration for proper nouns, ensuring that the distinctiveness of the street features is maintained while keeping the vocabulary simple and easy to understand.

### 3.2.2 Word Length

Word length refers to the length of words in the corpus (Lu, X. Y. & Zhang, Y. Q., 2023). This study used WordSmith to calculate the average word length of street names translation as 5.52, with a standard deviation of 2.91. This indicates that the C-E translation of street names tend to be relatively short. Most translation should aim to be concise, avoiding excessive length, except for some original street names that are longer.

In our daily process of translating street names, it is essential to adjust according to the length of the original names. Longer names often contain more geographical, historical, or cultural information, necessitating careful translation to ensure that the original meaning is fully conveyed. However, overly long names can hinder fluency in English, affecting navigation and recognition. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the impact of word length on readability and memorability during translation, simplifying and refining expressions whenever possible to enhance the practicality of street names. Shorter names are typically more acceptable to the public and contribute to more efficient traffic directions. Thus, striking a reasonable balance between word length and the completeness of information conveyed is vital in the C-E translation of street names.

### 3.2.3 High-frequency Vocabulary

High-frequency vocabulary refers to vocabularies that appears frequently in a corpus. By analyzing these high-frequency vocabularies, we can gain insights into the common terms used in the C-E translation of street names, providing a practical basis for discussing the principles of such translations. This study utilized AntConc for the frequency analysis, and some of the data is presented in Table 2.

It can be observed that the top 20 vocabulary items primarily consist of common nouns and attributive terms, making the consistency of their C-E translations crucial. It is also found that terms like “road” and its abbreviation “rd,” as well as “street” and its abbreviation “st,” essentially refer to the same concept. However, within the same city, some names use the abbreviation while others use the full form, leading to inconsistencies and a lack of standardization in the C-E translations. Additionally, it is important to standardize the order and structure among attributive terms, proper nouns, and common nouns to ensure that the translation is more harmonious and standardized.

**Table 2. Summary of High-frequency Vocabulary for Street Names Translations**

Rank	Words	Frequency	Rank	Words	Frequency
1	road	115	11	middle	11
2	rd	97	12	th	11
3	st	48	13	west	10
4	route	31	14	avenue	8
5	boulevard	24	15	east	8
6	north	22	16	nd	7
7	south	22	17	a	6
8	rue	18	18	of	6
9	bridge	12	19	street	6
10	ave	11	20	alley	5

## 4. Findings and Discussions

Through the analysis of the aforementioned corpus and observations from real-life situations, it identified several issues with the current C-E translations of street names, which include inconsistencies and inaccuracies in certain translations, irregularity of translation methods, lack of uniformity in structural order, and a lack of unified norms. To address these problems, it proposes the following reference translation norms based on the corpus analysis:

### 4.1 The Norm of Consistency for Attributive Terms and Common Nouns

Translation norms are a set of principles designed to ensure the quality and consistency of translations. At the national level, standards such as the *Regulations for the Setting of Urban Street Name Signs* (GB/T 19180-2016) provide basic requirements for the translation of urban street names. Additionally, some local governments and cities have developed their own translation norms based on regional characteristics to better suit local cultural and historical contexts. We can observe that some C-E translations of street names still exhibit inconsistencies between attributive terms and common nouns. To address this issue, improvements should be made. For common nouns like “Road”, “Street”, “Avenue”, “Alley”, “Highway”, “Expressway”, “Elevated Road” or “Elevated Highway”, “Ring Road”, and “Side Road”, we should strive for consistency. Additionally, the translation methods for attributive terms and common nouns should remain consistent, generally favoring transliteration. Adhering to translation standards is crucial for ensuring the accuracy and consistency of street name translations. Unified translations reduce misunderstandings, making it easier for foreign tourists and residents to navigate, thus enhancing travel convenience. Therefore, these standards are not only an important part of urban management but also a foundation for promoting international communication and cultural exchange. Translators should strictly follow these standards in practice to maintain consistency in the translation of street names across different regions.

### 4.2 The Norm of Distinctiveness for Proper Nouns

Through corpus analysis and daily surveys, it is found that the majority of street names adopt transliteration, which allows foreign friends to clearly distinguish between different street names. For instance, “Beijing Road”, “Fuhua Road”, and “Hairui Back Road”. Since some of the proper nouns in Shanghai’s street names are derived from personal names or the names of cities and provinces across the country, certain street names do not use transliteration but instead retain their distinctiveness. For example, “Avenue Eduard VII” and “Rue Massenet”. This translation method not only helps foreigners identify the streets but also provides insight into the related cultural background.

The methods for the C-E translation of street names are crucial for effective communication and cultural exchange. Distinctive translations not only help foreigners quickly understand geographical locations but also convey the cultural connotations and historical backgrounds behind the names. Effectively employing various translation strategies can ensure that names align with linguistic conventions while retaining their uniqueness, thereby enhancing people’s

sense of identity with the city. Choosing appropriate English translation methods is not only about language conversion; it also serves as a crucial bridge for cultural exchange.

### 4.3 The Norm of Structural Order Uniformity

Through corpus text analysis, this study has found that, in most cases, street names follow an order of proper nouns + attributive terms + common nouns, such as “Zhanlanguan South Rd” and “Youyongchang North Rd.” However, some street names do not adhere to this order, which can create an appearance of inconsistency and lack of standardization, potentially leading to confusion among foreign visitors. Therefore, during the translation process, it is essential for translators to pay attention to maintaining a uniform structural order to achieve aesthetic and standardized outcomes. A consistent structural order can enhance the coherence of translations, making street names from different regions more easily recognizable and understandable in international communications, which reduces confusion, ensures that tourists can accurately locate their destinations, improves the city’s image, strengthens external perceptions of professionalism, promotes tourism development, and further fosters international exchange and cooperation, ultimately contributing to economic growth.

## 5. Conclusion

This article uses a selection of street names from Beijing, Guangzhou, Haikou, and Shenzhen as data to establish a parallel corpus. Data analysis is conducted using Word Smith and AntConc, focusing on three aspects: lexical density, word length, and high-frequency vocabulary. The findings indicate that the C-E translations of street names exhibit low lexical density, limited vocabulary richness, and short word length. High-frequency vocabulary primarily consists of common nouns and attributive terms, with a significant amount of repeated vocabulary. Some translations are inconsistent and lack standardization, leading to issues such as mixed translation methods and inaccuracies. To address these problems, the following recommendations are proposed: the norm of consistency for attributive terms and common nouns, the norm of distinctiveness for proper nouns and the norm of structural order uniformity. A unified, distinctive and standardized translation of street names not only enhances the convenience for tourists but also enriches their understanding and awareness of the destination. Clear street names enable tourists to better plan their itineraries, helping them avoid getting lost or confused. Furthermore, effective translation reflects the city’s culture and history, contributing to an improved urban image and attracting more international visitors.

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