

**Neather, Robert (2025). *Translating for Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 188, £38.99 (paperback); £145.00 (hardback); £35.09 (eBook). ISBN: 9781138571860 (paperback); 9781138571853 (hardback); 9780203702505 (eBook).**

The role of translation in museums, galleries, and heritage sites has become increasingly prominent, particularly in the contemporary globalised and interconnected world. Museum translation, distinguished by its inherent interdisciplinarity, has emerged as a topic of enquiry within both translation studies and museum studies. Scholarly attention to this area has been growing steadily, with some studies concentrating on theoretical frameworks (e.g., Mertens & Decroupet, 2024; Neelsen, 2021) and others probing into professional and functional dimensions. Despite this rising interest, however, works addressing practical issues, such as those by Neather (2012; 2024) and Hutchinson and Eardley (2019), do not provide in-depth coverage of the full range of skills and knowledge required by practitioners in the field. As Neather (2025) aptly notes, “there remains remarkably little in the way of practical guidance for those involved in translation work” (p. 1). One of the significant limitations in this area of expertise is the absence of comprehensive, standardised guidelines for museum translation practices, as well as a noticeable gap between theoretical insights and actual implementation. In this regard, Neather’s book *Translating for Museums, Galleries, and Heritage Sites*, included in the series “Translation Practices Explained,” presents a timely exploration of the current landscape of multilingual and translation practices within these cultural institutions and, in the meantime, offers actionable guidance to translators and stakeholders.

Chapter 1 outlines the scope of the book and identifies its intended audience. It begins by justifying the examination of three types of cultural institutions — museums, art galleries, and heritage sites — as a unified entity, elucidating their shared commonalities in translation. Drawing upon Rouxel’s classification (2018), the chapter maps museum translation and identifies “interpretive resources” as the primary texts to be explored in this book, with additional examples of information resources also included. Following a brief overview of Chapters 2 to 7 and the appendices, which provide resources for further reading, the chapter clarifies that the book does not address translation technology, translation for individuals with disabilities, or website localisation, as these are considered distinct areas which require further research and training. It concludes by asserting that the book is well-suited for students and professionals in the fields of museum and heritage studies, as well as translation studies. In fact, it can be effectively utilised in classroom settings due to its insightful analysis of examples, exercises, and discussion points drawn from a variety of languages.

Chapter 2 delves into seven key concepts in museum translation, laying a solid foundation for the analysis of Chapters 4 to 6. It begins by presenting the International



Council of Museums' (ICOM) definition of a "museum," followed by an exploration of its educational and commemorative functions. Drawing on Whitehead's (2012) categories, the chapter investigates the relationship between curators and visitors across three "registers": verbal, environmental, and experiential. The analysis emphasises that the "experiential register" on the visitor's side lies beyond the direct control of curators, underscoring the need for deeper awareness and understanding of visitors' needs. The remaining two registers, "verbal" and "environmental," are discussed in the next four sections, which address issues related to display, space, text, and intertextuality. It is observed that different display methods and spatial arrangements of texts and objects influence the meanings conveyed. The chapter then moves onto a discussion of texts and introduces two analytical methodologies employed in this book: Hatim and Mason's (1990) text-type categorisation and Ravelli's (2006) communication frameworks. The concept of "intertextuality" is subsequently examined, ranging from micro-level rewording to cross-referencing among various co-spatially situated texts, thus revealing different intertwined levels. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the various potential communicative purposes of the source and target texts, which might be influenced by differing visitor demographics and institutional and curatorial expectations.

Chapter 3 explores museum and heritage translation from the perspective of industry practitioners. It emphasises the significance of a translation brief or "task description," which is expected to encompass key elements such as the nature of the exhibition, the intended audience, the intended purpose of the translation, and other relevant details, enabling translators to better understand the needs and expectations of stakeholders, including commissioners and visitors. To gain deeper insight into commissioners, the chapter analyses factors influencing the museum's approach to language provision, such as financial and staffing resources, visitor demographics, and language policies. Moreover, the chapter offers a detailed view of quality assurance, advocating for the implementation of boundary practices — cross-sectoral strategies that promote cooperation between translators and museum professionals — and for the consideration of visitor's actual responses to multilingual resources. After focusing primarily on the close collaboration between the translator and the museum in exhibition practices, the chapter shifts to the domain of translation for academic research purposes. It presents a case study of partnership between a translator and a museum studies researcher, in which the translator takes on a role beyond that of a language specialist, contributing as a collaborative academic researcher. The chapter offers valuable insights, analysing the roles of key stakeholders and highlighting the importance of visitor engagement in the shaping the decisions made by both commissioners and translators.

Chapters 4 to 6 provide in-depth and practical discussions on various types of texts that are often translated in museum contexts. Each chapter opens with a revision of some of the theoretical considerations outlined in Chapter 2, followed by a rigorous



critique of certain aspects of multilingual and translation practices in museums, galleries, and cultural sites, as delineated in Chapter 3. This approach combines theoretical concepts with empirical exploration, thereby ensuring a robust integration of conceptual analysis and practical application.

In Chapter 4, the focus is on fixed labels and wall panels within exhibition spaces. It first identifies the informative purpose of these texts, despite their variations in length, density, reader appeal, and layout. The following section explains Ravelli's (2006) communicative frameworks — i.e. representational, interactional, and organisational — with examples to systematically consider different aspects of texts. It observes that any change in the representational framework, such as omission, addition, or reordering, can impact the other two. The chapter then shifts to the issue of code preference, outlining the standards for physical arrangement of different languages on the same label, as well as a range of considerations that might affect it. To figure out the way in which writers of texts engage with readers, the next section elaborates on Ravelli's interactional framework, placing a stronger emphasis on creativity by exploring an array of original and inventive techniques used to translate labels and panels. In particular, Ekarv's ([1986/7] 1999, p. 203) "poetic restructuring" is highlighted as an effective method to foster creativity and engage visitors. However, as Neather (2025) himself argues, its efficacy in languages with different syntactic and spatial structures, such as Chinese, remains uncertain (p. 78). To elaborate on interactional differences, the concepts of "power" and "distance" are employed, echoing Ravelli's (2006) notions of "roles," "styles," and "stances." Additionally, the chapter expands the scope of enquiry to include cultural differences in label translation. This involves both micro lexical adjustments as regards the representational framework — illustrated through bilingual Icelandic-English labels that address lexical gaps via strategies such as reforeignization and explicitation — and broader rhetoric changes in the interactional framework. The latter is exemplified by Chinese-English labels, where techniques such as demetaphorization and the omission of certain representational elements are employed to avoid propagandistic tones in the English version. Specifically, racial issues emerge as a key consideration in addressing cultural matters. This chapter concludes with a discussion of various approaches to dealing with texts embedded in or inscribed on objects in the context of label translation, ranging from non-translation to full translation. It emphasizes both the challenges and possible solutions when text is materially part of the object, as seen in calligraphic works and inscriptions.

Chapter 5 transitions from the fixed texts of museum exhibitions to "optional materials," including leaflets, worksheets, and audio guides. According to Neather (2025), nearly all forms of leaflets, regardless of their differences in size, format, approach, and features, share their common nature as multimodal assemblages, although they might serve diverse purposes, either as navigational summaries, souvenirs, or supplementary materials (p. 93-98). The chapter proceeds to analyse translation



examples selected from expository leaflets, referring to other strategies like structural reconfiguration, addition, and cultural adaptation. It further examines leaflets that adopt a more visitor-friendly tone, demonstrating that the translated texts introduce various shifts in the interactional framework in order to enhance interpersonal appeal, often through the use of linguistic features, such as imperatives, second-person pronouns, questions, and lexical boosts. The following section explores a number of factors which influence worksheet design, including the purpose of the museum visit, usage context, and familiarity of readership with the museum and its content. Delving into the language of worksheets, Neather identifies several engaging features that are often used, such as directives, exclamations, interrogatives, creative techniques, different language registers targeted at various age groups, and multimodal elements like pictures, diagrams, and layout. Audio guides, as another supplementary learning resource in museums, are also discussed in this chapter with a focus on two main aspects. First, a series of factors that influence its use, as proposed by Mannion et al. (2015), are highlighted, and, notably, as Neather contends, some of them — such as visitor confidence, museological authority, and the likelihood of tool usage — are intricately interrelated. Second, given the significance of audio guides for foreign-language visitors, this chapter also analyses a number of frequent translation strategies — such as localisation, information redistribution, and the preservation of orality — which are aimed at enhancing their effectiveness.

Chapter 6 extends beyond the immediate confines of the museum space to examine three major text types that serve as standalone sources of information: catalogues, guides, and webpages. Neather reflects on the intended audience, function, and distinctive features of catalogues and guides, with a particular focus on the relationship between text and image and its implications for translation. To be more specific, the verbal-visual interactions within these resources are analysed in relation to two key aspects: 1) the use of pictures as illustrations of broader art-historical contexts, and 2) the role of texts as illustrations of artefacts. Neather maintains that, in the former case, the selection of pictures and their layout are driven by the visual appeal of artefacts or their interest as cultural curiosities, whereas, in the latter case, translation may involve major or minor shifts in the ostensive focus of the source text. The discussion then turns to three areas of complexity in catalogues and guides: technical cultural terminology, terminological density, and the often indeterminate nature of art-historical language. It is worth noting that these specific challenges also arise in other materials, such as labels, wall panels, and leaflets discussed in previous sections, as well as in web-based texts addressed later; however, the book overlooks their treatment in these contexts. The chapter does examine catalogue prefaces and forewords, underscoring the necessity for nuanced tonal adjustments in translation to align curatorial intent with reader reception. Web-based texts are explored in two sections: one examines how translation subtly recasts the culturally specific narrative of the source text, while the other looks into web-specific concerns, such as the effective multimodal adaptation of



images, colour schemes, hyperlinks, and overall design layouts, with examples drawn from the Chinese homepages of the Louvre Museum and the British Museum.

While the preceding chapters investigate various museum texts and their translation, Chapter 7 adopts a more holistic approach, advocating for the central role of translation in the museum milieu. It conceptualises the museum as a “translation zone” (163) where relevant intercultural encounters and multilingual exchanges are facilitated. Additionally, the chapter introduces three metaphorical perspectives on translation: 1) museums as agents that “translate” cultures; 2) visitors as “translators” of exhibitions; and, consequently, 3) visitors themselves as individuals who become “translated” through the process of reading and interpreting exhibitions. The explanation of the latter two contexts, in which foreign visitors rely primarily on translated texts, resonates with the sociological concepts of “symbolic interactionism” (Blumer, 1969) and “habitus” (Bourdieu, 1972). The chapter proceeds to argue for the incorporation of translation and multilingual practices from the outset in the curation process. The importance of preventing repetition and information overload due to the intertextual nature of museum texts is also stressed. Neather considers varying degrees and forms of translation practices, from literal renderings to extensive rewriting, to cater to the diverse needs of visitors. This visitor-oriented approach, reiterated throughout the book, charts a path for the future of museum translation, highlighting the critical role of enhanced collaboration with local communities and visitors.

In general, the analysis of various texts is both meticulous and detailed, highlighting their differing levels of necessity and significance in shaping the exhibition experience for visitors. Labels and wall panels are given substantial attention in the fourth chapter, given their direct and ubiquitous presence in museum spaces, as well as their indispensable nature for a wide range of visitors. In contrast, other text types – such as leaflets, worksheets, audio guides, catalogues, guides, and web-based texts – are addressed more concisely in the subsequent two chapters. While the book’s structure may initially appear repetitive, with key themes reiterated and cross-referenced throughout different sections, this intentional repetition serves to enhance intertextuality and reinforce the readers’ understanding of foundational concepts.

This book is particularly commendable for its accessibility and readability, expertly achieved through a practice-oriented approach that skillfully and carefully avoids excessive jargon and academic buzzwords, employs clear and straightforward language, and incorporates practical examples from a variety of languages. It also features a range of exercises and discussion points, along with thought-provoking hypothetical scenarios, all designed to encourage deeper engagement and critical reflection of readers. To further enhance usability, the inclusion of a glossary index enables readers to efficiently locate relevant information, reinforcing the book’s value as an accessible academic and practical resource.



While this book is noteworthy for its thorough examination of various texts within the museum context, the scope of this study could be expanded by further research into additional text types that are increasingly relevant in contemporary museum practice. For instance, QR codes on labels, interactive tables, digital kiosks, and mobile applications represent emerging forms of textual engagement that significantly enhance visitor interaction with digital content in museums. These forms share intertextual connections with the text types discussed in the book, yet also introduce distinct characteristics, such as spatial considerations, which both relate to and diverge from the texts analysed.

The contributions of this book, ranging from theoretical insights to practical tips, are firmly grounded in the author's extensive academic research and expertise in museum translation studies. By effectively bridging theory and practice in museum translation, the book not only provides practical guidance for professionals but also stimulates further academic enquiry. It offers a comprehensive discussion of this underexplored area, establishing itself as an indispensable resource for those interested in translation in the context of museums, galleries, and cultural sites. With its logical structure, comprehensive coverage of diverse texts, and accessible language, the book is highly recommended for students, practitioners, and academics specialised in museum and heritage studies, as well as in translation. It is hoped that scholars within these fields—and beyond—recognise the enduring relevance of the questions raised, and that the book will inspire further exploration and more diversified research on the translation of museums, galleries, and cultural sites in the years to come.

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**Wanyu Li**  
**Beijing Jiaotong University, Beijing**  
E-mail address: [wyli2@bjtu.edu.cn](mailto:wyli2@bjtu.edu.cn)

**Kexin Du**  
**Beijing Jiaotong University, Beijing**  
Corresponding author  
E-mail address: [kxdu1@bjtu.edu.cn](mailto:kxdu1@bjtu.edu.cn)

