

TRANSLATING ONOMASTIC UNITS IN HEMINGWAY'S WORKS: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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Abstract

This paper investigates the challenges and strategies involved in translating onomastic units—names of people, places, and cultural references—in the literary works of Ernest Hemingway. These units, rich in symbolic and cultural meaning, are essential to Hemingway's concise style and narrative depth. The study explores how onomastic features in *The Old Man and the Sea*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *The Sun Also Rises* are transferred into multiple languages, including Uzbek, Russian, Spanish, and French. Key translation dilemmas—semantic loss, cultural untranslatability, and the translator's role in maintaining fidelity—are critically examined. Through comparative analysis, the paper highlights how translator decisions affect reader interpretation and the preservation of Hemingway's minimalist literary vision.

Keywords: Onomastics, Translation Studies, Hemingway, Proper Names, Cultural References, Minimalism, Narrative Identity, Cross-cultural Transfer, Symbolism, Equivalence

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway, born in 1899 in Oak Park, Illinois, emerged as one of the most influential literary figures of the 20th century. His prose, often celebrated for its brevity and impact, is deeply intertwined with real-world settings, cultural landscapes, and character psychology. Names—of people, places, and institutions—play a critical role in shaping his literary universe. Hemingway's global travels and journalistic background further enriched his writing with authentic onomastic units that carry narrative and symbolic weight. However, transferring these names into another language poses numerous challenges. Names function not only as identifiers but as vessels of cultural, historical, and emotional resonance. The central aim of this paper is to analyze how these elements are translated into four major languages—Uzbek, Russian, French, and Spanish—and how such translations influence textual integrity and interpretive possibilities.

Method

This study draws from both onomastic theory and translation studies, adopting a **qualitative comparative framework**. Three of Hemingway's works—*The Old Man and the Sea*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *The Sun Also Rises*—serve as the corpus for analysis. Selected onomastic units fall into five categories:

1. Anthroponyms – e.g., Santiago, Jake Barnes, Robert Jordan

2. Toponyms – e.g., Pamplona, Paris, Madrid, Gulf Stream
3. Ergonyms – e.g., Café Iruña, Guardia Civil
4. Theonyms – e.g., Santiago (as Saint James), biblical echoes
5. Cultural Terms – e.g., aficionado, torero, comrade

Key translation strategies, adapted from Peter Newmark, include:

1. Transference (preserving original form)
2. Naturalization
3. Cultural substitution
4. Functional equivalence
5. Descriptive translation
6. Footnoting and glossing
7. The analysis compares the original and translated names across the target languages and evaluates the implications of each choice for reader engagement, cultural transfer, and narrative function.

Result

A number of trends emerged from the comparative analysis:

Anthroponomy

Character names are largely preserved across languages. “Santiago” remains unchanged in all translations due to its religious and cultural familiarity in Spanish-speaking and Orthodox countries. However, in Uzbek, some editions gloss the name as “Aziz Santiago,” subtly pointing to its saintly connotation. “Jake Barnes” and “Robert Jordan” are also retained in all versions, but in Russian and Uzbek, the lack of cultural familiarity with these names may reduce the psychological resonance or social inference.

Toponyms

Place names such as Pamplona and Madrid are preserved but often without explanatory context. In Uzbek translations, these names are sometimes transliterated (e.g., “Pamplona” becomes “Pamlona”), potentially distorting pronunciation and reader recognition. In French and Spanish translations, these place names blend naturally due to cultural proximity. However, the absence of footnotes or contextualization in Uzbek or Russian texts may reduce the significance of geographical or historical references (e.g., bullfighting traditions in Pamplona).

Ergonyms and Institutional Terms

Terms like Guardia Civil and Café Iruña pose significant challenges. The Russian version of *The Sun Also Rises* often simplifies Guardia Civil to “militsiya,” stripping it of its Spanish historical specificity. Uzbek versions use either transliteration or general substitutions like “mahalliy militsiya,” losing the Franco-era undertones embedded in the original term. Café Iruña is sometimes translated as “Iruña kafesi” in Uzbek and preserved in Spanish, but Russian editions often omit the name altogether or replace it with “кафе в Памплоне.”

Cultural Terms and Theonyms

The term *aficionado* is heavily loaded with cultural specificity. In French it is often footnoted or retained with explanation; in Uzbek, it may be translated as “*ishqiboz*” or “*muxlis*,” which weakens its connection to Spanish bullfighting culture. Similarly, *torero* becomes “*buqa jangchisi*” (bullfighter), which is descriptive but loses stylistic nuance.

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago’s name evokes Saint James, protector of Spain. Russian and French translations typically retain the name and rely on the reader’s cultural literacy. In Uzbek, this dual reference is often lost unless footnoted.

DISCUSSION

The translation of onomastic units in Hemingway’s literature is more than a linguistic task—it is an act of cultural negotiation. Names in Hemingway’s minimalist framework are often the only clues to deeper character traits, geopolitical contexts, or emotional subtext. Altering or simplifying them reduces interpretive depth.

Reader Reception and Cultural Literacy

Hemingway assumes a culturally literate reader, particularly familiar with European and American geographies and customs. In non-Western contexts, this assumption falters. Translators must either provide context through paratextual elements (footnotes, glossaries) or risk reader alienation. In Uzbek editions of *A Farewell to Arms*, the name “*Frederic Henry*” lacks cultural familiarity, which weakens character empathy unless compensated with additional narrative context.

Translator’s Visibility

The dilemma between **domestication** and **foreignization** is central here. Translators who “domesticate” names risk erasing cultural uniqueness, while those who “foreignize” may burden the reader. The balance is delicate. In the French version of *The Sun Also Rises*, names and places are preserved with stylistic fidelity, supported by intertextual cultural knowledge. In contrast, Uzbek and Russian editions often require explanatory expansion or simplification, drawing the translator into a co-creative role.

Onomastic Density in Hemingway’s Minimalism

Given Hemingway’s stylistic economy, every name carries symbolic weight. Removing or altering a name alters the texture of the text. For example, replacing *aficionado* with “*fan*” or “*supporter*” may erase its nuanced social elitism and traditionalism embedded in Spanish culture.

Implicit Narratives Through Naming

Names like Santiago or Jordan carry biblical undertones. When these are translated without reference, the story loses theological or mythic resonance. *The Old Man and the Sea* reads differently when Santiago is just “an old fisherman” rather than a Christ-like figure engaged in spiritual trial.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that onomastic units in Hemingway’s fiction are central to narrative meaning and stylistic effect. Their translation demands a nuanced understanding of cultural

semantics, literary function, and reader expectation. While names like Santiago or Pamplona may seem straightforward, their deeper resonance requires careful consideration.

Translators working on Hemingway's texts must be sensitive not only to the linguistic aspects of names but also to their symbolic, cultural, and emotional roles. As shown through comparative analysis across four languages, strategies such as transference, glossing, and contextual adaptation offer different levels of fidelity and interpretive depth. Ultimately, the challenge lies in preserving the iceberg beneath the surface: the unseen narrative depth that Hemingway so carefully embedded in each word, including each name. The translator's goal, then, is not merely to carry over letters, but to carry over layers of meaning.

Future work could examine audiovisual adaptations and subtitles of Hemingway's works, or explore reader responses in different linguistic communities to assess how translated names influence emotional and symbolic reception.

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