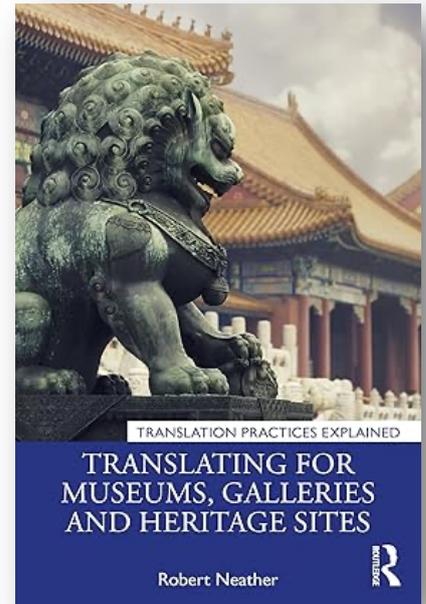


## Book Review: Neather, Robert (2025). *Translating for Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, pp. 188.

ASSOC. PROF. DR. NAZAN MÜGE UYSAL\*

**T***ranslating for Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites*<sup>1</sup> penned by Robert John Neather was published in 2025 as part of Routledge's series of coursebooks titled "Translation Practices Explained". Kelly Washbourne is the editor of this series. The author of the book, Robert J. Neather, is an Associate Professor in the Department of Translation, Interpreting and Intercultural Studies at Hong Kong Baptist University. His main research areas cover translation in intersemiotic environments like museums and heritage sites, with a particular focus on the Chinese museum context. He is also interested in collaborative translation, translation communities, and Buddhist translation. It is important to note that Neather is a United Nations certified translator with a wide array of freelance translation experience, along with the works he (co-)translated. Neather authored significant academic publications on museum translation, which can be deemed pioneering works in this distinct sub-field of translation and interpreting studies<sup>2</sup>. No doubt the *museum* setting here can be expanded to some other areas of expedition like *art galleries* or *heritage sites* despite some clear differences as well as certain commonalities among the three, as is mentioned by the author in the introduction part of the book (p. 1).



\* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University, Faculty of Science and Letters, Department of Translation and Interpreting, [mugeuysal@ibu.edu.tr](mailto:mugeuysal@ibu.edu.tr), ORCID: 0000-0001-8983-4367.

<sup>1</sup> The ISBN numbers for the paperback, hardcopy, and eBook versions are 9781138571860, 9781138571853, 9780203702505, respectively, and DOI is <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203702505>.

<sup>2</sup> To denote the name of the field, I prefer the term "translation and interpreting studies", noting that Neather uses "translation studies" in the book.

Geliş/Arrival: 13.01.2026  
Kabul/Accepted: 18.01.2026  
Yayın/Published: 26.03.2026



This work is licensed under a CC Attribution 4.0 International Licence.

© Söylem and Author(s)

Alıntılama/Cite as: Uysal, Nzan Müge (2026). "Translating for Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites". *Söylem* 11(1): 474-480  
Doi:

*Translating for Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites* incorporates seven chapters, starting with an introduction where the concept of *museum translation* is framed and the content and structure of the book is described. This chapter also reveals the aim and scope of the book including potential audience the content is designed for. Although Neather addresses museum translation as “the interlingual translation encompassing a rich variety of areas, genres and text types” within the scope of the book, he presents potential focus points with a view to how to map “the ecology of museum texts and their translations” referring to the classification of Rouxel (2018, p. 26, as cited in Neather, 2025, p. 2). Rouxel’s categorization addresses four basic areas starting with interpretive resources, which can also be called exhibitionary resources (e.g. object labels, audio guides, other textual resources of the exhibition settings, etc.); information texts (e.g. museum plans, directional signage, or websites -in Rouxel’s classification-); institutional communication (e.g. press-packs, press releases, tourist brochures, etc.); and finally research materials (e.g. conference proceedings, scholarly articles, etc.). *Translating for Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites* mainly explores the category of interpretive resources. Conceptual information and academic discussions are accompanied by the inclusion of practice scenarios in the form of case studies, practical exercises, brainstorming exercises or role-play exercises in each chapter, which makes the book a practical guide and a powerful reference material for a mixed audience ranging from scholars, students, and professionals in the field of translation and interpreting to those in museum and heritage studies. Neather (2025) states that since translation technology, translation for barrier-free access, and website localization are considered special areas that should be addressed separately, these areas are out of the scope of the book (pp. 3-4). A brief look at the structure and content of the book reveals that key concepts pertaining to the fields of museum and translation and interpreting studies are presented in Chapter 2, which, in this way, serves as a base for the subsequent issues to be discussed from Chapter 3 to Chapter 7. At the end of the book comes references including a list of further suggested reading, followed by a glossary index to help readers easily refer to relevant parts of the book in case of need.

Exploring key considerations shaping the interaction of museums, galleries, and heritage sites with translation, Chapter 2 functions as a fundamental component enabling a smooth track of the book and an outline for a good grasp of the essential concepts pertaining to this specialized field. The function of museums, the role of curators and visitors, the (spatial) organization of objects and visuals, texts and text types, intertextuality elements, and the skopos of translation are all enlisted as core elements impacting translation practices in this sphere and elaborated in detail in Chapter 2. Here, Neather, referring to the ideas and classifications of important researchers specifically in the field of museum studies, probes into fundamental aspects to translation of museums, galleries, and heritage sites, thereby providing illuminating information specifically for scholars and practitioners in the field of translation and interpreting studies. To illustrate, drawing on the definition of “museum” by the International Council of Museums (ICOM) in 2022, Neather (2025, p. 7-8) unravels well-established functions of museums such as educating or informing, but also some less distinguished roles like commemorating. This is linked to the changing nature of museum function, from a “didactic manner” -connected with the traditional approach- to a more recent “collaborative and constructivist” perspective as a significant consideration for

translation approach. Citing Whitehead's (2012) tripartite classification of registers as "verbal, environmental, and experiential", Neather (2025, pp. 9-10) aims at describing dynamics of display and curator-visitor interaction, as another important instance of translation practices in this field. One other vital dynamics is how the space is used and the impact of space on the meaning-making mechanism starting from the macro-level factors like the conception of museums as communication spaces and organization of the exhibitions to the micro-level dynamics determining the organization of objects, meaning both spatial positioning of objects or clusters of objects, and that of texts and labels. This brings another crucial element to the fore; the use of texts and text types in museums. Following the typology put forward by David Dean (1994), six categories of text types titled "title signs" and "sub-titles" (i.e. indicating the broad theme and sections of an exhibition), "introductory texts" (e.g. large panels typically at the entrance of an exhibition or sections of it), "group texts" (i.e. describing clusters of objects assembled in a single display), "object labels" (i.e. describing a specific object), and "distributed materials" (e.g. portable texts such as brochures and leaflets) are addressed (Neather, 2025, p. 19). The closing subtitle of Chapter 2 focusing on "translation purpose" also serves a bridge to the next chapter, where museum and heritage translation is analyzed as a process/as a component of language provision from an industrial lens.

Chapter 3 concentrates on museum translation from the scope of industrial practices, i.e. agents that may take place in "the translatorial action" (in Justa Holz-Manttari's term) in real-life settings and the importance and content of a translation brief; the impact of a museum's language provision in the maintenance of translation workflow and accordingly financial and staffing resources of museums; significance of understanding visitor demographics; political and geopolitical issues that may have an impact on the translation assignments; and the vitality and essence of quality assurance for translated works, with a particular focus on the significance of the establishment of a strong cooperation between stakeholders -as museums- and translators, and importance of analyzing visitors' perspectives effectively. This chapter ends up with a case study exemplifying the above-mentioned, suggested cooperation between a translator and a curator. On the other hand, Chapter 4, 5, and 6 establish a tripartite combination focusing on the theme of "texts in the ecology of museums". It is worth noting here that, in Chapter 2, the author asserts adopting two approaches to text analysis; the former being *text type notion* as well as Hatim and Mason's (1990) scheme of *argumentative, expository, and instructional text types* and the latter Ravelli's (2006) idea of three *communication frameworks* as *representational, interactional, and organizational* (as cited in Neather, 2025, p. 23).

Chapter 4 and 5 enrich the discussion from the scope of "fixed" and "non-fixed" texts the exhibition space provides. Neather makes a differentiation between the texts in this sphere as the ones that are incorporated within the exhibition space such as wall panels and object labels and those serving like optional materials visitor may consult; to name a few, leaflets, worksheets, and audio guides. Neather addresses important considerations concerning the translation of the texts in the first category, which can typically be defined as texts performing the function of informing visitors. Given the communicative purpose of these texts, the length and density of information, terminology load, and the preference of museum as to how to appeal to the visitor; in other words,

how the museum attempts to communicate with the visitors, whether in a didactic, authoritative tone of voice, thereby keeping a distance, or in a more direct and collaborative manner decreasing formal distance, are identified. This discussion is followed by the issue of information organization; “how is the information presented?”. This way, the concept of verbal-visual harmony and cooperation are focused on. When it comes to the text itself, Neather (2025) reminds readers of Louise Ravelli’s renowned idea of “communication frameworks”, and he further features M.A.K. Halliday’s “metafunctions of language”, i.e. ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions, and the three “register variables” of field, tenor, and mode within the “translation quality assesment model” of Juliane House, mentioning the similarity between these classifications (p. 49). As they share certain commonalities, these three classification systems could be utilized in the production, organization and analyses of translations, which are exemplified in Chapter 4 through some object labels displayed in different museums. The idea of “code preference”, which can be defined as the norm(s) for physical arrangement of different languages in a museum setting, is another issue highlighted, which is followed by the interaction of labels and panels with visitors as an instance of Ravelli’s interactional framework (pp. 57, 63). At this point, the author elucidates parameters of interaction with a particular focus on the textual dimensions [e.g. preferred tone of voice, information organization within the text, the use of (engaging) questions, saturation of personal pronouns, how the reader is addressed, formal or informal wording, etc.] and additionally the ideas of “power and distance” from pragmatics, which impacts how content is delivered to the audience. The analysis in this chapter further dwells on the inclusion of creative interaction techniques in the construction of text content like the use of alliterations, rhyme and rhythm, intertextual references, quotations or changes in traditional layout dimension, say creating a poetic form (p. 68). In this regard, Neather (2025, p. 76) mentions Ekarv Method, which entails the idea of “poetic restructuring”; that is, changing traditional label information into a poetic form to create more appealing label texts. The author further explicates a procedure to follow for establishing “poetic restructuring” of labels, which he modifies from Gilmore and Sabine ([1997], 1999, p. 207), and thusly he discusses how to increase creativity and readability of the label content, adopting a more reader-engaging approach (as cited in Neather, 2025, pp. 76-78). What is more, ways of dealing with lexical gaps or cultural differences in the translation process, particularly strategies of (re-)foreignizing, domesticating, explicitating on the micro level, and rhetoric adjustments that need to be addressed broadly on the macro level (e.g. demetaphorization and omission) so as to apply a “cultural filter” (in Julian House’s words), are also highlighted through the end of this section. As instances of some other concerns affecting translation process, techniques to deal with racial issues or objects involving texts or inscriptions observed in calligraphic works are also discussed. To avoid vagueness related to some taboo words, for example, or meanings that may lead to cultural sensitivity, techniques like addition of essential information in the labels or explicitation are given; similarly, for texts embedded in/on artefacts, non-translation, translating the text partially, or providing a full translation in information sources other than labels like websites or digital materials are explored as options to be employed.

Chapter 5 shifts the focus from “fixed” information sources, i.e. labels and wall panels, to “non-fixed”, or portable materials, also described as “optional” ones by the author such as leaflets,

worksheets, and audio guides. These materials are generally designed for providing extra information, and specifically for museums using monolingual labels or wall panels, the additional sources may serve an effective medium of translation. This chapter identifies a variety of purposes leaflets, predominantly fulfilling an expository function, may be used for. Leaflets can be utilized as a map of the whole exhibit, generally constructing a sort of cohesion with the fixed information texts of the exhibit via the use of intertextual repetition, or else they typically make good souvenirs with the visual density they provide, or they can solely be used for giving additional information to the audience. As in the translation of fixed display materials, translation of leaflets necessitates effective use of a repertoire of translation strategies like addition and neutralization that enable adjustments to the expository structure of the content, conforming with target language reception norms or norms of politeness. The chapter further examines factors affecting worksheet design, drawing on the aspects suggested by Kisiel (2003, as cited in Neather, 2025, pp. 109-110), and Neather (2025) states that, originating from monolingual worksheets, translation can be used as a means of content creation for a specific audience, and strategies of transcreation or translanguaging can be employed to that end. Since worksheets are expected to be used for educative purposes, the “interactional aspects” of the text becomes a major concern. Accordingly, the degree of formality/distance or engagement/collaboration constructed with the audience can be aligned through a number of strategies while designing/translating worksheets. We can mention word choice and arrangement of language register, use of exclamations, and interrogatives as well as inclusion of humor elements and multimodal features in this regard (pp. 114-115). The final optional material discussed in this chapter is audio guides, which share some common features with catalogues. The use of a catalogue or an audio guide is generally a matter of visitor preference. The chapter clearly identifies how to employ translation strategies on the way to developing effective audio guides. To illustrate, localizing in accordance with the expected cultural norms of the potential audience, adding, omitting, or foreignizing as ways of dealing with cultural terms in translation are explicated referring to various examples. The author maintains that audio guides may also act as complementary to labels and wall panels at a display where the use of intertextual elements help increase the “reapportioning” role of audio guides, enabling a feasible distribution of information over different information sources in the sphere of museums; yet, as the author contends, recitability of the audio content, intonation, voice quality and tone, inclusion of auditory stimuli, and arrangement of shifts in register are of great importance to invoke and sustain listeners’ interest in audio guides (pp. 122-124).

As the final part of the tripartite sections on “the texts”, Chapter 6 proceeds the exploration to the texts beyond the boundaries of museums, galleries, or heritage sites this time, namely catalogues, guides, and websites. These “free-standing sources of information” (ranging from general to more specialized in content), where typically pictures accompany texts, are mainly intended for providing further information. Catalogues and museum guides, in particular, may employ “in-visit” and “post-visit” functions. The picture-text interaction in these sources, hence multimodality aspect impacting translation, is examined in the chapter from the two scopes: the illustrative role of pictures for broad art-historical contexts, where main texts and caption texts (attached to the artefacts) work together for the depiction of both general historical narrative and

item-specific illustrations, and the interpretive role of texts to artefacts (pp. 128-131), whereby objects take the centre, with texts accompanying them and performing “the ostentive function” in Baxandall’s (1985) words (as cited in Neather, 2025, pp. 134-135). Technical and cultural terms, technical density of the content, and complex nature of art-historical language are identified as main challenges for translation of these information sources, and subsequently the significance of keeping writer’s tone of voice in the translation of prefaces or forewords of catalogues is discussed. The focus is shifted to the specifics of website-specific issues in the final section. Websites may involve hybrid text types, and adapting these contents to other languages and cultures necessitates maintenance of some textual and technical aspects in translation. Localization, obviously, takes the lead at this point, with important aspects like adjustments of multimodal elements, foregrounding or backgrounding of certain textual information (p. 159).

In Chapter 7, the author widens the scope to a more holistic perspective as he does so in the introduction part, together with Chapters 2 and 3. This chapter concentrates on the central role that translation should undertake in the sphere of museums, galleries, and heritage sites. Neather (2025, pp. 163-164) states that since museums assume the role of “contact zones” of different cultures or groups of people, they can also be considered “translation zones”; translation enabling intercultural contact and understanding for not only intercultural visitors but also local minority communities, by that bridging the communication gap between different parties; and he further states that *museums* and *translation* can metaphorically be associated in different ways, beyond the boundaries of linguistic interchange: First and foremost, museums “translate” cultures, but visiting an exhibition is a way of “translation” as well, since the multisemiotic content of the space is also read and interpreted by the visitor, and finally the experience of the visit itself resonates a sort of change or transformation in the visitors’ minds and perspectives, hence visitors are “translated” as they visit an exhibition. Neather (2025) proposes that integration of translation into the whole exhibition space is vital for a balanced dispatch of information over various channels of communication or text types so as to avoid large repetitions or information overload and advocates a “visitor-oriented approach to translation” and “function-preserving translation”. No wonder these approaches require appropriate decision making procedures as to the provision of multilingual resources conforming visitor demography, and may translators have the freedom of making apt interventions or adjustments in the translation process if these approaches are adopted. As the final words of the author, *collaboration* is the key for the future of museum and heritage milieu, *collaboration* both in the sense of strengthening museum-translation/translator cooperation and museum-visitor connection and integration (pp. 165, 167-168).

In short, *Translating for Museums, Galleries and Heritage Sites* is a unique example merging translation and interpreting studies with museum and heritage studies as well as bridging the gap between theory and practice in this distinct field of translation for museums, galleries, and heritage sites. The structural flow of the book helps readers to initially conceptualize basic notions and tenets of the field, followed by a detailed and in-depth analysis of various text typologies in museum translation, ranging from texts positioned within the exhibition space like wall panels and object labels and optional materials that aim at providing additional information such like leaflets, worksheets, and audio guide to texts exceeding the boundaries of the museum context

such as museum catalogues, guides, and webpages. Although these sections elucidate a comprehensive discussion on museum texts and strategies to be implemented in the translation of this wide textual variety, it can be noted that practical exercises could be provided with brief explanations that may serve as a guide for those in need of a route to follow with a view to reaching a clear conclusion. The final section is devoted to the depiction of the essential role that translation plays for the multilingual communication provision of museums, galleries, and heritage sites and can be interpreted as “a call” to stakeholders for positioning translation in the centre. Adopting a practice-oriented approach, this book provides valuable insights and proves an outstanding reference source for readers interested in translation encompassing the context of museums, galleries, and heritage sites.

#### REFERENCES

Neather, Robert J. (2025). *Translating for museums, galleries and heritage sites*. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.