

# Qualitative Interviews for Investigating Translation Practices in Museums

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## 1. Introduction

Increased attention has recently been paid to sociological and ethnographic approaches within Translation Studies (Batchelor 2018; Di Giovanni and Gambier 2018), calling for more “participant-oriented research” (Saldanha and O’Brien 2013), i.e. focusing on the participants involved in the translation practices. This perspective is based on the assumption that research on translation practices complements that on translation as text (Lörscher 2005). Translation practices may involve a number of processes leading to the creation of a translation output: within this scenario, several different stakeholders apart from the translators themselves may be involved in decision-making and in translation management, such as project managers, revisors, clients, text-writers, editors and domain experts. Although the role of the “unknown agents” (Schäffner 2014) and the “contextual factors” (Mason 2014: 38) informing translation practices still remain under-researched, some scholars have recently considered aspects of communication and collaboration among a diversity of stakeholders in translation projects (Risku 2006; Abdallah 2012; Foedisch 2017). Risku’s study (2006: 4) focuses on the role of translation service providers as a “communication hub”,

handling the flow of information between client and translator, thus ensuring translation quality. For Foedisch (2017: 55), quality depends on efficient collaboration between the different actors within “a translator network” and on their pursuing a common goal, while Abdallah (2012: 36) adds the importance of trust-building and a clear definition of the accountability of the different stakeholders.

Such an interplay between diverse people with various functions contributing to the translation process is highly relevant in the context of museum translation as it allows for different sets of expertise to merge into a joint effort, as also stressed by Neather (2012). In fact, Neather focuses on the practices of different stakeholders within the translation process as well as on the expertise considered necessary to provide a quality translation of museum content – and calls for “boundary practices” (Wenger in Neather 2012: 257) to overcome existing gaps in expertise and help the different actors communicate.

The aim of this paper is twofold. First, it seeks to promote the adoption of qualitative interviews as a research method within Translation Studies, and particularly in museum translation. By drawing on scholars (Kvale 2007; Wilson 2014) who claim that semi-structured interviews are suitable to investigate professional practices, we assume that interviews can provide detailed insights into actual translation workflows, the factors influencing them, the interaction among stakeholders and their expectations of translation quality. Investigating translation practices through qualitative interviews with the various people involved may thus generate novel and unanticipated knowledge, which would not emerge from the analysis of a translation as text. Second, the paper intends to show some methodological adaptations of qualitative interviews for when they are used in Translation Studies – adaptations which are generally necessary when borrowing methodologies from other disciplines (Saldanha and O’Brien 2013: 2). Two related projects investigating translation practices in European museums of different types – university museums on the one hand and art museums on the other hand – provide reflections on how the method of qualitative interviews may be adapted and how interviews may generate new and unexpected insights into professional practices related to museum translation.

## **2. Qualitative interviews as a method**

Interviews were first used in the late nineteenth century by British social policy researchers and anthropologists. The in-depth interview was then developed as a social research method in its own right in the US during the 1920s (Travers 2019). Most handbooks on qualitative interviewing within a range of disciplines draw on the methodological traditions of the social sciences.

### **2.1. Types of interviews**

Different types of interviews exist according to how “structured” the interaction between interviewer and participants is. On the one hand, structured interviews – which have much in common with quantitative questionnaires – are based on a predefined set of questions allowing for a limited range of answers and requiring the researcher to predict what the results will be (Saldanha and O’Brien 2013: 172). On the other hand, in unstructured or loosely structured interviews the interviewer seeks to engage in a spontaneous conversation with the participant, who can speak without prompts, making unexpected results and insights much more likely (*ibidem*). Halfway between these two extremes is the most common type of qualitative interview, i.e. the semi-structured interview. This generally involves using a fixed set of core questions to ensure comparability across participants but also allows for some flexibility (*ibidem*). The aim is “the construction of contextual knowledge” with the participants by following up “specific responses along lines which are peculiarly relevant to them and their context, and which you could not have anticipated in advance” (Mason 2018: 64).

### **2.2. Co-constructing knowledge through semi-structured interviews**

In semi-structured interviews, the priority is not getting answers to specific questions, but rather co-constructing knowledge by means of dialogic interaction

and exchange between interviewer and participant, implying an “egalitarian concept of roles” (Minichiello *et al.* 2008: 93). In this way, the interaction itself comes to play a fundamental role, converting interviews into a “meaning-making process” (Seidman 1998: 7), to which both parties contribute. The focus of qualitative interviews is thus on “the construction or reconstruction of knowledge more than the excavation of it” (Mason 2018: 62-63), where the unpredictable plays a major role. This kind of interview is based on the idea that meanings need to be developed cooperatively by the participant and the interviewer. Ultimately, exchanging ideas with specialists who have different backgrounds provides the opportunity to reflect on professional practices from diverse perspectives (Neves 2016: 241).

### **2.3. Pros and cons of semi-structured interviews**

In semi-structured interviews, a limited number of participants is involved, and the focus is on eliciting opinions, rather than just facts, which may reveal tendencies regarding social phenomena, professional practices, etc. Thus, generalizability of the results may be limited, but at the same time is not usually a priority (Mason 2018: 38) since the objective is to gain insights regarding specific contexts and actors. Compared to other data-gathering procedures (e.g. questionnaires), qualitative interviews also have other shortcomings and limits, such as the fact that they are time-consuming and require significant availability on the part of participants.

Nonetheless, semi-structured interviews offer a range of advantages. First of all, even a small number of interviews ranging from 10 to 30 can provide in-depth information on specific topics (Teddlie and Yu 2007: 84), as the researcher has the opportunity to gain insights from participants through their perceptions and experiences. Second, flexibility in the questions and spontaneity in the responses (Cohen *et al.* 2011: 409) are probably the most salient advantages of semi-structured interviews when compared to other methods for collecting information, such as structured interviews or questionnaires, which focus on a predetermined set of questions (Wilson and McClean 1994: 3). In fact, in semi-structured

interviews, the interviewer can adapt the order of the prompts to the situation and introduce unplanned follow-up questions, and the participant can also freely elaborate on the issues raised and add further unanticipated knowledge which may be relevant to the research. As a consequence, semi-structured interviews offer the possibility of obtaining perspectives on issues which were not predicted in advance.

#### **2.4. Unexpected insights**

Unexpectedness is a key term in qualitative interviewing. The “in-depth, unstructured nature of qualitative research and the fact that it raises issues that are not always anticipated” (Ritchie and Lewis 2003: 66) are some of the most noteworthy features of qualitative interviews. In fact, interviews are never “entirely pre-scripted” (Mason 2018: 64), as they are supposed to provide “unexpected or novel knowledge” (Braun and Clarke 2013: 171). The assumption behind interviews is that knowledge is contextual and situated, so researchers need to be prepared to improvise and develop a “capacity of surprise” (Wengraf 2001: 94), as they may often get “unanticipated responses” (*ibid.*: 108). A good interviewer knows how to adapt a flexible interview guide to “follow up on unanticipated issues and ask spontaneous and unplanned questions” (Braun and Clarke 2013: 125). Therefore, the capacity to improvise is crucial at different levels of the interviewing process, such as the design of the interview guide, the way the interview itself is conducted, and ultimately the interview analysis.

### **3. Qualitative interviews in Translation Studies**

Qualitative interviews are a widely adopted method in a variety of academic disciplines. The usefulness of this method has already been stressed in Linguistics (Dörnyei 2007; Edley and Litosseliti 2010) and Interpreting Studies (e.g. Angelelli 2007; Antonini 2010; Tipton 2010; Ceccoli 2018); and interviews

are becoming increasingly important in many other domains of Translation Studies (Saldanha and O'Brien 2013), such as:

- translator training, including studies on the conditions of translation training (Mirlohi *et al.* 2011), translation competence (PACTE group 2005; Károly 2011), and web search behaviour of translation trainees (Enríquez Raído 2011);
- interaction among the stakeholders involved in translation workflows, such as studies on translation project management (Olohan and Davitti 2015; Foedisch 2017), the role of translation technology in translation project management (Risku 2014), and user-centred approach to translation quality management (Suokas 2019);
- translator studies, focusing on the translator's workplace (Abdallah 2012; Ehrensberger-Dow 2014) and on translation memory-assisted translation (Christensen 2011; Moorkens 2012; LeBlanc 2013);
- translation process (Lauffer 2002; Krings 2005; Hubscher-Davidson 2011) and the revision within the translation process (Shih 2006);
- the EU context, studying e.g. migration terminology in EU institutions (Mariani 2014) or Memory Studies approach to EU institutional translation (Brownlie 2016);
- literary translation (Borg 2016);
- feminist translation (Wolf 2005);
- reception of translated tourist texts (Nobs Federer 2006);
- inference processes in legal translation (Faber and Hjort-Pedersen 2009);
- audiovisual translation research, studying either the creation of audio-descriptions (Eardley-Weaver 2014) and subtitles (Baker 2016; Grongstad 2016; Beuchert 2017; Orrego-Carmona *et al.* 2018), or the reception of audio-descriptions (Szarkowska and Jankowska 2015; Holsanova 2016; Leung 2018).

Most of the aforementioned studies make use of interviews in combination with other methods, including cognitive methods (e.g. concurrent and retrospective think-aloud protocols, keystroke logging, screen recordings and eye-tracking), ethnographic methods (e.g. observations and focus groups) or other empirical,

quantitative methods (e.g. questionnaires and analysis of corpora). Some of these studies (Lauffer 2002; PACTE group 2005; Károly 2011; Risku 2014; Borg 2016) specifically employ “retrospective interviews” with translators, which cover issues relating to a specific translation task previously undertaken by the translators (Krings 2005: 349)<sup>1</sup>.

#### **4. Investigating translation practices in museums through qualitative interviews**

This paper draws on two related projects – each one part of a wider PhD research study – which were carried out to investigate translation practices in different types of museums providing multilingual content in a variety of formats and on different media. Insights were gained through semi-structured interviews with a range of staff, such as curators, mediators, and press officers.

In one of these projects (Bartolini 2020), thirteen individual interviews with staff from a selection of six European university museums related to different fields (i.e. art, natural history, human anatomy, science, university heritage and botany) were conducted to explore their internationalisation effort within a broader approach to museum communication. More specifically, Bartolini investigated the processes underpinning the translation of the museums’ websites into International English. The objectives of the research were: a) identifying the intended audience for the museums’ English-version websites; b) discussing the translation workflow and the involvement of different stakeholders within and beyond the museum staff; c) examining whether participants showed an awareness of the potential need to address a linguistically and culturally heterogeneous audience; and d) identifying the possible impact of such an awareness on translation practices.

In the other project, Nauert (forthcoming) employed individual and group interviews with staff from 25 large and medium-sized European art museums to

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<sup>1</sup> For an account of the use of retrospection methods in Translation Studies see Enriquez (2011).

explore their translation policies and practices by focusing on the perspective of the museum and their role in contributing to the overall quality of translated content. Her study focused on all the text types that are potentially translated in art museums, such as web and multimedia content, brochures and catalogues, audio guides and exhibition labels. The objectives of the research were: a) describing and evaluating translation policies and practices in European art museums; b) analysing participants' awareness of the necessity for a systematic approach to translation quality management; c) elaborating categories for translation policies in museums regarding objectives, conditions, and tools; d) identifying potential enhancements to current practices and policies to contribute to overall translation quality.

## **5. Adapting the method**

Drawing on methodological approaches to interviews which are more common within the social sciences (e.g. Seidman 1998; Wengraf 2001; Mason 2018), interviews were used to collect information which could provide insights into translation practices in museums. For the purposes of our research, we needed to adapt this method slightly, in ways which will be illustrated in the following paragraphs. The interview format that we used required variations on the traditional methodological characteristics and steps of qualitative interviews. In particular, adaptations were made concerning the acknowledgement of the researchers' assumptions, participant recruiting, rapport-building during each interview, note-taking, and the analysis of the interviews. No adaptations were deemed necessary in relation to other steps, such as the design of the interview guide, as we considered the standard methodological approach to be appropriate for our research objectives.



### **5.1. Researchers' assumptions and background knowledge**

Being culturally situated, interviews are unique events, which are affected by the contributions of the researcher, especially in terms of their theoretical assumptions and their personal perspective. For this reason, when designing research interviews, it is generally recommended that the researcher try to identify, acknowledge, and make note of any prejudices, assumptions and ideological positions, which might affect the interviews without the researcher being aware of it (Wengraf 2001). When we carried out our interviews, we were aware of having different backgrounds from the interview participants, and that our knowledge of the museum sector was necessarily more limited and theory-based. These considerations thus informed the way in which we formulated the interview questions.

### **5.2. Recruiting**

Recruiting the participants is a critical moment in the interview process (Minichiello *et al.* 2008). This involves the researcher's "expert judgement" (Teddlie *et al.* 2007: 83-84) in selecting participants who can "yield the most information about a particular phenomenon" (*ibidem*), a technique generally referred to as purposive or purposeful sampling. This means being able to identify the "appropriate people" (Wengraf 2001: 95) to be interviewed by ensuring that they have an adequate amount of knowledge of the subject in question and are thus able to provide relevant and information-rich material. When investigating professional practices, the researcher's expert judgement may not always be sufficient to identify suitable candidates for interviews, since they may not have sufficient access to information on internal organisational structures and hierarchies, as well as on the specific responsibilities of staff within an institution or company.

In her study, Bartolini selected staff members that she assumed to be involved in the museum's communication practices, on the basis of general information regarding their roles which was sufficient for the recruiting process. People at

different levels and from a variety of departments were contacted in order to gain insights from participants with potentially different perspectives. By contrast, the purposeful sampling used by Nauert in her study required the collaboration of the museum management team in order to identify appropriate staff members involved in translation-related tasks. This was necessary because in many museums there is no specific professional figure assigned to translation-related tasks, but these tasks are potentially performed by a range of people from different departments (e.g. curators, press officers or text editors) along with their core responsibilities – making it difficult for the researcher to identify possible participants without guidance. Moreover, since the interviews also focused on the institutions’ translation policies, it was deemed appropriate to involve the museums’ decision-makers in the selection of interview participants.

### **5.3. Rapport-building**

Rapport-building is crucial for successful interviews as it creates a comfortable situation and facilitates interaction (Seidman 1998). The interviewer is generally expected to have knowledge, sensitivity and the ability to adapt to the participant’s language. For the interviews that we conducted in our respective projects, our background knowledge was essential, e.g. knowledge on the heritage sector in general, on the history of a specific museum, on past and current exhibitions, as well as on the organisation and staff within the museum. Sensitivity is obviously helpful in any dialogical context, but was not of crucial importance here, as we did not cover sensitive topics. Our main concern in rapport-building was our use of language and terminology, considering that the museum professionals we interviewed were not necessarily experts in Linguistics and Translation Studies, as shown by the interview with an art museum in Example 1<sup>2</sup>. To make the participants feel comfortable and to encourage them to speak with their own words, the questions were formulated in a language that

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<sup>2</sup> In the examples, the interviewer’s questions are indicated with the letter “I” and the participants’ accounts with the letter “P”.

was deemed to be easily accessible to the participants, avoiding specialised terminology, or explaining terms when necessary.

(1) I: Which are the most frequent translation problems you face?

P: Interpretation problems in more scholarly texts. In more basic texts, **calling things the same way every time they happen to occur.**

I: How do you ensure this?

P: We use, not all the time, but we use ... **I don't know how you call them,** ... computer-aided ...

I: ... translation tools?

P: More than translation, we usually use their databases. [...] One of them is Trados, and we also use Wordfast. (Anonymised example)

#### 5.4. Notetaking

Notetaking is considered a further decisive element within the interview process (Minichiello *et al.* 2008; Galletta 2013). Fieldnotes taken during and immediately after the interview generally include key terms and topics, issues in need of clarification, observations about participants' (re)actions in terms of paralinguistic features (e.g. facial expressions, tone of voice, gestures, etc.) as well as reflections on what was said (e.g. speculations about themes). In order to focus on the dialogue with the participants, our notetaking during the interviews that we conducted was limited to keeping track of the sequence of emerging topics and issues in need of clarification. A second phase of notetaking immediately after the interview (i.e. de-briefing notes) concentrated mainly on reflections regarding the content that came up in the interview. As our research projects focused on professional practices rather than personal issues, notes about the participants' reactions were not a priority.

## 5.5. Interview analysis

Analysis is a crucial step in the interview process (Kvale 2007; Creswell 2014). The information collected through interviews may be analysed adopting a variety of methods, such as grounded theory, content analysis or thematic analysis, according to the design and purpose of the research. The analysis may take different elements into account at the same time: interviews may be considered as a source of information regarding content and paralinguistic features but also as an instance of real language data. In fact, Linguistics makes a specific use of interviews, as it analyses the information by considering it as an “authentic communicative situation in which naturally occurring talk is exchanged” (Codó 2008: 158). Since our respective projects investigated professional practices rather than the linguistic and paralinguistic features of the participants’ accounts, our analysis focused primarily on content to develop “interpretive themes” (Mason 2018: 66) from the interviews.

This paper aims to show that each of our research projects needed specific adaptations in terms of methodology. Hence, this section will provide an illustration of the diversity of potential methodological adaptations. In Bartolini’s study, which investigated the translation of university museums’ websites, the six interview recordings were transcribed so as to get a ‘verbatim’ account of each interview, which was loosely based on techniques for orthographic transcriptions (e.g. adding punctuation), thus excluding paralinguistic features (e.g. fillers, tone of voice, laughing, etc.). Eventually, a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) of the transcriptions was carried out to develop a range of relevant themes. Nauert’s study, on the other hand, which looked at translation practices and policies in art museums, did not use full transcriptions of the interviews, and therefore involved a deeper level of adaptation. As her study investigated professional practices, thus focusing on an analysis of content rather than on language, a close verbatim account of what was said was not so crucial (Halcomb and Davidson 2006: 41). Furthermore, it was considered inefficient to transcribe more than 30 interview recordings verbatim. For this reason, Nauert opted for a thematic elaboration in a narrative form, based on fieldnotes combined with repetitive close listening of the audio recordings as proposed by Halcomb &

Davidson (2006), while including partial transcriptions of significant citations. Subsequently, a common structure of themes was elaborated to compare the collected information.

## **6. Some insights into museum translation practices**

In the literature, the format of semi-structured interviews is considered a highly suitable approach to investigate professional practices and workflows (Kvale 2007; Wilson 2014). The aim of this article is not to provide a comprehensive report of the interview results of our respective studies, but rather a small sample of the deep as well as unexpected insights gained from the interviews. The following subsections include examples from our interviews, shedding light on the multilingual communication strategies adopted by museums, staff members' expectations of translation quality, and their reflections on how to improve translation practices.

### **6.1. Multilingual communication strategies**

Our interview data provided insights into how different models of museum communication correlate with different quality requirements for translations, thus implying different multilingual communication strategies. Currently, museums are undergoing a paradigmatic change (Vergo 1989; Falk & Dierking 1992; Hein 1998; Hooper-Greenhill 2000; Simon 2010) concerning the relationship between museum and visitor, which triggers a phase of experimentation and results in a heterogeneity of communicative approaches and staff involved. The traditional approach, promoting more formal and academic content intended for the expert and educated visitor, is in contrast to new approaches in favour of more accessible and interactive content, suitable for a wider audience and not requiring prior knowledge. This shift seems to apply to varying degrees and to a variety of museum types.

When investigating multilingual communication strategies in art museums, we found, rather unexpectedly, that quality requirements varied according to the type of art discourse (i.e. contemporary, modern, and pre-modern) or the overall communication model. Contemporary art discourse, in particular, was described as a complex genre, characterised by a hermetic style, ambiguity, and the presence of multiple meanings. These characteristics seemed to have a great impact on how museum professionals perceived translation quality and what they expected from translators. In fact, conveying the linguistic style and tone of voice of the original content emerged as an urgent concern of participants working in contemporary art museums who consider text – particularly catalogue texts, publications, and exhibition content – as the unique expression of an author. In Example 2 the participant stressed the priority of staying true to the author’s style in order to stay true to the author’s intentions – which may be rather ambiguous and equivocal. Given the complexity and ambiguity of contemporary art discourse, which intentionally lacks a clear message, some museum staff expressed anxiety about translators trying to reformulate content.

- (2) Some curators write very obscure texts [...] [and] do not want to be terribly specific about things because their style is a bit more **hermetic** [...] Translators may say ‘I don’t understand this’ and we say ‘Well this is what it means, but **don’t overexplain it**, because the curator doesn’t want it to be overexplained. Sometimes **if you try to interpret concepts, you may make a mistake**. Because sometimes there are subtleties. So, you need to make sure that you are not **betraying the curator’s idea**. [...] So, in case of an author, **we really need to stay true to what the author wants to say** and how she or he wants to say it. So, for me a good translation is the translation that says what it needs to say and in the way the author expressed it. [...] The way the original was written is the way the translation should be written. [...] If you want to stay true to his ideas, **you cannot go around and re-explain the entire thing** so that it sounds more natural, because you are going to get into trouble if you are trying to do that. (Publications Department, Guggenheim Museum Bilbao)

By contrast, participants from art museums that favoured more accessible and interactive content suitable for a wider audience – often co-created by curators and mediators – rarely focused on the linguistic characteristics of the source content. Their focus was rather on the characteristics of the target text. They

referred to the challenges of creating a fluent and intelligible text, that is adequate and engaging for the target audience, while conveying the purpose of the source text, involving to a certain extent the rewriting and reformulating of the text. When referring to style, the participants pointed out the importance of natural-sounding style in the target language and the fact that each translator may have their own style. It can be said that a more audience-driven communication model is accompanied by a more target-oriented approach to translation – in line with the principles of a functional approach to translation, where purpose and target represent the decisive parameters for translation choices, as shown by Example 3.

- (3) **To translate is to betray** [*traduttore, traditore* – in the original Italian extract]. The logic is to produce a text that is not misleading from the source text, but at the same time has its own coherence, intelligibility, and **its own beauty** in the target language. This somehow frees [the translator] from a total adherence to the source text. [...] **Translating for me is interpreting**. Transferring content into another language means **rewriting** it, which is not easy. (Communication Department, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milano)

An audience-driven approach to communication and translation needs to be based on the identification and definition of a target audience, which should inform the multilingual communication strategies to be adopted (Cranmer 2016). Nonetheless, participants from university museums did not show a strong awareness of the importance of taking the target audience's needs into consideration when producing and translating texts. Unexpectedly, even though museums may have data suggesting that they receive international visitors, content was often not written or adapted specifically for an international audience in order to meet the linguistic and communicative needs of this heterogeneous audience, as can be seen in Example 4. In this example, assumptions about the intended readers and their needs were not internally discussed among the museum staff and converted into actual guidelines, but translators were expected to deliver texts in “the best possible English”. Thus, the participant's expectations seemed to refer exclusively to the linguistic accuracy of the translated texts, with no consideration of other translational issues, e.g. in terms of fidelity to the source text or necessary adaptations to improve accessibility. Other participants similarly

described the linguistic requirements for their translations, either by referring directly to a specific (native) variety (i.e. British English) or to correctness with reference to native language norms (“real English”, “grammatically correct”). Most participants from university museums confirmed that no coherent set of guidelines for the translation of their websites was provided, and that the definition of strategies to be adopted was ultimately delegated to translators. This confirms that in certain contexts a gap still exists between the museum as content provider and the translators as language experts. Translation guidelines may bridge this gap by providing information on various issues, such as the museum’s intended audience, which may contribute to the adoption of more target-oriented translation strategies and ultimately to translation quality.

- (4) [The website] English is **a translated English**, not [an English version that was made] thinking of a non-English audience. [...] But it was designed to ... translate the texts into **the best possible English**. But without thinking: “we also have a Spanish audience, native Spanish speakers, or an audience that comes more and more from the East.” We understand this ... from the visitors’ book. (Curatorial Team, Museum of Human Anatomy of the University of Turin)

## 6.2. Translation quality: perceptions and expectations

Translation quality as perceived by museum staff was often defined by referring to the translator’s competences and characteristics, such as domain-specific expertise (including knowledge of specialised terminology), native-speaker language competence and distinct writing skills, without necessarily considering translation competence. In fact, as emerged from our respective projects, museums tended to rely on disciplinary experts in fields related to the collections. When outsourcing translations, preference thus seemed to be given to collaborators who are familiar with the content, and not necessarily to professional translators. Given that collaborators may not always have the complete set of necessary competences to provide a quality translation, the authors claim that the interaction between museum staff and the translator can greatly contribute to fulfilling the museum’s quality expectations. However, the



need for a collaboration between the two professional communities was not always recognised by participants, as shown by the following examples.

In university museums, there seemed to be a preference for translators working into their own native language (Example 5) without necessarily considering their translational competence. This underlined the application of a more traditional prescriptive approach in TS, claiming that translation into the “language of habitual use” may be the best solution to “translate naturally, accurately and with maximum effectiveness” (Newmark 1988: 3).

- (5) [...] we need a **native speaker** [...] as it’s usually **general rule**, right? You translate to your own language or you version to the foreign one. (Marketing and Communications Department, Natural History Museum, Copenhagen)

Although the translator’s native-speaker language competence was considered essential by the university museums’ staff, the participants’ accounts also suggested that such competence may not be sufficient, by claiming that domain-specific expertise is a key requisite to guarantee translation quality. Nonetheless, it came as unexpected that finding collaborators who could satisfy their quality requirements was perceived as difficult or even impossible, as shown by Example 6. This example also revealed their disappointment in the work carried out by the translators they had hired, as they were not experts in the related field and not sufficiently familiar with the specialised terminology. In the perception of museum staff, it appeared difficult to find professional translators able to do the necessary research and use specialised terms in a disciplinary field. Since museums can encounter difficulties in finding collaborators with the required set of competences, we argue that the active participation of the museum may significantly contribute to the overall translation quality.

- (6) It’s a small ... it’s a booklet, which leads you through the Botanical Garden. And we wanted to do it in English, German and French, as ... three diplomatic languages, basically, but that proved to be impossible because **we couldn’t find a biologist who could be a native speaker in German or French**. So ... we could do this with English because some of our mentors are professors in England and Scotland, so they ... checked our texts and that was fine, but with German and French it was a problem because ... **translators that we used were** ...

**basically, what they did was a massacre on our text**, because it's ... you know, lots of scientific things and Latin names and so on. So, we decided it's not a good idea to ... to do in different languages because ... or ... until we have someone who can actually check the language and translate it ... in **good quality**. (Curatorial Team, Botanical Garden of the University of Zagreb)

Museum staff from art museums similarly stressed the need for domain accuracy as a key quality requirement. In the perception of the participants, what distinguishes art museums from other types of museum in terms of content creation is a strong curatorial tradition. In their view, texts in art museums have a special status, as there is a strong interpretative element in art discourse, and thus writing style matters a great deal. This particular condition had implications for various aspects of translation policy in art museums, for example, on the choice of external collaborators for translation services. As participants considered writing skills as a key competence for translating art discourse, some of them decided to work with a trusted collaborator to guarantee a specific writing style. In fact, long-lasting collaborations were considered a way to achieve the specific translation quality requirements in a process of approximation over time. This involved a close collaboration and continual interaction to align quality expectations and work towards a common goal while establishing a relationship (Example 7).

- (7) Personally, I prefer collaborating with freelance translators. Some of them know our working style quite well. [...] For me it is important to have a **personal relationship**. With agencies that is more difficult, because you never know who is translating. Sometimes translations are mechanical [...]. But when I work with a **translator that has come to know my texts, my work, and my intention – maybe we had a coffee together while talking about my expectations for the translation** – then things work better. (Education Department, Kunsthaus Graz)

The museum's active participation in the translation process was a *leitmotif* in many accounts given by participants from art museums. The negotiation of translation quality between the art museum and the translator community is often characterised by what Neather calls "expertise anxieties" (2012: 261), meaning that museum staff are concerned that the translator may not have the complete

set of competences to deliver a satisfying product. One such anxiety mentioned by participants regarded the translator's ability to interpret art discourse correctly. Participants expressed the concern that the translator may not grasp or may misinterpret artistic content due to a limited background in art history, which meant that sometimes former staff members might work as translators for a museum (Example 8).

- (8) We also have a **former staff member**, who had worked in the mediation department, and who now translates for us. [...] That is **someone who knows the museum, the collection**, and the content really well. [...] **The point is, you must be able to trust that the translator grasps the content**, someone who knows the subject, or comes from the **art sector**, so that no **misinterpretations** can arise. (Press Office, Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien)

A series of coping strategies was put forward by some of the participants to deal with differing expertise between translators and museum staff, such as checking translations in-house (Example 9).

- (9) For us it is extremely important that external collaborators have an **art historical knowledge**. [...] Sometimes, that is **difficult**. That is why we **always review translations in-house**. [...] (Press Office, Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt)

### **6.3. A dialogue between theory and practice**

Both of the authors received positive feedback from the interviewed participants, who appreciated the constructive exchange. In fact, while acknowledging some shortcomings of their practices, the participants showed openness to the issues and potential solutions raised during the interviews – in particular, the importance of considering the intended audience in terms of linguistic needs, and of implementing translation policies for more structured translation management. Participants further showed the intention to discuss such issues with the rest of their museum staff, as well as interest in examining the research results, which according to them may potentially inform and improve their current practice (Example 10). This confirms that interviews may be “potentially a learning event

for both participants” (Edwards and Holland 2013: 3) – the researcher and the person being interviewed.

- (10) We need to sort of ... set a level of English that is accessible to all. [...] But once again, that would be something **we should write in a guideline** [...] I would also like to say that ... having this conversation with you about this **tone of voice** and ... **are we aware?** Are we ... thinking about people here who are not native English speakers? All that stuff is actually **something I will bring back** [...] **in our team meeting**, I will say: “This was a good thing and we actually added a number of things.” So, **you've already actually contributed with something that I can bring with me** as well. So, it's a mutual thing. (Marketing and Communications Department, Natural History Museum, Copenhagen)

When addressing workflows of translation management with staff from European art museums, many processes were revealed as rather unstructured. The interviews allowed for a reflection on potential translation policies in museums aimed at improving these workflows, such as introducing standardised client specifications, employing computer-assisted translation tools to exploit previous translations, or creating a unit in charge of supervising translation issues. In fact, some participants from different departments engaged in just such a critical reflection during the interview, reassessing their current practices and discussing potential improvements to be adopted – demonstrating a level of openness to the implementation of translation policies, as shown in Example 11.

- (11) I: Thank you so much for the very interesting discussion and the precious insights into your work.

P1: **It was really good for us to reflect about these issues**, since we don't do that in the daily routine. For example, I think we should encourage the department to include the translators' name in relation to the stored texts in our text management system. [...] That would be perfect, because in case of content updates, we know who to contact.

P2: Yes, and I think, that's an important point.

P3: I think, we actually need a person responsible for the proofreading of English content.

P2: Yes, that is a key figure we are missing in-house.

P4: It would be very helpful to have a competent person in-house, who is available for us as a central contact person. (Marketing Department, Digital Communication Dept., Editorial Dept., Press Office, Universalmuseum Joanneum, Graz)

The authors claim that by enabling an exchange between researchers and participants, qualitative interviews can foster a dialogue between translation-related research and practice, with the possibility of one feeding into the other. In fact, as a result of this interaction, Nauert has developed a set of best practices for translation policies in art museums in collaboration with the participants. The importance of theory embracing practice with the aim of providing guidance is also expressed by Emma Wagner, translation manager at the European Commission in Luxembourg, in an exchange with the translation scholar Andrew Chesterman:

In my view, 'theory' should not be just some individual's brain-child: it should arise from observing practice, analyzing practice, and drawing a few general conclusions to provide guidance. These conclusions should naturally be tested in practice. Leading to better guidance. (Chesterman and Wagner 2002: 6)

## **7. Conclusions**

In this article we have discussed the use of qualitative interviews to investigate translation practices in different types of museum. We have argued that this method should be adapted when employed in Translation Studies and we have examined those methodological characteristics of qualitative interviews which need to be adjusted according to the specific aims of a project. Furthermore, we have shown the different ways in which two related projects on translation in museums needed to adapt the various stages of the interviewing process, such as recruiting and interview analysis; and we suggest that further research is needed on how qualitative interviewing methods need to be tailored to different research designs in TS – an issue partially addressed by Saldanha and O'Brien (2013).

In our projects, interviews have proved a valid means to gain new and unexpected insights into translation practices in museums. One significant insight, for example, is the fact that the involvement of museum staff in the translation process contributes to translation quality. Although to some extent the participants seemed to have a clear idea of their quality expectations, they lacked a systematic approach to specifying their requirements. In fact, most museums did not provide documented translation guidelines for their translators. However, museum staff attempted to achieve their quality expectations by prioritising collaboration with native speakers, domain experts or trusted translators, although the participants' accounts also revealed difficulties in finding such collaborators. In line with Neather (2012: 260), we argue that the participation of the museum in the translation workflow is fundamental to integrating the translator's expertise, thus allowing for an exchange of knowledge – for example in the form of guidelines. Such collaboration may help to ensure both domain accuracy and linguistic precision, ultimately improving translation quality. This may also help to integrate translation and multilingual practices within the museum's wider communication approach, rather than delegating such practices to translators as an isolated step.

With this article, we hope to have raised awareness of the need for a greater collaboration among the different actors involved in museum translation. Moreover, interviews have proved a valid method allowing the participants and the researchers to engage in a constructive reflection on translation workflows in university and art museums. In the future, it would be desirable for research to continue the dialogue with practitioners to further discuss and define best practices concerning the interaction among the diverse stakeholders involved in museum translation.

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