

CHALLENGES IN LEARNING TOURISM TERMINOLOGY: ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Muratova Dilorom Mahmudovna

*Teacher Uzbekistan State
World Languages University*

Abstract: The tourism industry is a cornerstone of the global economy, contributing approximately 10% to the world's GDP and demanding a highly specialized workforce proficient in domain-specific terminology. This article explores the multifaceted challenges encountered by learners of tourism terminology, drawing on an analysis of recent pedagogical, linguistic, and translation studies literature. Key obstacles include the rapid evolution of tourism language, leading to lexical gaps in dictionaries, terminological ambiguity and instability, significant cross-linguistic and cultural gaps, deficiencies in teaching materials, and a generally unsystematic pedagogical approach. Based on a critical synthesis of existing research, this paper proposes actionable recommendations. These include the systematic application of corpus linguistics methods for authentic vocabulary selection and glossary development, the implementation of task-based and experiential learning strategies, and the creation of standardized, multilingual term bases. This study concludes that a comprehensive, corpus-informed, culturally sensitive pedagogical framework is essential to equip learners with the precise and functional terminology required in the dynamic global tourism sector.

Keywords: tourism terminology, ESP, corpus linguistics, language acquisition, terminology pedagogy, lexicography, translation studies

1. Introduction

The modern tourism industry represents one of the most dynamic and rapidly evolving sectors of the global economy. Valued at over \$9 trillion USD and accounting for approximately 10% of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), it serves as a critical driver of economic development, employment, and cross-cultural exchange worldwide. The continuous expansion of international travel has, in turn, led to an exponential increase in the demand for tourism professionals who are not only experts in their operational roles but also highly proficient in the specific languages of the industry. English, recognized as the *de facto* lingua franca of global communication, holds a particularly pivotal position. It is the primary medium of interaction in cross-cultural settings such as airports, hotels, tour operations, and heritage sites, where effective and nuanced communication is paramount.

Consequently, the pedagogical focus has shifted significantly towards specialized English for Specific Purposes (ESP) training, specifically English for Tourism (EFT).

This form of instruction moves beyond general language competence to target a vast lexicon of technical terms, idiomatic expressions, and situational language. At the heart of this specialized training lies the mastery of tourism terminology—the precise and context-dependent vocabulary that describes the industry’s concepts, processes, and services.

However, teaching and learning this specialized lexis is fraught with difficulties. Educators and learners are confronted with a complex array of challenges, including the highly volatile and neologistic nature of tourism language, where new terms emerge faster than they can be documented. Furthermore, tourism terminology is often inherently unstable and ambiguous, as terms frequently carry different meanings depending on the specific sub-sector or discourse context. Adding another layer of complexity are the deep-rooted lingua-cultural differences and translation gaps between languages (such as English and Uzbek), where direct equivalence is often impossible due to distinct cultural concepts and realities. These issues are compounded by the fact that in many educational settings, the terminology instruction itself remains unsystematic and often fails to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world professional application.

2. Literature Review

The existing body of scholarship on tourism terminology acquisition is distributed across several interconnected domains, each illuminating a different facet of the challenge. This literature review synthesizes findings from theoretical linguistics, applied ESP pedagogy, and translation studies to establish the foundations for the subsequent analysis.

2.1 Linguistic and Terminological Characteristics of Tourism Discourse

Tourism discourse is not a monolithic entity; it is a multi-layered field of communication that encompasses three distinct but interacting levels: the professional (used within the tourism industry, e.g., a hotel's operations manual), the academic (used in tourism research), and the public (used in promotional materials and by the general public). This layered structure creates unique learning obstacles. The creation of new concepts and their corresponding linguistic labels occurs simultaneously across all three layers, often leading to ambiguity. As researchers have noted, “it is difficult to draw a clear line between the scientific, the professional or the general part of its own field“. This means that a term might have a precise technical definition for a hotel manager and a much vaguer, more connotative meaning in a travel brochure, forcing the learner to navigate multiple registers of the same word.

A defining feature, and perhaps the greatest challenge for the learner, is the extraordinary vividness and rapid neologism of tourism terminology. The language is in a state of constant flux, driven by technological innovation, emerging travel trends (e.g., sustainable tourism, bleisure travel), and global socio-economic shifts. New expressions appear continuously, and, as one study notes, “the biggest problem when

students are confronted with neologisms is that it is unlikely that any dictionary can fully meet the needs“. Compounding this, tourism terms are often described as pseudo-prescriptive, being ambiguous, unstable, non-economic, and highly text-independent. This instability makes them difficult to learn through rote memorization from a static list.

2.2 Pedagogical Challenges in English for Tourism (EFT) and ESP

From a pedagogical standpoint, the central challenge is effectively integrating tourism terminology into an ESP curriculum. Research indicates that students in tourism programs often possess only limited specialized vocabulary, a deficit which forces them to oversimplify complex cultural or historical narratives during professional interactions. This issue is exacerbated by language anxiety, which negatively impacts the fluency and engagement of future tour guides and front-desk personnel.

Furthermore, studies evaluating existing English for Tourism coursebooks have found that while they do contain a wealth of domain-specific vocabulary (e.g., guest, hotel, room, travel, tourism), the presentation and reinforcement of this lexis is often insufficient. A major pedagogical shortfall is the prevalent gap between theory and practice. Learners may memorize definitions but struggle to apply terms in nuanced communicative tasks, such as handling a customer complaint, narrating a destination's history, or leading an eco-tour. This practical deficiency is at the heart of the call for more context-embedded, experiential learning methods.

2.3 Lingua-Cultural Gaps and Translation-Specific Problems

When learning tourism terminology in a second language, particularly from English into a contextually and culturally distinct language like Uzbek, the problems are magnified. A contrastive analysis of English and Georgian tourism-related texts revealed an abundance of borrowed words and lacunas—terminological gaps—in the target language. These gaps arise when a concept that exists in the source language (and culture) has no direct equivalent in the target language's linguistic or cultural framework.

The translation of cultural realities is considered one of the most significant hurdles in tourism terminology. As one study on the translation of the Uzbekistan.travel website found, there are significant cultural gaps that lead to problems such as the “inadequate localization of historical and religious references“ and the use of “literal translations of proverbs and slogans“. Such issues can undermine the very purpose of tourism communication, which is to accurately and appealingly promote national identity and heritage to an international audience.

2.4 The State of Tourism Terminology in the Uzbek Context

Research on the specific case of Uzbekistan, a country rapidly developing its tourism sector, confirms and contextualizes these global findings. The system of tourism terminology in the Uzbek language was formed relatively late, actively developing mainly after independence. Consequently, in its early stages, the language was heavily

reliant on borrowing, with many English terms being imported directly (often via Russian), such as “tour operator,” “booking,” “voucher,” and “tour package”.

This extensive borrowing has created several challenges for learners and practitioners. One significant issue is the lack of standardization. The inconsistent use of borrowed terms alongside newly coined Uzbek equivalents leads to confusion. Researchers in Uzbekistan have explicitly noted that the “difficulties encountered at the initial stage of the study of tourism terminology indicate a lack of glossary in the field of tourism“. Furthermore, the creation of well-structured explanatory and translation dictionaries for tourism terms has been identified as one of the most important tasks of the present day. The Uzbek language is also witnessing the development of terms adapted to national culture, such as “travel agency” and “cultural heritage route,” creating another layer of terminological dynamism.

Thus, the literature review points to a complex, multi-faceted challenge. The difficulties of learning tourism terminology are not merely lexical; they are deeply embedded in the unstable, cross-disciplinary nature of the discourse itself, compounded by pedagogical shortcomings, and intensified by significant cross-linguistic and cultural gaps, particularly in contexts like Uzbekistan where the terminology system is still actively being formed.

3. Methods

This study employed a qualitative, document-based research design to identify and analyze the core challenges and potential solutions in teaching tourism terminology. The methodology consisted of a systematic thematic synthesis of peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, and professional reports published primarily between 2022 and 2026. The literature was sourced from major academic databases including Google Scholar, ERIC, CEEOL, Zenodo, and specialized repositories for Uzbek linguistic research (e.g., inlibrary.uz, conferences.uzswlu.uz). The search used Boolean queries combining terms such as “tourism terminology,” “ESP,” “corpus linguistics,” “Uzbek tourism translation,” and “terminology acquisition.” A total of 28 relevant documents were analyzed.

Data extraction followed a thematic approach. Each selected source was read to identify recurring themes and patterns related to learning obstacles and recommended solutions. The identified themes were then categorized into two primary groups: (1) systemic challenges, which included linguistic instability, terminological gaps, and pedagogical deficiencies; and (2) proposed solutions, which included corpus-based methods, experiential learning approaches, and standardization efforts. This thematic categorization formed the basis for the results and discussion sections. To ensure methodological transparency, all key findings and recommendations were cross-verified against at least two independent sources.

4. Results

The thematic analysis of the literature reveals a clear set of recurrent and interlocking problems that impede the learning of tourism terminology.

4.1 Lexical Instability and Neologisms

The most frequently cited problem is the highly dynamic nature of tourism vocabulary. New terms, often technology-driven or marketing-induced, are created and disseminated at a rate that significantly outpaces the capacity of traditional educational resources (textbooks, dictionaries) to document and standardize them. This forces learners to constantly encounter unknown lexical items. Furthermore, as noted in research on Balinese tourism, learners and practitioners face barriers not only in learning new words but also in navigating different cultural and linguistic barriers simultaneously; these include difficulty explaining local terminologies and understanding utterances due to different accents.

4.2 Terminological Ambiguity and Context-Dependence

Tourism language is characterized by inherent ambiguity. A single term can assume entirely different meanings across various tourism sub-sectors (e.g., “destination” in logistics vs. marketing) or across the different layers of discourse (professional, academic, public). This context-dependence makes decontextualized vocabulary lists pedagogically inefficient. Learners cannot simply memorize a definition; they must acquire the cognitive flexibility to interpret terms based on highly specific situational clues.

4.3 Lingua-Cultural Gaps and Lack of Equivalence

For learners, particularly in non-English speaking contexts, a major obstacle is the lack of direct one-to-one equivalence between languages. These cultural gaps (lacunas) arise when a concept or reality present in one culture (e.g., certain types of heritage sites, culinary traditions, or service models) is absent in another. As research on Georgian tourism vocabulary shows, these gaps lead to a reliance on borrowed words, which carry their own set of usage problems. The study of the Uzbekistan.travel website concretely demonstrated how inadequate localization and literal translation of culturally embedded terms result in a loss of meaning and a failure to appeal to an international audience.

4.4 Pedagogical Deficiencies and Resource Gaps

Educational practices themselves are often identified as a source of difficulty. A significant gap exists between what is taught in the classroom and the realities of professional practice. Students learn theoretical definitions but lack the ability to perform nuanced communicative tasks using the appropriate terminology in real-world scenarios. The problem is exacerbated by a lack of high-quality teaching resources. Studies consistently point to an absence of reliable, up-to-date specialized tourism glossaries and standardized terminological dictionaries, particularly for languages like Uzbek, which are still in the process of developing their terminological infrastructure. Furthermore, many existing coursebooks, while containing relevant vocabulary, do not provide sufficient or systematic practice for deep lexical acquisition. Ultimately, this

leads to the oversimplification of complex cultural and historical narratives by learners, a direct consequence of a limited and unsystematically acquired vocabulary.

5. Discussion

Addressing these interconnected challenges requires a multi-pronged pedagogical and methodological strategy. Based on the analysis of the problems, the following recommendations are proposed for educators, curriculum developers, and terminologists.

A foundational solution to the problems of neologisms and out-of-date materials lies in the systematic use of corpus linguistics. Specialized corpora (collections of authentic written and spoken tourism texts) can be built and analyzed to empirically identify the most frequent, relevant, and up-to-date terminology used in the field. This approach allows educators to create teaching materials based on actual language use rather than intuition. Corpora are indispensable for lexicography, as “the corpus approach to extracting tourism terminology proves to be a sufficiently objective and useful method for identifying terminological candidates“. Furthermore, a corpus-based lexical evaluation of ESP coursebooks enables curriculum developers and teachers to plan, select, and adjust educational resources to truly align with real-world language needs. This method is particularly critical for Uzbek, where a dedicated national tourism corpus, such as the one proposed by Adizova (2025) for the Bukhara region, could serve as the bedrock for a dynamic and growing terminological database.

6. Conclusion

Mastering tourism terminology is a fundamental, yet profoundly challenging, component of professional training in the global hospitality and travel industry. This article has demonstrated that the difficulties are not merely about memorizing a list of hard words. Rather, they are systemic, arising from the inherently dynamic, ambiguous, and cross-disciplinary nature of tourism discourse itself. These linguistic realities are amplified by significant lingua-cultural gaps between languages and by persistent pedagogical deficiencies that fail to connect decontextualized lexical knowledge with real-world professional performance.

To address these challenges, this study has proposed a shift towards a more dynamic, data-driven, and learner-centered paradigm. The core recommendations include the systematic application of corpus linguistics to ensure authentic and timely vocabulary, the promotion of terminological standardization through living digital glossaries, and the adoption of experiential and task-based learning strategies to bridge the theory-practice divide. For rapidly developing tourism destinations such as Uzbekistan, the creation of a national tourism corpus and the development of standardized multilingual resources are not merely academic exercises but urgent practical necessities for ensuring workforce competence and international competitiveness.

Future research should focus on empirical studies that directly compare the efficacy of corpus-informed curricula against traditional methods. Furthermore, longitudinal



studies tracking the professional success of learners trained with task-based versus conventional models would provide invaluable data. Finally, cross-cultural studies on the successful localization of tourism terminology could offer a blueprint for the many countries currently facing similar terminological challenges. Only through this kind of rigorous, evidence-based evolution can the pedagogy of tourism terminology truly catch up with the industry it serves.

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