

Conceptualizing museum translation

Cultural translation, interlingual processes and other perspectives

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The scholarly debate in translation studies and related fields has extensively addressed the definition, scope, and limitations of translation. We contend that museum translation, which encompasses both the traditional “translation proper” as well as the non-verbal and multimodal aspects of translation, is central to this debate. Museum translation covers an extensive spectrum of perspectives, which contribute to the expansion of the concept of translation and the field of translation studies. It capitalizes on the intrinsic interdisciplinarity of museum studies and translation studies, fostering a profound exchange of disciplines and serving as an ideal foundation for discussing the boundaries of translation. It has a dynamic nature that can contract or expand to suit the researcher’s perspective and disciplinary concentration. A comprehensive examination of the intricate procedures encompassed by museum translation is, therefore, timely. In this article, we examine and compare different applications of this concept and provide an overview of how various disciplines and research foci have approached this area of study. We aim to contribute to the ongoing development of the concept of museum translation and its position in translation studies, a call further addressed by each author in this special issue titled “Museums as Spaces of Cultural Translation and Transfer.”

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1. Museums: From contact zones to translation zones

As multimodal and multisemiotic places, museums serve as spaces where meaning-making is constructed through contact, sometimes taking the form of a dialogue between translators and visitors (Sturge 2007, 164). This reflects the concept of a “contact zone” as defined by Mary-Louise Pratt (1992). From a

transcultural and post-colonial standpoint, a “contact zone” refers to a space characterized by colonial interactions. In this zone, the spatial and temporal relationships between different groups of people who encounter one another at the frontiers are marked by cultural and social tensions, conflicts, and imbalances of power (Pratt 1992, 4–6). Pratt formulates that “contact zones” are “[...] social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” (Pratt 1992, 7). In this context, it might be argued that, although they do not serve as physical boundaries facilitating direct interactions between diverse groups under conditions of control and disempowerment, museums can be regarded as grounds where encounters and their associated dynamics take place.

Therefore, described as “contact zones” after Pratt’s initial definition, museums become spaces of encounter, negotiation, transfer, and learning, where objects, ideas, knowledge, customs, values, and emotions are collected, presented, and sometimes exchanged. The encounters that take place in museums are by no means simple or neutral. Ideally, and in line with James Clifford’s understanding, museums are places where contact is established with a view to reducing power imbalances by focusing on collective curatorship and dialogue between those who are represented and those who represent others, in an “active collaboration and a sharing of authority” (1997, 210). However, the forms of encounter in the museums are complex and varied. Specifically, the dynamics of encounter can be observed within three categories.

Firstly, the exhibition space facilitates the passive interaction of diverse source cultures through various display methods. Put simply, whether they are informed and consulted about it or not, any cultural group that is represented in a museum exhibition engages in a silent exchange with one another even prior to the visitors’ encounter with the exhibition due to the simple fact that they are placed and displayed in the same exhibitionary space.

Secondly, the represented cultures establish contact with the audience through the museum’s mediation. Mediation has the potential to foster a closer connection between different cultures, ethnicities, worldviews, and belief systems, which, in turn, builds a platform for effective communication, in line with Clifford’s conceptualization. However, it is also plausible that such mediation may inadvertently generate a sense of detachment between the visitor and the exhibition. The mediation of a museum’s collection through the organization of an exhibition and the application of display methods by the curatorial team are determining factors in this matter. The museum, as an authoritative and educational institution, engages in dialogue with the presentation of the exhibitions. The decision-making process of curating an exhibition is inevitably influenced

by preconceived ideas, biases, and prejudices. In this category of encounter, it is important to recognize that although mediation is orchestrated by the museum, visitors are actively involved in the meaning-making of exhibitions as well. It has, indeed, long been recognized that exhibitions are perceived through the personal interpretation of visitors, which is defined by, among others, their previous knowledge, background, state of mind, and own biases (Falk and Dierking 1992; Silverman 1995). In this light, visitors are actors in the mediation process as well.

The third category of encounters in the museum happens specifically at the level of the visitors themselves, who can encounter one another through verbal communication or by simply acknowledging each other's presence within the shared space. How visitors participate in verbal or non-verbal communication with each other during their visit might also impact their meaning-making process. The deliberate or unconscious interaction between visitors in the museum can itself be influenced by various factors, including the organization of the museum space (e.g., the layout of exhibition halls, the spacing between displays, and the availability of multiple paths for visitors to choose from) as well as the individual backgrounds of the visitors.

In each of these categories of encounter, museums can present, represent, challenge and promote new perspectives on pre-existing power relationships, historical events, culture-sensitive topics, scientific knowledge, artistic freedom, etc. All of these aspects can be evident in the exhibitions in numerous diverse ways, such as the decision to include, or indeed exclude, a particular artifact, the context in which it is displayed, the accompanying texts that are used, as well as the background information provided to visitors. The manner visitors perceive the combination of this information in the museum is equally important. This perception is influenced by their sensory and cognitive filter, as well as their socio-economic background, expectations, and needs. We suggest that these parameters can all be considered as translation, going beyond the traditional definition of interlingual text transfer. As such, museums can be regarded as zones where multiple layers of translation occur.

As "translation is logically one of the major activities in the contact zone" (Simon 2013, 181), the notion of a place of encounter has been further examined by scholars through the conceptual framework of a "translation zone." Referring to its attributes that transcend isolated semiotic registers, Emily Apter argues that, "[t]he translation zone defines the epistemological interstices of politics, poetics, logic, cybernetics, linguistics, genetics, media, and environment; its locomotion characterizes both psychic transference and the technology of information transfer" (2006, 6). Museums undoubtedly serve as spaces where all aforementioned characteristics of a "translation zone" might manifest, whether as integral components of the translation process or as the outcomes resulting

from translation. As an illustration, these outcomes could involve, among other things, making complex information easier for children to comprehend (such as through games or simplifying language), tailoring museum visits for individuals with specific requirements (such as going beyond the exhibition's theme to encourage interaction for patients with memory impairment), or providing bilingual or multilingual versions of information, whether in physical form on group texts, labels, and audio guides, or through phone applications, QR codes, and so on. Moreover, the former – integral components of the translation process – can be regarded as the defining characteristic of the translation in the museum. This encompasses the aforementioned types of encounters and also involves the transfer of knowledge in exhibitions, the translation of cultures by and through museums, and the dialogue between the triangle of curator, source culture, and target culture. Therefore, in addition to deeming museums as contact zones, it is also possible to characterize museums as "translation zones" (Neather 2021a: 307). To elaborate, based on this conceptualization, "museums as translation zones" can encompass both verbal and non-verbal translations of cultures within the museum setting. It also covers connections established with the source cultures for the exhibitions in which they are represented, which involves "off-stage and on-stage of cultural interaction and translation," for instance, consulting indigenous groups before displaying their art in a museum, or providing multilingual translations of verbal texts in exhibitions, depending on the expected needs of the visitors, and so on (Neather 2021a, 316).

2. Museum translation

According to Luc van Doorslaer (2021, 7), the specific translation processes considered across different sub-disciplines have implications for the definition of translation and the extent of its domain. Therefore, it is imperative to ascertain the definition of translation within the context of museums, which have been acknowledged as spaces of contact and translation. To do so, we trace the uses of the concept of museum translation in translation studies and beyond.

Prior to exploring the concept of museum translation, it is crucial to establish our understanding of the term translation. In fact, the discourse surrounding the definition, scope, and limits of translation has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate across several academic fields, including Semiotics, Ethnography, Literary and Cultural Studies, and particularly within the discipline of translation studies. Recently, the phenomenon of translation has been depicted as an exchange that encompasses society, culture, and politics, and through which meaning is rendered decipherable (cf. van Doorslaer and McMartin 2022). Simi-

larly, from an intercultural perspective, translation can be regarded as a negotiation in social and discursive settings (cf. Basalamah 2022). Consequently, in museums, this negotiation is conducted not only between the source and target languages and cultures but also among actors such as the curators, translators, and visitors, as mentioned earlier. Museum translation is thus a multifaceted and complex process that can encompass several viewpoints, and requires the acknowledgment of how anthropological, historical, literary, proxemic, semiotic, and sociological perspectives approach translation in the context of museums.

If so, in what manner can we conceptualize museum translation? Museums *translate* – while recontextualizing and re-mediating – culture, history and scientific knowledge through the selection and combination of objects and verbal texts, and through various multi-modal displays (Neather 2005, 2008). As tourist destinations attracting an international public, they also resort to interlingual and intersemiotic translations to cater to different language user needs and make their collections accessible to a variety of target audiences. In translation studies, this distinction is captured in the idea of “museums as translations” versus “translations in the museum” (Sturge 2007). Indeed, without a focus on translation in the broad and narrow sense, it is impossible to fully grasp the importance of museums as transnational learning environments and as spaces where generations connect through the transfer of novel ideas, worldviews, as well as cultural and scientific knowledge.

For instance, according to Robert Neather, an exhibition space serves as a platform for meaning-making, functioning “as a three-dimensional multimodal text” that constructs the museum as translation (Neather 2021b:159). Thus, the concept of museum translation involves acknowledging that museums are spaces of cultural translation and transfer that extend beyond physical structures where we seek language-based text transfer, which is on par with Sturge’s aforementioned distinction. Translations can be observed in various types of interactions, for example as those between the cultures represented in the museum space, between the exhibition and the visitor, and among the visitors themselves. Such translations are also manifested in the mediation of cultural and scientific knowledge, driven by curatorial purposes.

Remitting to Neather’s initial definition of museums as spaces of meaning-making which stand not only for channels that contain the tangible outcomes interlingual translation, but also for the translations themselves, we can initially argue that museum translation entails a combination of the aforementioned layers of translation that function in tandem. Hence, it is essential to implement a holistic approach in order to comprehend the functioning of its individual components. Regarding this matter, while not extensively discussed as a part of

Sturge's seminal distinction, we can nevertheless consider a subset of "museums as translation," that we can call "museum space as translation."

Museums have been regarded as spaces where curatorial and architectural expertise can be *translated* into concrete forms through the design of exhibitions and specifically in terms of ambient aspects (i.e., the architectural design of museums, such as the groupings and the layout of exhibitions), even before the "cultural turn" of the late 1970s and 80s in translation studies. Drawing on Hillier and Hanson's theory of space syntax, Peponis and Hedin argued that a legible spatial syntax in the museum transforms the transmission of knowledge and curatorial intention through architecture, impacting the pedagogy, or even the ideology of the message in some cases (1982, 24). This impact of architecture on the visitors' experience has also been recognized from a linguistic perspective. Louise Ravelli, for example, writes that museums function "as texts." Inside the composition, the "organized walking" through the displays "might function to draw visitors towards an object, or encourage some sequential reading of different displays, or allow for more open relations between them" (Ravelli 2006, 123). Indeed, it can be suggested that architecture affects the museum experience as a system of spatial relations in the way that visitors not only explore the connection between architectural constructs and objects but also perceive each other, "creating possibilities of co-presence and encounter" (Tzortzi 2015, 2).

Additionally, museum translation covers the multimodality of the museum experience and not only the architecture. Christopher Whitehead provides a conceptualization that might be useful in this regard. He offers a trifold view with his "model of the temporal visit," in which he demonstrates the nesting mechanism of "text" (i.e., materials related to verbal and multimodal texts such as digital panels, labels or audio guides), "environment" (i.e., how the museum space is organized and modified to accommodate an exhibition, such as lighting, graphics, and displays), and "circumstance" (i.e., the factors that have an impact on the interpretation of the exhibition, such as social interaction between visitors, or an individual's cultural background), which he shows to be closely tied to a fourth element, "experience," as it moves across all of these spheres through time and space (Whitehead 2012, xiii–xiv). Therefore, one possible conceptualization of museum translation based on this model focuses on the visitors' experience of all these elements together, recognizing the interdependent and interconnected functioning of all registers of interpretation. The experience of the museum becomes a *museological chronotope*, where the "intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships" is materialized and where "space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history" (Bakhtin 1981, 84). Consequently, space and time are fundamental components of museums and, therefore, museum translation. Besides possessing an exhibi-

tionary space, a collection, a curatorial team, and an exhibition theme, museums are also constrained by physical and temporal limitations while simultaneously translating space and time. It is essential to take into account that every museum, regardless of whether it showcases contemporary art, historical artifacts, rock formations, revolutionary ideas, or scientific discoveries, presents its own modeling of the world based on its vision, artistic, sociological, and political perspective, as well as its financial resources. This modeling process involves representing a specific portion of the universe through an exhibition, which we recognize as translation.

Another aspect to consider when discussing the significance of space and time is how it relates to practical aspects of exhibition practices. This includes the selection, recontextualization, and display of the chosen collection within the constraints of space (such as the boundaries of a museum building or the capacity of a museum website for a 3D tour) and time (such as the duration of a museum visit or the limited attention span of visitors). In synthesis of the aforementioned considerations, therefore, the presence of a museological chronotope can be viewed as an additional conceptualization of museum translation.

3. Translating the “other”

Considering the chronotopical aspect of museum translation, we can argue that it was not a coincidence that Juri Lotman depicted his concept of *semiosphere* through the metaphor of a museum:

Imagine a room in a museum, where exhibits from different eras are laid out in different windows, with texts in known and unknown languages, and instructions for deciphering them, together with explanatory texts for the exhibitions created by guides who map the necessary routes and rules of behaviour for visitors. If we place into that room still more visitors, with their own semiotic worlds, then we will begin to obtain something resembling a picture of the semiosphere.

(Lotman [1984; 1992] 2005, 213–214)

The metaphor of the museum provides an image for the concept. The semiosphere is a dynamic theoretical space that is based on a core-periphery relationship and the principle of semiotic irregularity, which encompasses culture in its totality. All units of meaning function in interconnectedness within the semiopshere. It is surrounded by a bilingual boundary that serves as a contact – hence translation – point for new meaning generation. Museum translation can be compared to the operation of the semiosphere across several levels. First of all, the core-periphery relationship within the semiosphere can be correlated to

the interaction between a target culture (core) and a source culture (periphery) within a museum. In this context, new information originating from “‘foreigners’ within a given system” (Lotman 2005, 214) is conveyed through physical objects and multimodal texts, facilitating the meaning-making among museum visitors. Furthermore, museum translation shares similarities with the description of the semiotic idea of the border. This concept encompasses both the semiosphere and the extra-semiotic space and serves as a point where the unrecognizable and undecipherable (i.e., foreign) texts are translated. From this perspective, museums also serve as borders between different cultures, traditions, worldviews, demographics, and beliefs and become a ground where objects, ideas, and people are translated into each other’s languages, whether intra- or interlingually, inter-semiotically, or intrasemiotically. The shared characteristics between the museum and the semiosphere support the previous discussion on museums as contact and translation zones. This demonstrates that both Semiotics and translation studies can contribute to the research field, highlighting the significance of an interdisciplinary approach in museum translation.

For instance, investigating translation in the museum space from a semiotic perspective, Jaanika Anderson and Maria-Kristiina Lotman described the copies of ancient art that went through certain modifications in time (i.e., changes in color, garments, size, material) as intrasemiotic translation (2018). Their research uses a relatively less frequently used term within the niche of museum translation, underlining a fourth dimension to Jakobson’s famous typology (1959). At the same time, it provides a semiotic approach that merges cultural translation with the hybridity of translating the layers of space and time within the context of museums. It sets an example for how the representation of the cultural Others in time and space could exist in hybridity.

Indeed, a semiotic approach allows us to conceptualize museum translation as the accumulation of the translational layers of “Other(s)-in-space” (*l’Autre dans l’espace*) and the “Other(s)-in-time” (*l’Autre dans le temps*) (for the terms cf. Patou-Mathis 2011). For instance, while representing the artistic practices of a certain source culture in an ethnographic museum could be regarded as translating the “Others-in-space,” representing the prehistoric human ancestors in a national museum could also be deemed as translating the “Others-in-time.” Both layers often exist in hybridity, such as the representations of ancient Greek and Roman sculptures in a fine arts museum. Apart from discussing the constituents of museum translation, one can thus also focus on the curatorial tendencies of representation in the museum space.

Such representations of Others – in time or space – make museums spaces of *cultural* translation specifically. For instance, Neather defined museum representation “as one form of ‘cultural translation’” since “museums ‘translate’ cultures

through the selection and combination of objects, texts and other representational apparatus in the exhibitionary space” (Neather 2018, 361). Abigail Celis (2019) similarly described curatorial work in the museum as a gesture of translation, as part of which other cultures are represented in local exhibitionary codes. This echoes Sturge’s perspective, whose seminal distinction between “translation in the museum” and “museums as translation” was discussed in the earlier paragraphs, and for whom cultural translation “constructs its source text as well as transferring it into a different language in the manner of the traditional translator,” and is an institutional as much as an individual process (2007, 6).

At this point, we would like to emphasize that translating the layers of time and space could potentially transcend the limits of the semiosphere and the *noosphere*¹ and simultaneously extend to the biosphere, as the Others in question could be within the realm of alloanimals,² plants, or rock formations, which can be observed in the case of science, geography or natural history museums. These museums are dedicated to non-human subjects, including stones, fossils, non-human animals and vegetation. While our attention has not been directed towards those museums in this instance, our conceptualization of museum translation can potentially extend to future initiatives involving museum translation in the context of those museums. This is because even the most factual and objective information must be translated if it is planned to be showcased in museums. Hence, although the current culture-centric subjects in contemporary literature on museum translation are prevalent, it can be argued that the domain of museum translation can potentially encompass a wide range of museum types, warranting examination.

4. Museum and translation studies: Convergences

The potential of what museum translation entails has been tackled from a translation studies angle, but also in the field of museum studies. Here, one could propose that museum translation has indeed been a subject of research for many years, albeit not always through the term “translation.” This inquiry has been on a par with the conceptualization of museum translation outlined above. It encompasses the approaches to translation through the perspectives of the curators and the visitors, including, but not limited to, meaning-making in the museum space and cultural translation. Scholars from museum studies broadly recognize the

1. A philosophical concept alluding to the collective human consciousness comprised of intellectual and cultural activities.

2. “[A]nimals besides the human animals” (Deely 2015, 19).

meaning-making capacity of museums and how the displays in exhibitions translate knowledge and ideas not only through a linguistic perspective but also on the visual, or even a multimodal level (cf. Moser 2010). Museums are recognized for their unique capacity to “bring the whole media ensemble into a particular place and space that exists within a set of complex mediated communication environments” (Drotner et al. 2018, 1).

Furthermore, museum studies have also included research into the making and representation of cultures in museums. Flora Edouwaye S. Kaplan has famously delved into the making of national identities in the museum as *Museums and the Making of “Ourselves”* (1994). In a similar vein to the work done in translation studies, museums have also been described as a frontier, a zone for “inter-cultural understanding,” “where learning is created, new identities are forged; new connections are made between disparate groups and their own histories” (Golding 2009, 2–4, referencing Marlene Nourbese Philip for the notion of frontier). Integrating the perspective of Folkloristics and Heritage Studies, Elo-Hanna Seljamaa posits that museums possess the authoritative agency to determine which identities to represent and which identities to suppress in silence (2021, 91). Through the decisions of curators, whose choices may not always be justified, exhibitions not only “implicitly and perhaps inadvertently represent the perspective of” ethnic majorities in museums, but also can reframe and reposition the identities and voices of minoritized groups (Seljamaa 2021, 92). Even though the discussion on the authority of museums in representing identities through various types of translation (e.g., interlingual, intersemiotic, multimodal, etc.) seems relatively recent, it is, in fact, possible to encounter such practices as early as the 19th century. In the representation of identities within a national framework in museums, the museum – and, by extension, the authorities with which the museum is affiliated, such as the government – selects which individuals or groups are granted recognition and by what means. Namely, it has been demonstrated that during the nationalist movements in the nineteenth century, museums served as institutions that mirrored current cultural, sociological, and political dynamics and served as tools to build a national image through their exhibitions (Aronsson and Elgenius 2014). This has been similarly demonstrated in the field of translation studies. To exemplify, van Doorslaer and Mertens (*forthcoming*) contend that museums have the capacity to metonymically translate various ethnic, religious, and cultural groups through exhibitions, therefore contributing to the formation of a homogeneous national identity, through which governments mirror their perspectives in order to communicate their political reforms and socio-cultural reorganizations.

The research on intercultural exchanges and identity-building in museums thus points to convergences between translation studies and museum studies, as

well as other domains such as folkloristics, heritage studies, and history. While analyses of intercultural exchange in other domains have not often explicitly referred to translation despite its essential role in such processes, it is evident that it speaks directly to translation, in its interlingual, multimodal, and cultural dimensions. Nonetheless, it is possible to observe apparent references to the concept of translation within museological and curatorial frameworks. For instance, Tony Bennett explains that “exhibitionary forms” in museums can function as the translations of “knowledge/power relations” (Bennett 2006, 59). He further exemplifies that, from a historical standpoint, the principles governing museological displays in the 18th century were influenced by the prevailing practice of scientific classification, which involved the collection and arrangement of various species in cabinets. However, these displays were not based solely on accurate classifications, but rather on culturally conventional distinctions and similarities in the visual appearance of these objects, which the author deems as the translation of “systems of thought” (2006, 70). Moreover, Mari-Carmen Ramirez emphasizes the similarities between the translator and curator, who is “translating what the values of one context are to the values of another context” (quoted in Marincola 2001, 41). In addition, Steven C. Dubin refers to the integration of “new principles into reality” in museums as translation, such as when the doctrines of “reconciliation regarding the past” in historically and culturally sensitive contexts are necessary (2006, 484). Translation has thus been explored, both explicitly and implicitly, and through its multiple dimensions, by museum studies researchers.

The dimension of intercultural exchange of museum translation has also been explored specifically in terms of memory, an encounter of the Other-in-time. Translation has the capacity to “act both as the *media* and as *objects* of remembrance” (Demirkol Ertürk 2021, 155). If one can regard museums as “memory institutions” (Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt and Aljas 2014, 164), then the collecting, preserving, and remediating functions roles of museums become clearer, which are on a par with the functions of memory. Considered as one of the most vital attributes of new museums, exhibitions strive to actively involve visitors by seeking to elicit an emotional reaction through the curatorial decisions made in the portrayal of specific events and individuals (Andermann and Arnold-de-Simine 2012). The relationship between memory and museums is evident through the experiential register of interpretation. Both individual and collective memory can be expressed through exhibitions, which serve as powerful reminders of the past (Neather 2022). In addition, it is also possible to define translation as “mnemonic transfer and remediation,” through which museums function as *translocal* sites to connect past and present (Spiessens and Decroupet 2023, 489, 501). From this perspective, even the very existence of the museum can be

regarded as translation, due to the fact that an individual or collective is revoked the moment the visitors step into the museum space, and continues with the visitors' exposure to multimodal texts. Nevertheless, it is of paramount importance to assert that interlingual translation plays a pivotal role in reflecting the curatorial authority and intentions as well as in how "visitors experience the museum environment and position themselves with regard to the transmitted memories" (ibid. 499).

5. Verbal aspects of museum translation: Central or auxiliary?

In fact, the verbal aspects of museum translation have long been known and discussed in academia, for instance from the perspectives of translating museum labels, mediation of museum texts, representation of indigenous cultures, quality assessment of interlingual translation, or accessibility for special needs. This has taken place from a museum studies angle (Coxall 1994; Garibay and Yalowitz 2015; Garcia-Luis, McDonald and Migus 2011; Lazzaretti and Gatti 2022) as well as from various linguistic ones (Gill 1994; Purser 2000; Jiang 2010; Jiménez Hurtado and Soler Gallego 2015). For instance, Min-Hsiu Liao acknowledges the diverse meanings and definitions that can be ascribed to museum translation, thereby facilitating the "theoretical and professional development" within the scope of museum practices. Nevertheless, she emphasizes the significance of examining museum translation through the lens of interlingual translation (Liao 2018, 47). She has also introduced a typology consisting of five functions of museum translation, focusing on language-based perspectives (Liao 2018, 48): "informative function" (i.e., how the target text is provided in a manner that facilitates the rendering of the source text for the visitors), "interactive function" (i.e., fostering visitor engagement with the exhibitions), "political function" (i.e., the influence of ideology on the communication dynamics between a museum as an institution and its target audience), "social-inclusive function" (i.e., acknowledging the diverse linguistic backgrounds the visitors, hence mirroring the multilingual needs in the museum texts), and "exhibitive function" (i.e., integrating translations as physical objects in exhibitions). It is evident that a broader perspective on museum translation – which considers ethnography, identity-building, representation, multimodal communication, and spatial organization as translation – can also be grounded in similar frameworks as the foci of these functions have been investigated in contexts that do not involve interlingual translation.

As a matter of fact, one can encounter particular viewpoints that consider language in the context of museum communication as necessary yet "auxiliary," thus positioning it outside the center of the research spotlight (Plokhotnyuk and

Mitrofanenko 2018, 21). Namely, similar to Liao's typology of museum translation, Vladimir Plokhotnyuk and Ludmila Mitrofanenko (2018, 22) present a four-dimensional typology of museum communication, which consists of the communicative relations between "the outside world – a museum specialist," "a museum specialist – a museum collection," "a museum specialist (exhibitor) – an exposition," and "a museum exposition – a visitor." The process of communication begins before the curation phase, wherein specialists deliberate on the inclusion of artifacts in a museum collection based on their own perspectives, intentions, and the criteria set by the museum. Additionally, the museum's affiliations with other esteemed institutions, such as ministries of culture and education, may also influence the selection and display of items. Furthermore, the experts examine the collection and analyze the values and meanings that might be ascribed to the selected artifacts. The third phase delineates the manner in which experts impart significance to the museum collection by means of their exhibition choices, such as providing complementary information, arranging and grouping artifacts, and so forth. The final type of communication refers to the visitor experience, which is influenced not only by the museum's curatorial decisions regarding the arrangement of their collections within exhibitions but also by the reception of these choices. As previously mentioned, the sentiments and personal backgrounds of visitors collectively contribute to their perception of what the museum communicates.

An alternative perspective on the notion of the experience of museums might be examined by investigating the topic of accessibility and co-texts. In other words, the boundaries of the "experience" are not necessarily confined to the viewpoint of "museums as translation," as the other category in Sturge's seminal distinction (2007), "translation in museums," can also serve as a foundation for exploring the visitor experience and meaning-making from the perspective of the target audience. More specifically, one of the possible ways to explore this is through museum audio description, which serves as a means of facilitating access to various museum artifacts, such as the artworks showcased in exhibitions. This form of audio description may occasionally incorporate many modes of sensory engagement, particularly when it is intentionally created to function "as a stand-alone experience" (Manfredi and Bartolini 2023, 267). As a consequence, visitors can be subjected to "experiential equivalence" through the connection of museum audio descriptions with the source and target texts that accompany the artifacts in intersemiosis. Therefore, the visitors not only contribute to meaning-making through their experience of the exhibition rendered by the audio description but also engage in "memory-making," particularly when they are recognized "as the main subject and producer of meanings in different contexts" (ibid. 271).

Thus, it can be concluded that the translation of exhibitions in museums has attracted the attention of various academic fields, each with their own overlapping and contrasting viewpoints on how to approach and conceptualize it. The differences in the conceptualization of museum translation arise from the inquiry of whether museum translation should primarily rely on the utilization of language within museums (such as interlingual translation found in labels, brochures, group texts, audioguides, etc.), or if researchers should adopt a broader approach to translation, which entails integrating various forms of knowledge, such as social, cultural, historical, ethnographic, artistic, didactic, and political reflections and perspectives, as well as curatorial intentions. This integration can take place through the representation of identities, the recontextualization of objects, people, and events, or even through the overall visitor experience, including their interactions with each other and with the museum. However, such differences can be regarded as complementary, mutually enriching each other's scopes. Another discrepancy that has been pointed out is that certain scholars opted to not utilize the term "translation" and instead employed alternative terms such as "communication" to designate the same concept and similar practices, as exemplified earlier. Nevertheless, it is clear that the similarities across previous research on museum translation, regardless of whether they were explicitly labeled as such, outweigh the differences. The brief overview we have attempted to present to our readers illustrates the primary concerns of researchers, regardless of their field of study or the time frame in which they participated in the discourse. Ultimately, the concerns revolve around issues of inclusion-exclusion, accessibility, representation, identity, image building, memory, and so on.

6. Museums as spaces of cultural translation and transfer

Given the aforementioned perspectives, our main argument was that the definition of museum translation comprises a diverse array of viewpoints within the realms of communication, representation, and cultural understanding. To illustrate these multidimensional approaches, we have addressed the divergence in viewpoints and terminology as a typical trait of the conceptualization of museum translation. We have also pointed out two particularities of the relevant research. First of all, despite its perceived novelty and niche nature, the questions related to inclusion, cultural and ethnic representation, communication through space and time, authority, power, multilingualism, and so forth have been the subject of scholarly discourse for several decades across various academic disciplines, including, but not limited to, museum studies, semiotics, folkloristics and heritage studies, history, and architecture. Secondly, while translation studies traditionally

emphasizes the role of interlingual translation, and while the fundamental focus on interlingual translation remains pertinent, approaches that do not particularly focus on written verbal texts in museums gradually attain more prominence. These include approaches that consider museums as an artistic, cultural, historical, educational, sociological, and political whole in which meaning is conveyed through multimodal texts and received by a multitude of demographics. In this regard, we hope to have answered Marie-Noelle Guillot's call that "there is as yet no overview of translation practices across the many different possible sites of representation that museums are, fundamentally and both intralingually and interlingually" (Guillot 2014, 92).

The aim of this special issue is to explore museums as spaces of cultural translation and transfer and to provide an inter-/trans-disciplinary perspective that prioritizes both the linguistic and non-linguistic applications of translation. In line with this aim, the articles included associating museum translation with various concepts, such as audio description, generational translation, interlingual translation, intersemiotic translation, intralingual translation, memory, metonymy, popularization, resemiotization, transcultural sensitivity, and visitor experience. Therefore, we can reiterate our argument that the concept of museum translation should not be confined to a single definition or discipline, as it intrinsically thrives on inter-/trans-/multi-disciplinarity while its definition evolves in tandem with the definition of translation.

This special issue illustrates the extensive range of perspectives on museum translation by discussing the role of the curator and the visitor while simultaneously focusing on museums, their websites, and visitor diaries. The articles featured in the special issue do not concentrate on a particular type of museum; instead, they offer case studies including art, diasporic, ethnographic, natural history, and university museums.

Opening the issue, Anneleen Spiessens and Luc van Doorslaer present a trifold view of museum translation comprising interlingual, intersemiotic, and cultural aspects, which function as a cohesive unity in the museum space. Taking the time to detail the value of using translation concepts in museums, they highlight the *resemiotized* nature (for the term cf. Liao 2023) of museum translation – which entails the confluence of verbal, visual, and auditory cues in museums – as a transformative process. They direct their attention to the issue of sensitivity, which leads them to conceptualize "Museums as Resemiotized and Sensitive Translations." Through their case study, the AfricaMuseum in Belgium, they discuss and apply the abovementioned concepts to analyze transcultural sensitivity in the museum.

Next, Robert Neather sheds light on the expectations and reactions of museum visitors, examining a novel aspect of Museum Translation. In his article,

he highlights a broad conceptualization of translation in the context of museums, which transcends not only a language-based viewpoint as in verbal text transfer (e.g., interlingual or intralingual translation) but also the juxtaposition and combination of various semiotic registers as a curational practice. Namely, he introduces visitor experience as an incremental perspective to consider within the scope of museum translation, suggesting that translation can be regarded as a point of contact between memory and history. Giving prominence to the shift from the text producer (i.e., the museum as an institution, curator, professional or non-professional translator, etc.) to the text receiver (i.e., the visitors from various backgrounds with shared or divergent identities), he analyzes the intertexts related to The Museum of Chinese in America (MOCA) to investigate how the visitors translate this museum in line with their identitarian position-takings. The datasets utilized in this paper are derived from museum diaries and online museum reviews, holding a pivotal position in the analysis.

In contrast to the first two articles, Terje Loogus and Jaanika Anderson opt to narrow their research scope to verbal translation. Their study investigates the translation strategies employed by the University of Tartu Museum in Estonia for local and international visitors. Their primary focus lies on interlingual translation, emphasizing the inherent combinatory nature of museum texts, which also encompass intralingual and intersemiotic translations. These combinatorial texts arise from the institution's objective to embody its socio-political position, which, in turn, influences its language policy, while the perspectives involved in the creation of museum texts have academic, didactic, or design-related undertones. The authors contend that due to the authoritative status of museums, the translation strategies employed in museum texts assume heightened significance, as the manner in which museum translations deliver messages might influence visitors' perceptions of the exhibition.

Annalisa Sezzi's and Jessica Jane Nocella's main focus similarly lies on the translation of verbal texts. However, rather than centering their research on interlingual translation, their primary emphasis is on the process of popularization. Examining the concept of popularization as recontextualization and intralingual translation, they propose that the extent of this translation process is further influenced by additional mediation when the intended recipients are children. In relation to the concept of museums as "translation zones," the authors characterize museum websites as "important agents of knowledge dissemination." Through the website of the Natural History Museum in London *OLogy*, as well as the website of the American Museum of Natural History in New York, they conduct a discourse analysis and reveal the convergences and divergences in knowledge dissemination practices between their selected case studies.

The following article by Chiara Bartolini provides a comprehensive analysis of the distinct levels of interpretation, specifically examining the interlingual, intralingual, and intersemiotic translations of the artworks exhibited at the Pinacoteca di Brera. The author emphasizes the significance of examining museum translation, particularly in relation to the diverse media present in art museums, such as labels, online descriptions, audio guides, and audio descriptions for visitors with accessibility needs. This research encompasses not only the physical exhibitions within museums but also extends to online platforms, aligning with previous scholarly contributions in this special issue. The author directs attention toward the diverse interpretations that emerge from the multiple translations of the same artworks. She emphasizes that the process of meaning-making might vary significantly according to the visitors' requirements and capacities, particularly when considering the matter of accessibility.

Closing the issue, Clare Hindley, Katja Grupp, and Magda Sylwestrowicz assert in their analysis that museums can be conceptualized as environments that facilitate the preservation and transmission of collective memory through the process of translation. This definition encompasses an examination of the influence of generational translation and the significance of architectural elements within museum spaces in facilitating introspection and eliciting emotional reactions. The authors emphasize the significance of visitors' backgrounds in shaping their experiences and perceptions of museums that depict catastrophic events in history, as they explore the interplay between history, memory, and visitors. This is exemplified through their examination of the Jewish Museum Berlin as a case study. The authors illustrate the difficulties faced by their case study in achieving visitor expectations by examining the concept of generational translation.

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Résumé

La définition de la traduction, sa portée et ses limites ont été le sujet de nombreux débats scientifiques dans le domaine de la traductologie et de ses disciplines proches. Nous soutenons que la traduction muséale se situe au cœur de ce débat, englobant à la fois la « traduction proprement dite » ou traditionnelle et les aspects non verbaux et multimodaux de la traduction. La traduction muséale couvre un large éventail de perspectives qui contribuent à l'expansion du concept de traduction ainsi que du domaine des études sur la traduction. Elle tire parti de l'interdisciplinarité intrinsèque de la muséologie et de la traductologie, ce qui favorise un échange approfondi entre les disciplines et constitue une base idéale pour discuter des limites de la traduction. La traduction muséale est un concept qui peut se contracter ou s'étendre en fonction de la perspective du/de la chercheur.se et de sa concentration disciplinaire. Un examen approfondi des procédures complexes qu'englobe la traduction muséale est donc requis. Dans cet article, nous examinons et comparons les différentes applications de ce concept et donnons un aperçu de la manière dont diverses disciplines et axes de recherche ont abordé ce domaine d'étude. Notre objectif est de contribuer au développement du concept de traduction muséale et de sa position dans les études sur la traduction, une demande à laquelle chaque auteur répond dans ce numéro spécial, « Museums as Spaces of Cultural Translation and Transfer » [Les musées, lieux de traduction culturelle et de transfert].

Mots-clés : traduction muséale, traduction culturelle, conceptualisation, sémiosphère, muséologie

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