

## PAPER DETAILS

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## **Neglect of Translation in Museums: A Case Study of the Ulster Museum**

Rui SUN\*

As museums increasingly seek to engage diverse and global audiences, the role of translation in the presentation of exhibits and the transmission of cultural and historical narratives becomes pivotal. This article explores the interdisciplinary research field of museum translation, using the Ulster Museum as a case study. The aim of this study is to identify the neglect of translation service within museum contexts and emphasize the significant role of translation in enhancing visitor experience. I begin by mapping the scholarly research in museum translation. It is evident that translation, despite its significance, remains underemphasized within museum contexts, with detrimental consequences for visitor engagement and access to cultural exhibitions. The Ulster Museum, an iconic institution in Northern Ireland, is examined in detail to identify areas for potential improvement in its translation services. Through analyzing the text in the Chinese Museum Map, I identify translation issues and offer coping strategies with the potential to not only overcome language barriers but also enhance the overall museum service. Ultimately, I emphasize the important role of translation in museums in enhancing accessibility and visitor experience. This study contributes to ongoing research in the field and calls for future investigations into effective translation methods and their impact on enriching the museum experience for diverse audiences.

Keywords: museum translation; museum service; neglect; translation issues; Ulster Museum

### **1. Introduction**

Museums are institutions that “play a major role in preserving and offering access to objects of knowledge” (Silverman 2015, 9). Museums provide a platform for cultural exchange and engagement in dialogue, with language acting as the bridge for international visitors to access this platform. As one of the language services within museums, translation is the key to cultural accessibility, enabling diverse audiences to engage with and understand the cultural significance of exhibits (Kiraly 2014). Cultural engagement and effective communication evoke emotional resonance in visitors, thereby enhancing their overall visiting experience (Falk and Dierking 2016). A positive visitor experience, in turn, reflects the professionalism of the museum sector, thus promoting the development of such institutions.

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Museum translation, while undeniably important, is often underestimated in the broader context of museums. Despite the widespread availability of multilingual services in museums, translations in museums have not received sufficient attention from either the museum industry or researchers (Chen and Liao 2017). In an age characterized by cultural diversity and internationalization, this underestimation can hinder effective communication and the development of cultural institutions. It is an unavoidable developing trend for museums to employ translation in multiple languages and forms, fulfilling their educational, cultural, and social roles on a global scale.

The Ulster Museum is an important cultural center in Northern Ireland, attracting visitors from all over the world, but the lack of translation services within the Museum is, to some extent, a weakness in the allocation of resources for the institution. This paper<sup>1</sup> employs the Ulster Museum as a representative case study, exploring the status of translation services within the Museum. The aim of this study is to identify the neglect of translation service within the museum context and emphasize the significant role of translation in enhancing museum service.

To achieve this aim, this article employs a multifaceted methodology. It begins by conducting a literature review, delving into the existing scholarship on translation in museums and its development over the years. This review helps to understand the research topics in the field. The case study at the Ulster Museum consists of qualitative data collection methods and translation analysis. Case study data was collected through taking photos in the physical gallery, accessing the Ulster Museum's website, and collecting printed resources provided by the Ulster Museum. The translation analysis focuses on the Chinese translation of the Museum Map, providing insight into the translation issues in museums and potential coping strategies, and offers a set of prescriptive recommendations intended for scholarly and practical reference.

This study argues that effective translation can provide a more inclusive and engaging experience for diverse audiences. Successfully integrated translation services within museums can make museum collections and exhibitions accessible to a wider range of visitors.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper derives from the author's PhD dissertation titled "Ulster Museum's 'The Troubles and Beyond Gallery' in Chinese: Translating Difficult Histories in Northern Ireland" and submitted to Queen's University Belfast.

## 2. Museum Translation

In the early stage, Kate Sturge (1997) laid the groundwork for understanding the role of translation in the multilingual landscape of museums. She explores translation strategies within museums, highlighting approaches like domestication and foreignization (Sturge 1997, 26–35). Building on this foundation, Sturge (2007) emphasizes the connections between museology and translation studies, with a particular focus on the broad concept of translation within ethnographic studies and the representation of culture in ethnographic museums. Within this examination, she addresses significant issues in transmitting cultural values (Sturge 2007).

Regarding texts in museums, Louise Ravelli's (2006) study employs a systemic functional linguistics approach to the construction of museum texts. Within this approach, she provides a comprehensive analysis of museum texts, focusing on “organizational,” “interactional,” and “representational” functions (Ravelli 2006). In a similar vein, Marie-Noëlle Guillot (2014), adopting a cross-cultural pragmatics perspective, examines museum texts and explores challenges in museum texts translation, addressing issues from interlingual and intercultural transfer, and from contextual to textual levels. Guillot's work emphasizes aspects such as terminology use, culture-specific intertextuality or referencing, and highlights the “ontological, contextual, and pragmatic factors” (75) on the translation practices of museum texts.

In the realm of semiotics, Robert Neather discusses the relationships between the visual and the verbal elements within the museum space, and proposes that different types of texts (e.g., labels, audio guides, wall panels, and leaflets) are intertextually linked to convey the meaning of objects (2008, 2012a). He looks at the translation issues and strategies in museum translation practices on a textual level and also examines quality assessment, visitor needs, and identity of translators in his works (Neather 2012b). Later, Neather's (2018) works focus on cultural representation in art museums, in which he distinguishes between museums as texts/translations and texts/translations in the museum by considering the multimodality of museum contexts. To supplement Neather's early study, Catherine Anne Sell's (2015) research focuses on the Japanese context through four case studies of different cultural museums. Sell explores the relationship among texts, objects, and space, where individual texts, the display objects, and their physical environment form a unique and important aspect of museum texts. The focus of these studies has been the translation in art museums.

To draw the connection between translation and the representation of difficult histories in museums, we could refer to Min-Hsiu Liao's (2016) research on the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum, in which she examines the translation of time and space. In 2017, Liao and Chia-Li Chen researched the translation of national identity in the Taipei 228 Memorial Museum, which gives some insight into how sensitive topics are dealt with. To extend the analysis of museum text, Liao (2018b) explores multimodality in translation in museum space through a case study of Glasgow's St Mungo Museum of Religious Life and Art. Liao (2018a) also discusses the contribution of translation to museums and industries. Her research emphasizes the importance of translation research in improving translation practice in museums and helping museums meet their new expectations in this developing multilingual society.

The research focus on museum translation shifts from text analysis (primarily in the form of labels) to the examination of audio guides, multimedia, and accessibility services. Museum translation goes beyond linguistic transfer, concerning cultural sensitivities, historical contexts, and the overall visitor experience. The fundamental objective is to ensure that visitors, regardless of their language or cultural background, can engage with and appreciate the exhibits and collections within the museum space.

The subsequent section looks at the deployment of translation services in the Ulster Museum. Through this examination, we shall assess the adequacy of the existing translation provisions, exploring both the potential strengths and shortcomings. This empirical investigation serves to illuminate the real-world application of museum translation.

### **3. The Ulster Museum**

The decision to focus on the Ulster Museum was motivated by its substantial international visitors, emphasizing the significance of evaluating and addressing any potential neglect of translation services to enhance the overall visitor experience. The Ulster Museum assumes an important role in Northern Ireland, evident in its strategic location, rich history, and diverse collection. Located in Botanic Gardens, Belfast, the Ulster Museum is one of the largest museums in Northern Ireland, and part of National Museums Northern Ireland. The Ulster Museum has evolved over the years and is now one of the most important buildings in Belfast and Northern Ireland and a representative tourist attraction. Rosaleen Hickey, exhibition curator at Irish Architecture Archive, describes the Ulster Museum as “a unique, iconic and

highly didactic building” from the perspective of architecture (Hickey 2015, para. 8). The details of the design and style of the museum building and its alterations over the years provide us with the context of the museum space and emphasize its significance.

According to Hickey (2015), the Ulster Museum has undergone three major stages of development. These three phases coincide with three periods of political development in Northern Ireland, namely the birth of Northern Ireland in 1922, the Troubles period (1960s-1990s), and the development of the post-conflict Northern Ireland, after 1998. It can be seen that the development of the Ulster Museum is closely related to the political and social development of Northern Ireland. It also reflects its unshakable status as a national museum and city landmark. It beheld the wonders of Northern Ireland’s natural science, witnessed the devastation of the Troubles, and made its contribution to the reconstruction of a post-conflict society.

The development of the Ulster Museum is not only shown in its increasing collection, but also on an architectural level, which is the evolution of the museum building. The Ulster Museum was originally a natural history museum founded by Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society in 1821. To house the Museum’s expanding collections, in 1913 a competition was held to design a new building. James Cumming Wynnes of Edinburgh stood out in the competition and became the winner. However, due to the First World War, only part of the design was completed. In 1962, the museum was renamed the Ulster Museum, and was considered as a National Museum, which laid down its important role in Belfast city. The name indicates that it serves not only as a local museum for Belfast but for the whole of Northern Ireland.<sup>2</sup> In the meantime, as a result of its increasing importance and the increase in exhibits, the further expansion of the museum building was required. Another competition was held in 1964, won by Francis Pym of London. The newly expanded part is cleverly spliced on to the old building, in a series of rock forms that seem to jut out at random. With this, the Museum finally achieved today’s special architectural shape in two sharply divergent styles (see figure 1). In that sense, the appearance witnesses the history of the Ulster Museum’s development and its increasing importance in Northern Ireland. Since then, its architectural style has always

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<sup>2</sup> “Building of the Month: May 2009 – Ulster Museum, Belfast,” *Twentieth Century Society*, accessed October 1, 2023, <https://c20society.org.uk/building-of-the-month/ulster-museum-belfast>.

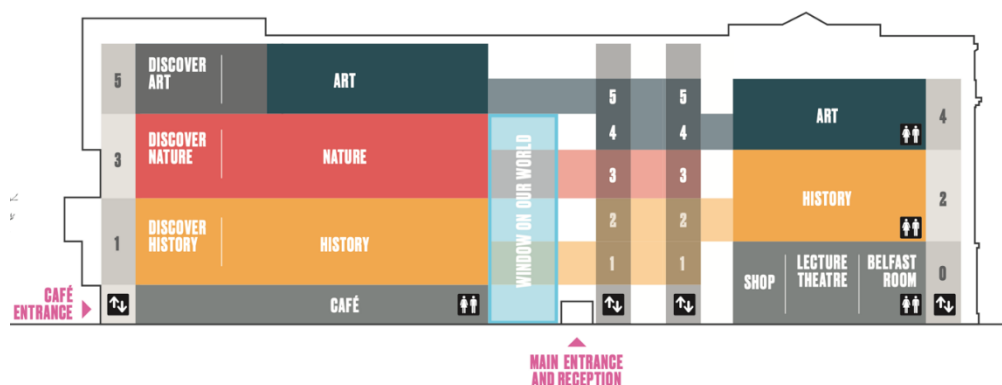
been one of the Museum's main features. The external features imply the Ulster Museum's long history and the rich collection housed inside.

Figure 1. The Ulster Museum building, located in Botanic Gardens, Belfast (Photo by the author)



The internal structure of the Ulster Museum is divided into five floors and three exhibition zones, the history zone (yellow), the nature zone (red), and the art zone (navy blue) (see figure 2). The ground floor contains an information desk, a shop, and a café. The history zone, located on the first and second floors, covers the human history of Ireland from the sixteenth century to the present and its reflection of the world. The third and fourth floors house the nature zone, in which there are more than half a million specimens from Northern Ireland and beyond. The art zone on the top floor is an open spacious place, providing ten art galleries, with collections including painting, sculpture, ceramics, and textiles.

Figure 2. Ulster Museum structure shown in the map



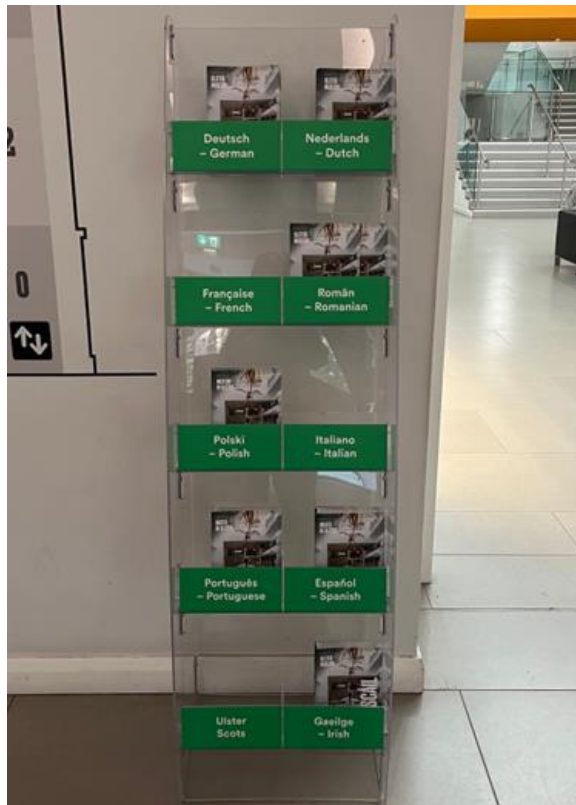


The historical development and structural design of the Ulster Museum show its unique status and rich exhibition. In a museum of this scale, the demand for translation is substantial. There is ample room for the development of multilingual exhibitions, including the translation of exhibit labels and wall text, as well as multilingual audio guides and audio descriptions. As of now, the Museum only provides multilingual maps.

#### 4. Translation Analysis

In the Ulster Museum, the only multilingual service is the Museum Map, provided in fourteen languages, including English, Chinese (Simplified), Dutch, French, German, Irish, Italian, Lithuanian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish, and Ulster-Scots. These multilingual maps are available at the entrance and the reception desk (see figure 3). Maps in ten languages are placed at the entrance, and the maps in other four languages are at the reception desk. During the peak tourist season, there is a high demand for maps in certain languages such as French, Italian, and English. The Ulster Museum is actively restocking to meet this demand.

Figure 3. Museum map available at the entrance (Photo by the author)





The Ulster Museum's website provides multilingual maps in digital format. Visitors have the option to either download these maps or view them online. The Ulster Museum's website previously employed translation software as an accessibility tool for their webpage. Visitors could choose different languages from the menu bar on the webpage. However, it appears that this feature is no longer available, possibly because machine translation was not accurate enough. I once glanced at the Simplified Chinese translation, and was able to grasp the general content. However, it fell short in accurately conveying specific terms related to local history and specialized terminology.

Another available translation resource is my own Chinese-language website.<sup>3</sup> In cooperation with the Ulster Museum, I translated texts within the Troubles and Beyond Gallery into Chinese and created a dedicated Chinese-language website. This platform showcases my translations, supplemented with images of the exhibits, catering to Chinese visitors. Due to the sensitive nature of my translation work, which involves the historical complexities of the Northern Ireland Conflict and encompasses a substantial volume of content, a comprehensive analysis is deferred to my forthcoming articles. In this paper, the focus remains on the translation aspects of the Map.

There are a total of sixteen pages in the Map. Page 1 is the cover. The cover of the printed version (collected in the physical museum in September 2023) and the digital version (accessed online in October 2023) in Chinese is different (see figure 4). Depending on the reading mode, the cover differs horizontally and vertically, while the rest of the content remains the same. The pages 2-3 introduce the visiting routes and instruction, pages 4-13 provide descriptions of the five floors of exhibitions and rooms, and pages 14-15 introduce three additional attractions of the National Museums Northern Ireland, including the Ulster Folk Museum, Ulster Transport Museum, and Ulster American Folk Park. Page 16 presents two ways to support the Museum (membership and donation).

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<sup>3</sup> Chinese-Language Website of the Troubles and Beyond Gallery of the Ulster Museum, <https://ruisun048.wordpress.com>.

Figure 4. Printed Chinese map (*left*) and digital Chinese map (*right*)



I chose two examples from page 3 and page 5 to discuss the translation issues in the Map. The Chinese translation is apparently machine translation, and it should be noted that the purpose of my analysis is not to address the quality and accuracy of machine translation, but to demonstrate areas where the translation services at the Ulster Museum could be further enhanced and how museums can improve the quality of translation services.

The first example is shown in table 1. The analysis of the translation of the Art section reveals issues within each sentence. For instance, from a typographical perspective, the Chinese version exhibits inter-character spacing. Evidently, within the initial line of the Chinese text, “在我们美丽的 美术馆中” (*zài wǒ men měi lì de měi shù guǎn zhōng*), a spatial lacuna emerges between “的” (*de*) and “美” (*měi*), a divergence from the conventional Chinese script, which customarily lacks such interstitial spacing. This occurrence is attributed to the probable incapacity of machine translation to appropriately transpose between full-width and half-width characters. Furthermore, the absence of subsequent post-editing exacerbates these typographical inaccuracies.

Table 1. A comparison of “Art” section in the Museum maps in English and Chinese

<b>English Version</b>	ART Encounter the very best of the national collections in our beautiful art galleries. You'll discover works from the 16th century to ultramodern fashion and furniture, paintings, prints, sculpture and silverware.
<b>Chinese Version</b>	艺术 (yìshù) 在我们美丽的 美术馆中，欣赏国家收藏中的精华。您会发现的作品有从16世纪到超-现代时装和家具，绘画，版画，雕塑和银器。 (zài wǒ men měi lì de měi shù guǎn zhōng, xīn shǎng guó jiā shōu cáng zhōng de jīng huá. Nín huì fā xiàn de zuò pǐn yǒu cóng 16 shì jì dào chāo-xiàn dài shí zhuāng hé jiā jù, huì huà, bǎn huà, diāo sù hé yín qì.)

Another concern pertains to the utilization of punctuation. For instance, the translation of “furniture, paintings, prints” into “家具， 绘画， 版画” (jiājù, huìhuà, bǎnhuà) exhibits an issue in its use of punctuation. In the Chinese language, the customary practice for denoting conjunctions between parallel words is the utilization of ‘、’, which serves as a slight-pause mark used to set off items within a series. This is in contrast to the comma typically employed in the English language. In the Chinese context, the accurate rendition should be “家具、 绘画、 版画” (jiājù、 huìhuà、 bǎnhuà).

A noticeable issue arises in the realm of directional translation, for example in the case of the History section (see table 2) that reads, “Take the lift to levels 1 or 2,” which is rendered in the Chinese version as “乘电梯到第一层或第二层” (chéng diàn tī dào dì 1 céng huò dì 2 céng). Within the Chinese context, it is imperative to recognize that floor numbering conventionally commences from level 1, equivalent to the ground floor in English terminology. Thus, the accurate rendering should ideally read as “乘电梯到第二层或第三层” (chéng diàn tī dào dì 2 céng huò dì 3 céng) (Take the lift to levels 2 or 3). Nevertheless, it is pertinent to note that this particular text serves as a directional sign providing instructions for elevator usage, and in the English context, the numerical reference corresponds to levels 1 and 2. Hence, retaining the original translation may be deemed permissible, given the situational relevance and contextual alignment with elevator numbering in the English setting.

Table 2. A comparison of “History” section in the Museum maps in English and Chinese

<b>English Version</b>	<b>HISTORY</b> Journey through history as you go from Ulster’s earliest people, through turbulent times of war and conflict to periods of peaceful development and progress. Take the lift to levels 1 or 2.
<b>Chinese Version</b>	历史 ( <i>lìshǐ</i> ) 从阿尔斯特 (Elster) 最早的人们经历历史之旅, 经历动荡的战争和冲突时期, 再到和平发展与进步时期。 乘电梯到第1层或第2层 ( <i>cóng ā ěr sī tè (Elster) zuì zǎo de rén men jīng lì lì shǐ zhī lǚ, jīn gù dòng dàng de zhàn zhēng hé chōng tū chí qī shí qī, zài dào hé píng fā zhǎn yǔ jìn bù shí qī.</i> <i>chéng diàn tī dào dì 1 céng huò dì 2 céng.</i> )

An additional prominent error becomes apparent in the interpretation of the word “Ulster” wherein it is rendered as “阿尔斯特” (*ā ěr sī tè*). However, within the Chinese version, under the section labelled “历史” (*lì shǐ*) (History), the word “阿尔斯特” (*ā ěr sī tè*) is accompanied by “Elster” in parentheses, an evidently erroneous inclusion.

The translation challenges observed in the Map imply the necessity for a more diligent and professional approach to the provision of multilingual services at the Ulster Museum. While these maps may present an appealing facade, the quality of the map content, as discerned in the Chinese version, requires notable improvement. This becomes particularly important for a comprehensive institution like the Ulster Museum, which receives a substantial daily influx of tourists and thus possesses a heightened demand for accurate and accessible maps. Enhancing the quality of translation is poised to yield manifold benefits, including improved visitor service, heightened museum accessibility, and a more effective conveyance of cultural content. Ultimately, this endeavor holds the potential to cultivate a professional image for the Ulster Museum and enhance the overall visitor experience.

The second example discusses the critical translation error in the Map—the failure of conveying the depth of historical and cultural significance. This oversight is poised to have a significant adverse impact on the comprehension and engagement of visitors with the historical and cultural exhibitions. The instance under consideration is derived from the translation of “The Troubles & Beyond” on page 5. The Troubles and Beyond Gallery presents the significant and contentious history of Northern Ireland, and reflects the Ulster Museum’s aim of opening up new dialogues and challenging perspectives. However, the Ulster Museum has been very cautious about presenting the Troubles, as there are “challenges and sensitivities involved” in

presenting such contentious history (Logan 2019, 167). Thus, inaccuracies in translation could be detrimental to the advancement and enrichment of the exhibition’s objectives.

The common problem in translation is the interpretation of local terms used in the museum text. Table 3 shows the translation of a typical term, “The Troubles & Beyond.” In the Chinese version, it has been translated as “麻烦与超越” (*má fan yǔ chāo yuè*) (trouble and transcend). However, the specific rendering of “The Troubles” with capital letters carries a nuanced historical significance within the context of Northern Ireland, emphasizing the need for precise and context-sensitive translation.

Table 3. A comparison of “Troubles & Beyond” section in the Museum maps in English and Chinese

<b>English Version</b>	THE TROUBLES & BEYOND Explore the Troubles and Northern Ireland's continuing emergence from years of conflict in the context of wider social, economic, cultural and political influences.
<b>Chinese Version</b>	麻烦与超越 ( <i>má fan yǔ chāo yuè</i> ) 探索麻烦和北爱尔兰持续崛起于 更广泛的社会，经济，文化和政治影响下的多年冲突。 ( <i>tàn suǒ má fan hé běi ài ěr lán chí xù jué qǐ yú gèng guǎng fàn de shè huì, jīng jì, wén huà hé zhèng zhì yǐng xiǎng xià de duō nián chōng tū.</i> )

The word “Troubles” has been used throughout Irish history to describe times and events of conflict (of various kinds) which are regarded as frustratingly vague. To distinguish from the Troubles in the early 1920s (Russell 2019), the term “the Troubles” used in the Museum Map refers to the history of Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to the late 1990s that was “dominated by the civil and political conflict.”<sup>4</sup>

Chinese language generally refers to “The Troubles” as “北爱尔兰问题” (*běi ài ěr lán wèn tí*) (Northern Ireland Problem). The term is now almost exclusive to Northern Ireland, and unique to Northern Ireland Conflict/Issue. In Chinese, instead of “冲突” (*chōng tū*) (conflict) and “议题” (*yì tí*) (issue), “问题” (*wèn tí*) (problem) is widely used to describe this history. The translation of “Troubles” as “问题” (*wèn tí*) in Chinese signifies the situation resulting from the turmoil. “问题” (*wèn tí*) (Problem) is, in essence, a ‘downgrader,’ a term of somewhat

<sup>4</sup> “The Troubles and Beyond,” *Ulster Museum*, accessed September 24, 2023, <https://www.ulstermuseum.org/whats-on/troubles-and-beyond>.

lesser intensity when compared to “纷争” (*fēn zhēng*) (contention), or “冲突” (*chōng tū*) (conflict). Consequently, the Chinese term “北爱尔兰问题” (*běi ài ěr lán wèn tí*) (Northern Ireland Problem), or simplified as “北爱问题” (*běi ài wèn tí*) (NI Problem, with “NI” as an abbreviation for Northern Ireland) would be a better choice for translation.

The word ‘beyond’ does not just mean to surpass someone or something. In the context of the Ulster Museum, it contains three aspects. Beyond has a temporal aspect (in terms of time), a spatial aspect (in terms of international geography), and a conceptual aspect (which is the inclusion of art, culture, and history). Firstly, it extends beyond a specific time frame, as the Troubles and Beyond Gallery not only presents the historical period from the 1960s to the 1990s but also extends to the present day, with materials relating to a ‘post conflict’ Northern Ireland (Logan 2019). Secondly, in terms of geographical space, the Troubles Gallery presents that history on an international stage. It includes timelines marking significant world events that transpired during the Troubles, such as the Yom Kippur War in the Middle East, alluding to its impact on other nationalities and regions. Thirdly, the Troubles Gallery not only presents political histories but also highlights significant social, economic, and cultural developments occurring in Northern Ireland and globally. Notable exhibits include representations of cultural life, such as the “Olympic Gold Medal” and the LGBT+ collection “Pride T-shirt.”

All of these contents give the word ‘beyond’ more meanings. There are several translation options. In Chinese, literally, “The Troubles and Beyond” can be translated as “北爱尔兰问题及其延续” (*běi ài ěr lán wèn tí jí qí yán xù*) (Northern Ireland issue and its extension/continuation). However, “continuation” sounds like the continuation of the issue alone. In addition, “延续” (*yán xù*) is more about the temporal aspect. While the Gallery describes historical events and all aspects of the culture and everyday life that accompanied this conflict. It can be understood as the impact of the Troubles, and translated as “北爱问题及影响” (*běi ài wèn tí jí yǐng xiǎng*) (the Troubles and its impact).

The naming of the Gallery and its presentation on the Map are of crucial significance. It requires a concise and semantically rich text description that includes both historical connotation and intuitive information reference for visitors. Given its importance as a gateway element to the visiting experience, the keywords are “The Troubles.” Attaching a relevant suffix



to it and translating it as “北爱问题展馆” (*běi ài wèn tí zhǎn guǎn*) (NI Problem Gallery) could be an appropriate and concise choice.

Drawing from the aforementioned examples, it becomes evident that similar errors appear throughout the Chinese language Map. These inaccuracies have the potential to significantly affect the overall visitor experience and could potentially raise concerns about the Ulster Museum’s level of professionalism. The Ulster Museum may need professional translators to revise the existing translation. As Neather (2012b) examined the Chinese context indicating that the task of translation in museums is not undertaken by specialized museum translators, a professional category that remains underappreciated. The result of examining the map reflects that Neather’s earlier findings remain applicable today. Therefore, it is advisable not to rely too heavily on machine translation, and it would be better to have professional translators review and refine the content. Since the Map contains limited content, the task should not be too difficult, and it can be easily accomplished. Through improving the quality of the translations, it will enhance the experience for international visitors and have a more positive impact on the Museum’s image.

The case of the Ulster Museum highlights the particular importance of translation in a context rich in diverse cultural, historical, and political nuances. Bridging the translation gap at the Ulster Museum is not just a matter of linguistic accessibility; it is about enhancing the overall quality of the visitor experience, fostering inclusivity, and ensuring that the Museum fulfils its educational and cultural mission. To maximize visitor engagement and satisfaction, it is crucial for museums to address this gap and provide comprehensive, culturally sensitive, and accurate translation services. While museums present cultures and histories different from visitors’ backgrounds, translation promotes intercultural dialogue and narrows the gap in cultural understanding (Katan 2014).

## 5. Conclusion

This paper employs the Ulster Museum as a case study to investigate the current state of translation services within museums, specifically as an exemplification of inadequacies in the translation domain. This study emphasizes the significant potential for strengthening translation services to enhance the international visitor experience, thereby enhancing the overall quality of museum service.



This paper presents a literature review on scholarly research of museum translation. Through introducing the current research topics and developments in this field, this study sheds light on the underdeveloped state of translation within the field of museums. This paper then provides a historical account of the Ulster Museum's development, emphasizing its pivotal role in the context of Northern Ireland. This prominent position stands in stark contrast to the noticeable absence of translation services within the Museum, thereby highlighting the current state of neglect regarding the practice of translation.

The translation analysis section primarily focuses on two examples, extracted from the third and fifth pages of the Chinese version of the Map. Translation issues on the third page predominantly concern disparities in the Chinese-English format, punctuation usage, and evident linguistic translation errors. These issues are relatively straightforward to address, and it is recommended that the Museum engage professional translators to make revisions and proofread the existing translation versions, refining the translated content in the Map.

Conversely, the issues on the fifth page pertain to the translation of local historical and cultural aspects. Such translations are inherently more challenging, as machine translation can only provide literal text translations and cannot convey deeper cultural nuances. Consequently, the translation of "The Troubles & Beyond" in the Map may influence visitor comprehension, potentially contradicting the original purpose of providing the Multilingual Maps. The translation might not effectively enhance the accessibility of the Museum's exhibits or visitor engagement. To address this issue, a more detailed analysis is presented, which involves dissecting the historical and cultural factors within "The Troubles" aligning with the thematic underpinnings of the Troubles and Beyond Gallery, and meeting the requirements of the target audience. Ultimately, an alternative translation version is proposed for reference.

The research findings reveal a concerning neglect of translation services within museums, characterized by limited availability of multilingual materials, direct utilization of machine-generated translations, and inaccuracies in historical and cultural content. This investigation highlights the significance of translation services in museums and issues a compelling call to action directed at both museum institutions and researchers. It advocates for a focus on the quality of translation services, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the quality of reference materials for international visitors, improving the overall visitor experience, and enhancing the standard of museum service.

For the Ulster Museum, despite its commendable efforts, there may be challenges in catering to every visitor's linguistic needs. There is an opportunity for further enhancement, particularly in the areas of translation services, audio guides, or audio descriptions. With continued dedication, the Ulster Museum can further elevate its standing as a public sector that not only provides valuable experiences but also ensures inclusivity for a diverse audience.

Based on my personal experience in participating in international museology conferences and interactions with museum professionals, it is observed that many within the museum sector predominantly perceive translation as a mere language tool, concerned with the literal transference of museum text from one language to another, without due consideration for contextual and nuanced adaptations.

Therefore, to raise awareness among institutions about the significance of translation in museums, it is suggested that translators engage in communication with museum staff. This collaborative approach can encompass not only the translation of content but also the explanation of specific translated elements. Furthermore, translators can play a pivotal role in adapting content, structuring information, and refining display formats to cater to the diverse requirements of different visitor demographics and the distinct exhibition spaces.

Future research in museum translation offers promising avenues for improving the visitor experience and advancing the field. Research can focus on assessing translation quality, understanding visitor needs, and examining the impact of translation on learning and education. Visitor-centered approaches and cultural sensitivity in translation require in-depth exploration. These research directions collectively contribute to the ongoing evolution of museum translation, enhancing accessibility, inclusivity, and the cultural value of museum experiences.

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