

## Terms and Their Translation for Museum Labels

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Hommage à Bernard Quemada : termes et textes

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[See table of contents](#)

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Article abstract

With the development in France of both general and specialized museums, and the growing cultural and touristic exchanges between countries, access to their information is becoming increasingly important. The aim of a long term research project of the English Linguistics Department of the University of Franche-Comté is to translate the French labels of a classified museum (the Museum of Fine Arts and Archeology of Besançon) into English and give practical training in terminology and translation to third year English for Special Purposes students. To do this, two different bilingual lexicons have to be created: one of the repetitive terms used by the Museum to describe the exhibits, i.e. museological terms, and the other of the subject of the label, i.e. in 1993 Egyptology. The theoretical problems and practical solutions concerning the compilation of highly specific bilingual lexicons, the translation of maximum information telegraphic style texts and the choice of specialized terms to be used for a general museum public of all ages as well as the teaching outcomes of such a project are discussed.

# TERMS AND THEIR TRANSLATION FOR MUSEUM LABELS

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## Résumé

*Le développement des musées de toutes sortes ainsi que celui des échanges culturels et touristiques internationaux sont deux facteurs qui rendent l'accès aux informations muséologiques particulièrement important. La Section de Linguistique Anglaise de l'Université de Franche-Comté-Besançon a mis en place un projet de recherche dont le but à long terme est la traduction en anglais des cartels d'un musée classé (le Musée des Beaux-arts et d'Archéologie de Besançon), dans le cadre de l'enseignement de la terminologie et de l'anglais de spécialité (licence). Pour ce faire, deux lexiques bilingues doivent être élaborés : l'un pour les termes répétitifs utilisés pour décrire les œuvres et objets exposés, qui relèvent de la terminologie muséologique, l'autre pour les termes relatifs au domaine de la collection traitée chaque année, en l'occurrence, pour 1993, l'égyptologie. Sont examinés au cours de cette étude les problèmes théoriques et les solutions pratiques envisagées pour la réalisation de lexiques bilingues hautement spécialisés, la traduction de textes de style télégraphique d'une grande densité informative, le choix des termes en fonction du public des musées — grand public tous âges confondus —, et le bilan pédagogique d'un tel projet.*

## Abstract

*With the development in France of both general and specialized museums, and the growing cultural and touristic exchanges between countries, access to their information is becoming increasingly important. The aim of a long term research project of the English Linguistics Department of the University of Franche-Comté is to translate the French labels of a classified museum (the Museum of Fine Arts and Archeology of Besançon) into English and give practical training in terminology and translation to third year English for Special Purposes students. To do this, two different bilingual lexicons have to be created: one of the repetitive terms used by the Museum to describe the exhibits, i.e. museological terms, and the other of the subject of the label, i.e. in 1993 Egyptology. The theoretical problems and practical solutions concerning the compilation of highly specific bilingual lexicons, the translation of maximum information telegraphic style texts and the choice of specialized terms to be used for a general museum public of all ages as well as the teaching outcomes of such a project are discussed.*

With the development in France of both general and specialized museums and the growing cultural, touristic and academic exchanges between countries, access to their information is becoming increasingly important (Loffler-Laurian 1988: 39). The town of Besançon has a population of 120,000 and its Museum of Fine Arts and Archeology receives 35 to 45,000 visitors a year including 16,000 foreigners who speak mainly English or German as either their mother tongue or their first foreign language. Access to information is through the exhibit labels which name and describe the 6,000 items on permanent display. For the visitor who does not speak French much of this enormous wealth of information is lost and the spontaneous curiosity of the visitor often remains unanswered: *"l'objectif (de la traduction) est de permettre à un public plus vaste d'avoir accès à l'information scientifique. Pour faciliter cet accès, on doit lever certaines barrières qui sont d'ordre "technique" (intellectuel, barrières des connaissances), ou d'ordre linguistique (langue originale, inconnue du lecteur potentiel)."* (Loffler-Laurian 1984: 124)

A long term research project of the English Linguistics Department of the University of Franche-Comté-Besançon and the Besançon Museum is to translate the exhibit labels of this classified Museum into English and to give practical training in terminology and translation to third year English for Special Purposes students.

Museum exhibit labels are a highly distinctive form of communication between the specialist-author of the labels and the museum visitor whom Michel Laclotte, Director of the Louvre, describes as “*Un public de base, celui du grand tourisme [...] celui des spécialistes, et un troisième public, scolaire.*” (Schneider *et al.* 1992: 82).

The subject matter of the labels belongs to a particular field of activity and describes an exhibit. The vocabulary is specific and the style of discourse is reduced to a minimum due to the constraints of space available on the labels and time taken to read them. The importance of these linguistic aspects of exhibit labels has only recently been recognized by museologists who are now turning to linguists to assist them in the preparation of more efficient labels (See: articles by Loffler-Laurian and the interdisciplinary review *Publics et Musées* edited by the Presses Universitaires de Lyon since 1992).

When the project between the Museum and the English Linguistics Department was set up in 1989, it was thought that these linguistic aspects of museology, *i.e.* a specific communication situation, a specialized vocabulary, a distinctive style of discourse and its translation would provide basic material for observation and research. Thus, the aim of the project was threefold: **a linguistic research aim** of investigating the linguistic parameters used on museum labels and elaborating a methodology to translate this specialized discourse and its vocabulary; **a teaching aim** of providing authentic practical training in the compilation and translation of a specialized vocabulary (bilingual terminology) and developing the students’ knowledge and appreciation of their local heritage and the wider field of artistic achievement and finally **a community service aim** of providing the local Museum with an appropriate translation of its exhibit labels giving non-French speakers access to its information. Since the project began labels, from the painting, pastels, ceramics, medieval statues and Egyptology sections have been translated and presented to the Curator by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts.

## TWO EQUIVALENT CORPORA

Desjardins and Jacobi (1992: 15) have described a label as “*un petit texte inscrit sur un support de faibles dimensions, généralement rectangulaire, placé à proximité d’un spécimen, un objet ou tout autre expôt. Ce texte a pour fonction de désigner, décrire ou commenter l’item auquel il se rattache.*” Normally the visitor can see both the label and the exhibit at the same time. The label acts as a “mediator” between the exhibit and the reader by identifying and explaining it. Thus, besides the title of the exhibit, if it is a painting or statue, the label contains terms needed to describe the exhibit: its dimensions, origin, provenance or how the Museum acquired the item, the base material and technique, school, workshop or factory to which the item belonged, comments on the condition of the item ... This set of terms concerning the description and presentation of the items comes from the identification record (*fiche signalétique documentaire*) compiled and permanently updated by the Museum staff for each of its exhibits. Apart from the above information, this record includes a photograph, an historical description of the work and a bibliography of catalogues and reference works concerning the item.

The following are examples of the labels making up the source French corpus of the project:

- BUSTE DE STATUE : PROPHÈTE (ÉLIE OU SAMUEL ?)  
Franche-Comté  
Première moitié du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle

*Calcaire : restes de la sous-couche de préparation et traces de polychromie et de dorure*  
H. 0.62 , l. 0.44 , Ep. 0.28

■ *SAMSON BRULEY*

*Gray, vers 1560 — Besançon, 1662*

*SCÈNES DE LA VIERGE (NATIVITÉ — MASSACRE DES INNOCENTS — PRÉSENTATION AU TEMPLE — ADO-  
RATION DES MAGES — CIRCONCISION — FUITE EN ÉGYPTÉ — RETOUR EN ÉGYPTÉ — JÉSUS PARMİ  
LES DOCTEURS — NOCE DE CANA), d'après DURER, GOLTZIUS, RAPHAËL et VON AACHEN (1620).*

*Huile sur bois*

*Provenance : Une église de Besançon*

*Confiscation révolutionnaire.*

■ *FRAGMENT DE CARTONNAGE INSCRIT AU NOM DE PADIHORPAKHERED (?)*

*Inv. : D 863.3.230*

*Ancienne collection Paris*

*Toile enduite et peinte en noir, blanc et bleu; bande centrale dorée*

*H. 455 mm — l. 54 mm*

*Basse époque*

■ *PLAT : décor de bouquet de fleurs jeté au naturel.*

*Faïence de petit feu.*

*Fabrique Veuve Perrin*

*Vers 1775/80*

*(Label in a display case of ceramics from Marseille)*

To define an equivalent corpus in English, bibliographical research was undertaken with the help of the Museum specialists and the Museum's exhibit identification records. The French labels and records were analysed to ascertain the exact subject area involved, *i.e.* not sculpture in general, but medieval religious sculpture in wood and stone. The English corpus was made up of museum catalogues from English museums, standard English reference works and dictionaries on the subject area and occasionally the translation of major French museum catalogues. It must be mentioned in passing that since 1989 our bibliographical research has not revealed one specialized French-English glossary for any of the subject areas that have been covered. Some excellent monolingual dictionaries by renown specialists in the field are available: *Dictionary of subjects and symbols in art* by James Hall and *An illustrated dictionary of ceramics* by George Savage and Harold Newman or in French Louis Réau's *Dictionnaire illustré d'art et d'archéologie*. Réau's *Lexique polyglotte des termes d'art et d'archéologie* first published in 1928 was used as a basis by the International Institute for Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations and then UNESCO for the *Dictionnaire polyglotte des termes d'art et d'archéologie* finally published in 1953. Its ambitious linguistic aim was to provide art historians with equivalent terms in a "dozen" languages (Réau 1953: VII) covering art, archeology and iconography. This wide linguistic and conceptual range limits its usefulness for detail especially as it contains only 250 pages and had to be available to the public at an "accessible price."

Two equivalent corpora were defined and the terminological phase as described by Sager (1990: 2) was undertaken, *i.e.* "the collection, description, processing and presentation of terms, *i.e.* lexical items belonging to a specialized area of usage of one or more languages" (Sager 1990: 2).

The term gathering process was carried out manually on cards (time and man-hours and thus cost were not major considerations within the framework of our University project) and then computerized for presentation on paper as opposed to the current fully automated methods of direct data collection as the equipment at our University is not available in sufficient number. Perhaps the disadvantages of not having a computerized

data base system were outweighed by having human readers who could distinguish relatively easily morphological, terminological and textual features. (See: Otman 1991: 60 for the advantages and disadvantages of fully automated data base systems).

#### SELECTION CRITERIA FOR EXTRACTING TERMS

A term was defined as a specialized lexical unit designating a concept or an object or a process (Sager 1990: 55; Gouadec 1990: 19). An initial analysis of the terms on the French labels showed that there were two different sets of terms: one repetitive used by the Museum to present its exhibits *i.e.* museological terms, and the other specific to the subject area and used by the subject specialists, *i.e.* Egyptologists to describe the exhibits, *i.e.* the denomination, characteristics and condition. This second set changed each time the subject of the labels changed. This implied that the project did not only include the museological glossary, but also one for painting, another for ceramics, another for Egyptology and so on for each section of the Museum. Thus, our extraction process consisted of distinguishing firstly the terms belonging to the specialized areas of museology and the subject area from the general vocabulary and secondly those belonging to museology from those of the subject area, *i.e.* Egyptology, etc.

To try and establish a clear distinction between what linguists call language for special purposes (LSP) and language for general purposes (LGP), the starting point was the consideration of the theoretical position of Gentilhomme (1992) in relation to the linguistic sign in specialized vocabulary. Taking the Saussurian sign in the general vocabulary represented by the classical formula:

$$\text{Sign (S)} = \langle \text{Signifier (Sa), Signified (Se)} \rangle$$

Gentilhomme added a syntactical component (St) and noted the splitting of the signified (Se) into two meaningful components existing already in the mind of the specialist, but not in that of the layman, *i.e.* the general or usual meaning plus the specialized meaning. Gentilhomme summarized this splitting of the signified in the following formula for specialized signs:

$$\text{Ssp} = \langle \text{Sa; Su, Ss; St} \rangle$$

where Ssp = specialized sign, Sa = signifier, Su = usual or general meaning, Ss = specialized meaning within a given area of knowledge and St = syntactical component which can differ from that used in the general language (our case for museum labels). This new model of the sign in specialized discourse focuses attention on the importance of general words that can take on a specific meaning in a specialized subject area (conceptual terminological polysemy) (Gentilhomme 1993: 481).

The next considerations were the needs of the user of the glossary, *i.e.* student-terminologists who were neither specialists in museology nor the subject area. Ideally these needs could have been defined as immediate access to the equivalent and synonyms in English of all the French simple, complex and periphrastic terms. A brief definition of the terms in both languages would have been a great advantage, but this could only have been done by native speaker specialists in the field and not terminologists. This consideration of the user's needs and Gentilhomme's model conditioned the whole approach to term extraction and resulted in the inclusion of complex lexical units or terminological units or periphrastic units (See: Chukwu and Thoiron 1989; Clas 1987) which are not necessarily set phrases, but phrases which contain general vocabulary (nouns, verbs, present and past participles, frequent on our labels, and even adverbs) which is part of the Ss component and collates with the basic terms. It was considered that the non-specialist

translator could hesitate over the choice of the translation for these terminological units *i.e. huile sur bois (oil painting on panel or oil on panel or oil painting or oil on wood), acquérir un tableau (purchase as opposed to acquire a painting); portail latéral (side door); partiellement recouvert (half hidden)*. Thus, when faced with the choice between a general unit used with or in a specialized context, the criterion became the non-subject specialist terminologist's need (or is the translation of the term or collocation obvious for an intelligent layman?). This need was then linked to the frequency of the item in the corpus to avoid chance collocations or hapax legomena.

The demarcation between museological terms and those of the subject area was also difficult to establish. *Peinture sur toile (canvas painting)* is included in Blanchet and Bernard's *Glossary of museology* (GM), but neither *huile sur toile (oil or oil painting on canvas, frequent on our labels)*, nor *huile*, nor *toile* are as entries. The term *faïence* is not included in GM, but *céramique* is. *Statuaire* and *statue* are not, but *sculpture antique, sculpture polychrome* and *sculpture sur pierre* are. The criteria for inclusion in a specialized glossary are obviously difficult to define. For our purpose there were two specialized vocabularies, but as no clear criteria could be established to separate them it was accepted that overlapping existed and that an artisanal term gathering procedure had its advantages. The student-terminologist made the decision to include a term in one or other glossary or in both. The overriding consideration was need or user-friendliness "when in doubt include". Thus, *faïence* and *statuaire* were included in both because these terms describe two major sections of the Museum, *i.e. Galerie des faïences* and *Statuaire médiévale* and are also headwords used as a basis for forming a series of collocations in the specialized area glossary.

#### TRANSLATING MUSEOLOGICAL TERMS

The translation of the museological terms into English was facilitated by the existence of Blanchet and Bernard's above mentioned glossary (GM) published by the Canadian Minister of Supply and Services in 1989. Naturally, this glossary lacks terms specific to French historical events, cultural environment and traditions, *i.e. confiscation révolutionnaire (seized during the French Revolution), récupération artistique (recovery of works of art confiscated from the church when the church and state separated in 1905)*. However, other basic terms such as *cartel (exhibit label), fiche bristol (descriptive data card), inédit (never exhibited)...* are also missing.

As our corpus contained catalogues from recognized English museums (British Museum, Victoria and Albert Museum) on the same subject areas, most of the translations or their equivalents were found (the differences between French and English exhibit labels in presentation and content are not in the scope of this paper) and differences in usage were noted, *i.e. vers 1900 (circa or c.1900), XVII siècle, XVII s. (17th century or 17th c.)*.

When an overall comparison was made between the vocabulary used by the Besançon Museum and that observed in other French museum catalogues, it was found that most of the terms were the same despite the fact that the French Ministry of Culture has not standardized terms for use in classified museums. Some, however, were specific to the Besançon Museum, *i.e. ancienne collection* which does not mean old or former collection, but is the term used when the Besançon Museum does not know how it acquired the exhibit. Hence the translation suggested was *unknown provenance*. A recent translation (1991) of the catalogue of the Unterlinden Museum in Colmar uses the phrase *in the Museum's collection since its foundation* to cover the same concept.

#### TRANSLATING SPECIALIZED AREA TERMS, PROPER NAMES AND TITLES

The translation of the specialized area terms proved to be much more difficult, especially those for Egyptology, religious painting and sculpture and ceramics. As men-

tioned above, despite extensive bibliographical research in both France and England no specialized bilingual glossaries could be located. This meant that a procedure had to be set up to ensure that an appropriate translation or its equivalent was found: 1) compilation of a targeted bibliography supervised by a Museum or University specialist; 2) understanding the concept or object in French; 3) reading and term gathering in English source material; 4) verifying the appropriateness of the English term with specialist informants (preferably native English speakers). The word “targeted” bibliographical research is used because the aim was not to compile an extensive bilingual glossary, but to find highly specific terms in English and make them available to the student-translators, *i.e. cuve de sarcophage extérieur (case of the outer coffin), couvercle-plaque (mummy board)*.

The tradition of translating proper nouns varies from one language to another. The English tradition (Newmark 1987: 214) is not to translate foreign proper nouns. However, there are many exceptions. Egyptology, for example, is fraught with translation and spelling dangers due to the fact that the French names are derived from Greek translations or transliterations of the Egyptian hieroglyphs, whereas the English names are a direct translation or transliteration of the hieroglyphs, *e.g. the French and English names of the four sons of Horus: Hâpi (Hapy), Amset (Imsety), Douamoutef (Duamutef) and Kebeh-senouf (Qebsennuef)*. In the case of Egyptian proper names on coffins, *e.g. Ankhmoutnefer, fille de Nesykhonsou et de la dame Takharef*, the French transliteration was maintained as the Besançon Museum identification record gave no indication of a description in English of this exhibit and no expert was available to transliterate the original hieroglyphs directly into English.

The names of saints and prominent people were translated when a recognized form existed, *e.g. Sainte Barbe (Saint Barbara), Melchisedech (Melchizedek)*. The same principle was applied to names of towns and cities, *i.e. Anvers (Antwerp), Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen)*.

Titles of biblical paintings and statues were translated by the accepted English equivalent, *e.g. Bourreau de Saint Étienne lapidant (The stoning of Stephen), Les trois enfants ressuscités par Saint Nicolas, sortant du saloir, (The three school children, restored to Saint Nicolas, coming out of the pickling tub)*. Réau (1953: VII) insists on the difficulty of translating these “*termes iconographiques qu'on rencontre à chaque pas en histoire de l'art et font trébucher les traducteurs inexperts.*” He includes in his dictionary (1953) the translations of titles of well-known religious paintings and statues, *e.g. Vierge de Pitié (Our Lady of Pity), Vierge en Majesté (Madonna of Majesty or the Virgin enthroned)*. Considerable research was required to find the accepted English equivalent of biblical, classical and literary themes often unfamiliar to our student-translators. There was also the added difficulty of synonyms and near-synonyms, *e.g. cup or goblet* for drinking vessels on banquet tables and *warrior* or *soldier* for saints in armour. Our basic reference was the revised edition of James Hall's *Dictionary of subjects and symbols in art* (1979).

#### PRESENTATION ON PAPER OF MUSEOLOGICAL TERMS

When both the museological and subject area terms used for a section of the Museum were on cards, they were then prepared for computerization and distribution on paper to the translator-terminologists. This raised the question of which terminological units were to be retained, their basic or canonical form and their presentation. Although frequency was not a parameter in our collection process and statistical counts were not made, it was used in some unclear cases, *e.g. huile sur toile (oil painting on canvas)* was included because of its frequency in our corpus although it is not listed in GM. To answer the requirement of user-friendliness an entry was made under both *huile* and *toile* and the

collocational series of *huile sur bois*, *huile sur cuivre*, *huile sur papier*, *huile sur toile* were included under *huile*. Contrary to the system proposed by Clas (1987: 213), the complex terminological unit of *huile sur bois transposée sur toile* was maintained under the headword *huile* and not broken down into shorter units. This system can lead to what Clas called *encombrement* (*overloading*), but our principle of user-friendliness outweighed this consideration. Although this concept of overloading has not yet become a problem in the museological glossary it has occurred in another of our current projects, a bilingual glossary of eyewear terms (Gill 1989) where under the headword *verre* there are 311 collocations with *verre* as the first word and 147 where it occupies another position in the collocation.

The decision concerning which canonical forms to be used as the headword was dictated by lexicographical tradition and frequency of grammatical forms more specific to the corpus, *i.e.* present and past participles which were frequent due to the need to shorten and simplify the presentation, *i.e.* *dit l'Ancien* (*called the Elder*), *né en, à* (*born in*). The case of *working* (*working model*, *working in Rome*) is an example of the difficult problem of deciding whether a present or a past participle should be considered as an adjective and entered as a canonical form in its own right (Landau 1993: 91). The solution adopted was to include the present participle as a headword and then to list the collocations with their translations.

Contrary to Blanchet and Bernard for whom conventional grammatical information was apparently of only marginal relevance and thus not included in their GM, our presentation included these data for each headword: part of speech, gender for French nouns, irregular plurals, feminine form of French adjectives and nouns, variants including American and British forms, accepted abbreviations... Although the theoretical principle in bilingual lexicography that the grammatical category of the source and target terms should correspond and be consistent was accepted it was sometimes difficult to respect, *i.e.* *dividing* in *dividing line* (*ligne de séparation*).

As the compiler of the glossary was also the future user, particular attention was paid to making the presentation and information easy to use and avoiding cross references. An innovation in the presentation of gender for the English user was the inclusion, even if cumbersome, of the gender after each French noun in the microstructure or terminological units if the noun was not the headword, *e.g.* under the headword *art nm*, *musée m des ~ décoratifs*, *œuvre f d'~*. In order to make the presentation less dense or easier to read, the conventional technique of replacing the headword by a tilde was used. Following the example of COBUILD, no formal distinction was made between the different meanings of polysemous terms, *e.g.* *huile* (*oil* and *oil painting*), *toile* (translated by *canvas* or *painting* in painting and *linen* in Egyptology). The inconvenience of lexicographical unorthodoxy was considered to be less important when compared with the advantage of having the homographs and collocations containing the headword together without reference to another entry. The collocation or mini-context with its translation was usually sufficient to indicate the subject area.

#### TEXT TRANSLATION AND PRACTICAL CHOICES

When the translation of the museological and subject area terms used on the labels was available on paper, the task of text translation was undertaken. However, many label titles, particularly for paintings and ceramics, were ambiguous, *e.g.* *Le souffleur à la pipe* (*d'après Georges de la Tour*), which does not portray a glass blower with a glass blowing pipe, nor a prompter in a theatre with a pipe, but a young man lighting his tobacco pipe. Thus, to understand the titles and hence be able to translate them, the student-translators had to return to the Museum. These ambiguities helped to achieve part of the teaching



aim of the project of developing the students' knowledge and appreciation of artistic achievement.

The text translation involved two major practical considerations: firstly a definition of the visitor or reader and the Museum's role in relation to this visitor and secondly the type of discourse used on the labels (the syntactical component *St* in Gentilhomme's model). The concept of public or reader is taken into account in all communication acts and conditions both the choice of terms and style of discourse. In the case of the Besançon Museum labels, the definition of the curator of the Museum coincided with that given above by Michel Laclotte, *i.e.* tourists, school children, specialists and intellectuals with the great majority of visitors being tourists and school children, *i.e.* non-specialists. The public for our translations is limited to the 16,000 foreigners including foreign school groups, who visit the Museum. These visitors reflect the same general breakdown as that for French visitors with the majority of foreigners being tourists. Thus, the public for the translations was defined as a group of non-specialists of all ages. This clarified the communication situation, *i.e.* specialists writing for non-specialists and raised the question of the translator's approach to labels containing a high density of specialized terms that are unknown to many visitors. It must be remembered that although the exhibit is present and can be seen this does not imply that the viewer makes the correct association between the object and the term (Jacobi 1990: 113). The solution of providing an explanation or giving the specialized term in brackets is not possible due to the limited space available on labels. The choice between two possible translations for an object, *e.g.* *cowl and hood (capuche)*, *cynocephalus* and *dog-headed (cynocéphale)* was made by the translator after consultation with the curator concerning the Museum's role, its target public and its theoretical options. The position adopted for the Besançon Museum labels was to avoid where possible the use of learned or rare terms. Thus, *hood* was chosen and not *cowl* and *dog-headed* and not *cynocephalus*. On the Egyptology labels *cynocéphale* was translated by *ape-headed* and not *dog-headed* as the English Egyptologists refer to the deity Hapy, son of Horus, as having the head of an ape or a baboon, undoubtedly because an ape is said to resemble a man and at the same time have a long dog-like snout.

A museum label is designed to identify and present the exhibit and at the same time interest the visitor, *i.e.* didactic and pleasure functions. However, the text must respect both the constraints of the established rules of the discipline and those of museology. A label is more a description and a classification of an object belonging to a certain class of objects or discipline than a text simplifying or popularizing scientific data (see: Jacobi 1987: chapt. 2 for a description of scientific and technical French). The dual objective of summarizing knowledge and making it accessible (and even interesting!) to a general public is difficult to equate with the constraint of limited space on a label. The solution adopted by museums has been to conventionalize and formalize the specialized discourse into a telegraphic style message with a set layout or form of presentation containing only the most basic information about the work: name, date and place of birth and death of the author, title of the work... It is difficult to count the number of signs due to the extensive use of abbreviations, symbols, numerals..., but it can be estimated that a label rarely contains more than 40 signs with each group of signs conveying maximum information. This results in a message with a high density of semantically precise terms.

The main syntactical technique used to reduce the text and obtain maximum formal and semantic economy is ellipsis eliding the verb form and replacing it by a past participle functioning as an adjective or by an adjective, *e.g.* *mains cassées et collées (hands broken and glued)*, *ailes autrefois rapportées, arrachées (wings added in the past, broken)*, *revers évidé (hollow back)*. Both the subject and the verb can be eliminated as they are considered to be understood. There is no ambiguity as the meaning is conveyed by the

past participle or adjective, *e.g. né à Anvers (born in Antwerp), actif à Rome (working in Rome)*. It is rare to find a complete sentence with a subject, verb and object or predicate on a museum label for a permanent collection in the Besançon Museum. Desjardins and Jacobi (1992: 21) refer to labels with this type of enumerative syntax as identification labels as opposed to descriptive, explicative and commentary or rhetoric labels which have a more complex syntax. The following labels show a typical identification label from an exhibition at the Autun Museum cited by Desjardins and Jacobi (1992: 27) and one from the Besançon Museum both identifying an exhibit of the Egyptian falcon god Horus.

**Autun Museum**

■ Le Dieu Faucon Horus  
vers 900 av. J.-C.  
calcaire  
Musée du Louvre, Paris

**Besançon Museum**

■ FAUCON COURONNÉ  
Inv. : D. 890.1.48  
Dépôt des Musées Nationaux en 1890, envoi n° 194  
Terre cuite glaçurée vert pâle  
H. 33 mm — L. 18 mm — l. 9 mm

Both these labels with minimum syntactic features can be defined as identification labels, despite the descriptive line (without a subject or a verb) in the Besançon text which is only an expansion of the base material and the equivalent of *calcaire* in the Autun text.

The following are examples of descriptive labels. That on the left is for the exhibit described above, but it was given another label by the Clermont-Ferrand Museum for their presentation of the same collection. That on the right is the description added by the Besançon Museum to the label reproduced in their catalogue entitled *Loin du sable*:

**Clermont-Ferrand Museum**

■ HORUS, LE DIEU FAUCON  
22<sup>e</sup> dynastie — vers 950 - 730 av. J.-C.  
Coiffé de la double couronne (Haute et Basse Égypte), le Dieu Horus est perché sur un socle symbolisant la façade du palais royal. Une dédicace au taureau Apis est inscrite au verso.  
Original en calcaire blanc : Musée du Louvre, Paris

**Besançon catalogue**

■ Faucon couronné  
Inv. (...) (*as above*)  
Des traces noires sur le dos sont peut-être les vestiges d'un décor très altéré.  
Le faucon couronné du *pschent*, un des aspects d'Horus en tant que dieu héritier de la royauté, est ici assez grossièrement modelé. À la base de sa couronne se trouve un anneau de suspension. Le bec et les yeux sont tachetés de noir; le dos est orné (?) d'une ligne pointillée noire.

These longer labels use complete sentences with a verb that is usually *to be* and are more typical of the descriptive type for temporary exhibitions and catalogues. The labels in the Besançon Museum are not of the explicative or commentary type where the specialist author explains and/or comments or gives an opinion on the exhibit. Explanation and commentary are more usually associated with long texts, *i.e.* posters and panels used for temporary exhibitions (Poli 1992).

The use of upper and lower case characters in bold or standard type in titles (see above four labels) varies from one museum to another and from one type of label to another. In the Besançon Museum, upper case characters in bold type are used for identification labels for permanent exhibitions and lower case characters in bold type are used for catalogue titles. Our translation respected the typographical features of the source labels.

Signs, symbols, abbreviations and numerals are constantly used, *e.g.* "(?)" (= believed to be correct, but not certain), "=" (= the same as), "inv" (= inventory) and are a characteristic of scientific and technical discourse (Jacobi 1987: 61). These items are coupled with

a maximum use of a standardized punctuation system to clarify meaning and separate the structural units (Loffler-Laurian 1985).

The number of specialized terms naturally depends on the variety and wealth of the exhibits in a museum section. Each section or subject, *e.g.* ceramics, Egyptology... has its own traditions and terminology. The theoretical aim of the writer-specialist is to keep this vocabulary to a minimum judged necessary to inform the visitor and at the same time respect the standards and authenticity of the subject area, but the telegraphic style used on identification labels would only seem to increase the density of the terms, *e.g.* *Seille à eau en faïence stannifère de grand feu* (*water-jug in high temperature tin-glazed earthenware*). These terms are then repeated in different contexts and on different labels for similar objects so that, it is hoped, the reader can comprehend and integrate the new term (didactic function of a museum).

The simplified, abbreviated and conventionalized style coupled with the relatively limited number of terms is an advantage for the non-native speaker translator as it can be replicated in a relatively acceptable form in another language: the difficulty is not so much syntactical, but lexical. All the term and text translations are corrected by a native speaker to compensate for infringing the golden rule of translating only into one's mother tongue.

#### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service aim of the project was achieved. Each year the English Linguistics Department has presented the Museum with a translation on paper of the labels of a section of the Museum, *i.e.* painting, ceramics, medieval statues, pastels and Egyptology. In the future the Linguistics Department will have access to the same computer aided program for publication as that used by the Museum to eliminate retyping by the Museum and proofreading of the English by the University staff.

The translation of museum labels did provide authentic practical training in bilingual terminology and to some extent text translation. It also demonstrated that text translation and even terminological translation can only be carried out professionally by native speaker terminologists of the target language who need access to specialist informants to confirm the appropriateness of the translated terms. The methodology of term bank compilation became a reality and the importance of computers in this process became evident. Discussions are currently underway to enable our fourth year Language Industry students to computerize the glossary along the lines of what Clas (1987: 213-214) called a mini-bank which coincides with our purpose. Mini-banks are for a particular user (a University linguistic class-cum-translator), cover one specialized field, provide quick access to information and are more artisanal and manual than the bigger fully computerized data banks. Clas estimates that a mini-bank contains approximately 3,500 terms. Our museology glossary already contains approximately 1,000 French terms with their translation or equivalent. The more general teaching aim of an appreciation of the students' own local heritage and the wider field of artistic achievement can be thought to have been accomplished as the students visited the Museum several times, actually looked at art objects and worked on the description of items belonging to their own heritage and the world of art.

The linguistic investigation confirmed that museum labels are a specific form of communication and revealed the difficulty, and even the contradiction, in a museum communication act as envisaged through its labels: a specialist writing for non-specialists and using terms, without explanation or reader-writer interaction, that are specific to the subject area and often unknown to the reader. The syntax of the telegraphic style message is specific to museum labels and, if it is not unique in pedagogical and pleasure communicative contexts, it would appear to be rare. More research needs to be carried out to

investigate this form of syntax in this pedagogical communicative situation to evaluate if it does provide maximum comprehensible information through a minimum of linguistic signs and achieve its pedagogical and pleasure aims.

The terms used on the labels belonged to two different areas despite the fact that no objective criteria could be formulated to distinguish specialized terms from the general vocabulary and one specialized vocabulary from another, *e.g.* museological vocabulary from the specialized subject area vocabulary. Our practical solution was based on the subjective criterion of need or user friendliness, *i.e.* would the future user (our terminology student or an intelligent layman) need to "look up" or research the word or collocation in another dictionary or glossary to be able to translate it. If the answer was affirmative the item was included.

Both the museological terms and those of the other specialized areas reflected the vocabulary, including signs, symbols and numerals, used in scientific and technical discourse and labels are an example of specialists writing for non-specialists without popularizing or reformulating the terms for these readers. After discussion with the Museum curator it was decided that when there was a choice between a learned or rare term and a more general word for the same object, the general word was used in the translation. However, the density of the specialized terms in relation to the total number of lexical and functional units in the telegraphic style message was high. More research is required to ascertain if the number of the terms is too high in relation to the other units in the message and if the reader does make the appropriate association between the term and the exhibit. This study did not investigate the paralinguistic features of size and type of letters used on labels in relation to speed of reading and efficiency of comprehension or the geographical or spatial location of the label in relation to the position of both the exhibit and the reader.

The question of the quality of the translations can be raised, *i.e.* adequacy of the message or the degree of semantic identity with the original text, comprehensibility and grammaticality, especially as these were not done by native speakers and only corrected by native speaker University staff. Museum labels have a simplified grammatical form and the major difficulty lies not in the syntax, but in finding and selecting the appropriate term. The ideal person to verify the translations would naturally be a native English subject area specialist from an English, American or Canadian museum who is used to working with exhibits and their description. These ideal experts who must also have the time and the patience to undertake such a task, have still not been found. For the moment the translations fulfil their intention and appear to convey information acceptably, but their appropriateness and effectiveness can only be evaluated by specialists and the Museum public over a long period of time. In the meantime it was decided that Samuel Johnson's famous comment on dictionaries applied perfectly to our translations: "the worst is better than none, and the best cannot be expected to go quite true".

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