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Integrating museum studies into translation studies: Towards a reconceptualization of the source text as sensory experience in museum audio description and the notion of experiential equivalence

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Abstract: This article focuses on museum audio description (AD) as a modality of intersemiotic translation (IT) primarily addressed to people with visual impairments. Still at an early stage of development in terms of both academic research and professional practices, museum AD lies at the crossroads of a variety of disciplines, such as translation studies (TS) and museum studies (MS). The aim of this contribution is to suggest a reconceptualization of traditional notions in TS (source text and equivalence) in the context of museum AD and encompassing the translational phenomenon per se. Theoretical considerations from MS and specific guidelines for museum AD practices will offer cross-disciplinary insights to redefine such concepts and reflect upon translation as a semiosic process in which meanings are created, rather than transferred. This article suggests the coincidence in AD of source and target texts as sensory experience and puts forth the concept of experiential equivalence.

Keywords: intersemiotic translation; museum audio description; museum studies; source text; equivalence

Introduction[1]

The first decades of the twenty-first century have seen an unprecedented proliferation of

diverse forms of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Such developments, closely associated with the related phenomena of globalization and technological change, have contributed to challenging the common understandings of what has conventionally been qualified as translation and to blurring the boundaries of traditional theoretical paradigms within translation studies (TS). In recent years, the discipline has witnessed considerable innovation and experimentation of a variety of novel approaches and concepts, as a result of new translation phenomena and diversified scholarly endeavors. On the one hand, alternative translation practices and tools have brought to the fore new notions; on the other hand, "well-established concepts that have traditionally been peripheral to the […] study of translation" (Dam, Brøgger, and Zethsen 2019, 1) have experienced a renewed interest. Although Roman Jakobson's (1959) seminal threefold typology of translation has been accepted by many TS scholars and included in a broad definition of translation, intersemiotic translation (IT) has not received extensive attention in TS over many decades and has been under-researched until recently, except in the fields of audiovisual translation (AVT) and media accessibility (MA). However, in the contemporary world in which communication has become primarily multimodal – involving words, images, movement, gestures and sounds, combined to convey complex messages – shedding new light on translation between different semiotic systems has become of paramount importance (Boria et al. 2020). While research into multimodality has increasingly grown since the 2000s (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; O'Halloran and Smith 2011; Jewitt 2014), multimodal TS outside AVT has found its way only quite recently (see Kaindl 2012; Pérez González 2014).

As Tiina Tuominen, Catalina Jiménez Hurtado, and Anne Ketola (2018, 2) point out, multimodality may be explored from at least two different perspectives: on the one hand as "the coexistence of multiple modes" (Gibbons 2012, 8), on the other hand as the process of "decoding these elements from an interpreter's standpoint" (Everett 2015, 3). Likewise, research into multimodal translation either places emphasis on the combination of modes or on the active role played by the interpretant of such modes.

The article deals with the specific context of museums, which represent "a complex semiotic environment in which a number of differing systems of signification interact to produce meaning" (Neather 2008, 219), e.g., between objects, verbal texts and the spatial environment, to name just a few. The focus is on audio description (AD), i.e., a modality

of "intersemiotic, intermodal or cross-modal" translation (Orero and Vilaró 2012, 297), from visual to spoken language, primarily addressed to people with visual impairments. Although AD is now regarded as an established practice and an emerging academic field within the broader area of AVT, only recently have other AD types (different from the dominant screen AD) been partially investigated in TS (e.g. Eardley et al. 2017; Hutchinson and Eardley 2019). More specifically, museum AD – providing access to cultural artefacts or artworks – is still at an early stage of development, in terms of both academic research and professional practices, and lies at the crossroads of a variety of disciplines, namely TS (also including AVT), MA and museum studies (MS).

As the volume *Moving Boundaries in Translation Studies* (Dam, Brøgger and Zethsen 2019) clearly shows, in order to face the challenges of the current age, many translation scholars engage with a range of disciplines outside their field (e.g. information technology, sociology and ergonomics, to name just a few) with a view to importing and applying their concepts and methods. In this article, we propose to draw insights from MS to address issues typical of new forms of communication and to put forward a broader conceptualization of translation, which attests to its "ubiquitous" nature (Blumczynski 2016).

Significantly, no consensus has been reached on what might legitimately be viewed as translation. In the current scenario, key questions need to be asked: what is a text exactly? What is the relationship between a target text (TT) and a source text (ST)? Should equivalence still be considered the yardstick for translation as the deontological codes of translators seem to advocate for?

Drawing from new paradigms in MS and professional guidelines for museum AD, this article will point to the need for exploring museum AD as a unique form of IT that ultimately allows for rethinking the concept of translation seen as a "semiosic process" (Marais 2019) in which meanings are created, rather than transferred. In order to offer a schematic overview of our reflections, we will classify the theoretical concepts taken into account by adopting Andrew Chesterman's (2019) conceptual framework, which categorizes novel or revisited TS notions into "platypus" concepts (when a new empirical phenomenon occurs and a new concept is created), "splitter" or "lumper" concepts (when a phenomenon is not new but is examined through a new scholarly perspective, with the

result of dividing or grouping existing related concepts into different entries) and "rebranding" concepts (occurring when a new term is given to an existing concept).

This article is divided into seven analytical sections. It starts with an overview of relevant issues in TS that have proven to be controversial over ages and from different perspectives. It proceeds with a focus on MS and the insights it can bring to revisiting some traditional translation concepts. Key aspects involved in museum AD are discussed also drawing from current guidelines addressed to professionals that interestingly include theoretical notions. The next sections propose some considerations in the light of the previous analysis. After briefly describing two conceptualizations of museum AD, the article argues in favour of the ST as sensory experience, specifically in the realm of museum AD and more generally in multimodal translational contexts. Furthermore, it puts forth the "rebranding" concept of experiential equivalence. Finally, it suggests that the very notion of translation might be reconsidered.

Some conceptual issues in TS

TS has long been characterized by "a plethora of binary concepts" (Marais 2021, 7), including the clear-cut distinction between ST and TT. Traditionally regarded as the point of departure of any translation process, the ST was defined by Gideon Toury (1995, 33–34) as "another text, in another language/culture, which has both chronological and logical priority". Nevertheless, the concept has been problematized by various scholars, such as Dirk Delabastita (2008, 239), who argued that, although "[t]he standard Western model of translation posits a kind of exclusive, binary and unidirectional relationship between source text and target text", the reality is less straightforward. Along similar lines, Anthony Pym (2011, 92) pointed out that "the theoretical problem is that all texts incorporate elements from previous texts, so in principle no text can be a primal 'source'". The directionality of translation had already been questioned in the 1990s with the shift of TS towards a cultural dimension, which led to broader definitions of translation, relying on issues of power and agency. More recently, Loredana Polezzi (2012) and Moira Inghilleri (2017) have expanded the concept of linearity traditionally inherent in the translation process to encompass plurilingualism and heterolingualism connected with migration. Likewise, Laura Ivaska and Suvi Huuhtanen (2020, 313) have questioned the

concept of ST, arguing that "one problem is that the ST does not necessarily equal what is commonly understood as 'the original text'", referring to phenomena such as pseudotranslation, indirect translation and retranslation.

From a semiotic perspective, the ST – viewed both as a single, independent text or as a group of multiple texts translated in their entirety or partially – could be regarded as part of a complex translation process and described as an "incipient sign system", or rather "a complex incipient system" that is "part of the stream of semiosis" (Marais 2019, 45). Rather than being governed by binary oppositions, the translation process should be seen as "triadic" (Marais 2021, 25). Following Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, Kobus Marais (2021, 20) points out that "translation entails a non-linear process that revolves around three points, representamen, object and interpretant", where "the pattern is neither stable nor linear, i.e. it is dynamic and complex". The framework of Peircean semiotics also contends logocentrism in conceptualizations of translation, which rather needs to be seen as "the complex systemic process underlying semiosis, the result of which produces semiotic forms" (Marais 2019a, 1).

The ST has long been seen as the key element of the equivalence paradigm, which was at the centre of a linguistic framework (Catford 1965; Nida and Taber 1969; Koller 1979) and has represented a thorny issue throughout the history of TS. Today, although the axiom seems to persist, especially for the lay audience and in the realm of professional practices, it may be seen as a problematic criterion. Reflected in the popular understanding of the term translation – in the common view, a transparent rewording of a ST – the notion of equivalence has long pointed to "the nature and the extent of the relationships which exist between SL and TL texts" (Shuttleworth and Cowie 1997, 49), whereby "the TT [is] to be considered as a translation of the ST in the first place" (Kenny 1998, 77). Nevertheless, the concept has been controversial, and opinions varied radically as to its exact meaning. Firmly rejected by Katharina Reiss and Hans Vermeer (1984) and described by Theo Hermans (1995, 217) as a "troubled notion", the concept was also dismissed by deconstructionist theories, which saw translation as a form of transformation rather than of meaning transfer, given that no text has a fixed or stable meaning (Derrida 1985). In the 1990s, the equivalence paradigm evolved into a closer consideration of the communicative aspects of translation, when Juliane House (1997) put forth the concept of "functional equivalence", a type of relationship based on

conveying function(s) and meaning(s), rather than lexico-grammatical structures. However, from a multimodal perspective, the notion of meaning transfer seems to be inadequate, because IT invariably entails a process of transformation between different modes in which a crucial and active role is played by the recipient, contributing to meaning-making.

With a view to going beyond current conceptualizations in TS, translation has been compared to cultural representation, as discussed in the area of museum translation; Kate Sturge (2007), for example, developed the idea of the museum (and especially the ethnographic museum) as a form of translation, where the people and culture represented (which correspond to the ST) are translated by the curator into the exhibits on display (TT).

Contemporary translation practices invite us to rethink traditional concepts of TS, in line with Edwin Gentzler's (2017, 1–2) idea of post-TS:

> The shift in focus from translation as the center of a single discipline, to multidisciplinary analyses shows how translations impact many disciplines and signifies a new direction for the field. In addition, the discourse on translation from the outside field can help scholars better analyze the translational phenomena considered from within.

Given the specific interest of our study in museum AD, we tackle translation and multimodal issues drawing from the "outside field" of MS, to which we now turn.

New paradigms in MS

Since the 1980s, MS as an academic discipline has experienced "a wave of unprecedented changes: having long been considered elitist and unobtrusive, museums were now, as it were, coming out" (Mairesse and Desvallées 2010, 21). The main change has been a shifted emphasis from museums as depositories of objects with inherent meanings to the visitor as the active producer of meanings. Several theories have paved the way for this: among them, the advent of the "New Museology" (Vergo 1989) and the constructivist approach to museum learning (Hein 1998). Furthermore, the conceptualization of "the

post-museum" as "a process or an experience" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000, 152), and later of the "participatory museum" (Simon 2010), in contrast with the traditional "modernist museum" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000), have set the scene for new different forms of museums.

Museums nowadays are addressing new challenges, concerning the interpretation[2] and construction of meanings. The notion of "heritage interpretation" is central in MS, yet not a new one, having been proposed for the first time by Freeman Tilden (1957) in the context of the American national parks. The "father of heritage interpretation" defined it as "an educational activity which aims to reveal meanings and relationships through the use of original objects, by first-hand experience, and by illustrative media, rather than simply to communicate factual information" (Tilden 1957, 8). Such a definition already provides all the hints to the key issues of museum interpretation, namely the close relation between interpretation and learning, the importance of meaning-making and authenticity in the visitor's individual experience, and the need to mediate the latter rather than conveying plain facts.

Tilden's (1957) pioneering definition, despite also being criticized, has been largely embraced and expanded by other museum scholars. For instance, following Tilden's perspective, Sam Ham ([1992] 2013, 8) defined interpretation as "a mission-based approach to communication aimed at provoking in audiences the discovery of personal meaning and the forging of personal connections with things, places, people, and concepts". More recently, this idea has also moved beyond the educational activity involving the production and consumption of museum texts to encompass the whole viewer's experience, not just during the visit but also including the reflections and memories evoked by such a visit (Whitehead 2012, xii). The evolving nature of the concept of museum interpretation also testifies to the professional practices related to it, which may involve different actors, including curators, educators and guides. In different ways, all of them are heritage interpreters, contributing to the overall visitor's experience. These interpreters, in line with post-modern, constructivist theories in MS, are not supposed to convey an inherent truth lying within the object itself, but rather to "provide access to experiences – both intellectual and emotional – that encourage understanding" (Ham [1992] 2013, xii).

Therefore, interpretation may be either imposed top-down or co-constructed with visitors as active participants in meaning-making and "memory making" (Ham [1992] 2013, 81) through a constant process of remembering and connecting (Silverman 1995). Questioning the museum's uncontested authority (Whitehead 2012, 38) allows for a combination of potentially different perspectives, interpretations, and meanings.

Within the museum's interpretative framework, the predominant approach to cultural heritage in MS has historically corresponded to "a product-based approach" (Whitehead 2012, 36), whereby interpretation has mainly focused on objects and collections as repositories of meanings, rather than on the production processes of such objects or their social and cultural role.

The paradigmatic change more recently advocated in MS "from an object-oriented to an experience-oriented approach" (Babic and Miklosevic 2013, 309) has called for a more complete definition of the notion of "museum experience" (Falk and Dierking 1992), which is now at the heart of museum interpretative processes. In their "Contextual Model of Learning", John Falk and Lynn Dierking (2000, 10) recognized the active nature of learning, which underpins their holistic framework of museum experience, conceived of as the synthesis of three different contexts, namely personal (the visitor's own expectations and prior knowledge), social (the interactions between different visitors and with the museum staff) and physical (the structure of the building and the exhibition display). This means that each visit is a unique experience informed by the interaction of these contexts. The museum experience could thus be considered the actual ST in post-modern approaches to museum interpretation.

Since an "interpretive product" may be represented by "any finished interpretive program or device" (Ham [1992] 2013, 4), encompassing not just labels or panels on the wall, in this article we argue that museum AD for people with visual impairments should be regarded as an instance and an integral component of museum interpretation within the broader communicative practices occurring in museums, including different forms of written texts (e.g. brochures, panels and catalogues), oral texts (such as audio guides) and other communicative exchanges (for instance, guided tours). As a consequence, besides being an ambassador to access rights and accessibility strategies, the translator/describer is also an agent of heritage interpretation.

Museum AD: some theoretical insights from the professional guidelines

Within museum interpretation, AD may be considered an example of what Louise Ravelli (2006) defines as "museum text" and Robert Neather (2008) "museum translation". In TS, museum AD is regarded as an instance of IT and "intersensorial translation" (De Coster and Mühleis 2007, 189), providing access to cultural artefacts or artworks or, to borrow Rachel Hutchinson and Alison Eardley's (2019, 42) definition, as "a verbal description that seeks to make the visual elements of the diverse contents of museums and galleries accessible to blind and partially sighted people." Josélia Neves (2020, 323) also proposed the concept of "intersensory translation", whereby "the senses are transducers that 'translate' the world so that it may be understood by the brain".

Current AD practices may rely on the existing guidelines, although those specific to museums appear to be limited, especially with respect to the wider provision of regulations for screen AD. The main museum-specific AD recommendations for professionals available at present consist of six sets, the first two from the US (Snyder 2010; Giansante 2015), produced by associations of professional describers, i.e. the American Council of the Blind and Art Beyond Sight respectively. Other two sets (RNIB and VocalEyes 2003; VocalEyes 2019) were published in the UK by two charity associations, i.e. the Royal National Institute of Blind People and VocalEyes. Another one, which was produced as an output of a European project (Remael, Reviers, and Vercauteren 2015)[3], is deeply rooted in theoretical research and only partially oriented towards professional practices. Finally, a shorter set (DescriVedendo 2021) was produced in Italy as part of a local project, DescriVedendo, by the *Associazione Nazionale Subvedenti Onlus*.

Although these differ in terms of length and scope (some being more research-based, others more practice-oriented), all of them contain practical indications and general strategies for AD professionals, rather than official standards. Most importantly, they include theoretical issues showing the evolution of relevant concepts, which could yield relevant insights for the purpose of the present article.

It could be argued that the selected museum AD guidelines mainly focus on what is considered to be the ST of an AD process, i.e. one of the different possible "objects" of translation in the museum multimodal and multi-layered context. Such objects, which are instances of cultural heritage, may span from single items (e.g. artworks, installations and cultural artefacts) to open spaces and architecture.

According to the European guidelines (Neves 2015, 70, emphasis added),

> Very often, there is *no clear-cut ST* as such (as happens with film) and the DG[4] [the AD] has to work within contexts that are multi-layered, that can be extensive (e.g. a castle and grounds) and changeable (e.g. gardens); encompassing and atmospheric (e.g. a temple); or minute and intricate (e.g. a work of art).

Interestingly, the same set of guidelines (69, emphasis added) also states that, in museum AD,

> There is no "original text" to go by because the DG [the AD] *is* the original text. There is however an original *non-verbal* text that will live as a co-text with the DG and that will determine the nature and structure of the DG.

Therefore, the AD itself is not presented as a TT but rather as the "original text" produced by a translation process, while the item to be described is considered both a (non-verbal) ST and a co-text by which the AD needs to live, as well as one of many possible multimodal "texts" in museums (Ravelli 2006). In addition, while screen AD depends on and is experienced as part of its verbal and multimodal ST, namely an audiovisual product, museum AD may be designed as a stand-alone experience. The TT thus becomes "an original text/event in its own right or a unique complex mixture of diverse stimuli" (Neves 2020, 325).

The threefold view of the ST – as 1) an object/a place, 2) a no clear-cut ST or 3) *the AD* itself – seems to make the concept different from what is normally conceived of as ST in professional translation practices, as well as extremely hybrid, fluid and hard to define.

According to the most current deontological codes, professional translators are still expected "to convey the meaning between people and cultures *faithfully*, accurately and impartially […] ensuring *fidelity* of meaning and register" (ITI 2013, 4, emphasis added).

This view still seems to refer to the age-old notion of equivalence in translation also represented in pioneering translation approaches, including "formal correspondence" (Catford 1965) and "formal equivalence" (Nida 1964). Although some sets of AD guidelines apparently pursue the same goal, we also find insights that seem to point to an alternative view. In the Italian museum AD guidelines, the notion of equivalence seems at first to be based on the concept of "fidelity" to the object/artwork to be described through "an understandable and *faithful* description"[5] (DescriVedendo 2021, emphasis added), in line with the principle of "What You See Is What You Say" (WYSIWYS) (Snyder 2010, 12). Furthermore, guidelines generally invite describers to "paint a picture" (RNIB and VocalEyes 2003, 31) in order to translate visual input (such as information regarding size, perspective, composition, colours or light) into words. By trusting the describer in providing faithful "visual" access and "bring[ing] the picture or artefact to life" (48), listeners are using the describer's eyes to "see" the object itself (31). Therefore, equivalence is supposed to be achieved between two images, i.e. the visual image perceived by a sighted person (the translator/describer) and the "mental image" in the listener's mind.

Nonetheless, the European guidelines conceive various approaches to AD, namely "simple, objective (factual) description", a "narrative approach" and an "interpretative approach" based on "deconstructing and recreating through suggestive language, sound effects, [and] music" (Neves 2015, 71). The latter seems to advocate for multisensory experiences, also including the provision of "sensory reference[s]" (DescriVedendo 2021) such as tactile information, e.g., about textures, which later becomes "a sense memory of the experience" (Giansante 2015, 11).

While the experience of seeing an object through the sense of sight involves perceiving "the whole and complete image instantaneously", that of "seeing" it through touch and hearing means "piecing together many different bits of information" (RNIB and VocalEyes 2003, 34). As a consequence, the mental image needs to be "incrementally" built up in the listener's mind, that is "each line should add to that image in an order and in sequence" (Giansante 2015, 7).

With the purpose of creating a mental image while avoiding any potential confusion – and thus ensuring the above-mentioned equivalence – guidelines alert describers that "the

image is the equivalent of a mirror image" (Snyder 2010, 57), which affects the use of phrases such as "to the left" or "on the right" (Giansante 2015, 6–7), suggesting the key role played by the viewer's perspective.

Some guidelines also advocate for providing "access to the same information" (RNIB and VocalEyes 2003, 49) available to sighted visitors, while admitting that "offering equality of experience does not necessarily mean replication of content" (VocalEyes 2019, 5) and implicitly recognizing that the experience of mentally picturing an object may differ from that of seeing the object itself.

At times, the concept of experience may be expanded in different directions. For instance, describers are invited "to relate the individual's life experiences to the content in the work of art" (Snyder 2010, 53), which means aiming for equivalence at the level of the listener's own experiences. In a different way, the listener may be guided through the re-enactment and the translation of the artwork (or part of it) into action by way of "positioning, movement or touch" (Neves 2015, 70), thus bringing the *mental* picture to life and giving place to a further multimodal and multisensory layer in the translation process, involving the visitor as an active participant and creator of meanings.

Neves (2015, 68) makes the crucial point that AD is "an extra that has to fit in with the rest of the visit or event in such a way that it almost goes unnoticed", also adding that the description "cannot be the experience itself because people visit places to engage with what the place has to offer and not with the mediators/mediation technology". This seems to imply that AD for blind and partially sighted people is a tool rather than an end, and that the actual object/place is only a part of the wider visitor's experience – which may call for deeper reflections on the concept of equivalence at the level of experience.

Two conceptualizations of museum AD

The theoretical issues discussed so far allow us to distinguish two main, opposite orientations in museum AD, which are underpinned by two contrasting conceptualizations of the role intended for museum AD, as already suggested by Hutchinson and Eardley (2019). On the one hand, this is defined as translation of visual

information into verbal information; as a result, textual fidelity is privileged to grant access to the artwork or artefact considered as a ST. On the other hand, AD is presented as an interpretative tool capable of offering a more complete "museum experience" (Falk and Dierking 2000): significantly, the experience itself becomes a ST to be faithful to in order to achieve a functional equivalence at the level of emotional engagement, which resonates with functional theories of translation (Nord [1997] 2018).

We suggest that the former position outlined above seems to echo the "modernist museum" (Hooper-Greenhill 2000) theorized as "a collections-focused, building-based institution" (McCall and Gray 2014, 20). In other words, museums are about objects, and thus a "literal" translation of such objects is vital to offer equal opportunities to access cultural heritage, although museum scholars hold that a form of mediation is essential to give objects a voice (Coxall 1991). Conversely, the latter position seems to reflect a post-modern approach to cultural heritage practices (Hooper-Greenhill 2000), which ascribes to museums the role of participatory institutions, about and for people, as well as constructed with people (Simon 2010). The two opposed views of museums, namely the "old modernist museum" and the "new post-museum", may be said to reflect the distinct "interactional approaches" in terms of style and stance proposed by Ravelli (2006, 72) from a linguistics perspective. The concepts underlying these orientations lead us to a possible reconceptualization of some traditional theoretical notions in the framework of TS. In particular, we will rethink the notions of ST and equivalence, which, although strictly related, will be discussed in two separate sections.

ST/TT as an instance of sensory experience

We argue that the concept of ST may be substantially revisited in light of the insights from both the new paradigms in MS and the professional AD guidelines, giving rise to a "lumper" concept according to Chesterman's (2019) taxonomy. In other words, we propose to reconsider the ST and group it with the TT into a unique entry, where ST and TT come to overlap as sensory experience. We will now attempt to explain the reasons why we think this could provide an alternative to a common dichotomy. The museum AD guidelines show that a more traditional conceptualization of the ST as the object that is to be audio described coexists with the consideration of the AD as the "original text"

(Neves 2015, 69). Likewise, from the point of view of MS, the objects (i.e. the STs) have long been seen as "products" (i.e. the TTs) or "outcomes of the creative act" (Whitehead 2012, 36). We thus argue that this might suggest a juxtaposition between the concepts of ST and TT, which almost seem to coincide in a single unit. In fact, the object on display is at the same time the TT of a cultural and creative process (Sturge 2007) and the multimodal (non-verbal) ST of a translational process, while the AD is the TT of the same translational process and the original verbal product that has been created from scratch and will coexist with the object itself – thus both simultaneously being ST and TT. This multi-layered process-based approach acknowledges that "an object is not in itself a form of reality, but a product, a result, or an equivalence" (Mairesse and Desvallées 2010, 61), and thus a "representation of and element within specific cultural and historical moments and processes" (61).

In TS, the notion of overlap between ST and TT is not new since it echoes Jacques Derrida's (1985) abolition of the dichotomy between "original" and translation, between "same and copy". However, reflections applied to AD deriving from MS and the museum AD guidelines might add new insights. On the one hand, they corroborate the idea that there is no "original text". On the other hand, the overall experience could be seen as the actual ST/TT of the translation process, respectively based on two mental images of the object, i.e. the describer's and the visitor's.

In the case of museum AD, being an instance of IT, the notion of ST/TT necessarily entails a "sensory experience" (Hutchinson and Eardley 2019, 46), which reflects the shift in attention in MS from objects to experiences. Therefore, the focus in AD should be not just "the assimilation of visual information, but also the social, cognitive and emotional elements of visits" (Hutchinson and Eardley 2019, 43).

Towards the notion of experiential equivalence

By drawing on MS and research into museum AD, we propose the "rebranding" (Chesterman 2019) concept of "experiential equivalence",[6] arguing that the centrality of experience in interpretation/translation does not exclusively apply to IT but may be extended to other translation practices at large. We will now illustrate the main issues that

lead us to this assumption.

Recent trends in MS have revealed a paradigmatic shift from the level of objects as repositories of meanings to the visitor's own experience (Falk and Dierking 2000) and their active role in shaping knowledge (Hooper-Greenhill 1992). If, on the basis of the constructivist approaches to museum learning (Hein 1998), we understand that heritage interpretation cannot be solely about translating and providing access to inherent meanings residing within the objects, equivalence cannot be sought between a supposed ST and a TT but rather at the level of experience.

The same may arguably apply to museum AD as an instance of IT. Ideally, according to most of the guidelines, the audience should be offered the possibility of creating a presumably analogous "mental image" (Giansante 2015, 11). However, to stick to the authority of the object/artwork as a carrier of meanings and to the principle of "fidelity" – close to the above-mentioned principle of "WYSIWYS" (Snyder 2010) – is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, as already pointed out, the object itself cannot be unequivocally considered a clear-cut ST. Secondly, if the object does not bring meanings per se but it is the subject that "reveals" them (Tilden 1957), this implies that the actual ST would be the subject/describer's mental image, rather than the object itself. Furthermore, recognizing that museum AD is an instance of heritage interpretation means that it is part of a more complex interpretative process (to which different actors ideally contribute as co-participants), and most importantly of the museum experience. From a semiotic point of view, this is reflected by the concept of meaning as "an open-ended process" put forth by Pedro Atã and João Queiroz (2019, 1).

From the perspective of MS, museum interpretation will "involve at a minimum enhancing someone's experiences" (Ham [1992] 2013, 2), as it is expected to help "visitors to understand, appreciate, value, and care for our (their) cultural and natural heritage" by making them "feel a part of the experience" (Veverka [1994] 2013, 88). Therefore, as argued by Hutchinson and Eardley (2019), museum AD (as a process) should translate into an experience. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily mean the same experience for everybody but rather an equivalent experience. In fact, the visitor's experience may differ from the translator/describer's and vary for each individual, depending on one's "personal context" (Falk and Dierking 2000). Differences may also

derive from the type of AD (live or pre-recorded) and its context of use (on-site or online), as an on-site live AD may allow for more interaction between the guide and the visitors within a predefined timeframe, while pre-recorded AD (and even more so online AD) may force a more unidirectional communication despite allowing users more freedom in various choices regarding this experience (e.g., how much time to dedicate to each object/AD).

In line with MS theories, Eardley et al. (2017, 201) note, in relation to museum AD, that "meaning is not held inherently in the work itself, waiting for a viewer [the describer] to 'extract' it, but rather that viewers are themselves potential meaning-makers, bringing their own experiences, memories and emotions to their interpretation". The MA scholars thus advocate for an "enriched audio description", which aims at offering "a kind of transcreation, the creation of a new artwork, rather than a translation" (201).

When embracing a "more creative 'experiential' approach" (Hadley and Rieger 2021, 190), the idea is "to create an analogous artistic engagement experience for the blind or low vision visitor – not identical to that of the sighted visitor, but equal, in terms of impact", which would result in the creation of an alternative "new non-visual artwork or experience" (193–194).

In addition to that, if the "post-modern museum" has opened up the interpretative process to visitors, this means that the product of the interpretative (translation) effort can now be co-created. In other words, "interpretation can also be seen as a co-construction in which individual visitors are agents, responding unpredictably to curatorial interpretation and developing their own understandings" (Whitehead 2011, 53).

In light of the above considerations, the proposed notion of experiential equivalence is based on the conceptualization of the museum visit as an experience, whereby visitors are involved in an active and creative process of meaning-making and memory-making, encompassing multimodal and multisensory input. As a consequence, heritage interpreters – including various meaning-making participants, such as the institution/commissioner, the describer/translator and visitors – are constantly interpreting, remembering, connecting and creating meanings. In particular, the visitor/user may be recognized as the main subject and active producer of meanings in

different contexts, i.e., in museum interpretation, museum AD and, arguably, any translation practice.

Equivalence cannot be related to single texts, being the object on display or the AD itself, but should be based on the overall experience comprising such texts and the associated meanings and memories. Experiential equivalence could thus be defined as a type of equivalence that does not occur at the level of text, effect or function but of the user's holistic experience, a synthesis of personal, social, physical and sensory dimensions that is bound to evoke continuous memories and reflections with respect to the object or artefact being described through AD. Such an experience, albeit unique to any individual, is at the heart of any museum visit as a meaning-making process, both within and beyond the museum's walls and the timespan of the visit.

Revisiting the notion of translation

The insights stemming from the literature on museum interpretation within MS and the exploration of the museum AD guidelines seem to offer further food for thought for broadening the notion of the translational phenomenon per se.

By bringing together the concepts of translation and heritage interpretation, this article points to the need for reconsidering the idea of translation as a "semiosic process" or "sign-process" (Marais 2019b, 43), in which meaning is mediated and created, rather than transferred. The notion of translation could benefit from a renewed focus on "the *process* of making meaning, i.e., the process of turning a sign into another sign", which essentially implies that "any meaning-making and meaning-taking process entails translation" (44).

More specifically, museum AD is a "multilevel" process of translation and interpretation (43). Within it, the object (considered not just as ST/visual input but also as TT/result of a creative process) is first perceived and translated into a mental image by the describer (who is both a receiver and a meaning-making actor). The latter then translates this mental image into written words, which are recorded (or played live) and listened to by an active user (also a co-participant in the translation/interpretation process). The user lastly translates them into a mental image, which forms part of the AD experience, in turn

encompassed in the wider museum experience. The multi-layered essence of the AD process could similarly be extended to any translation practice, which is necessarily "complex, involving various levels and various cause-and-effect relationships" (43), suggesting that translation may be conceived in non-binary terms. From a semiotic perspective, this means that an incipient sign (or set of signs) might give rise to a set of mental signs (interpretant) in the describer's mind and voice, which are interpreted by the listener in yet another iteration of signs.

The concept of experience may also be fruitfully borrowed from museum interpretation for reconceptualizing translation. In the heritage context, interpretation is based on "provoking a person to have personal thoughts and to make personal meanings about a place, a thing, a person, or a concept", which would allow for "shap[ing] that person's experience" (Ham [1992] 2013, 80). The same may be true for translation, if an experiential equivalence is sought. By recognizing the centrality of the user, this would extend translation research from a product- or process-based approach to a broader and more complex experience-oriented one.

Conclusions

This article has aimed to suggest a reconceptualization of traditional notions in TS by focusing on museum AD, an instance of intersemiotic practice. In doing so, we have attempted to demonstrate that a cross-fertilization between MS and TS may be particularly useful for reconsidering such conceptual issues and the role of translation per se. As a practice involving a multiplicity of signs, museum AD for visually impaired people seems to be particularly apt to exploit the advantages of an interdisciplinary approach due to its intrinsic interdisciplinarity.

More specifically, we have examined some key notions of TS by looking at them through both the lenses of the discipline of MS and the existing guidelines to museum AD, which include significant theoretical ideas, in an attempt to provide an answer to key questions concerning the role of the ST and the nature of equivalence.

If we adopt Chesterman's (2019) conceptual framework to categorize novel or revisited TS issues, we can summarize our reflections by suggesting a "lumper" concept and a "rebranding" concept. First, we have posited that the traditional concepts of ST and TT may be combined and ultimately grouped in the framework of museum AD, where they may be said to coincide, embodied in a sensory experience. Second, we have sought to rethink, and rebrand, the notion of equivalence as both distinct from the old-aged idea of "faithfulness" and the most recent functionalist view, by proposing the user-oriented concept of experiential equivalence. Although dynamic equivalence and functional equivalence had overcome the concept of transfer of supposedly stable meanings pertaining to a ST, they still claimed an arguably similar reproduction of an effect or a communicative function, respectively. Conversely, given the intersensory nature of IT and the value of the visitor's memory, experiential equivalence does not account for any form of transfer because is based on a museum experience that is continuously re-enacted by each individual as meaning-maker. We posit that this might be applied to translation at large, especially if we embrace the ideas that any text is a multimodal instance (Kaindl 2013) and translation an infinite process of meaning-making (Marais 2019b). By interfacing with MS, we placed emphasis on the active role played by the visitor in appreciating and co-construing the whole experience, the result of the interaction among personal, social, physical and sensory dimensions.

One of the most evident limitations of this article is the essentially unidirectional perspective. As a matter of fact, we explored the discipline of MS and the museum AD guidelines with the goal to investigate typical notions of TS. In other words, in our attempt to broaden the horizons of TS concepts, we started from, and returned to, translation issues. One step further would be to export the notions of TS into MS, in an osmotic process that might arguably be beneficial for all the parties involved.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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[2] Throughout the article, the term *interpretation* will be used with the meaning assigned to it in MS, as defined in this section, instead of the commonly accepted meaning attributed in TS.

[3] The ADLAB project was financed by the European Union as part of the EACEA Lifelong Learning program. The AD guidelines produced as a project deliverable contain the section "Descriptive guides: Access to museums, cultural venues and heritage sites" (Neves 2015).

[4] In the European guidelines, the concept of AD is referred to as DG, i.e., "descriptive guide".

[5] Since the guidelines by DescriVedendo (2021) are written in Italian, quotations in the article are the authors' translation.

[6] For "experiential equivalence", we do not refer to the notion proposed by Sechrest, Fay, and Zaidi (1972).

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