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## **Museums and creative industries: The contribution of Translation Studies**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Creative industries are now widely recognised as an important drive for economic growth around the world. The museum industry, specifically, is regarded as a crucial cultural asset in this development. Against this background, this paper explores how translation research can help improve the practice of museum translation, which in turn can help museums meet their new expectations as a culture and creative industry. The paper begins by discussing the concepts of museums and museum translation. It then reviews the literature on translation practices in museum settings, with a view to proposing five functions of museum translation: informative, interactive, political, social-inclusive, and exhibitivite. The paper continues by discussing “inter-community disjunctions” between museums and translation professionals, and suggests that Translation Studies on museum texts can have more explicit museological implications in at least two areas: economic value and social-inclusivity in museums. It is hoped this paper will stimulate much-needed theoretical and professional attention regarding the role of translation practices in the museum industry.

### **KEYWORDS**

Museum translation, creative industry, international visitors, multimodality, community translation, tourism translation

### **1. Museum as a creative industry**

Creative industries are now widely recognised as an important drive for economic growth around the world (Van der Pol 2007). The concept of creative industries originated from the United Kingdom (Van der Pol 2007: 2). Under the official UK campaign “UK Creative Industries” (Creative Industries 2016), eleven industries are listed, including advertising, architecture, art and culture, crafts, design, fashion, games, music, publishing, technology, and TV and film. The museum industry falls under the category of “art and culture”, which has the general aim of enhancing quality of life and education. Although there are some doubts on whether long-established museums can be categorised as a creative industry, in reality, museums are now seen as an important cultural force which can boost the economy. With the museum industry facing this transition from “an established arts-based model” to the creative industries model (Volkerling 2001: 437), its main challenge is to demonstrate its economic and cultural value (Rentschler 2004: 140). It seems to be a global trend that museums are receiving less funding from the government, and that museums are encouraged to generate income through multiple channels (Bradburne 2001, Skinner, Ekelund, Jr. & Jackson 2009, Lin 2010, Lawley 2015). Besides the economic pressure, museums are increasingly expected to engage with society and ensure equal access in the community (Rentschler 2004: 140–141). It is against this background that we aim to

address how translation, as an important tool of multilingual services in museums, can help museums cope with these challenges.

The objectives of this paper are twofold. First, it aims to provide an overview of what has been published on translation practices in museum settings so that any trends of this research field can be identified. Second, it aims to suggest areas where translation research can contribute to both museum practices and research. By achieving these two objectives, it is hoped that this paper will stimulate much-needed theoretical and professional attention regarding the role of translation practices in the museum industry.

## **2. Museums and translation**

The International Council of Museums (ICOM), a leading international NGO museum organisation, defines a museum as “a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment” (ICOM 2007: 2). This definition reflects the views of professional museum practitioners and academics. However, this non-profit definition of museums has been contested. Blunden (2016), for example, points out that there are certainly many for-profit museums, and many public museums that “need to be profitable to survive in a climate of decreasing government support” (Blunden 2016: 6).

As pointed out in Section 1, against the background of the culture and creative industries, museums have gradually been expected to undertake commercial approaches to generate income and contribute to local or national economic development (Rentschler 2004: 140). This paper proposes to explore the role of museum translation in the development of the museum industry. Despite the observation that many museums around the world now provide translation, translation practices in museums are still relatively under-researched. This can be evidenced when examining studies relating to museum labels, languages, or texts, e.g. McManus (1989), Coxall (1994), Jacobi (1995), Rousham (1995), Purser (2000), Schaffner (2006), Ravelli (2006), Fragomeni (2010), Surrell (2015), Lazzeretti (2016) and museum guidelines for label writing, such as the ones provided by the Australian Museum (Kelly 2015) and the Victoria and Albert Museum (Trench 2013). In these studies and sets of guidelines, translations are either ignored or mentioned in no more than passing comments. These comments often underestimate the complexity of translation practice. One example is: “if you are getting labels translated into other languages, do try to get the translation done by a native speaker of that language” (Ambrose & Paine 2012: 149). In other instances, the discussion is on the presentational rather than the linguistic features. For example, “[bilingual labels] present a special problem because the number of words is immediately doubled” (Rousham 1995: 94).

The use of the term *museum translation* is worth discussing. It is recognised 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). Museum translation is a broad term that can encompass several layers of meanings. In the broadest sense, a museum exhibition itself is seen as a form of translation. Bal (2011: 537), for example, regards translation as “transference, exchange, passage between present and past, language and image, form and meaning; passage and exchange between styles, sexes, media”, and argues that “all artistic expressions, all works of art, are acts of multiple translation”.

Sturge’s (2007) view of museum translation involves the concepts of “source texts” and “target texts”, but here texts do not necessarily refer to verbal texts. She proposes that in ethnographic museums, translation can be understood as a process of selecting, relocating, exhibiting, and interpreting. In this sense, “museumized objects” are seen both as source text and target text (Sturge 2007: 153). From a different perspective, displayed objects can be regarded as representing source texts, while their verbal interpretation constitutes target texts. Therefore, translation can be used to refer to the transmission between different cultures and different modes.

In Translation Studies, museum translation usually refers to the study of interlingual transmission of texts in museum exhibitions, with a set of source texts (STs) and target texts (TTs) as data. Although it is understood that different interpretations of “translation” in museums are equally important and each can contribute to theoretical and professional development in museum practices in its own way, given the limited space in this paper, my primary focus will be on interlingual translation of texts in museums.

One of the most comprehensive studies on museum texts is Ravelli’s *Museum Texts: Communication Frameworks* (2006). She defines museum texts as “the language produced by the institution [museum], in written or spoken form, for the consumption of visitors, which contributes to interpretative practices within the institution” (Ravelli 2006: 1). Museums nowadays provide texts in a variety of modes, including catalogue entries, leaflets, websites, object labels, introductory and section panels, audio guides, personal guides, portable written guides, and interactive touchpads. Among these different modes of museum texts, Ravelli divides the analysis of museum texts into three metafunctions of language, following the model of systemic functional linguistics (Halliday and Matthiessen 2014): representational meaning, which concerns how we engage with, understand, and refer to our world; interactional, which concerns the roles, the relation, and the attitude of text producers and receivers; and organised meaning, concerning how texts are shaped and structured to convey the

previous two meanings. Although Ravelli (2006: 1) also considers a whole museum exhibition as a text, the primary focus of her study is on texts in museums, i.e. analysis of choices of specific linguistic features in verbal texts.

While museum texts are crucial in contextualising and narrating the exhibition, Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen (2016: 26) argue that “how to display and narrate language itself as an object in the museum” is often overlooked. The methodology adopted in their study is designed to analyse whether a language is present, how texts are positioned in the physical space, and related issues. Based on this approach, Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen (2016: 29) propose that apart from providing information about the exhibition content, verbal texts in museums also perform the function of directing visitors around the display, and are displayed as an object itself.

Below I propose a typology of five functions of museum translation by drawing on the studies of Ravelli (2006) and Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen (2016), but also reflecting specific research dimensions of Translation Studies, including translation in global politics and conflicts (e.g. Baker 2006, Salama-Carr 2007), and community translation (e.g. Taibi and Ozolins 2016).

- **Informative function:** Museum translation provides information to museum visitors who do not understand the source text. The research focus is usually on how much of the ST is relayed in the TT.
- **Interactive function:** Museum translation interacts with the target readers by making them feel welcome and involved, and by reducing the distance between the institution and the visitors who rely on translations, usually international visitors.
- **Political function:** Museum translation can be an ideological tool which reflects and reinforces the view of how the museum as an institution wants to communicate with target text readers. What to translate, how to translate, and what languages to be translated into are all ideologically motivated.
- **Social-inclusive function:** Museum translation ensures language equality in a multilingual community as there is an increasing awareness that many museums only “speak” the mainstream or dominant language of the society, and thus exclude members of other language communities.
- **Exhibitive function:** Translation as an object can be displayed in museums. One example is an exhibition entitled “Temporary Center for Translation<sup>1</sup>”, in which different translated texts are exhibited. The theme of this exhibition was to explore translation as a mode of thinking, making, and doing. This function highlights that physical presence of translation itself in museums creates meaning.

It should be noted that this list of five functions is not exclusive, and there may be other functions or ways to categorise the functions of museum translation. Furthermore, these five functions are normally interconnected,

i.e. in a museum exhibition translations often perform more than one function at the same time. The final note is that the exhibitivistic function will not be included in the discussion below because it is more about seeing translated texts as objects for display rather than textual practices.

### 3. An overview of studies on museum translation

In this section, I will review various studies explicitly or implicitly related to museum translation. This will be done primarily with a view to understanding how they are related to the first four functions of museum translations, as discussed above.

#### *Informative Function*

In existing literature, one trend of studies that can be identified is those taking museum texts as the data and examining how much of the ST is relayed in the TT, or whether the ST is relayed *appropriately* – which may imply a different judgment according to different theoretical approaches. These discussions often refer to linguistically-oriented approaches, and museum texts are often only investigated to exemplify a type of translation challenge or strategy.

Different types of museums offer rich resources for Translation Studies. For example, a museum with a technical or scientific theme would provide data for the investigation of management and strategies of dealing with specialised terminology (Gill 1994). Museum catalogue entries have also been used to test how the quality of translation may be better assessed with the model developed from systemic functional linguistics (SFL). For example, Jiang (2010: 117) asserts that the criteria of informativity, acceptability, and intertextuality in SFL are useful to test the appropriateness of museum labels. The rich cultural and historical background embedded in museum texts also bring translation researchers to investigate the challenge of culture-specific items (Wang and Tong 2014).

These studies have brought new insights into Translation Studies, but they are also of limited relevance insofar as they decontextualise texts from the museum settings. One obvious problem in their methods is overlooking that museum texts are not exclusively verbal, but are delivered and received through multimodal channels.

The museum as a multimodal site has been well researched in Museum Studies and in multimodal discourse analysis (e.g. Martin & Stenglin 2007, Ravelli & McMurtrie 2015). However, multimodality in museum translation is still largely an under-explored area. Neather's research (2008, 2012a) is an exception to this by addressing intersemiotic and intertextual relationships in museum exhibitions. In his pioneering studies, Neather (2008, 2012a) adopts the concept of intertextuality in social semiotics to

investigate the ST-TT relationship. He first indicates that different modes of texts (e.g. labels, audio guides, wall panels, and leaflets) are intertextually linked and collectively contribute to the interpretation of objects. At the same time, different modes of texts are linked to the objects in different ways. For instance, he argues that wall-panel texts and objects are situated in a three-dimensional intersemiotic exhibition, whereas leaflets form part of two-dimensional printed documents with photos (of objects, for example). He asserts that museum translations should be seen as “a parallel set of Target Language intertexts that both cohere amongst themselves and in relation to the Source Language texts with which they are likewise intertextually related” (Neather 2012a: 215). Compared with previous studies, Neather’s approach more explicitly addresses the features of museum texts by taking into consideration the complicated multimodal context of museum exhibitions.

### *Interactive Function*

Studies which primarily address the interactive function of museum translation prioritise the relationship between people rather than between texts. In the existing literature, two types of approaches dealing with the interpersonal relationships involved in museums can be broadly identified.

The first type considers museums as tourism destinations; thus interaction takes place between visitors as customers and museum institutions as service providers (e.g. Cranmer 2013, Hogg, Liao, & O’Gorman 2014). This type of research aims to explore how translations can facilitate communication with international tourists more effectively, and therefore the data under investigation tends to be welcoming or visitor information, on museum websites or in printed form, such as leaflets.

Cranmer (2013) reports a project in which a panel of interdisciplinary experts evaluated the translated welcome leaflets provided in major museums in London. This project makes several recommendations to these museums, which will be elaborated under Section 5. Also in the context of tourism studies, Hogg, Liao, & O’Gorman (2014) adopt the methodology of discourse analysis and examine how social values of museums are embedded in visitors’ information on ten major British and Chinese museum websites. They found the English museum websites tend to be more interpersonal, because museums are conceived as a place for entertainment; whereas the Chinese museum websites adopt an authoritative tone, presenting museums as a cultural education institution. Their study suggests that translation shifts in writer-reader interaction can be explained by the fact that the social role of museums is perceived differently from culture to culture.

Interaction in museums is interpreted by Liao (2015) from a different perspective: interaction takes place within the multimodal museum exhibition among different agents, including makers of objects, exhibitors,

viewers, as well as producers and receivers of translated texts. This project examined an exhibition of a Scottish photographer's record of China in the nineteenth century. This exhibition toured several cities in China and in the UK, and contained texts in English and in Chinese. To identify different versions of narratives of an exhibition, she combined several methods, including visual analysis of the photographs (e.g. the gazes, the perspectives, and angles of the subjects being photographed); discourse analysis of the STs and the TTs, and audience research based on visitors' comments. This study demonstrated that the stories produced by the photographers, the exhibitors, the translators, and the visitors may be conflicting, but they collectively contribute to the construction of one exhibition.

The studies that I have discussed under the interactive function contribute to drawing the target text users into the centre of the discussion of museum management. Therefore, they are different from the studies under the informative function, whose approach to compare the ST and TT tends to assume that translations are to some degree inferior to the source text, and therefore they need to be examined against the source text.

### *Political Function*

Different from most of the studies above, which see museum translations as bridging the linguistic gap by, for example, maintaining accuracy, showing understanding of cultural references, and drawing international visitors closer, a few scholars have responded to the question in Translation Studies on the ethical and controversial role of translation practices in global conflicts (Deane-Cox 2014, Liao 2016, Chen & Liao 2017).

Ideological representation is a common interest of both museum and Translation Studies. In Museum Studies, what to exhibit and how to exhibit involve motivated decisions, and the authoritative or scientific role of museums has been challenged (e.g. Vergo 1989, Ferguson 1996, Hooper-Greenhill 2000). Similarly, in Translation Studies, the impartial or invisible roles of translators have been debated, and translation is now often examined in the context of global conflicts and politics (e.g. Baker 2006, Salama-Carr 2007).

Due to the focus on the political function, it may not be surprising to find that war or memorial museums have been used as the research target. Deane-Cox (2014), for example, examines how Holocaust memory is translated based on a case study of the French and English audio guides at the Centre de la Mémoire at Oradour-sur-Glane. Drawing from the Memory Studies, this study argues that translation adds another layer of mediation in the remembrance of the past, and can thus influence the formation of cultural memory. Indeed, in another study by Deane-Cox (2013), translators are referred to as "secondary witness[es]" in the discussion of Holocaust memory transmission.

Chen & Liao (2017) took the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum as a case study to examine how Taiwanese identity is formatted in the Chinese text and reframed in the English translation. National museums are often important sites for international visitors to learn about a nation. In this project, Chen & Liao (2017: 65) found that not only are there discrepancies in historic perspective between the STs and the TTs, but the English translations also embody inconsistent assumptions of national identity(ies). This study emphasises that without awareness of ideological assumptions embedded in translations, museums run the risk of sending unintended messages to international visitors.

So far, the research we have reviewed mainly discussed international visitors as the users of the translated texts, but translations are common and in some cases required by law in multilingual societies. This will be discussed in the social-inclusive function below.

### *Social-Inclusive Function*

Translation for museum visitors from different language backgrounds in a multilingual community has received little attention from translation scholars so far. Some scholars have investigated the physical display (or lack thereof) of translated texts in museums. For example, Valdeón (2015) examined a number of history museums in the United States and one feature noted by him was the poor quality of translations that were full of grammatical and spelling mistakes, such as the Spanish translations in the museums in Florida. He considers these flawed translations as evidence of museums showing little interest in translations as mediation of intercultural communication, and positioning the Spanish-speaking population in the margins of the society (Valdeón 2015: 369).

Also on the issue of displaying translations, Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen (2016) apply the framework of linguistic landscape analysis to examine how different languages are presented visually in the Museum of Sámi Culture in Finland. They argue that the choices of languages to be included and the ways in which they are displayed – for example, creating a visual hierarchy by placing one language on top of another, or indicating a language by using a national flag – “reinforce and also challenge existing linguistic hierarchies and inequalities” (Kelly-Holmes and Pietikäinen 2016: 37). They observed that in multilingual panels, the endangered Northern Sámi language is placed above the national language Finnish, and the global tourist *linguae francae* English and German. This visual hierarchy can be regarded as “an attempt to subvert the prevailing linguistic hierarchy which tends to prioritise larger languages” (Kelly-Holmes & Pietikäinen 2016: 29).

Although language accessibility of museums has not been the focus of Translation Studies, there are some ground-breaking studies in this area, particularly on the provision of guides for visitors with visual or hearing

disabilities (Jiménez Hurtado et al. 2012, Soler Gallego & Jiménez Hurtado 2013). Jiménez Hurtado et al. (2012) first identified different visitors' profiles and their needs, including general adults, children, teenagers, teachers and students, families, speakers of other languages, visually impaired people, hearing impaired people, mentally or intellectually disabled people, and physically disabled people. Then specific modalities that may need to be developed to ensure accessibility were proposed, including audio description (AD), sign language interpreting (SDI), subtitling for the deaf and hard of hearing (SDH), intralinguistic subtitling, and respeaking. Texts may also need to be adapted for individuals with different levels of prior knowledge (e.g. lay or expert) or cognitive abilities (e.g. children or adults). This study highlights some very important aspects of how translation and interpreting can function as a tool for museum accessibility.

As commented in Jiménez Hurtado et al. (2012: 364), the future of accessible museums lies in the collaboration between museums and translators and interpreters. The potential of the social-inclusive function of museum translation will be further explored in section 5.

#### **4. Museum translation – expert anxiety?**

The review above demonstrates that informative, interactive, and political functions have received more attention from Translation Studies, whereas the social-inclusive dimension of translation has been relatively less explored. However, overall museum translations remain under-researched in Translation Studies. There is certainly potential for translation researchers to contribute more to museum practice. Below, I will try to first explain why museum translation has not been properly practiced or researched, and then attempt to identify areas for further development in the succeeding section.

Based on the theory of "community of practice" (Wenger 1998), Neather (2012b) carried out an ethnographic study investigating the stakeholders involved in museum translation, including museum curators and translators. The study offers an insightful explanation to the many unsatisfactory translations found in museums, namely "expertise anxiety" (Neather 2012b: 266), which means that neither the museum community with its domain-knowledge, nor the translation community with its meta-discursive competence, feel competent enough to independently produce an accurate piece of translation. This expertise anxiety leads to "inter-community disjunctions" (Neather 2012b: 261). There seems to be uncertainty about which community is more competent in translating texts in museums, or who "owns" the genre.

One reason for these disjunctions may be the understanding of the concept of translation. Garibay and Yalowitz, both experienced consultants in museum education, propose a few questions that museum professionals

may ask regarding multilingual access, including: “What is the best way to translate text?” or “What are best practices for translation or for bilingual label development?” (Garibay & Yalowitz 2015: 3). However, after proposing these questions, they immediately criticise these questions arguing that their foci are so narrow that they can limit the way museum professionals approach the issue of multilingual audiences. From their comments it can be seen that translation is considered a very narrow and perhaps unhelpful concept.

While the above review highlights the perception that translation as a practice in museum may be seen as almost irrelevant, at the same time the question remains as to how a “boundary practice” (Wenger 1998) can be fostered “to build points of contact between communities and their different practices” (Neather 2012b: 261).

Collaboration between museum and translation professionals – including academics and practitioners – is probably the most direct way to build up points of contact, as has been demonstrated in some of the research projects above (e.g. Cranmer 2013, Chen & Liao 2017). More specifically, in terms of research, I would argue that the key to demonstrating the value of translation practices and translation research is to make more explicit how the research findings are relevant to museum practices and what their museological implications are. Returning to the big picture of the culture and creative industries, the next section will discuss more concretely how Translation Studies can help the museum industry face new challenges in a world of increasing historical, cultural, and linguistic complexity. The two areas I propose to focus on are the economic and the social-inclusive values of museums.

## **5. Translation and museological implications**

### *Economic value – Museum as tourist destination*

A clear expectation for museums as part of the creative industries is to boost culture-tourism and attract tourists, particularly international tourists. Translation plays a vital role in attracting international tourists who do not have the language of the host nation by providing them with essential information and by welcoming them and guiding them through the exhibition. Concurrently, museums (particularly national museums) play a crucial role in helping international visitors learn about other cultures.

Global tourism as a research topic is of interest to both museum and translation researchers. Cranmer (2013) reports a collaborative project titled MGIVE (Museums and Galleries and the International Visitor Experience) that explores how museums can better communicate with international visitors. The project was led by the Department of Modern and Applied Languages, University of Westminster, in collaboration with six major museums and galleries in London. This project examined the production of leaflets in foreign languages, and intended to lead to solutions

as to how these materials can be produced more effectively for international tourists. The project found that translated information provided in major British museums showed a lack of awareness of the needs, expectations, and sensitivities of visitors from other cultures. The MGIVE project proposed three possible solutions for overcoming the communication barrier, the first of which was hiring culturally sensitive experts to produce customised translations. However, they also acknowledged this solution may be unrealistic considering the cost to the museums. The second solution was to produce separate domestic and international versions of texts. Experts in intercultural communication should be consulted in the production of the international version, which could then serve as the ST for all the TTs. The third solution was to produce one easily understandable English version for all visitors, and language teachers could then be consulted.

The solutions from the MGIVE project are similar to what the localisation researchers in Translation Studies refer to as the GILT process, namely globalisation, internationalisation, localisation, and translation (Jiménez-Crespo 2013). In this process, globalisation means to identify that an institution operates in a global market. Internationalisation is an essential step in preparing the product for localisation. An important goal in this process is to guarantee that “source digital products are not tied to any particular culture” (Jiménez-Crespo, 2013: 25). The process of internationalisation reduces the time and resources needed to localise the product into many languages (Jiménez-Crespo, 2013: 26). One way of implementing internationalisation, as carried out by the Danish Tourist Board, is to produce the source text in English rather than in Danish (Kristensen 2002). The English text is then provided as the source text for translation into other languages. This corresponds to the second solution proposed by the MGIVE project discussed above. By seeing museums as tourism destinations, the interest of translation research in tourism can be extended to the museum industry, particularly regarding (but not limited to) the localisation and internationalisation of visitors’ information such as websites and leaflets.

Providing translations to international tourists also brings up the political function of translation. As museums address visitors from different cultures, they need to be aware that an inappropriately assessed translation can send unintended messages to international visitors. This is particularly sensitive in the current climate of global conflicts – how one nation both talks about itself and views other cultures need to be dealt with sensitively, as previously discussed under the political function above.

Research on ideology by translation scholars is not only restricted to bilingual or multilingual communication but is also relevant to monolingual narratives in museums. If we adopt Sturge’s (2007) view, a museum object is itself the ST and the TT concurrently. In an ethnographic museum where objects from other cultures are exhibited, how museum texts name an object or refer to any culture-specific concepts that are unfamiliar to the

culture of either the host museum or the visitors is ideological. These terms often do not have a ready equivalent in the target language, and present challenges to the writing of museum texts. An example of such difference in naming objects can be seen in the display of an ancient Chinese bronze vessel in the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. The former has the object labelled as “Zun”, which is a transliteration from the Chinese name, whereas the latter labelled the object as “Vessel”, which situates an ancient Chinese object in the contemporary English context. The different lexical choices embed different political assumptions as to how the institutions manage the gap between the cultural background of the visitors and the objects. More specifically, do museums want to transport people to the culture of the objects, or do they want to transport the objects to the culture of the visitors? The implications of these lexical choices go beyond the quality of language; such as for accuracy or fluency.

To conclude, in terms of attracting international visitors to foster the economic value of museums, translations help engage the visitors and reduce the distance between the institution and the visitors caused by language barriers. Translation researchers have also highlighted how ideological implications may shift in the process of translations, and museums need to make sure that they have not sent unintended messages to visitors from different cultural backgrounds.

#### *Social-Inclusive value: Equal access to language*

The economic value concerns mainly international tourists, but translation service is also important for a community with members of different language backgrounds. This is an area that has been less addressed by translation scholars who explore museum texts. However, the concept of inclusive museums is closely related to the field of community translation, i.e. the study about “service offered at national or local level to ensure that the members of multilingual societies have access to information and active participation” (Taibi & Ozolins 2016: 8).

An inclusive and equal access to museums has been a core issue in museum management and studies (Sandell 2002). It has been highlighted that museums still struggle with how to engage all members of the community “regardless of class, gender, age, race/ethnicity, or even *linguistic background*” (Garibay & Yalowitz 2015: 2; emphasis added). In this argument, providing translation in museums can be regarded as recognising that members of a community should have equal rights to access the linguistic information provided in the museums.

The discussion on this issue usually takes place in countries with more than one official language, e.g. Belgium (Shelley 2015); societies with a large number of immigrants, e.g. the United States (Martin & Jennings 2015); or linguistic minorities such as users of sign languages (Goss et al. 2015). It is common to see that museums only provide linguistic access in one or a

few dominant languages, thereby excluding other language speakers in the community from the linguistic access.

Martin & Jennings's (2015) report of their project to engage the Latino community at a museum in San Jose, California, provides us with a big picture of how the practice of text translation fits into the activities of community engagement. The entire project consisted of several initiatives, such as facilitating bilingual communications in museums (e.g. changing the phone line to include a bilingual line or hiring a bilingual receptionist), producing bilingual printing and interpretive material inside the museum, distributing Spanish flyers through the local Latino shops, and promotion through local Latino media. This scenario suggests that the discussion of the role and function of translation practices in museums goes far beyond texts within the museums, and translation research can contribute far more in this regard.

Providing translations to multilingual communities is an area where studies on community translation can contribute. Specifically, community translation has four aims (Taibi & Ozolins 2016: 11): to bridge between public services and the community members who do not speak the mainstream language; to bridge between different social groups; to facilitate information flow between community members; and to improve the socio-economic position of the language minorities and help them participate more effectively in their new community. These aims are clearly in line with the agendas of inclusive and equal museums.

Access to museums has not been a focus in studies of either community translation or interpreting, probably because it is often regarded as an elite or luxurious activity rather than a basic need for citizens – and this is precisely the motivation underlying the promotion of inclusive museums, namely that museums should be for and about the community members, and all members should have equal access to museums. This reflects the aims of the “art and culture” industry as specified at the beginning, that is, to enhance the quality of life and education. Community translation (and interpreting) can guide museum professionals in terms of language provision in a multilingual community, whereas museums provide the context for translation scholars to develop new directions in studies in community translation.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper aspired to achieve two aims: to provide an overview of museum translation, and to suggest how translation research can contribute to museum practices and research. With regards to the first aim, existing studies in museum translation have been reviewed and discussed under the four communicative functions proposed. The literature review suggests a trend that research in museum translation has gradually been engaging in a wider socio-political context. Early studies adopted decontextualised approaches by solely examining linguistic features in texts, but later studies

have begun to engage with the multimodal exhibition space, the cultural-historical background of exhibition themes, the responses of museum visitors, the ethical role and ideological stance of museum institutions, and multilingual and immigrant societies.

In terms of the second aim, this paper has concretely identified two possible areas that Translation Studies can contribute to museums as an important cultural asset to creative industries. One potential area is to help museums attract international tourists by providing culture-sensitive museum texts, and avoiding sending unintended messages about the ideological position of the institution or the host country. The other potential area is to help museums achieve equality and solidarity in a multilingual society by bringing insight from the research on community translation.

In this paper, I have attempted to identify five functions of museum translations and two potential museum themes of collaboration. Needless to say, the discussion in this paper is just a start and is by no means exhaustive. Further studies are needed to provide greater insight into museum translations.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Dr. Min-Hsiu Liao is a lecturer at Department of Language and Intercultural Studies, Heriot-Watt University, where she teaches English-Chinese translation and interpreting. Her research interests lie in the translation of texts in museums in various aspects, including writer-reader interaction, conflicts between the source and the target cultures, and multimodality in the museum space.

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<sup>1</sup>This was an exhibition in the New Museum, New York, from 16 July to 19 October 2014. More information about the exhibition can be found here: <http://www.newmuseum.org/exhibitions/view/temporary-center-for-translation> (consulted 20.11.2017).