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Professional Museum Translators for Promoting Multilingualism and Accessible Texts: Translation Practices in Some Italian Museums and a Proposal

Abstract

This article examines the role of museum translation in the contemporary world. More specifically, the paper advocates linguistic “accessibility” for museum target texts, focusing on a case study of three Italian museums. Combining a qualitative context-oriented methodology and a theoretical approach, the paper draws on interviews with museum professionals in the city of Bologna, Italy, and puts forward a proposal for a linguistic training of professional museum translators who can tackle the challenge posed by multifunctional texts. The findings suggest that, although translation is recognized by translation-related staff as a crucial activity in the internationalization of museums, translation practices are not systematic. Exploiting interdisciplinary connections between Translation Studies and Systemic Functional Linguistics, interfacing with Museum Studies, the paper argues that an effective, “accessible” and “inclusive” museum text may be produced by a linguistically trained translator who is capable of conveying, in a different language, the “organizational”, “interactional” and “representational” functions (Ravelli 2006) which are interlocked in a museum text. Authentic examples from panels and exhibit labels will be offered, dealing with the Italian-English language pair.

Keywords

museum translation, museum translator, multilingualism, accessibility, systemic functional linguistics

1. Museums, language and translation

Contemporary phenomena such as globalization, migration and increasing mobility of people for business travel or tourism have had a considerable influence on the twenty-first century's museums, which have become international sites that need to include multilingual audiences, with different cultural and social backgrounds. As a result, the concept of "inclusive" and "accessible" museum has become a well-established paradigm, meaning that a museum institution should engage *all* members of society, "regardless of class, gender, age, race/ethnicity, or even *linguistic background*" (Garibay and Yalowitz 2015: 2, emphasis added).

The importance of communication in its widest sense is on the agenda of museums nowadays. However, despite more general key studies in museums and communication (e.g. Hooper-Greenhill 1991, 1994; McManus 1989, 1991; Coxall 1991, 1994), language issues have been rarely addressed in museum studies (MS), with a few exceptions (e.g. Koliou 1997; Kjeldsen and Jensen 2015; Blunden 2016).

Research into museum language has also been limited in linguistics, apart from groundbreaking work by Ravelli (1996, 2006) and other sparse contributions (e.g. Purser 2000). More recently, the discourse of museum communication, focusing on the press release, has been tackled by Lazzeretti (2016). Notably, Ferguson, MacLulich and Ravelli's guidelines (1995) offered a rare example of collaboration between museum professionals and language experts.

The main tools by which museum institutions may communicate with their multilingual and multicultural audiences are multiple languages and translation. Especially in non-Anglophone contexts, where a huge variety of languages is spoken and museum visitors come from different areas of the world, translation should thus play a vital role in providing them with essential information and enabling them to learn about other cultures. In many countries, a significant amount of translation work is being undertaken, especially into English as a global language. Nevertheless, focusing on Europe, this fundamental activity is disregarded in key documents issued in the area. This trend can be seen in a frame of reference for museum professions in Europe (Ruge 2008) by *the International Council of Museums* (ICOM), the output of a project involving France, Italy and Switzerland:

While definitions of activities of museum professionals are offered, museum translation is not envisaged. Likewise, in The Italian Chart for Museum Professions (ICOM 2008), although a general knowledge of the English language is required for all museum professions, the lack of awareness of translation issues is confirmed if one analyses the occurrences of the key words *traduzione /tradurre/ traduttore* (“translation/ translate/ translator”): “translation”/ “translate” occur twice, albeit in a figurative sense, while there are no occurrences of “translator”. In a more recent document by ICOM (2017) about updating museum professions and their functions in the light of a reform in public museums, translation is totally ignored. Similarly, on the Website of the Italian Association of Translators and Interpreters¹ (AITI), selecting for instance the Emilia-Romagna region, the category “museum translator” is not included. Such documentary evidence concerning the role of museum translation in Europe and Italy seems to confirm what Neather (2012b: 245) observed with respect to China: The museum community is not usually associated with translation.

Within academia, museum translation has been either ignored or minimized in MS and linguistics. For example, studies that focus on the importance of the language dimension in museums (e.g. McManus 1989; Coxall 1994) did not encompass the translation activity. More recently, when Garibay and Yalowitz commented on the translation-related questions posed by museum professionals interested in providing “written resources in multiple languages”, dismissed them as “quite narrow” (2015: 3-4). In doing so, the scholars underestimated the complexity of translation. Likewise, linguistic studies (e.g. Purser 2000; Ravelli 2006; Lazeretti 2016) have not been concerned with translational issues. Most importantly, translation practices in museums are still a relatively under-researched area in Translation Studies (TS), excepting the pioneering work by Neather (2005, 2008, 2012a, 2012b, 2018) in China and a few notable exceptions (e.g. Sturge 2007; Jiang 2010; Guillot 2014; Liao 2018). As Guillot points out, “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” (2014: 92).

1 See <http://www.aiti.org>.

The purpose of this paper is twofold. Firstly, it aims to discuss current practices in the field of interlingual museum translation in the European scene, and more specifically the Italian setting, focusing on a case study of museums in the city of Bologna. Secondly, it argues in favour of professional museum translators and seeks to suggest a specific training for them, where emphasis is placed on the capacity to produce accessible translated texts. It is believed that such training should entail a linguistic background founded on linguistics, more specifically Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday 1985a). Concrete examples of museum texts will be offered, dealing with the Italian-English language pair. However, the issues involved might be representative of other European contexts where English is the target language (TL). By way of illustration, each source text (ST), written in the Italian source language (SL), will be compared with its corresponding target text (TT). The ultimate aim is to show how a theoretical linguistic background may help translators deliver more effective, accessible and inclusive translations.

2. Theoretical framework

In this paper, TS gives the conceptual framework to explore issues of translation theory, relating them to insights from MS. Moreover, linguistics, in particular SFL, offers the theoretical and analytical toolkit to analyse texts and translate them within a didactic proposal.

2.1 Conceptual issues

In this section, key conceptual issues which serve as a background to the study are outlined, drawing on TS, MS and SFL. In particular, the notions of museum translation, museum text, multilingualism, accessibility and inclusion are provided.

As Liao makes clear, the term “museum translation” (2018: 47) can convey different meanings, including that of a whole exhibition (Bal 2011) or “museumized objects” (Sturge 2007: 153). In this paper it refers to the common meaning employed within TS, i.e. “the study of interlingual

transmission of texts in museum exhibitions, with a set of source texts and target texts as data” (Liao 2018: 47). The concept of “museum text” may be interpreted in different ways. From the point of view of linguistics, Ravelli (2006: 1-2) distinguishes between “texts in museums” and “museum as texts”, which correspond to “the language produced by the institution, in written and spoken form, for the consumption of visitors, which contributes to interpretative practices within the institution” and “the way a whole institution, or an exhibition within it, makes meaning, communicating to and with its public” respectively. This article adopts the first view and defines a museum text as a linguistic product found in a museum. Museum texts encompass a wide range of text-types, namely catalogues, leaflets, introductory and section panels, labels, websites, audio guides, interactive touchpads (Liao 2018: 47), as well as guidebooks, brochures, audiovisual texts (through voice-over or subtitling) and, more recently, apps.

The definition of “multilingualism” has varied in different academic fields (cf. Kemp 2009). As Garibay and Yalowitz (2015: 3) affirm, this topic has been dealt with in MS only recently and barely; in their view, it may be referred both to visitors who use a different language from the dominant one and who speak two or more languages within a given community. In the present article, it broadly refers to audiences who speak a variety of languages other than the SL.

The notion of “accessibility” has been defined in various ways within different disciplines and contexts. Within MS, it is considered in terms of practical, physical, intellectual and cultural accessibility (Kjeldsen and Jensen 2015: 92); in TS, it is almost exclusively viewed with respect to disabilities (see e.g. Jiménez Hurtado and Soler Gallego 2015; Soler Gallego and Jiménez Hurtado 2013; Neves 2018) rather than to language accessibility. Finally, in linguistics, accessibility does not presume a high level of reading knowledge, “does not compromise the scientific integrity of the information needing to be conveyed” and entails a cohesive and coherent texture (Ravelli 1996: 371). In this paper, the focus is on linguistic accessibility, fundamental to communicating the museum’s messages to a variety of audiences.

In the past decades, the concept of “inclusion” has been prominent in MS (Dodd and Sandell 2001), with the broad sense of encompassing race, ethnicity, class, gender, disability etc. (see e.g. Garibay and Yalowitz, 2015; Ng, Ware and Greenberg 2017). In TS, it has not received much attention, although Liao (2018: 56-57) pinpoints the “social-inclusive value” as one

of the five functions that museum texts should aim at. According to the scholar, “equal access to language” can be achieved through multilingual texts, not only addressed to international visitors, but also to members of a community who speak different languages (Liao 2018: 56). However, museum professionals have been slower to identify strategies for such an inclusion (Garibay and Yalowitz 2015: 2).

This paper argues that both accessibility and inclusion may be accomplished through an effective translation informed by a linguistic theory which is concerned with meaning and the way language functions. It is posited that SFL best serves this purpose.

2.2 *Systemic functional linguistics: Some basic tenets*

SFL theory (Halliday 1985a) was developed by Halliday in the 1960s and has been extended ever since², with applications in various context across the world. For this reason, it has been advocated as “applicable linguistics” (see Matthiessen 2012).

Over the last twenty-five years, a growing interest has been shown in a translation theory informed by Hallidayan linguistics. Within SFL, a range of works on translation by linguists appeared (e.g. Taylor Torsello 1996; Steiner and Yallop 2001; Steiner 2004)³. Likewise, an SFL approach to translation has been harnessed even by TS scholars (e.g. Hatim and Mason 1990; Baker 1992/2011; Taylor 1990, 1993; House 1997, 2015)⁴, also with didactic purposes (e.g. Kim 2007a, 2007b, 2009; Manfredi 2008, 2011, 2012, 2014, 2019; Di Bari and Manfredi 2013).

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to offer an illustration of the Hallidayan analytical model, its basic principles will be briefly sketched.

2 Halliday, Michael A. K. (1985; revised 2nd edition, 1994; revised 3rd edition, with Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen, 2004): *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*, London, Edward Arnold. This paper also refers to Halliday, Michael A. K. (2014, revised by Christian M.I.M. Matthiessen): *Halliday’s Introduction to Functional Grammar* (4th edition), London, Routledge.

3 For an overview, see Kunz and Teich (2017).

4 For an overview, see Manfredi (2008); Munday and Zhang (2017)

Halliday and Matthiessen assert that a “text is a rich, many faceted phenomenon that ‘means’ in many different ways” (2014: 3). More specifically, as Halliday (1985a: 53) remarked, a clause is the product of three simultaneous semantic processes, being at one and the same time a *representation* of experience, an interactive *exchange* and a *message*. Therefore, each utterance contemporarily encodes different types of meaning, which are related to the “functions” of language, called “metafunctions”, determined by different variables of the context (Halliday 1985a). The model identifies three main metafunctions that speakers/writers use language for: the “ideational” (subdivided into two components, i.e. “experiential” and “logical”) to represent experience, the “interpersonal” to encode interaction and the “textual” to organize the previous functions into a coherent whole. Table 1 shows a schematic overview of the model:

Tab. 1: Contextual variables, metafunctions and lexicogrammatical realizations (based on Halliday 1985a)

CONTEXT	SEMANTICS (meanings)	LEXICOGRAMMAR (systems of wording)
Field	Clause as Representation: Ideational Meanings (experiential and logical)	TRANSITIVITY TAXIS; LOGICO- SEMANTIC RELATIONS
Tenor	Clause as Exchange: Interpersonal Meanings	MOOD MODALITY APPRAISAL
Mode	Clause as Message: Textual Meanings	THEMATIC STRUCTURE COHESION

In short, experiential meanings are construed to represent experiences, which consist of a flow of events (Halliday rev. by Matthiessen 2014: 212-213). Such goings-on are activated by field, which concerns the activity of discourse, and are realized in lexicogrammar by the system of TRANSITIVITY, a configuration of a process unfolding through time, participants involved in it and any attendant circumstances of space, cause, manner etc. Besides, logical meanings concern the relationships between experiences and are realized in the grammar by the systems of TAXIS and LOGICO-SEMANTIC RELATIONS.

Interpersonal meanings are triggered by the variable of tenor, which deals with the relationship between interactants and their attitudes, and

are construed in grammar by the systems of MOOD, MODALITY and APPRAISAL.

Finally, textual meanings are activated by the mode of discourse and are realized by structural cohesive devices, such as THEMATIC STRUCTURE, and non-structural ones, like COHESION.

3. Methodology

The paper combines a qualitative context-oriented (see Saldanha and O'Brien 2013) and a theoretical methodology. Firstly, it illustrates the findings of a series of interviews with participants engaged in the translation process, more specifically with translation-related staff within museum institutions.

Secondly, it adopts a theoretical method in proposing a museum translator training founded on a linguistic approach to translation. More specifically, it argues that an SFL-informed training could help museum translation and translators. The advantages will be demonstrated through authentic examples of exhibition texts drawn from the museum settings where the interviews were conducted.

For the purpose of this study, five museum professionals were interviewed, four in two focus group interviews and one in an individual interview. The interviews were semi-structured and were conducted face to face, in 2018.

Despite being aware that “the museum represents a particularly complex semiotic environment in which various systems of signification (verbal, visual, spatial) interact to produce meaning” (Neather 2008: 218), this paper focuses on the verbal text expressed through the graphic channel. The restricted focus is justified by the fact that the primary goal of this paper is to promote a museum translator who makes informed linguistic choices.

4. Museums in Bologna: A case study of translation

With the development of global tourism and the growth of international visitors, museums in the city of Bologna need to address multilingual audiences. Translation is thus expected to be a key factor in coping with such challenge.

The paper focuses on the current translation practices in three museums, presenting the findings from interviews with the museum agents who are responsible for choosing translators and following the translation process.

4.1 Context and research participants

Within an ongoing research project on museum translation, three public museums located in the city of Bologna, Italy, have been chosen, namely MAMbo (which in Italian stands for Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna/Bologna Modern Art Museum), Museo Civico Archeologico (Archaeological Museum of Bologna) – which also hosts an important Egyptian collection – and Museo di Palazzo Poggi, University museum (composed of fourteen museums of art and science). The three museums are key cultural sites in the city and representative of different types of domain, since the objects which are exhibited vary and consist of works of contemporary art (paintings, sculptures etc.), archaeological artefacts, scientific specimens and instruments. In all three museums, translation mainly occurs from Italian into English.

The three museums under investigation will be named with the letter a, b and c.

Research participants will be indicated with the letters A, B, C, D and E, to maintain their anonymity. According to their roles within the museum institutions they work for, they are grouped as follows:

- A: Responsible for the editorial sector of the museum;
- B, C: Responsible for the communication sector;
- D, E: Responsible for the “technical” coordination.

All interviewees are the real commissioners of translations within their institutions and sometimes also play the role of translators, although most frequently of revisers.

4.2 Findings from interviews

The results from interviews are organized around three major issues related to museum practices: the role of translation in today's museums (§ 4.2.1.), the type of participants involved in the translation process (§ 4.2.2.) and the museum professionals' views concerning expertise and translation quality (§ 4.2.3.).

4.2.1 The role of translation in today's museums

The research participants were asked which is currently the role of translation in the museums they work for.

A, B, C, D and E were fully aware of the importance of translation, especially to meet the needs of growing international visitors in the city of Bologna. However, A, B and C regretted the general economic difficulties of museums, while D and E deplored time pressures.

Although English is the main or exclusive TL in the three museums, two of the interviewees declared that, in a global society and with the constant growth of multilingual visitors, a wider range of languages would be desirable, e.g., French or Russian, in order to be more inclusive and also respectful of cultural identities. Regrettably, all interviewees agreed on the fact that developing multilingual resources is demanding and cost-prohibitive.

In the three museums, a variety of text-types is translated, as Table 2 below illustrates:

Tab. 2: Text-Types in translation in museums a, b, c, in Bologna, Italy

	Museum a	Museum b	Museum c
Catalogues	x		
Guidebooks		x*	x
Leaflets	x	x	x
Exhibition labels	x	x**	x
Panels	x		x
Take-away information sheets		x	
Audio guides	x	x	x
Press release	x		

* Only 1.

** Incomplete.

In museum “a”, translation concerns institutional material such as press release, along with catalogues, leaflets, panels and labels; in “b”, mainly labels and leaflets, with incomplete translated material, and in “c” guide-books, leaflets, panels and labels.

In museum “b”, only the catalogue of a recent and successful exhibition is available in an Italian-English version and in many exhibitions translation is not available. To compensate for the lack of translated panels in “b”, where a general information leaflet is available in Italian and English versions, take-away information sheets produced by the internal staff are provided.

In the three museums, audio guides have been included recently.

Participant A explained that, in temporary exhibitions, the artist or chief curator decides the linguistic material to translate (such as the recent case of preservation of an Italian dialect). She also added that titles of contemporary works of art are not translated since they are considered part of the creation itself. We might observe that, from the point of view of the visitor, this might lead to potential problems.

Findings thus show that, although translation is highly valued by the museum staff, the amount of translated texts is not complete for lack of resources and stronger translation policies.

4.2.2 *Participants in the translation process*

Interviewees were asked who are the participants involved in the translation activity in their museum institutions and how the translation process takes place.

A, B and C declared that translations are contracted out to external professional translators. Since they work within public museums under the city Municipality, commissioners cannot choose *ad hoc* freelance translators and have necessarily to refer to translation agencies included in an official agreement. Given that the category of museum translator is not encompassed within professional associations (see § 1), commissioners tend to seek for translators who have already dealt with the special languages of art, archaeology, and other domains, although it is not always possible. Professionals B and C also lamented the lack of financial resources and consequently of the opportunity to offer translated material, which leads museum professionals with a general knowledge of English to produce information sheets, for merely informative purposes.

Research participants D and E stated that translation is mainly handled internally, by a variety of agents, i.e. museum professionals, academics, students who take part in internship or voluntary service programs, under the supervision of exhibition curators and/or the museum staff.

As regards the translation process, A, B, C, D and E pointed out that translations invariably undergo extensive revision and that they take ample part in the process themselves, as field experts. Revision occurs at different levels, from personal interaction with the translator to complete rewriting.

In general, when museum professionals are engaged in translating themselves, either for proper translation, revision or rewriting, their normal activities are not associated with translation. Participant A insisted on the importance of “fidelity” of the commission, in the sense of regular collaboration with the same translator(s). She stated that, in general, catalogues and labels of the same exhibition tend to be commissioned to the same translator in order to obtain coherent translations.

A, B, C concurred that professional translators are respected in their role, therefore guidelines or glossaries are not supplied (in the case of an artist, online information about biographical and artistic material is suggested).

In sum, the tendencies emerging from the interviews reveal that translations are carried out by a great variety of agents, i.e. external translators, museum professionals, academics and translation students.

4.2.3 Translator expertise and translation quality

The interviewees were asked about their view concerning translator expertise and about what they value in translation.

A answered that the ideal translator is a professional translator with a specific background in the domain field and who is in contact with native speakers of the TL, who can be consulted.

Participants B, C, D and E explained that, unlike in the past, in most cases translators are non-native speakers of the TL (i.e. English); this condition does not seem to affect their concern, since they reported past experiences with English translators who lacked the domain-specific knowledge and produced awkward translations. A, B, C, D and E placed great emphasis on the quality of translated texts, essentially in terms of accurate and reliable information and of terminological precision in the domain field. A acknowledged that

terminology is not the exclusive concern, since specific concepts which may pertain to philosophy or aesthetics sometimes need to be interpreted.

A, B and C did not explicitly recognize the importance of fluency in translated texts. Conversely, D and E showed their concern for readability, especially when museum texts are written and translated by academics, who are used to academic writing in both the SL and the TL, but not to a more popularized style which can engage a larger public. These professionals argued that, since Italian academic style tends to be even more formal than its English counterpart, a first useful step would be intralingual translation, in order to produce a communicatively functional translation in the TL. They commented that a specialized text needs to be addressed from specialists to a general audience, and thus an effort of simplification should always be made. D revealed that occasionally, when personally involved in translations, she prefers to write an English ST and subsequently translate it into Italian.

A also highlighted the role of culture in translation, pointing out that linguistic and cultural aspects of a ST need to be interpreted and adapted into cultural references familiar to the target audience. Professionals were acutely aware that “a sense of frustration, cultural misunderstanding and exclusion” (Neather 2005: 191) may derive from ineffective translation choices.

When the interviewees were asked for their opinion with respect to a special training for museum translators, all agreed that it would be extremely useful and appreciated.

5. A Proposal for translator training

In TS, museum translation has been generally explored, according to the major focus of interest, as a text or exhibition product, in terms of the producer or the receiver (Neather 2018: 372).

In the present section, a didactic proposal for museum translators is put forward, with a view to suggesting that a linguistic approach might help solve some of the problems raised by the museum professionals who were interviewed and also stemmed from direct observation of translated exhibition texts in the museums under investigation.

In particular, as some of the interviewees admitted, terminology is not the only important issue in museum texts. Although the range of texts on display undeniably revealed an essentially accurate terminology, they

were not always appropriate at the level of discourse: The underlying reason might be explained from an SFL perspective.

As a matter of fact, although the meaning of a text is typically understood in terms of representation (i.e. what the text is about), this is only a partial view of the *whole* meaning of a communicative event. The type of interaction taking place and the way the text is organized also contribute to the global creation of meaning, since meanings operate simultaneously. When translating a ST into a TT, multi-layered meanings should thus be conveyed, although not necessarily through the same language structures.

Within an SFL framework, Ravelli (2006) offers a comprehensive study of museum texts, from a monolingual perspective, i.e. English. In her study, museum texts are analysed on the basis of three metafunctions, which the scholar names “organizational”, “interactional” and “representational”, a clear reflection of Halliday’s (1985a) “textual”, “interpersonal” and “ideational” metafunctions (see § 2.2.).

This paper argues that Ravelli’s linguistic approach to museum language could be fruitfully applied to the practice of translation. With the goal to show the benefits of a paradigm theoretically rooted in SFL in the translation of museum texts, the following subsections will provide instances of authentic STs and TTs which accompany permanent exhibitions in the three settings under scrutiny and will propose alternatives for a more effective rendering in the light of SFL. Examples are taken from written texts such as panels and exhibit labels: The former inform about broader issues and the latter describe or interpret objects. The goal is not to detect translation mistakes, but rather to suggest that the translation of a museum text should encompass a wider view not merely related to “content”. An SFL view allows us to consider any clause “a multifunctional construct consisting of three metafunctional lines of meaning” (Halliday rev. by Matthiessen 2014: 211) and offers the tools for taking informed translation decisions. Although the three metafunctions are encoded simultaneously in a text, each of them should be carefully conveyed for the purpose of an effective rendering. In order to illustrate this principle, the following sections will present and discuss a selected case for each metafunction.

5.1 The clause as message and the “organizational” function

The first strand of meaning identified by Halliday (1985a) gives the clause its character as message. Ravelli (2006: 9) argues that “it is the issue of

organizing texts which poses some of the more challenging communication issues for museums”. For example, in a museum label, there should always be some correspondence between the Theme of the text and the object being described (Ravelli 2006: 37). In general, an English unmarked structure makes the text easier to follow.

An important aspect that might compromise the accessibility of a text is its lexical density, a feature under the variable of Mode. The phenomenon consists in the amount of ideational material that is packed into a clause and determines the “written-ness” of a text, along the cline of the written Medium. The latter varies from being highly written (e.g. in academic textbooks) and very spoken (such as in spontaneous conversation). In general, written texts tend to be more lexically dense than speech, which means that they usually include a high proportion of lexical items with respect to grammatical ones (Halliday 1985b). A typical resource that makes a text lexically dense is nominalization, by which processes, typically worded as verbs, are reworded as nouns (see Halliday and Matthiessen 2014: 729). In this case, although the instantiation occurs at the level of experiential meanings, it clearly has consequences for textual meanings, which intersect. As Ravelli (2006: 61) puts it, “a text overloaded with nominalization is unlikely to be desirable in a museum context”.

Let us consider an instance of a museum text where keeping nominalization in the TT might make it unnecessarily more complex to read, thus textually less appropriate:

Tab. 3: Archaeological Museum, Bologna, Egyptian collection. Label, *Amuleti*/“Amulets”.

ST	TT
<p><i>Si chiamavano amuleti quegli oggetti che, portati sul corpo, venivano usati dagli Egiziani per proteggere i vivi e i morti dai più disparati pericoli. La potenza e l'efficacia degli amuleti derivava da diversi fattori, il primo dei quali era dato dalla forma [...]. Altro elemento di potere magico era costituito dal materiale con cui erano realizzati [...]. La potenza degli amuleti poteva essere accresciuta dalla presenza di raffigurazioni e testi incisi. [...]</i></p>	<p>The amulets are objects which were worn by the Egyptians to protect living and dead people from all kinds of dangers. The power and effectiveness of the amulets depended on various things, amongst which their shape. [...] Their magical power depended also on their material. [...] The power of the amulets could be increased by their representations and inscriptions. [...]</p>

The ST shown in Table 3 is taken from an object label. In the Archaeological Museum in Bologna, objects are accompanied by both texts that simply name objects and others that provide more detailed descriptions. The ST above is an instance of the latter and features various instances of nominalization (marked in bold), which is also typical of academic discourse in Italian. The packaging of events as abstract nouns is almost completely transferred into the English TT. Although from a grammatical point of view there is nothing “wrong” in the TT solutions, and the words are probably familiar to many TL speakers, they are unlikely to facilitate understanding in the social context of the exhibition, essentially for two reasons. First, “the ideational content [which] is densely packed in nominal constructions” (Halliday rev. by Matthiessen 2014: 728) makes the text less straightforward and more “scientific”. Although the text might be read by a specialist visitor, a simpler rendering may widen the target audience. Second, one should consider that museum visitors commonly stand, probably surrounded by other people and attracted by other elements that divert their attention.

Consequently, a more desirable translation might have been for example: “The amulets were powerful and effective due to various things, such as their shape or material. [...] They could have been more powerful thanks to portrayals and inscriptions”, where the information flows easily. This less abstract solution seems to be more accessible especially to those international visitors who speak English as a *lingua franca*.

5.2 *The clause as exchange and the “interactional” function*

In SFL, the dialogical interaction between addresser and addressee takes place at the level of the clause as exchange and is realized through interpersonal meanings, which Ravelli (2006: 70) labels “interactional”.

In the past decades, a paradigm shift has seen the role of the visitor become prominent in museum research (Hooper-Greenhill 1994; Anderson 2004; Kjeldsen and Jensen 2015). With respect to linguistic accessibility, as Ferguson et al. point out in their guidelines, “it is appropriate for museum texts to engage readers as people, in a personal but polite way” (1995: 5). Clearly, the authors refer to the English language communicative style. When a translator of a different SL has to produce an inclusive and effective

English TT, s/he should consider similar issues. One of the most typical resources for making a text closer to the reader is the use of a personal pronoun like “you” (Ravelli 2006: 85). One example may be found in the following text found at the MAMbo museum:

Tab. 4: MAMbo Museum, Bologna: Panel, *Lo sguardo di Morandi tra Bologna e Grizzana*/ “Morandi’s gaze between Bologna and Grizzana”

ST	TT
<i>In questa sala è possibile vedere alcuni paesaggi che Morandi dipinse ad olio e ad acquerello, disegnò e incise nei due luoghi in cui egli trascorse gran parte della sua vita, ovvero a Bologna e Grizzana. [...]</i>	In this room can be seen several landscapes that Morandi painted (in oils and watercolours), drew, and engraved in the two places in which he spent the greater part of his life, Bologna and Grizzana. [...]

The portion of text shown in Table 4 was taken from a wall panel displayed in the section of MAMbo museum devoted to Morandi’s collection. An analysis of the grammar of interpersonal meanings can aid in understanding the problem arisen. Generally speaking, the TT contains a mistake, in that “can be seen” is not preceded by a grammatical subject as is required by the TL. If the translator had detected the function of possibility inherent in the clause, it is likely that s/he would have avoided the error: A possible solution might have been to shift the impersonal *è possibile* (“it is possible”) into a personal “you can see”, preserving the same function of possibility. Such rewriting would also have allowed to construe less distance from the addressee, as is more typical of contemporary museum texts in English. Moreover, the active voice of “you can see”, rather than the passive “can be seen”, would also have contributed to a more personal and less formal type of relationship: Once again, different strands of meaning intersect, here interpersonal and experiential.

This aspect is inextricably linked to the cultural context of translation. From the point of view of a ST, as House (2009: 38) explains, “differences in culturally shared conventions of behaviour and communication, preferred

5 Giorgio Morandi (Bologna, Italy, 1890–1964) was an eminent Italian painter and print-maker known for his still life of everyday household objects, namely vases, bottles and pots, flowers and for his familiar landscapes, both from his studio window in Bologna and outdoors in Grizzana, a village on the Appennines where he used to spend the summer. Museo Morandi (“Morandi Museum”) is the widest public collection dedicated to the artist, presently hosted by the MAMbo Museum.

rhetorical styles, and expectation norms in the source and target speech communities” need to be dealt with: In other words, “cultural differences are to be identified at all levels of analysis”.

5.3 *The clause as representation and the “representational” function*

In SFL, the clause as representation construes experience, and this is close to the traditional notion of content. This is realized in a text by ideational (experiential and logical) meanings, which Ravelli (2006: 95) calls “representational”.

Since a museum text aims to communicate technical knowledge of a given field – be it scientific, historical or cultural – the realization of experiential meanings also includes the technical vocabulary, which represented a core issue for the museum professionals who were interviewed. However, it also comprises the TRANSITIVITY structure (i.e. processes, participants and circumstances) through which reality is represented. As seen in section 2.1., in the SFL model, “what is going on” is expressed by the part of the clause named “process”, which is realized by a verbal group. In addition, a text unfolds through logico-semantic relationships of “expansion” or “projection”.

Let us consider a final example where an accurate pre- translation analysis and the subdivision of the grammatical structure of the text into its components – in terms of both logico-semantic relations and Transitivity – might have avoided a translation problem:

Tab. 5: Museum of Palazzo Poggi, Bologna: Panel, *Il corno dell’unicorno o dente di narvalo*/ “The unicorn’s horn or narval tusk”

ST	TT
<i>[...] Giuseppe Monti riteneva che il corno proveniente dalla collezione di Ferdinando Cospi non potesse appartenere al mitico animale. [...]</i>	<i>[...] Giuseppe Monti believed the tusk on display was part of Ferdinando Cospi’s collection and did not belong to the mythological animal. [...]</i>

Table 5 offers a brief extract taken from a panel seen in the Museum of Palazzo Poggi. The Italian ST features a clause-complex that is composed of a main clause (*Giuseppe Monti riteneva*/ “Giuseppe Monti believed”),

followed by a projected clause introduced by *che*/ “that”. Within the latter, *il corno proveniente dalla collezione di Ferdinando Cospi* (“the tusk from Ferdinando Cospi’s collection”) is a participant, instantiated by a nominal group (NG) constructed with a head noun (*il corno*/ “the tusk”) post-modified by an embedded clause that qualifies it. In terms of Transitivity structure, the NG can be analysed as a participant of a possessive attributive clause (Halliday rev. by Matthiessen 2014: 296), more specifically a Possessed, while *al mitico animale* (‘to the mythical animal’) functions as the Possessor. In other words, in Italian, the text says Monti believed that the tusk in the collection was not part of the animal. In the TT, conversely, “the tusk on display was part of Ferdinando Cospi’s collection” conveys a different meaning, i.e. that both the fact that the tusk on display pertained to Cospi’s collection and that did not belong to the animal were Monti’s assumptions.

5.4 Discussion of the proposal

The selected examples in sections 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 aimed to demonstrate that the fundamental issues put forth within linguistics by Ravelli (2006) with respect to the museum language may be extremely useful in the practice of museum translation. Likewise, those guidelines derived from collaboration between museum and language experts in Australia (Ferguson et al. 1995) from a monolingual perspective might also be useful for contemporary museum multilingual practice.

TS has undoubtedly provided valuable insights into the still overlooked field of museum translation, from a variety of angles. Sturge (2007), in her study of ethnographic museums, analyses major issues involved in the transmission of cultural values, within a broader view of translation which entails cultural distance or proximity, exoticism or appropriation. However, translators are not directly offered practical tools for their activity.

Jiang (2010), in his article focused on translation quality assessment of museum labels, claims to relate the notions of “informativity”, “acceptability” and “intertextuality” to the SFL ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions, in order to evaluate a corpus of Chinese-English translated texts. In line with this descriptive aim, the role of professional translator is not explicitly addressed.

Liao (2018) presents a comprehensive taxonomy of five relevant functions that museum translation should aim at, i.e. “informative”, “interactive”, “political”, “social-inclusive” and “exhibitive”. Especially with respect to the fourth and fifth functions, almost neglected in the literature, the scholar seeks to offer, on the one hand, theoretical suggestions aimed to stimulate the economic value and social inclusivity in museums, and on the other hand, practical insights pursued to advocate collaboration between translators and the museum community. It seems worth noticing that the “interactive function” advocated by Liao can be related to Ravelli’s (2006) “interactional function” embraced in the present paper from a more practical point of view, focusing on specific language choices in STs and TTs.

Translation practices in museums and the perspective of the participants directly engaged in the process have been the object of investigation in Neather’s (2012b) work on the way in which the notion of “expertise” is perceived among the museum and translation communities in the Chinese cities of Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macau.

The present paper attempted to connect the context of current museum practices in Italy and a proposal of a special training of professional museum translators who are capable of coping with the linguistic challenges posed by exhibition texts. Liao (2018: 49) considers linguistic studies on translation “of limited relevance” since “they decontextualize texts from the museum settings”. However, the restricted focus of this paper is not intended to imply that the linguistic aspect is the exclusive concern of museum translation, since other semiotic means contribute to the overall meaning of an exhibition. As Neather (2018: 362), drawing from Whitehead (2012: xiv), reminds us, museum texts are embedded in a wider environment where lighting, spatial layout, physical readability of labels, colours and textures of walls and even furniture play a role. In point of fact, translation is a multifaceted process that needs to be informed by multidisciplinary, especially for those text-types whose meanings are not exclusively conveyed by a verbal text – be they books for children, where illustrations play a key role, or audiovisual texts, which are affected by multiple constraints (e.g. verbal, visual, acoustic, proxemic and kinesic). As in attendant fields, a museum translator should not only be a language expert, nor a general translation expert, but rather an expert of meaning-making production of exhibition texts at *all* linguistic levels. In addition, in a context where translation is

mostly outsourced, translators may not necessarily have access to the non-verbal components of the exhibition, such as the spatial and the visual, as also reported by Neather (2018: 373). It is argued that a solution to overcome the gap between the written text and the crucial multimodal elements involved in exhibitions might be initially found in a strict collaboration between professional museum staff, curators and translators specifically trained for this purpose. Once this goal has been achieved, a multimodal translation training might be the following step, in order to provide the museum community with all-round museum translation experts.

6. Conclusion

This paper aims to examine the role of translation and translators in some Italian museums, which may be representative of a more general situation, at least in the Italian context. Obviously, in order to offer generalizations, a larger study involving other Italian museums in other regions should be carried out, along with further research focusing on the European framework.

Findings from interviews, albeit limited to the case study, seem to confirm Neather's (2012b) results with respect to the Chinese context: The translation activity is not performed by expert museum translators, a category of professionals that is still undervalued. Different types of participants take part in the translation process, from external professional translators and academic institutions ("expert" translators) to staff within the museum community ("non-expert" translators).

Interviews also revealed that the major concern of museum professionals was the quality and accuracy of museum texts, particularly in terms of specialized terminology. Some of them also recognized the importance of their communicative function, since they have to engage a great variety of visitors, with different types of expertise in the field, diverse cultural backgrounds and English frequently used as a *lingua franca*.

In museum texts, although the technicality conveyed by ideational meanings is a key issue, the way the text engages the reader and the way it is organized often pose problems to translators, and potentially to museum visitors if they face an ineffective TT. This paper argued that a specific

training for museum translators informed by linguistics (in particular SFL) might help this fundamental meta-discursive competence at all discourse levels, namely “organizational”, “interactional” and “representational” (Ravelli 2006). As SFL “can assist writers to create texts that are consistently accessible” (Ferguson et al. 1995: 4), it may also assist translators. What TS scholars and linguists might do is to offer a theoretical and empirical contribution aimed at the creation of a new museum translator profile, capable of producing inclusive and accessible texts to engage an ever-growing multilingual public.

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