

TRANSLATION AND CURIOSITY IN THE MUSEUM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THEME AND CONCURRENCE IN SOURCE- AND TARGET-LANGUAGE MUSEUM LABELS

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Abstract: Museum visitors’ engagement with a label often starts from an initial spark of curiosity about the displayed object, and for many international visitors, engagement with a label means reading a translated text. This case study explores how museum labels direct visitors’ attention towards the objects on display, with a focus on ideational concurrence between visual and verbal content, and the Theme-Rheme structure (Blunden 2020). The case study was carried out at the New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum in Taiwan. The study combines a Thematic analysis of museum labels with visitor interviews and investigates whether shifts in translation related to these features could impact how labels encourage visitors’ engagement with the exhibition. The findings suggest that the presence and positioning of ideational concurrence within a translated museum label may either help to convert international visitors’ initial curiosity into enthusiasm and engagement or disrupt their ability to connect with the exhibition content.

Keywords: museum translation; multimodality; affect; ostensivity; visitor studies; Theme/Rheme structure; reader response; museum labels; visual-verbal interaction; curiosity.

1. Introduction

Museum translation studies has emerged as a small but growing subdiscipline within Translation Studies (see e.g. Liao 2025; Neather 2024 for an overview of the field). This development reflects both the social role that museums play in multilingual and multicultural societies and the economic imperative for museums to engage international visitors. This article contributes to the field by focusing on *ostensivity* of museum labels, a concept Neather (2024) draws from Baxandall (1985) in his discussion of museum translation, defining it as “the quality where language *points to* or *demonstrates* particular aspects of interest in an artwork, so as to guide interpretation” (Neather 2024: 134; original emphasis). Linguistically, this function of steering visitors to look may be associated primarily with imperatives, and indeed, museum texts frequently feature this kind of grammatical structure (Ravelli 2006: 77), directing visitors to interact with objects (e.g. *open the drawer to find more documents*) or to navigate around the space (e.g. *turn left for the temporary exhibition*). However, Baxandall (1985) argues that even the most apparently descriptive sentences perform a demonstrative function. Labels direct viewers’ attention through demonstratively establishing a “reciprocal reference between the word and the object” (*ibid.*: 10). A statement like *This painting depicts flowers*, should be read as *Look -This painting (right here next to the label) depicts flowers!* Bal (1996: 2) further unpacks this demonstrative act: *Look* draws attention to the object’s “visual availability”, while the second part - which Bal glosses as “this is what it is” - asserts “epistemic authority” (*ibid.*) grounded in the assumed expertise of the text producer which allows the reader to trust the information provided. These labels thus “push” visitors to look at the displayed works (Blunden 2020: 55), equipped with new knowledge gained from the label, and this “push” plays a central role in establishing a relationship between the visual, the verbal, and the viewer.

Empirical studies have shown that visitors typically engage in a back-and-forth viewing pattern between object and label (Garbutt *et al.* 2020: 95; Smith and Smith 2001), and this is one way in which visitors exercise and fulfil curiosity within the museum environment. Curiosity, or novelty-seeking behaviour, is a psychological process that is considered a driving force behind learning behaviour in museums as spaces of free-choice learning (Falk and Dierking 2000). In this process of novelty-seeking, visitors are often initially drawn to an object because of its visual appeal or their personal interest. If an initial glance at the object successfully piques their curiosity, then visitors may turn to the label to learn more. An effective label not only satisfies initial curiosity, for example by identifying the function of an object, but also deepens visitors’ interest, prompting readers to return their gaze to the object - for example, to a specific detail they might otherwise have overlooked. This creates a satisfying viewing experience in which the label successfully “adds something more” (Blunden 2020: 45) to the experience of looking at the object, by either scaffolding the introduction of new information or directing attention towards particular aspects of the item.

This article asks: What specific linguistic features of the label facilitate this viewing pattern, and how might translation shifts influence this dynamic and affect the target text (TT) reader's museum experience? To explore this, we draw on Blunden's (2016, 2020) application of the Theme-Rheme framework from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004) to systematically analyse the ostensive function of museum texts, with the aim of identifying a pattern of shifts between ST and TT. This Theme/Rheme analysis is further corroborated with visitor interviews in order to explore how shifts in Thematic structure can potentially impact the visitor's experience. Our investigation draws on a case study carried out at 新北市立鶯歌陶瓷博物館 New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum in Taiwan, and involves analysis of the Mandarin STs and English TTs.

2. Reading museum labels

A museum is a multimodal space, where the multiple semiotic modes involved in a museum exhibit are all closely interrelated. Blunden (2016, 2020) explores this interrelation, identifying features of written verbal texts that create – or disrupt – cohesion between verbal and visual modalities. It has even been suggested that, in the highly complex and potentially confusing environment of the exhibition, verbal texts establish an order among the potential “chaos”, acting as a “crucial braking force on the paradigmatics of the museum” (Neather 2008: 221).

Common to these multimodal studies is a fundamental (and perhaps unsurprising, from a linguistic perspective) position that verbal text, while certainly not the only important semiotic resource in a museum, plays a central role. However, in Museum Studies more broadly, there has always been debate about the role of verbal texts (e.g. Serrell 1996), some authors enquiring whether they disrupt the visitor's engagement with museum objects (Dudley 2012); or even more fundamentally, whether visitors read them (McManus 1989; Reitstätter *et al.* 2022).

Responding to these questions, a growing number of empirical studies investigate how visitors read and use labels within the museum environment¹. Studies have found that the mean time that art museum visitors spent looking at a single painting and its accompanying label was less than 30 seconds (Smith *et al.* 2017; Smith and Smith 2001). The authors observe that visitors tended to look first at the artwork, then read the label, then glance briefly back at the art before walking away, so that more of their time was actually spent reading the label than looking at the artwork (Smith *et al.* 2017: 81). Similarly, a recent eye-tracking study found that the average length of a single fixation (where the visitor looks at a single point, without moving) directed at a label was 0.5 seconds, more than double the average 0.248-second average fixation on a certain part of an artwork (Garbutt *et al.* 2020: 95).

¹While this study focuses on written labels, it acknowledges that museum interpretation is often mediated through multiple, intertextually connected modes (Neather 2024: 24); see e.g. Kim (2020) and Liao and Bartie (2021) on the role of audio guides in the museum experience.

There is of course significant variation between individual visitors' reading times and patterns. Reitstätter *et al.* (2022: 134) categorise visitor reading behaviour into 'high affinity', meaning that the majority of labels were read attentively, 'low affinity', meaning that little or no reading took place, and 'medium affinity', meaning that some but not all texts were read. The study found that the majority (40.4%) of visitors were medium affinity readers while few (25.5%) were high affinity readers, but that even low affinity readers (34%) used labels to access information such as titles or artist names (Reitstätter *et al.* 2022: 143). The authors therefore assert that "Visitors all read, but to different extents" (*ibid.*).

Reading museum labels allows visitors to gather information about objects, places, and histories of which they might have little to no prior knowledge. Labels and other interpretive materials are therefore intrinsically linked to ideas of the museum as a "place for learning" (Falk and Dierking 2000: 113). In a survey involving 4,502 museum visitors across Australia, the UK and the USA, 31% of participants stated that their reason for visiting a museum was either 'education' or 'to find out about [the topic of the museum or exhibition]' (Smith 2020: 116), meaning that learning was the most common reason given for visiting. Whether museum visitors actually 'learn' in the sense of retaining information is another question, and some research has suggested that visitors may remember little information after their museum visit (Schorch *et al.* 2016: 104). Similarly, in Smith's (2020: 135) survey, a staggering 80% of visitors said that their views "had not changed in any way" after their museum visit.

However, it may be the case that what visitors are looking for is not information but rather a sense of immediate discovery and exploration. Packer (2006) describes a museum visit as an 'educational leisure experience' and writes that:

What [visitors] seek from their visit is not so much to learn something as to engage in an experience of learning that is inherently valuable or enjoyable in its own right, regardless of the learning outcomes that may or may not ensue (*ibid.*: 329).

The experience of learning, or 'learning for fun' (Packer 2006) provides an intrinsic motivation (Csikszentmihalyi and Hermanson 1995) for visitors to engage with museum interpretations, whether or not they acquire long-term knowledge from that experience. In pursuit of learning for fun, visitors are likely to move through exhibitions in search of objects or displays that spark their curiosity, even if this means resisting the routes laid out by exhibition designers. This way of engaging with exhibitions may at first seem to be a "fail[ure] to use the exhibitions in the thorough and systematic way that should reward them with the greatest educational benefits" (Rounds 2004: 390). However, the curiosity-driven visitor is in fact moving strategically, and conserving their limited attentional resources to focus on fulfilling their motivating curiosity (Bitgood 2000; Rounds 2004) in order to enjoy the sense of exploration and discovery that characterise learning for fun. Given that visitors' attention is a limited resource (Bitgood 2000), museum labels can play an important ostensive

role in directing that limited attention towards the objects or features that the label-writer considers most important (Baxandall 1985; Neather 2024).

Finally, the experience of a museum visit is social as well as educational, and this may shape how groups of visitors interact with and around labels. Groups of visitors may use labels as a prompt for discussion, reading parts aloud or asking one another questions (Eklund 2020). This social aspect is a key facet of ‘learning for fun’ (Packer 2006), and conversations prompted by labels or by objects need not necessarily be serious: instead, humorous conversation and ‘playful sociality’ (Eklund 2020: 1507) are a common feature of museum visits.

3. Ideational Concurrence and Theme-Rheme structure

One crucial element in this process of steering or focusing the visitor’s attention is what Blunden calls a ‘verbal vector’, a linguistic feature which acts to “explicitly ‘motivate’ or push the viewer to look at the displayed artefact and/or attend to particular features of it” (2020: 66).

The key component of a verbal vector is *ideational concurrence* between the label and the object, meaning that something visible in the object is mentioned in the written label. Specifically, there are three types of concurrence:

- correspondence, where the label refers to the whole object (e.g. “this panel”);
- meronymy, where there is a reference to part of the object (e.g. “the blue cloak”); or
- hyponymy, where the text refers to a class or category to which the object belongs (e.g. “portraits”) (Blunden 2020: 54).

Blunden (2020) links concurrence to the SFL concept of Theme, which can be defined as “the point of departure of the message; it is that which locates and orients the clause within its context” (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 64). In both English and Mandarin, an element is Thematised by placing it in the first position in the sentence (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004; Liu and Yang 2013). The remainder of the clause, after the Theme, is called the Rheme. Here, the Theme may be developed, or new information may be provided (Eggins 2004: 300). Ravelli (2006: 37) emphasises that Theme plays a key role in organising information flow in museum texts and argues that it is important to maintain “some symmetry between the Theme of the text, and the focus of the exhibit.” Blunden (2020: 54) further suggests that when ideational concurrence is present in Theme position, the reader’s attention is drawn to the connection between the verbal and material modes and this may ‘push’ the reader’s gaze away from the label and towards the object. In other words, emphasising concurrence by placing it in Theme position allows the label to direct the reader’s attention towards the visible object, thereby performing an ostensive role (Baxandall 1985; Neather 2024). On the other hand, concurrence in Rheme position is deemphasised and may construct a weaker link between the label and the object (Blunden 2020), potentially weakening the label’s ostensive or attention-steering potential (see examples of ideational concurrence in Theme and Rheme position in Table 1 below).

The other component in a verbal vector is presence, a concept related to ‘semantic gravity’ (Martin and Matruglio 2019; Maton 2013). Presence “specifies the linguistic resources that act to anchor or free the verbal texts from the immediate context of the display” (Blunden 2020: 49). In Blunden’s analysis, presence is evident primarily in the use of the definite article ‘the’ or the deictic marker ‘this’ (Blunden 2016: 201–5; 2020: 55–56). For Blunden (2020), a museum label ‘adds something more’ to the visitor’s experience of looking at an object when verbal vectors are paired with new information: the vector creates an explicit link to the object, the new information fulfils the visitor’s curiosity, and the visitor can leave feeling fulfilled. New information without verbal vectors establishes a parallel discourse that may not motivate attention to the object: for example, if a label displayed alongside a vinyl record discusses the singer’s life but does not refer to that specific record, then it may direct the visitor’s attention to outside information rather than to the visible object (Blunden 2020: 65). On the other hand, verbal vectors without new information can feel ‘empty’ and unsatisfying to the viewer (Blunden 2020: 67). A label stating that ‘This painting depicts flowers’, if displayed alongside a painting which clearly depicts flowers, merely reformulates in the written mode information that is already available to the visitor through the visual mode. Blunden refers to this ‘semiotically empty’ construction as a ‘shell vector’ (*ibid.*: 56). For examples of vector types, see Table 1.

While Blunden’s vector types offer a useful framework to link the information flow of a label to its potential to guide visitors’ viewing and satisfy their curiosity (or not), this framework will not be adopted in full in the analysis below because the expression of linguistic presence in Mandarin remains unclear. As explained earlier, *presence* in Blunden’s analysis refers to the use of the definite article ‘the’ or the deictic marker ‘this’. While deictic references such as ‘this’ and ‘that’ exist in Mandarin (realised as 這 *zhè* and 那 *nà*, or using formal variants such as 此 *cǐ* and 該 *gāi*), studies of Mandarin grammar have consistently shown that there is no equivalent of the English definite article *the* in Mandarin (Chen 2004; Li and Thompson 1981).

It is therefore highly likely that presence is expressed differently in Mandarin compared to English. However, a detailed analysis of presence mechanisms in Mandarin would go beyond the scope of the present study, and as such the study focuses on ideational concurrence rather than adopting the full verbal vector framework. This adapted method allows a consistent analysis of labels in both Mandarin and English, and still – as Blunden has shown – gives an indication of where, and whether, the label establishes links to the displayed object.

The analysis presented in the following section is grounded in the notion that, as Blunden (2020) suggests, the Theme/Rheme structure of the label and the presence of ideational concurrence are key factors in whether visitors who are drawn to an object find the accompanying label satisfactory. The current case study combined Theme/Rheme analysis with visitor interviews to explore whether visitor satisfaction appeared to co-pattern with the presence and positioning of ideational concurrence in the label text.

Table 1. Vector types (adapted from Blunden 2020).

Vector Type	Description	Example (concurrency <u>underlined</u>)	Function
Thematic vector	Ideational concurrence (+ presence) is realised in Theme position	<u>The landscape</u> represents the Syrian desert.	Pushes reader to look at the object and provides new information; satisfies reader's desire for knowledge ('adds something more')
Non-Thematic vector	Ideational concurrence (+ presence) is realised in Rheme position	The story...is depicted <u>in several episodes on this panel.</u>	Connects the label to the object, but provides a less powerful push to look than a Thematic vector; provides new information ('adds something more')
Shell vector	Ideational concurrence (+ presence) is realised in both Theme and Rheme position, with no new information added	<u>The landscape extends into the distance.</u>	Pushes reader to look at the object but does not provide new information; may be experienced as unsatisfying (does not 'add something more')

4. Studying translated labels and their readers

To examine the relationship between Theme-Rheme organisation in museum labels and visitors' satisfaction, a case study was carried out at the 新北市立鶯歌陶瓷博物館 New Taipei City Yingge Ceramics Museum in Taiwan. The study focuses on labels from an exhibition titled 回看所來處 Once We Were, which explores how Taiwanese ceramics culture developed across history and the role that ceramic objects played in people's daily lives from the 17th to the 20th century.

The data collection included two strands: first, a Theme and concurrence analysis (Blunden 2020) was carried out on all 47 written labels (in both the Mandarin ST and the English TT) in this exhibition, and any translation shifts were identified. Second, walking interviews (Madsen 2017) were carried out with TT users to investigate their responses to the translated labels as they moved around the exhibition space with the researcher. The participants were eight non-local international students (6 British and 2 German) recruited from local universities via convenience sampling. The interviews were carried out in English or German. Ethical approval was obtained from the researchers' home institution, and all participants gave informed consent for their data to be used; all names are pseudonyms.

Table 2. Participant demographics.

Participant name	Age	Gender	Languages spoken
Grace	22-24	F	English + French
Rory	22-24	M	English
Finlay	22-24	M	English
Isla	22-24	F	English + French
Maisie	18-21	F	English + Swedish
Evie	18-21	F	English
Luisa	25-27	F	German + English
Klara	25-27	F	German

To identify visitors' experiences within the museum space, their responses were coded according to Bednarek's (2008) work on 'emotion talk', a framework derived from Appraisal Theory (Martin and White 2005) within SFL (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). Bednarek (2008: 11) defines emotion talk as:

language about emotion [...] constituted by all those expressions in the dictionary that denote affect/emotion, for example love, hate, joy, envy, sad, mad, enjoy, dislike and so on (as well as fixed expressions such as He had a broken heart).

Bednarek categorises instances of emotion talk into five types: un/happiness, in/security, dis/satisfaction, dis/inclination, and surprise. In this paper, we will focus on expressions of dis/satisfaction², as this category involved visitors' expressions of whether a label fulfilled their expectations or not.

To identify cases where visitors' attention co-patterned with or diverged from verbal vectors in written labels, a comparative approach was adopted which combined the label and interview analyses. Working with the transcribed interviews, the researcher made a note of which objects or labels each interviewee mentioned. The photographs taken during the interview process were also used here, in order to accurately identify what interviewees meant by deictic terms such as 'this' or 'that one'. Finally, interviewees' responses to these salient objects or labels were compared with the Theme and concurrence analysis carried out on the labels, in order to identify whether the presence or absence of concurrence in the written label text appeared to co-pattern with visitor attention. The fundamental questions here were: what did the interviewees pay attention to? Could their attention potentially have been steered, or diverted, by the presence or absence of ostensive features in written labels?

Of course, it would not be possible to state definitively that visitors' response to a certain object was *caused* by the label – there are too many other factors involved in interaction with a museum object. However, if any co-patterning between concurrence, Thematisation and emotion talk were found, then it could suggest avenues for future research.

² The interview data analysed here is part of a larger project that explores visitors' affective responses more broadly (see Johnstone 2025); however, this paper focuses specifically on data related to their attention.

5. Visitors' *dis/satisfaction with labels*

Here we will specifically explore visitors' responses to the labels that they read, and whether the labels were able to satisfy their motivating curiosity. In order to focus on whether the English translations were effective or not, the discussion below will draw on the interviews with non-local visitors.

Where participants expressed satisfaction with a label in specific terms, this often focused on the accessibility of the writing. Finlay, for example, appreciated that some labels were presented in straightforward language:

I think the information was like, quite to the point which was good, not really any like big fancy words trying to make it sound more interesting than it is, you know?

When participants felt curious about a particular object, and the label satisfied their curiosity, this was often not expressed as satisfaction with the label itself, but rather as excitement or happiness about the object – and these expressions of happiness often involved information gleaned from the text. For example, in describing why she enjoyed looking at the display of painted plates (Figure 1), Maisie said:

yeah I found it really interesting that there's like, pictures, it's like, very to do with luck and superstition and the Taiwanese culture

Here, Maisie's appreciation for the plates is not purely aesthetic, but instead relates to the meaningful designs. While it is not impossible that she was already familiar with some of the auspicious patterns included in the display, her comment echoes the content of the label (McManus 1989) and was likely prompted by reading it.

Appreciation could also be prompted by objects which were entirely unfamiliar to participants, as demonstrated by Klara's excitement about a water-filled saucer placed under the legs of a kitchen cabinet to keep insects away (Figure 2):

ich find's auch einfach super, also es ist halt voll angepasst an die lokale Kultur weil hier gibt es überall Ameisen und auch diese ganz kleinen komischen Viecher, deren Name ich nicht kenne, und es, es scheint mir einfach wie die schlaueste Idee überhaupt, da Wasserringe ran zu machen.

[I just think it's awesome too, like it just completely fits the local culture because there are ants all over the place here and also these really little weird bugs that I don't know the name of and it, it just seems to me like the cleverest idea in the world, to put water-rings on there.]



Figure 1. Painted plates

Her enthusiasm for this feature is facilitated by the label – the saucers are so small that it is unlikely her attention would have been drawn to them if they had not been highlighted in the text. She also echoes the exact phrasing used in the label when struggling to describe the saucers. Here, it seems that she is re-reading the label as she speaks, as indicated by the use of English words within the German-language interview:

da gibt's so, Wasser, um die, em, Sockel herum? nein, um die - „on the periphery“, ich weiß nicht, „ring-shaped indentation“ da - -
[there's like, water, around the, um, plinth? No, around the – “on the periphery”, I don't know, “ring-shaped indentation” there --]

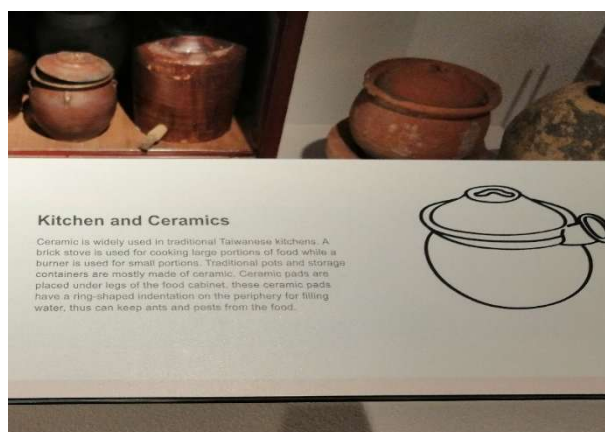


Figure 2. Insect protection device (left) and Kitchen and Ceramics label (right)

Another display where labels facilitated enthusiasm for an unfamiliar object featured a foot-driven millstone used to grind traditional medicines (Figure 3). The medicine grinder was mentioned in four out of the eight non-local interviews. Finlay specifically mentioned engaging with the labels:

I looked at this and then I saw the photo, and I assumed it was a foot massager [laughs] at first from the photo but then I realised it was for

grinding medicine. So like, I looked, I read, I read the information, in this part.

Evie, who visited the exhibition together with Finlay, referred to his error and also mentioned reading:

I thought that was interesting, actually, this thing, I wouldn't have known what it was if I didn't read it. Cause [Finlay] actually said he thought it was a foot massager from the picture [laughing]

Here, engaging with the text facilitates both her interest in the object and the humour of realising Finlay's mistake. Grace, who also laughed when describing her interest in the medicine grinder, went through a similar process of misrecognition:

initially I thought it was like em, something like for his feet or something [laughs] but it's, it's to grind the medicine down.



Figure 3. Medical equipment display

Although all four participants who mentioned the medicine grinder laughed about their misrecognition of it, these humorous statements were accompanied by positive evaluations – Finlay thought it was “cool”, Evie found it “interesting”, Grace “liked it”, and Klara considered it “a cool invention”. By providing

accurate and accessible information about this unusual contraption, the label allows visitors to respond to the object with both humour and interest.

Expressions of dissatisfaction were more likely to focus specifically on the labels than expressions of satisfaction. In several instances, participants expressed dissatisfaction with a label when they wanted more information about an object but felt that the label did not provide that information. For example, Evie expressed disappointment with the labels associated with a display of roof tiles:

there's not anything about it, so it's like you're just telling me that it's like part of a roof, but I was like, okay. I can see that outside. I didn't really understand why they'd put that there, to be – all this here, to be fair.

Similarly, Finlay felt that the label displayed alongside a decorative ceramic window did not offer him any new information:

yeah, I feel like some of the information on that was kind of just like, I could have figured that out myself without having to read it. It's like, "allows light to come in", I was like well yeah, it's a window, so [laughs]

These participants had made the effort to read labels and felt that their effort had essentially been wasted. However, in the two cases above, the interviewees could at least still recognise the items, as they were already familiar with roof tiles and windows. When participants did not recognise or understand the objects that they were looking at, they found uninformative labels particularly disappointing. Evie was dissatisfied by a display of traditional ceramic pillows (Figure 4):

Some of these things I found really interesting but I'd have liked more information, so, the pillows – well, "pillows", it's not really a pillow, but like, yeah, they were calling them pillows and I was like, I wanted to know more, me and [participant name] were really confused as to how it's a pillow, when it's so solid [laughs]

By suggesting that the objects on display are "not really a pillow" despite the label stating that they are, Evie questions the authority of the museum text. She is dissatisfied with the quantity of information, and she also suspects that the information that has been provided may be inaccurate.

Evie makes explicit the link between dissatisfaction with the label and disengagement from an object that she had previously been curious about:

yeah. That was another thing, with quite a few of the things around here it would just say something and I was like, it's not explaining what it is, so I – it just made me lose interest cause I was like, oh, I have no idea what this is [laughs].



Figure 4. Ceramic pillows

For visitors who are curious about an unfamiliar object, labels provide a way for them to make sense of what they are looking at, as Maisie states in her interview:

the label's very important. There's a lot of things actually that are very like, ambiguous, and just, you know, you can't really tell exactly what it's supposed to be so I did find it useful here

However, when the label does not help the reader to “tell exactly what it's supposed to be”, their initial curiosity may dissipate and they may disengage, as described above. Uninformative or overly complex labels disrupt the conversion of curiosity into excitement or enjoyment. Instead, curiosity becomes frustration, disappointment or disinterest.

This section has drawn on interview data to suggest that affective engagement with labels, sparked by interest in an object, follows one of two patterns depending on the success or failure of the label to effectively communicate and construct links between the object and the verbiage. When the label satisfies the visitor's desire for information and functions together with the object as a cohesive act of multimodal communication, the visitor's initial curiosity is converted into pleasure, excitement, or happiness. These positive appraisals are directed at the object. When the label does not provide the information that visitors seek or does not form a cohesive whole with the object, the visitor's initial curiosity is converted into dissatisfaction with the label and ultimately disengagement from the object. These two affective pathways are shown in Figure 5 below.

These two patterns demonstrate that effective labels play a major role in facilitating affective connection with a museum object. They are particularly important for non-local or non-expert visitors, who lack the background knowledge to make sense of museum objects without support. Labels can provide this support, and effective labels allow visitors to form an affective connection to objects. However, when labels do not effectively scaffold a sense of connection with the object, visitors disengage.

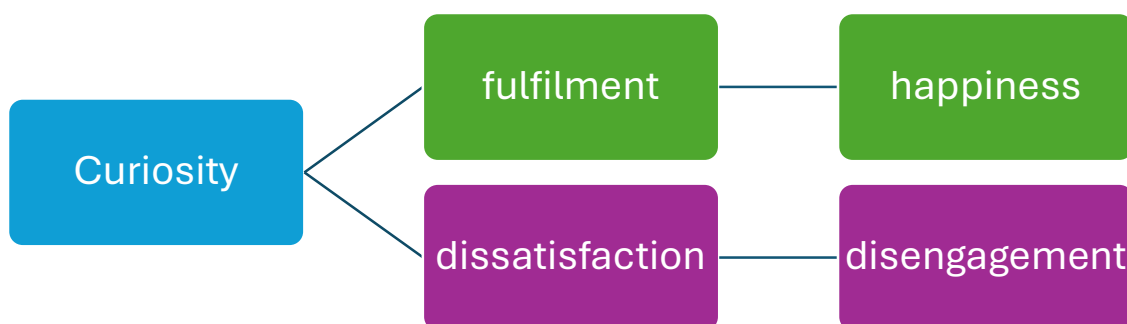


Figure 5. Converting curiosity

6. Comparative label analysis: Theme and concurrence in translation

The previous section established that successful labels provide new information and enable the visitor to recognise the connection between the label and the object. This section will explore some ways in which this connection between the label and the object are constructed in language.

Out of the 47 interpretive labels included in the 回看所來處 Once We Were exhibition, seven did not contain any ideational concurrence in either the Mandarin or English and were thus excluded from this analysis. The remaining 40 labels contained ideational concurrence either in Theme position, Rheme position, or both. In exactly 20 of these 40 labels, the English translation replicated the ideational concurrence in the same position (Theme, Rheme or both) as the Mandarin source text. In the remaining 20 labels, however, there were differences between the positioning or amount of concurrence in the English translation and the Mandarin source text. In eight of the labels, concurrence was moved from the Theme to the Rheme position; in six, concurrence was moved from Rheme to Theme position; in four cases, significantly more concurrence was present in the English translation than in the Mandarin source text; and in two labels, there was significantly less concurrence present in the English.

In theory, these shifts may strengthen or disrupt cohesion between the translated label and the display and may direct target readers to look at the display differently to readers of the source text. However, visitors are active participants in museum interactions, who engage with museum media in varied and sometimes unexpected ways. As such, combining textual analysis with visitor research can make a contribution towards understanding the effectiveness of museum labels.

7. Co-patterning analysis: interview results and visitor dis/satisfaction

This section will focus on translated labels that appeared to be either particularly successful or particularly unsuccessful, based on participants' comments in the interviews. Ideational concurrence and Thematicity will be analysed, to identify any cases where participants' responses may appear to co-pattern with the presence, absence, or position of concurrence in the label text. One unsuccessful label and two successful labels will be presented.

As mentioned earlier, Evie was dissatisfied with the label provided alongside a display of ceramic pillows. Evie said that she “[would] have liked more information” and that she and another participant were “really confused”. The label involved here is titled 寢室與陶瓷, Bedrooms and Ceramics, and is displayed at the head of a model bed kitted out with ceramic pillows, and with ceramic heaters on the floor alongside it (Figure 6). The position of the label at the head of the bed means that visitors cannot read the label and look at the pillows at the same time, as they must move around to the side of the bed to see the pillows clearly.

Figure 6. Ceramic pillows (left) and Bedrooms and Ceramics label (right)



In addition to this spatial disconnect, ideational concurrence (underlined) in the label is placed in Rheme position, creating further lack of cohesion between the object and the text (Table 3). There is only one explicit mention of pillows, and it is placed in Rheme position, as part of a list: “ceramic objects such as pillows, oil lamps, and heaters”. The importance of pillows is deemphasised here, and no specific information about them appears to be provided.

This is a shift in translation: in the Mandarin label, there is a second reference to pillows, placed in Theme position (Table 4). This explicit mention of pillows in the source text has been translated as “most of which”, which is not only confusing – it sounds as if the pillows, oil lamps, and heaters are *all* cylindrical,

when actually this should refer only to the pillows – but also reduces the overall amount of ideational concurrence between the label and the display.

Table 3. Concurrence in the English Bedrooms and Ceramics label.

Concurrence		
Theme	Rheme	Concurrence type
In traditional bedrooms,	ceramic objects such as pillows, oil lamps and heaters can be found in the room,	hyponymy correspondence
most of which	are cylindrical-shaped and includes a hollow area where water bags can be placed to keep warm or to hide valuable belongings.	
<u>Heaters</u>	are also called fireballs,	correspondence
which	were used to warm blankets and keep the room warm,	
while the chamber pot	is portable toilet used during bedtime.	

Table 4. Concurrence in the Mandarin Bedrooms and Ceramics label.

Concurrence		
Theme	Rheme	Concurrence type
傳統寢室中 [In traditional bedchambers]	可見到陶枕、油燈、烘爐等陶瓷器物, [can see <u>ceramic pillows</u> , <u>oil lamps</u> , <u>heaters</u> , suchlike ceramic objects]	correspondence
陶枕 [<u>ceramic pillows</u>]	大多長筒形, [mostly cylinder-shaped,]	correspondence
中空部分 [central empty space]	可放置水袋保溫或藏放財物; [can place water bag to keep warm or hide precious items;]	
烘爐 [<u>heater</u>]	又被稱為火球, 可以烘暖棉被與保持室內溫暖; [also called fireball, can heat blankets and maintain warmth in the room;]	correspondence
夜壺 [chamber pot]	則是供夜間內急時用。 [was provided in the night for emergency use.]	

The Mandarin label Thematises the pillows, creating a cohesive link between the label and the object, and it also provides specific information about the pillows, stating that they are usually cylindrical and have space inside for a hot water bag or to store small valuables. The label both connects with the display and “bring[s] new meaning to the interaction” (Blunden 2020, 66), but the English translation is unsuccessful in offering either the connection or the new meanings to a non-local reader.

One translated label that succeeded in converting a participant’s curiosity into excitement was the 廚房與陶瓷, Kitchen and Ceramics panel. As mentioned earlier, Klara expressed enthusiasm for the ceramic saucers placed under kitchen cabinets to keep away pests. The label allows her to discover the purpose of the ‘ceramic pads’ by placing the object in Theme position, with new information following in Rheme position (Table 5).

Table 5. Concurrence in the English Kitchen and Ceramics label.

Concurrence		
Theme	Rheme	Concurrence type
<u>Ceramic</u>	is widely used in traditional Taiwanese kitchens.	hyponymy
A <u>brick stove</u>	is used for cooking large portions of food	correspondence
while a <u>burner</u>	is used for small portions.	correspondence
<u>Traditional pots and storage containers</u>	are mostly made of ceramic.	correspondence
<u>Ceramic pads</u>	are placed under the <u>legs</u> of the food cabinet,	correspondence meronymy
these <u>ceramic pads</u>	have a <u>ring-shaped indentation</u> on the periphery for filling water, thus can keep ants and pests from the food.	correspondence meronymy

Throughout the English TT, visible objects such as the stove, the burner, and pots and storage containers are placed in Theme position. This is a shift in translation when compared to the source text (Table 6), which Thematises the amount of food being cooked rather than the objects used to cook it.

Shifting ideational concurrence into Theme position across the label may construct stronger links between the visual and verbal modes in the English translation of the label than in the Mandarin source text; certainly, the translation seems to be effective, as it facilitates Klara’s enthusiasm for a fairly esoteric object.

Table 6. Concurrence in the Mandarin Kitchen and Ceramics label.

Concurrence		
Theme	Rheme	Concurrence type
陶瓷 [Ceramics]	大量運用在台灣傳統廚房中， [are used in large quantities in Taiwan's kitchens]	hyponymy
食物量多時 [when making a lot of food]	會使用磚搭而成的灶烹煮， [(people) would cook on a stove made out of bricks]	correspondence
量少時 [when making less food]	則使用火爐。 [would use a burner instead.]	correspondence
傳統的鍋具、儲物容器 [Traditional pots and storage containers]	大多是陶瓷材質， [many are made of ceramic]	correspondence
菜櫥底下的陶瓷櫥腳墊， [Ceramic footpads underneath food cabinet]	在凹槽中注水可用來防蟲蟻。 [water placed in the indentation can be used to defend against bugs and ants]	correspondence meronymy

Finally, one of the most popular objects among participants in this case study was the medicine grinder, which several interviewees found “cool”, “interesting”, or amusing. The grinder is displayed in a glass cabinet alongside other ceramic objects used in medical procedures, the interpretive label, and a photograph of the apparatus in use (Figure 3).

The label, titled 醫藥用具 Medical Equipment, does not Thematisise the grinder in either the Mandarin ST (Table 7) or the English TT (Table 8). In the Mandarin label, a reference to the category of 醫藥用陶瓷器皿 [medical ceramic ware] is placed in Theme position, which potentially builds stronger cohesion between the group of objects displayed in the case and the verbal text; in the English label, the “ceramic containers” have been moved to Rheme position.

However, visitors do not seem to experience the same sense of disconnection and dissatisfaction with this relatively disconnected label as they do with the 寢室與陶瓷, Bedrooms and Ceramics label; instead, their excitement about the object endures. Several factors could play a role in this. One factor could be the fact that most participants appeared to discuss the medicine grinder together with others, using it as the trigger for humorous interaction. The enjoyment of this playful sociality (Eklund 2020) could compensate for any affective disconnection provoked by the relatively disconnected label. Another factor is the role of multimodal communication in this exhibit. The photograph of a man using the medicine grinder, displayed alongside the label, allows visitors to understand how the object functions. Information about how the grinder is used is supplied in visual rather than in verbal form, and participants appeared to find that satisfactory. This finding emphasises the importance of investigating Theme and concurrence in context, and of incorporating visitor research into Museum Translation Studies.

Table 7. Concurrence in the Mandarin Medical Equipment label.

Concurrence		
Theme	Rheme	Concurrence type
早期台灣醫療 [Early Taiwanese medical treatment]	以中藥為主, [mainly Chinese medicine,]	
由醫師診治開立藥方後, [after the doctor diagnosed and prescribed medicine]	再自行熬煮藥草。 [then (people would) boil the herbs themselves.]	
傳統生活中常見的醫藥用陶瓷器皿, [Medical ceramic ware common in traditional life]	有煎煮藥草的藥壺、裝藥物的藥罐, [included <u>medicine jugs</u> for boiling herbs, <u>medicine jars</u> for storing medicine]	hyponymy correspondence correspondence
而中藥行 [and Chinese medicine shops]	會使用碾船、調藥杯等用具。 [would use tools such as <u>grinders</u> , <u>measuring cups</u> .]	correspondence correspondence

Table 8. Concurrence in the English Medical Equipment label.

Concurrence		
Theme	Rheme	Concurrence type
Early Taiwanese medical treatment	was mainly based on Chinese medicine, with doctors diagnosing and prescribing medicines and then patients boiling the herbs themselves.	
In traditional Chinese medicine,	<u>ceramic containers</u> were commonly used to prepare herbs, including <u>medicine pots</u> for decocting herbs and <u>medicine jars</u> ,	hyponymy correspondence correspondence
while herbal medicine shops	would use <u>ceramic utensils</u> such as <u>herbal grinders</u> and <u>measuring cups</u> for pharmaceutical purposes.	hyponymy correspondence correspondence

8. Discussion: Converting curiosity

This article has presented a Theme/Rheme analysis of the labels and analysis of visitor interviews carried out in the 回看所來處 Once We Were exhibition, with selected examples of one label which converted visitors' curiosity into disengagement, and two which converted curiosity into enthusiasm. From this small sample, it appears that presenting ideational concurrence in Theme position may facilitate cohesion between the label and the object, and therefore cases in which concurrence shifts into Rheme position during the translation process could be problematic. However, in some cases (such as the medicine

grinder), participants overcame this visual-verbal disconnect, possibly by depending on multimodal resources to further their understanding of their object or by using humorous discussion with co-participants to construct a socially-led affective connection with the object. This small-scale case study has suggested that, in line with Blunden's (2020) research on verbal vectors, the presence and positioning of ideational concurrence within a museum label may contribute to visitors' interaction with an object, and to their ability to form an affective connection to that object.

The study also argues that for many museum visitors, engagement with a museum label starts from an initial spark of curiosity about the displayed object. However, this curiosity can be channelled in one of two directions. When labels provided sufficient information to fulfil that curiosity and allowed the reader to make a connection between the text and the object, participants in the current study experienced enjoyment. On the other hand, if the connection between the text and the object was unclear or the label did not provide additional information, participants expressed dissatisfaction. Their initial curiosity could be converted either to happiness or disappointment, and the difference lay not in the object but in the (translated) label. This underlines the crucial importance of museum labels, and museum translation, in shaping visitors' experience of an exhibition.

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