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Abstract: *Intercultural challenges in translating for museums from English into Arabic*

Museums seem to be about objects, but are really about people. There is a relationship between the museum and its community. Whether global, national or local, this "people" dimension is the fundamental test of whether a museum is truly effective in realizing its ultimate objectives of interpreting the meaning and value of its holdings to its visitors. Thus it is essential that museums put people first in their planning.

In a museum, it is not enough to put the objects on display, and ask people to look; interpretive texts or panels should accompany these objects to give the visitor an idea about the origin and the historical background of the collections on display. Brochures flyers and booklets, too, must be available to encourage and facilitate the visitors' access to the museums.

In a bilingual society, like that of the United Arab Emirates, which consists of a cosmopolitan mixture of people, these interpretive texts should be written in both Arabic and English to reach the vast majority of people.

The paper is based upon the author's experience as a translator in the Sharjah Museums Department, translating into Arabic interpretive texts, panels, brochures, flyers and booklets written in English by English native speakers. Literal translation can be used in many cases, for example for scientific texts translated for use in the Natural History Museum, Botanical Museum and the Aquarium. However more problematic texts are translated for those museums addressing man's culture and religion such as the Heritage Museum or the Islamic Museum or some of the restored historical houses.

In this case the English texts written by English native speakers should be carefully interpreted by the translator to convey the appropriate message to the Arab visitor or reader. The texts may refer to issues that are sensitive for different reasons, whether historical, political, religious or cultural; the concept of death is one example. These intercultural challenges require the translator to be well informed about both cultures, to do considerable research, and to understand the target audience well enough to deliver the message in the best way possible.

For this study many texts of all the above-mentioned types were analyzed. The issue of culturally sensitive translation illustrates how museums and their audiences are no longer taking their relationship for granted. They are reconsidering it in every dimension; Intellectual, cultural, educational, political and aesthetic. If we accept that museums' purpose is to be of service to society, then it is vital they be responsive to their social environment in order to remain relevant to changing social needs and goals.