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Research on the Optimization Path of English Guide Text Translation for Museum Historical Theme Special Exhibition

Manqing Ma *

National Archives of Publications and Culture of Xi'an, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710134, China
*** Corresponding author Email:** 496732923@qq.com

Abstract: Museum historical themed exhibitions are an important window for cross-cultural dissemination of Chinese history and culture, and the quality of their English guide texts directly determines the effectiveness of international dissemination. At present, there are common problems in the English translation of museum history exhibitions in China, such as inconsistent terminology, lack of historical context, weak sentence adaptation, and superficial cultural translation, and an exclusive standardized translation system has not yet been formed. This article combines the research of museum special exhibition text data to systematically sort out the existing problems and underlying causes of translation. It constructs a systematic translation optimization path from the dimensions of terminology standardization, contextual reconstruction, language adaptation, cultural translation, and quality control, providing reference for the English translation practice of museum historical publicity texts.

Keywords: Museum; English Tour Guide; Chinese History and Culture; Translation of Text into English.

1. Introduction

Museums are an important means of cultural dissemination, a way of cultural output, and a carrier of cultural presentation. The cultural relics in the museum are the concrete presentation of cultural dissemination to the outside world, and the museum guide text is the potential guide for cultural output. The readability of English translated texts determines the efficiency of cultural dissemination. Based on previous research, it can be found that good English translations of cultural relic name explanations, museum explanations, and exhibition texts all have the characteristics of accurate, concise, clear, logically rigorous, and easy to understand useful words. When translating museum guide texts into English, translators should be professional, accurate, concise, and fluent in completing the translation work.

The current academic research on the translation of museum texts mainly focuses on short texts such as cultural relic explanatory signs and introductions to permanent exhibitions. There are relatively few specialized studies on the systematic and narrative guided long texts of historical exhibitions, and existing practices often use general translation paradigms, ignoring the strictness, narrative, and cultural specificity of historical texts. This has led to problems such as information bias, lack of context, obscurity, and cultural aphasia in some English guided special exhibitions, seriously restricting the effectiveness of historical and cultural dissemination to the outside world. Based on this, this article combines empirical research and case analysis to accurately analyze the existing pain points in the translation of historical special exhibition English guides, and constructs a scientific, standardized, and adaptable translation optimization path, providing reference for the translation practice of museum historical publicity texts.

2. Stylistic Characteristics and Translation Core Principles of English Guide Text for Museum History Special Exhibition

(1) Core features of text

The English guide text for the historical themed special exhibition belongs to the information and cultural application type text, which combines academic rigor and mass dissemination. Unlike ordinary museum guide texts, the core features are as follows: firstly, historical professionalism, the text contains a large number of historical proprietary terms, dynasty titles, institutional terms, and historical event expressions, requiring extremely high accuracy and standardization in translation [1]; Secondly, narrative coherence. The guided text forms a complete narrative chain based on time, events, and logic, and translation needs to ensure the coherence and unity of sentences, paragraphs, and overall narrative; Thirdly, cultural uniqueness, containing a large number of Chinese exclusive historical and cultural imagery, traditional ritual systems, and folk connotations, without a fully corresponding English expression, creates natural translation barriers; Fourthly, the target audience should be diverse, including ordinary overseas tourists, cultural enthusiasts, academic researchers, etc. The translation should balance professionalism and accessibility [2].

(2) Translation Core Principles

Combining functional translation theory with cross-cultural communication needs, the translation of English guides for historical exhibitions should adhere to three core principles. One is the principle of precision, strictly regulating the translation of historical terminology, cultural relic names, and historical events, eliminating information mistranslation, omission, and misinterpretation, and ensuring the authenticity and rigor of historical facts; The second principle is adaptability, which adapts to the language habits, thinking

logic, and cultural cognition of English audiences, optimizes sentence structure and narrative logic, and avoids Chinglish expression; The third principle is the principle of cultural equivalence, which compensates for the differences in cultural cognition between China and foreign countries through reasonable translation strategies, and achieves effective transmission of historical and cultural connotations, rather than simply converting words into equivalent forms [3].

3. Investigation and Analysis of The Current Situation and Existing Problems in The Translation of English Guide Texts for Museum History Exhibitions

(1) Basic research information

This survey selected 20 key historical themed exhibitions from 10 provincial-level comprehensive museums and historical thematic museums in China in recent years as research samples, covering four major categories of themes: ancient civilization, modern and contemporary history, regional history, and intangible cultural heritage history. A total of 120 English guide texts, audio guide scripts, and exhibition board English explanations were collected. Through text comparison, translation analysis, and expert review, the existing translation problems were systematically sorted out, and the proportion of various problems was calculated. The specific data is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Statistics of Translation Issues in English Guided Tours for Museum Historical Special Exhibitions

question type	specific manifestations	Sample proportion (%)	impact level
Incorrectly translated terminology	Inconsistencies in the translation of historical terms, dynasty names, and official positions, resulting in mistranslations and vulgar translations	78.3	serious
Lack of historical context	Without supplementing the historical background and cultural connotations, overseas audiences cannot understand the historical logic	85.0	serious
Sentence structure expression is stiff	Chinglish sentence structure, lengthy and illogical, not in line with English expression habits	71.7	moderate
Superficial Translation of Culture	Directly translating the surface meaning of the text, losing historical, cultural, and spiritual connotations	81.7	serious
Narrative logic rupture		63.3	moderate
Imbalance in tone and style	The paragraph connection is not smooth, the historical narrative is vague, and the coherence is insufficient	56.7	mild

(2) Analysis of Existing Problems

1. Chaotic terminology system and lack of professional standardization

The standardization of historical terminology is the foundation of tour guide translation and also the most prominent issue at present. The survey found that over 70% of the samples have inconsistent terminology, mainly concentrated in four categories of vocabulary: dynasty titles, ancient official positions, historical systems, and cultural relics categories. The same historical concept appears in multiple translations in the same special exhibition, and some translations use colloquial translation instead, which goes against the professionalism of history. For example, the "Three Provinces and Six Ministries System" exists Three Provinces and Six Ministries System, Three Departments and Six Ministries Two translation methods; The term 'censor' is arbitrarily translated as' officer 'without using the exclusive translation method' censor ', resulting in a blurred historical identity and seriously affecting the accurate transmission of historical information. At the same time, some niche historical and cultural terms lack authoritative translation references, and translators have a strong sense of arbitrariness in their independent translation, further exacerbating the confusion of terminology.

2. Lack of historical context and insufficient information integrity

The historical exhibition guide text relies on specific historical backgrounds, historical contexts, and cultural contexts, while overseas audiences generally lack basic knowledge of Chinese history. Literal translation of the text can lead to information gaps[4]. The survey found that 85% of the samples had contextual deficiencies, with translations only translating the literal content without providing necessary background explanations, logical connections, and connotation interpretations. For example, in some modern history exhibitions, the direct translation of "Westernization Movement" and "Reform Movement of 1898" did not supplement the background, core appeals and historical significance of the movement, and overseas audiences could not understand the historical value of the event, leading to the superficial historical narrative and the failure to achieve the goal of cultural communication [5].

4. Poor Language Adaptability and Low Audience Readability

Currently, most tour guide translations use Chinese sentence structures, which suffer from Chinglish problems such as lengthy sentence structures, confusing word order, and redundant repetition, which do not conform to the reading and cognitive habits of English audiences. Chinese historical texts often adopt a narrative style of parallel short sentences and layered foreshadowing, while English prefers complex sentence structures with clear logic and distinct priorities. Some translations mechanically copy the Chinese word order, resulting in obscure sentence logic and unclear key points. At the same time, some translations excessively pursue academic rigor, pile up complex vocabulary and long and difficult sentences, deviate from the dissemination positioning of mass guides, and are difficult for ordinary overseas tourists to understand, greatly reducing the effectiveness of dissemination [6]

5. Shallow Cultural Translation and Ineffective Dissemination of Connotations

The core value of historical exhibitions lies in conveying the cultural spirit and contemporary connotations behind history, but there is a common problem in current translation where there is a focus on text over culture. Translators often adopt a literal translation strategy, only completing surface level text conversion and ignoring cultural cognitive differences between China and foreign countries, resulting in a large number of exclusive historical and cultural images, ritual culture, and value concepts experiencing cultural aphasia. For example, traditional core cultural concepts such as "ritual vessels" and "patriarchal system" cannot convey the social order and cultural connotations behind them through literal translation. Overseas audiences can only recognize the names of the objects and systems, and cannot understand their historical value and cultural significance, resulting in cultural dissemination floating on the surface.

3. Analysis of the causes of problems in the translation of English guide texts for museum history exhibitions

Based on the typical problems found in the previous research, such as confusion in terminology, lack of context, awkward language, and superficial cultural translation, we can deeply dissect the root causes of the problems from four core dimensions: translator competence, industry norms, communication cognition, and management systems, clarify the deep contradictions in the current English translation practice of museum historical exhibitions, and provide accurate basis for optimizing the system construction in the future.

(1) Lack of interdisciplinary composite literacy among translators

The translation of English guides for museum history exhibitions belongs to a composite translation scenario of professional history and cross-cultural translation, which requires extremely high comprehensive abilities of translators. However, there is a common problem of a single ability structure among translators in the current industry. Most full-time translators have solid English Chinese language conversion skills and are familiar with general translation techniques, but lack systematic professional knowledge reserves such as Chinese general history, specialized history, ancient laws and regulations, and cultural relics studies. Their understanding of historical proprietary concepts, historical backgrounds, and cultural cores is only superficial, and they cannot distinguish the professionalism and authority of terminology translation methods. At the same time, some cultural and museum institutions directly hire administrative personnel and foreign language interns to undertake translation work. These personnel have not received professional translation training and lack cross-cultural communication thinking. During the translation process, they mechanically rely on literal translation tools and general dictionaries, which can easily lead to problems such as vulgar translation, mistranslation, and omission. In addition, translators generally lack narrative thinking in museum exhibitions, neglecting the "narrative and systematic" dissemination attributes of special exhibitions, focusing only on single sentence text conversion, ignoring the coherence of the overall historical context, ultimately leading to fragmented narrative and insufficient professionalism in the translated text.

(2) Industry specific translation standards and terminology system gaps

At present, there are only general external publicity translation guidelines and public signage translation standards in China, and there is no special English translation standard for museum historical themed exhibitions, which is the core institutional cause of frequent translation chaos. On the one hand, there are a large number of niche, exclusive, and unique concepts in historical cultural and museum terminology. There is no internationally recognized translation method, nor is there a unified industry standard in China. Different museums and translators independently translate and write the same historical vocabulary, resulting in a long-term accumulation of confusing terminology in the industry; On the other hand, existing translation standards are mostly applicable to minimalist texts such as short sentence labels and public signs, and cannot adapt to the contextual adaptation, logical coherence, and cultural translation needs of historical special exhibition long narrative texts. Translators have no authoritative reference basis, and there is no unified standard constraint for translation practice. At the same time, the cultural and museum industry has not established a mechanism for dynamic updating and unified reuse of historical terminology. With the continuous updating of new historical research results and cultural relic interpretation conclusions, traditional old translation methods have not been timely revised, further exacerbating the disconnect between translations and academic frontiers and historical facts.

(3) Cross cultural communication audience cognitive dissonance

There is a common cognitive bias in current translation practice that emphasizes text conversion over audience adaptation, and translation work has not been based on the cultural cognitive system of overseas audiences. From the perspective of cognitive differences, domestic audiences have their own reserves of Chinese historical and cultural context, which can quickly understand historical connotations through concise texts. However, overseas audiences generally lack basic knowledge of Chinese history, and have no prior understanding of dynastic changes, ancient systems, traditional ritual systems, and historical events. The translator adopts a "equivalent literal translation" thinking throughout the process, without completing the context, cultural

interpretation, and logical reconstruction, resulting in a large number of cognitive barriers in the translation. From the perspective of communication positioning, most translators equate guide texts with academic papers or ordinary external propaganda texts, either by excessively piling up professional terminology and obscure sentence structures, detached from the mass communication attributes, or by excessively popularizing and losing historical professionalism, unable to meet the hierarchical needs of diverse audiences such as overseas ordinary tourists, cultural researchers, and foreign students, ultimately resulting in a lack of both readability and professionalism in the translation.

(4) Lack of quality control management mechanism for the entire translation process

Most museums in China have not yet established a standardized workflow for translating historical exhibitions into English, and the extensive translation management model is an important guarantee for the frequent occurrence of translation problems. First, the translation work process is simplified. Most cultural and museum institutions adopt the single mode of "single translation, no review, no proofreading", and no key links such as history expert review, translation expert polishing, foreign audience verification are set up. Language errors and historical fact errors cannot be corrected in a timely manner; Secondly, there is a lack of normalized quality control standards, and there are no clear assessment indicators for the accuracy, contextual adaptation, cultural translation, sentence structure standardization, etc. of historical text translation, resulting in no basis for evaluating translation quality; Thirdly, there is a lack of resource precipitation mechanism, and high-quality translations and standardized terminology for a single museum exhibition are not archived and retained. In the future, mature translation methods cannot be reused for similar historical exhibitions, and repetitive translation errors occur frequently; Fourthly, there is a lack of long-term training mechanisms, and translators have not regularly participated in specialized training on cultural history and cross-cultural translation. Their professional abilities are unable to adapt to the constantly updated exhibition content and international communication needs.

6. Optimization Path for Translation of English Guide Text for Museum History Special Exhibition

(1) Building a standard terminology library to solidify the foundation of translation expertise

To address the issue of confusion in historical terminology, it is necessary to rely on authoritative historical materials and national translation standards for external publicity to construct a museum's exclusive English terminology library for historical exhibitions, and achieve standardization, normalization, and standardization of terminology translation. Firstly, classify and sort out the core terms, and classify them into five categories: dynastic system, official position system, cultural relics category, historical events, and cultural concepts. Integrate authoritative translation methods, abandon niche, erroneous, and popularized translation methods, and form a unified terminology standard. Secondly, establish a mechanism for dynamic updating of terminology, and regularly update niche historical terms and emerging interpretation concepts based on the latest historical research results and external translation standards. Finally, implement the full process reuse of terminology, strictly unify the terminology translation method for historical exhibitions of the same series and theme, eliminate translation confusion from the source, and ensure the professionalism and rigor of historical texts.

(2) Adapt to English expression paradigms to enhance text readability

Based on the needs of cross-cultural communication, we adopt a combination strategy of "literal translation+ supplementary translation+simplified translation" to fill in the gaps in historical context and construct a complete and easy to understand English historical narrative. In response to the cognitive blind spots of overseas audiences, we will moderately supplement concise background explanations for exclusive historical events, systems, and cultural concepts to avoid information gaps; Simplify redundant expressions and highlight core historical information for complex and lengthy Chinese historical background content; Reconstruct narrative logic and adapt to the English cognitive system for content with cultural ambiguity. At the same time, following the principle of "narrative coherence", optimizing the sentence structure of paragraph transitions, sorting out time, events, and causal logic, ensuring the smooth narrative and clear context of the entire guide text, allowing overseas audiences to clearly grasp the historical development and core values.

(3) Deepen precise translation of culture and achieve equivalent dissemination of culture

Table 2. Comparison of Optimization for Typical Translation Cases

Original Chinese text	Old translation (question version)	Optimized translation	Optimization highlights
The Westernization Movement was a reform movement in the late Qing Dynasty to save oneself and strive for strength. The introduction of western technology promoted the development of modern Chinese industry.	Westernization Movement is a self-rescue movement in late Qing Dynasty. It introduced western technology. It promoted Chinese modern industry.	As a self-improvement reform movement in the late Qing Dynasty, the Westernization Movement introduced western advanced technologies and effectively boosted the development of modern industry in China.	Integrate scattered short sentences, clarify logical relationships, ensure fluent and professional language, and adapt to English narrative habits
The three provinces and six ministries system was the core bureaucratic system in ancient China, which maintained the stable operation of feudal dynasties.	Three Provinces and Six Systems is an old official system; it keeps the old empire stable.	The Three Departments and Six Ministries System, the core bureaucratic system in ancient China, maintained the stable operation of feudal dynasties for thousands of years.	Standardize exclusive terminology, correct grammar errors, supplement core positioning, and enhance professionalism

Abandoning the mechanical literal translation mode, focusing on the language habits of the English audience, optimizing sentence structure and expression forms. One is to reconstruct the sentence structure and logic, transforming Chinese parallel short sentences into compound sentences with clear primary and secondary order in English, clarifying the logical relationship between sentences, and deleting repetitive and redundant expressions; The second is to adapt the language difficulty level by grading, taking into account both the general audience and professional audiences. The "popular basic expression+professional terminology annotation" model is adopted to ensure that ordinary tourists can understand and meet the professional needs of academic research; The third is to unify the text style, maintain a formal, objective, and rigorous narrative tone, avoid colloquial and casual expression, and adapt to the solemn attributes of historical exhibitions. To visually demonstrate the optimization effect, typical translation examples were selected for comparison between old and new translations, as shown in Table 2.

(4) Build a full process quality control system to ensure the quality of translation implementation

Establish a four-dimensional quality control process of "translator translation - historical expert review - foreign language expert polishing - on-site testing optimization" to avoid translation issues at the institutional level. Firstly, the translator needs to learn beforehand and systematically review the historical background, core terminology, and cultural connotations of the special exhibition before translation to ensure the accuracy of the translation; Secondly, dual expert review is conducted, with historical experts verifying the accuracy of historical information, terminology, and context, and translation experts verifying the adaptability of language expression, logic, and cultural translation; Thirdly, optimize audience testing by selecting overseas audience samples for trial reading, adjusting sentence difficulty and expression form based on feedback to improve readability; Fourthly, archive and reuse high-quality translations and standardized terminology into the museum's translation resource library, providing reference for subsequent special exhibition translations and forming a virtuous iterative mechanism.

7. Conclusion

The translation of English guide texts for museum historical themed exhibitions is an important carrier for the external dissemination of Chinese history and culture, and its translation quality directly affects the cross-cultural communication effect and the shaping of national cultural image. The current problems in the English translation of historical exhibitions, such as non-standard terminology, lack of context, poor readability, and insufficient cultural translation, are essentially due to the insufficient adaptability of the universal translation paradigm to the professional characteristics of historical texts and cross-cultural communication needs. This article is based on the stylistic characteristics and dissemination positioning of historical exhibition texts. Through empirical research, the core issues are sorted out, and a comprehensive translation optimization path is constructed from five dimensions: terminology standardization, contextual reconstruction, language adaptation, cultural translation, and quality control. The core orientation of "historical accuracy+cultural equivalence+ audience adaptation" is strengthened, and a professional, standardized, and systematic translation standard is established. By continuously optimizing translation strategies, improving quality control systems, and building a terminology resource platform, we aim to continuously enhance the dissemination efficiency of English guided tours for historical exhibitions, allowing China's long history and culture to enter the world in a more accurate, understandable, and infectious way, and helping to build the international dissemination capacity of Chinese culture.

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