
THE IMPACT OF ENGLISH TRANSLATION QUALITY ON CULTURAL ECONOMY: A LITERATURE REVIEW OF YOGYAKARTA'S HERITAGE TOURISM

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Abstract

Yogyakarta is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, which serves as a vital pillar of the local cultural economy, especially following the UNESCO (2023) recognition of its Cosmological Axis. In the era of global tourism, the effective communication of this heritage to international audiences is heavily dependent on the quality of English translations. However, linguistic inaccuracies in tourism materials often hinder global branding and create a “trust deficit” among international visitors. Using a literature review, this research synthesizes 17 key sources (comprising 14 primary academic articles and 3 key international frameworks), including targeted academic articles and global frameworks from UNWTO and UNESCO. The findings suggest that professional and culturally nuanced translations significantly improve international tourists’ trust, acting as a “new currency” in the digital economy which directly correlates with increased economic empowerment for local communities. The study concludes that investment in high-quality translation is not merely a linguistic necessity but a strategic economic move to ensure sustainable growth in the fragmented global economy.

Keyword: *Translation Quality, Cultural Economy, Heritage Tourism, Yogyakarta, Digital Trust, Literature Review.*

Introduction

Yogyakarta, often referred to as the cultural heart of Indonesia, possesses an invaluable wealth of tangible and intangible heritage. From the majestic Kraton complex to the Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta and its Historic Landmarks recently recognized by UNESCO (2023), the city’s identity is synonymous with cultural preservation. In the contemporary global landscape, this heritage is not merely a historical legacy but a primary driver of the “Cultural Economy.” The economic vitality of Yogyakarta relies heavily on its capacity to transform cultural values into sustainable tourism products. However, as the world enters an era of fragmented global economy and high digital competition, the success of this transformation depends on how effectively these values are communicated to an international audience. According to Nugroho et al. (2022), high-quality translation acts as a bridge that ensures the professional branding of a destination, directly affecting the international market’s perception of Indonesia’s tourism quality.

Despite its prestige, Yogyakarta faces a persistent “communicative gap.” While the physical restoration of heritage sites receives significant funding, the “linguistic restoration” of information often remains overlooked. This study identifies a recurring phenomenon where English translations in prominent tourist areas are treated as secondary or merely ornamental. Research by Silva et al. (2021) on the linguistic landscape of Malioboro highlights a lack of functional consistency in public signage, where English is often used without considering its communicative precision. This issue is echoed in more academic settings; for instance, Fahmi et al. (2022) and Purwaningsih et al. (2025) found that museum exhibition labels the very primary source of historical education for foreigners suffer from low accuracy and literal translation errors. These linguistic blunders do not just create confusion; they trigger a “Cultural Loss” where the deep philosophical and historical essence of Javanese heritage is stripped away, leaving behind a flat and uninspiring narrative for the visitors (Li, Chen, & Lv, 2021).

The urgency of this issue is amplified by the rapid digital transformation in the tourism sector. Nowadays, a tourist’s journey begins long before they arrive in Yogyakarta, starting with digital interactions on websites and social media. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022) identifies ‘building trust’ as a fundamental pillar for the global recovery of tourism post-pandemic, emphasizing that digital credibility is essential for international travelers. While the rise of Machine Translation (MT) tools like Google Translate and DeepL has provided a quick fix for language barriers, as explored by Freskila et al. (2025) and Alhaj (2024), the absence of human expertise in auditing these automated translations often results in unnatural phrasing that erodes this “Tourist Trust.” In an economic sense, trust is a currency; when information is

perceived as unprofessional or inaccurate, it creates a trust deficit that diminishes the visitor's willingness to engage deeply with local products, ultimately hindering the economic empowerment of local practitioners in places like Tepus or Nglanggeran (Raharjo, 2022; Irawati et al., 2022).

Therefore, this research seeks to move beyond a purely linguistic analysis by positioning translation quality as a strategic economic intervention. While previous studies have focused on error analysis in specific locations, this study employs a literature review to synthesize findings from all 17 sources (14 primary academic sources and 3 key international frameworks), providing an in-depth and focused view of the translation-economy nexus in Yogyakarta. By analyzing the intersection of linguistic accuracy, cultural preservation, and digital branding, this paper argues that professional translation is a fundamental investment required to safeguard Yogyakarta's cultural economy in the global era.

Literature Review

The evaluation of translation quality in this study is grounded in the functional model of translation. According to the foundational theories often cited in Indonesian translation studies, quality is measured through three main instruments: accuracy, acceptability, and readability (Nababan et al., 2015). In the tourism sector, these three aspects are crucial because they determine how effectively a message is delivered to an international audience. Napu (2020) emphasizes that linguistic errors in tourism materials, such as brochures and promotional texts, are not merely grammatical mistakes but functional failures that can mislead tourists and diminish the professional image of a destination.

Modern translation studies have shifted from a purely linguistic approach to a cultural one, often referred to as the "Cultural Turn." Li, Chen, & Lv argue that tourism texts are deeply embedded with cultural identities. Therefore, translating heritage sites in Yogyakarta requires more than just finding lexical equivalents; it requires the transmission of cultural values. Pratama et al. highlight that "cultural loss" frequently occurs when translators fail to find appropriate strategies for local wisdom terms, resulting in a "flat" experience for tourists who seek the exotic and authentic spirit of Javanese heritage.

In the era of digital transformation, the use of technology has become inevitable. However, the quality of digital content remains a challenge. Freskila et al. (2025) and Alhaj provide a comparative perspective on the use of Machine Translation (MT) like Google Translate and DeepL. While MT offers efficiency, it often lacks the "human touch" necessary for the nuances of cultural tourism. For the cultural economy of Yogyakarta to thrive globally, digital platforms must balance technological speed with human expertise to ensure that information on websites and social media remains accurate and trustworthy.

The link between translation and the cultural economy is increasingly recognized in recent literature. Nugroho et al. and Rong Lu et al. suggest that translation is a form of "power" that shapes the global perception of a destination. High-quality translation acts as a catalyst for economic empowerment by increasing tourist satisfaction and trust. As discussed by Raharjo and Irawati in their studies of tourist villages like Tepus and Nglanggeran, sustainable development and local economic growth are highly dependent on how effectively local values are communicated to the global market (Anwar, 2024).

Methods

This study employs a literature review method to explore in depth the intersection between translation quality and the cultural economy. Rather than mapping massive datasets, this targeted approach follows a qualitative synthesis process to evaluate key literature that directly addresses the research focus within the specific context of Yogyakarta.

Data Sources and Selection

The primary data for this study consists of 17 sources comprising 14 primary academic sources and 3 key international frameworks published between 2015 and 2025. Given the qualitative and focused nature of this study, the selection was intentionally scoped down through a targeted search on academic databases such as Google Scholar, ResearchGate, and university repositories. The strict criteria for selection included:

1. Articles focusing specifically on tourism translation quality in Indonesia, particularly in Yogyakarta and Central Java.
2. Studies discussing the direct impact of translation on tourism promotion and economic development.
3. Recent research regarding the role of technology and machine translation in the tourism sector (e.g., Freskila et al., 2025).

Data Analysis Procedure

The analysis was carried out in three stages:

- Identification: Mapping the linguistic problems found in various tourism media, from museum labels (Fahmi et al.; Kamilia et al.) to linguistic landscapes in public spaces (Silva et al., 2021).
- Synthesis: Connecting the linguistic findings with economic concepts such as branding, tourist trust, and local economic empowerment as discussed by Raharjo and Irawati.
- Evaluation: Assessing the role of translation as a strategic tool in the “Cultural Turn” perspective and its implications for Yogyakarta’s cultural economy (Li, Chen, & Lv; Rong Lu et al.).

By synthesizing these selected perspectives, the study provides a robust and focused view of how linguistic precision acts as a driver for sustainable economic growth in the heritage tourism sector.

Result and Discussion

This section provides a synthesis of the academic articles and global frameworks analyzed in this study. The discussion is structured to identify the correlation between translation quality and the cultural economy in Yogyakarta, followed by an in-depth analysis of the variables identified during the literature review process.

Literature Review Results Summary

The literature review encompasses 17 sources comprising 14 primary academic sources and 3 key international frameworks/theories to provide a holistic understanding of the research problem.

Table 1. Summary of Literature Review and Global Frameworks

No	Author’s Year	Research Focus	Key Findings
1	Alhaj, A. A. M. (2024).	Digital Impact	Unedited machine translation erodes international tourist trust.
2	Anwar, M. K., & Aprilianisa, N. K. (2024).	Global Factors	Digital communication is a key driver for economic growth in the global era.
3	Botsman (2017)	Trust Theory	Defined trust as the “new currency” in the modern economy.
4	da Silva, A. M., Tjung, Y. N., Wijayanti, S. H., & Suwartono, C. (2021).	Malioboro Landscape	English usage is predominantly ornamental, lacking functional communicative value.
5	Dyah Raina Purwaningsih, Maysa Kamilia, & Asrofin Nur Kholifah. (2025).	Sandi Museum	Prevalent literal translation errors based on ATA error categories.
6	Fahmi, S., Habibullah, N. L. A., Anggraeni, E., & Susanti, A. (2022).	Sonobudoyo Museum	Identified low accuracy and lexical errors in museum exhibition labels.
7	Freskila, E., & Jayantini, I. G. A. S. R. (2025).	Machine Translation	DeepL outperforms Google Translate but still requires human post- editing.
8	Irawati, N., Lestari, H. D., & Kesuma, W. P. (2022).	Nglanggeran Village	Communication of local values is critical for sustainable economic development.
9	Li, F., Chen, J., & Lv, X. (2021).	Cultural Turn	Translation serves as a vehicle for cultural identity transmission.
10	Lu, R., Abdullah, M. A. R., Ang, L. H., & Ghani, C. A. A. (2023).	Power & Translation	Translation acts as a tool to control the economic narrative of a region.
11	Nababan, M., Nuraeni, A., & Sumardiono (2015)	Translation Quality Assessment Model	Translation quality is measured through three main dimensions: accuracy, acceptability, and readability.
12	Napu, N., & Pakaya, U. (2020).	Tourism Brochures	Grammatical inaccuracies negatively impact the professional image of destinations.
13	Nugroho, R. A., Septemuryantoro, S. A., & Lewa, A. H. (2022).	Tourism Quality	Effective translation is a prerequisite for high-quality tourism services.

14	Pratama, A. A., Ramadhan, T. B. L., Elawati, F. N., & Nugroho, R. A. (2023).	Cultural Words	Significant “cultural loss” in translating local Javanese wisdom terms.
15	Raharjo, P. (2022).	Tepus Tourist Village	Strategic promotion of local wisdom depends on accurate linguistic branding.
16	UNESCO (2023)	Heritage Status	Recognized Yogyakarta’s Cosmological Axis as World Heritage.
17	UNWTO (2022)	Tourism Recovery	Identified “Building Trust” as the pillar for post-pandemic growth.

Source: Data Processing Result, 2026

Analysis of Linguistic Accuracy and the UNESCO World Heritage Mandate

The synthesis of research by Fahmi et al. (2022) and Purwaningsih et al. (2025) reveals a systemic vulnerability in the linguistic infrastructure of Yogyakarta’s heritage sites. These studies provide empirical evidence that museum exhibition labels, which serve as the primary educational touchpoint for international visitors, are frequently marred by low accuracy and literal translation. Such errors are not merely pedantic linguistic concerns; they represent a fundamental failure in cross-cultural communication. When historical narratives are translated without professional rigor, the profound philosophical values of the artifacts are lost, leading to a fragmented understanding of Javanese history among global audiences. This condition suggests that while physical conservation is well-funded, the “linguistic conservation” of Yogyakarta’s heritage remains critically underdeveloped.

This issue has gained unprecedented international significance following the official recognition of the Cosmological Axis of Yogyakarta by UNESCO (2023). As a designated World Heritage site, Yogyakarta is now subject to global scrutiny regarding its ability to preserve and communicate its “Outstanding Universal Value.” The ornamental use of English, as identified by Silva et al. (2021) in areas like Malioboro, contradicts the professional standards required for a UNESCO-listed destination. If the English linguistic landscape is treated merely as a visual decoration rather than a functional tool for education, the city risks undermining its own global prestige. Therefore, aligning translation standards with the UNESCO mandate is an urgent necessity to ensure that the city’s philosophical narrative is conveyed with the intellectual depth it deserves.

The Phenomenon of “Cultural Loss” and Economic Value

The research conducted by Pratama et al. (2023) and Napu (2020) highlights a pervasive phenomenon described as “cultural loss.” This occurs when local Javanese philosophical concepts which are the primary assets of the cultural economy are stripped of their nuanced meanings during the translation process. In heritage tourism, what is being “sold” to international visitors is not just a site, but an authentic cultural experience. When a translation fails to capture the essence of concepts like Hamemayu Hayuning Bawono, the “exotic” and premium appeal of the destination is compromised. This reduction in authenticity leads to a direct devaluation of Yogyakarta’s cultural commodities, as international tourists may perceive the heritage offerings as less “premium” or intellectually engaging.

The economic impact of linguistic quality can be effectively analyzed through the lens of Botsman’s (2017) theory, which identifies “trust as the new currency” in the modern economy. In the cultural economy of Yogyakarta, translation quality serves as the primary mechanism through which this currency is earned from a global market. A “trust deficit” emerges when international tourists encounter unprofessional or ‘flat’ translations, leading to a loss of confidence in the destination’s professionalism. As noted by Nugroho et al. (2022), this lack of trust acts as a psychological barrier that prevents tourists from engaging in higher-value transactions, thereby hindering the city’s ability to command significant economic returns.

The practical implications of this “trust currency” were vividly demonstrated during the International Summer Camp Program *Bina Budaya Antarbangsa* (BINAR) in September 2025. During a field observation in Malioboro with 28 participants from seven different countries, Field observations during the International Summer Camp Program *Bina Budaya Antarbangsa* (BINAR) in September 2025 indicate how international visitors interact with the local linguistic landscape. As we walked through the historical site, taking photographs and sharing stories about Malioboro’s history, the participants’ engagement reached its peak when the historical narratives were communicated clearly and accurately. Conversely, when the onsite information was ambiguous or poorly translated, it created a visible “communication gap” that visibly diminished their curiosity and engagement.

This firsthand experience confirms that for international travelers, professional translation is the primary gateway to appreciating local heritage. Without it, the rich cultural exchange intended in international programs like BINAR cannot be fully realized, as linguistic quality forms the very foundation of global trust. When cultural terms are stripped of their nuances, it results in a “Cultural Loss” that devalues the tourism product. Therefore, investing in high-quality translation is not merely a linguistic effort but a strategic economic move to ensure that Yogyakarta’s heritage remains a trusted and premium commodity in the fragmented global economy.

Digital Transformation and the UNWTO Trust Framework

In the era of digital transformation, the reliance on Machine Translation (MT) has become a double-edged sword for Yogyakarta’s tourism branding. While Freskila et al. (2025) acknowledge the efficiency of tools like DeepL in bridging basic language gaps, the absence of human-led auditing remains a significant risk. Automated translations often fail to grasp the cultural context and sociolinguistic nuances inherent in Javanese heritage. According to Alhaj (2024), unedited digital content that feels “robotic” or inaccurate can deter tech-savvy international travelers who rely on digital platforms for pre-arrival information. In a competitive global market, a single linguistic blunder on an official website can go viral, causing long-term damage to the city’s digital reputation and perceived professionalism.

This digital challenge must be addressed within the framework of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO, 2022), which identifies “Building Trust” as the primary pillar for post-pandemic tourism recovery. The UNWTO emphasizes that digital credibility is earned through the delivery of high-quality, authentic, and reliable content. For Yogyakarta, this means that every digital touchpoint from social media to official tourism portals must adhere to professional linguistic standards. Failure to do so not only violates the UNWTO’s trust-building mandate but also creates a sense of “informational insecurity” for global travelers. Therefore, integrating human linguistic expertise with digital technology is a strategic investment necessary to meet global standards and ensure that Yogyakarta’s digital narrative remains credible and authoritative.

Translation as a Driver for Local Economic Empowerment

The link between translation quality and local economic outcomes is most prominently observed in the development of tourist villages (Desa Wisata). Studies by Raharjo (2022) and Irawati et al. (2022) in villages such as Tepus and Nglanggeran demonstrate that the sustainability of these communities depends on their ability to reach international markets directly. High-quality, culturally-nuanced translation allows these communities to bypass traditional intermediaries and communicate their unique “local wisdom” to a global audience. By professionalizing their communication, these villages can position themselves as premium niche destinations. This alignment with professional standards increases the “Economic Value” of local products and services, allowing community members to benefit more directly from their cultural assets. Furthermore, applying Botsman’s (2017) concept of the “Trust Shift,” professional translation facilitates a shift in trust from large-scale tour operators to local community-based tourism. When local wisdom is translated with accuracy, it fulfills the UNWTO (2022) goal of inclusive and sustainable tourism development. According to Anwar (2024) and Rong Lu et al. (2021), this professionalized narrative ensures that the economic benefits of Yogyakarta’s UNESCO-recognized heritage are not siphoned off by external perantiaries but are instead retained by the local practitioners. Thus, improving translation quality is a vital economic intervention that transforms cultural heritage into a sustainable source of income for the people of Yogyakarta.

Overall, the analysis confirms that translation quality is not a peripheral linguistic issue but a core strategic asset for Yogyakarta’s cultural economy. The synergy between the linguistic precision demanded by UNESCO (2023), the trust-building framework of UNWTO (2022), and the economic theory of Botsman (2017) proves that professional communication is the engine of global competitiveness. By addressing the current linguistic gaps in museums and digital platforms, Yogyakarta can convert its cultural prestige into tangible economic empowerment. Professional translation serves as the ultimate bridge that connects local wisdom with global markets, ensuring that Yogyakarta remains a trusted, high-value, and sustainable destination in the fragmented global economy.

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