Strengthening Cultural Tourism at the Sidoarjo Museum of Cultural Arts Through Translation Practices

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Abstract

This study examines the role of translation practices in supporting cultural tourism, specifically in understanding the strategies used by tourism practitioners in translating descriptive texts at the Sidoarjo Cultural Arts Museum. The focus is on the translation challenges faced by local artists, museum guides, and cultural experts with limited English proficiency in communicating their cultural heritage to international tourists. Data were collected through observation, translation practice, and interviews, and were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method. The findings reveal that participants struggled to find an accurate English equivalent for Sidoarjo's cultural terms, leading them to adopt functional translation strategies to preserve the meaning and message. Using machine translation tools proved helpful in translating culture-specific terms while also saving time. Moreover, the participants' translation products showed improved narrative coherence, and their confidence also increased when delivering cultural narratives to international visitors. This paper highlights the importance of functional translation practice as a means of empowering local tourism practitioners and improving the accessibility of cultural tourism in regional museums.

Introduction

To promote cultural tourism and showcase local wisdom, the Sidoarjo Art Council (Dekesda) is developing the Sidoarjo Cultural Arts Museum. This museum is envisioned as a space for preserving and displaying local art forms and as a cultural platform that introduces Sidoarjo's heritage to domestic and international visitors. Thus, the museum must ensure that its narratives are presented in a linguistically accurate and culturally accessible manner, making effective translation practices a crucial component of its communication strategy.

In today's era of globalization, museums function not just as repositories of artefacts but as intercultural communication spaces that transmit knowledge, history, and identity across linguistic and cultural boundaries. Within this context, translation is more than a linguistic process; it is a cultural act that requires sensitivity to symbolic meaning, context, and the communicative goals of the institutions. Functional translation highlights context, audience needs, and communicative purpose and is especially relevant for museums. It allows for the rendering of multimodal and culturally rich texts in a way that resonates with international audiences while preserving the authenticity of the source material (Mertens & Decroupet, 2024; Piña, 2024; Sun, 2022).

Prior studies have highlighted the importance and challenges of museum translation. Kamilia et al. (2024) and Khrisna et al. (2023) found that inaccurate translation of exhibit labels—due to stylistic and linguistic errors or the lack of explanation for culture-specific terms—negatively impacted visitor comprehension. Nurpermadi et al. (2020) reported that literal translation remains the dominant approach in the Pekalongan Batik Museum, often failing to capture the cultural nuances essential for international engagement. Meanwhile, Yu and Hirzel (2024) noted the need for translators to consider institutional identity and cultural objectives, especially when national narratives are involved.

Museum translation is inherently multimodal and inter-semiotic. Exhibition texts coexist with visuals, spatial, and digital elements that shape visitors' interpretive experience (Neather, 2021). As such, translators must navigate linguistic choices alongside curatorial, aesthetic, and cultural dimensions (Lin, 2022; Sun, 2022). Scholars argue that high-quality museum translation requires not only linguistic competence but also cultural adaptability by employing strategies, such as domestication, foreignization, and explanatory techniques to bridge cultural gaps, including pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and textual knowledge, in ensuring high-quality translation outcomes (Mukhtorova, 2024; Munday et al., 2022; Ningrum et al., 2024; Zhang & Wu, 2023).

In Sidoarjo's context, local tourism practitioners often face challenges translating exhibit text into English. These challenges stem from their limited English language proficiency. This paper examines how these practitioners approach translation tasks at the Sidoarjo Cultural Arts Museum using functional translation strategies. It explores their decision-making processes, the tools they use, and the extent to which their translations support the museum's broader goal of strengthening cultural tourism.

Methodology
This study used a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the translation practices of local tourism practitioners in the Sidoarjo Cultural Arts Museum (Anggito & Setiawan, 2018). The source texts described cultural arts such as traditional dances, wayang, and visual artworks. Data collection was conducted from May 30 to June 30, 2025. This procedure was done in three stages: observation, translation practice, and semi-structured interviews. The observation phase followed a structured checklist adapted from Khudaybergenova (2021), focusing on five aspects: external context of the text, information structure, information density, communicative purpose, and genre type. Participants were then assigned to translate the descriptive texts from Indonesian into English. Afterwards, semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted using a framework adapted from Larasati and Rasikawati (2022), covering issues such as culturally specific concepts, lexical gaps between source and target languages, expressive meaning shifts, structural differences, and technical translation problems. Data were analyzed through reduction and categorization based on recurring issues, followed by thematic interpretation supported by relevant theories and literature.

Finding and Discussion
The findings reveal how participants navigated the challenges of translating exhibition texts from Indonesia to English using functional translation principles. Emphasis is placed on

their decision-making processes, the role of digital tools, and how their translation choices affected the delivery of cultural meaning to international audiences.

Dekesda has developed a miniature exhibition space inside the Sidoarjo Cultural Arts Museum to showcase the region's diverse cultural heritage. This exhibition offers historical insight and basic knowledge about Sidoarjo's arts and culture, specifically for locals and international tourists. The displays include: 1) a costume model of Remo Munali Patah Dance, 2) Banjar Kemuning Dance, 3) Buri Bandeng Dance, 4) Medang Kahuripan Tari, 5) Udeng Pacul Gowang, 6) Jenggala traditional wedding attire, 7) A miniature of the Kamalagyan inscription, 8) A collection of Wayang Gagrag Porongan, and 9) A collection of Reog Cemandi.

Participants were assigned to translate the exhibit descriptions from Indonesian into English, using either manual translation, machine-assisted tools (e.g., Google Translate), or a combination of both. This approach was chosen to accommodate their limited English proficiency while maximizing efficiency.

Table 1. The Translation Outcomes

No.	Source Text	Translation
1	Tari Remo Munali Patah Munali Patah adalah budayawan asli Sidoarjo, dari Desa Banjar Kemantren yang telah menciptakan Udheng Pacul Gowang (Ikat Kepala Khas Sidoarjo) dan Remo Munali Patah Khas Sidoarjo. Beliau juga penggerak seni tradisional Ludruk.	Remo Munali Patah Dance Munali Patah is a native of Sidoarjo, from Banjar Kemantren village, who created Udheng Pacul Gowang (Sidoarjo's signature headband) and Remo Munali Patah. He is also the driving force behind the traditional art of Ludruk.
2	Tari Banjar Kemuning Nama Banjar Kemuning diambil dari nama desa di Sidoarjo yaitu desa Banjar Kemuning, yang terletak di pesisir timur Sidoarjo. Masyarakat desa ini mayoritas bermata pencaharian sebagai nelayan. Tari Banjar Kemuning menggambarkan kehidupan para istri nelayan yang tegar dan kuat dalam menghadapi sulitnya kehidupan saat suami mereka pergi melaut.	Banjar Kemuning Dance Banjar Kemuning is taken from the name of the village in Sidoarjo, Banjar Kemuning village, which is located on the east coast of Sidoarjo. The majority of the people in this village work as fishermen. Banjar Kemuning dance depicts the lives of fishermen's wives, who are strong and resilient when facing life's difficulties when their husbands go to sea.
3	Wayang Gagrag Porongan Wayang Gagrak Porongan adalah salah satu bentuk seni pertunjukan khas Kabupaten Sidoarjo, Jawa Timur, yang memadukan unsur tradisional dengan sentuhan kontemporer. Gaya ini dikenal dengan sebutan "Jek Dong", yang berasal dari kata "Jek" (keprak) dan "Dong" (kendang dan gong besar), mencerminkan perpaduan antara suara keprak dan gamelan dalam pertunjukannya.	Wayang Gagrag Porongan Wayang Gagrak Porongan is a performance art form typical of Sidoarjo Regency, East Java, that combines traditional elements with a contemporary touch. This style is known as "Jek Dong", derived from the words 'Jek' (keprak) and "Dong" (large drums and gongs), reflecting the combination of keprak and gamelan sounds in the performance.
4	Reog Cemandi Reog Cemandi adalah kesenian tradisional asli dari Desa Cemandi, Kecamatan Sedati, Kabupaten Sidoarjo, Jawa Timur. Kesenian ini pertama kali muncul pada tahun 1922 sebagai bentuk perlawanan masyarakat terhadap penjajahan Belanda. Diciptakan oleh Dul Katimin, seorang santri asal Pondok Pesantren Sidoresmo Surabaya, Reog Cemandi menggunakan topeng barongan dan kendang sebagai alat untuk menakuti penjajah dan mengusir roh jahat.	Reog Cemandi Reog Cemandi is a traditional art form from Cemandi Village, Sedati District, Sidoarjo Regency, East Java. This art first appeared in 1922 as a form of community resistance to Dutch colonization. Created by Dul Katimin, a student of Surabaya's Sidoresmo Islamic Boarding School, Reog Cemandi uses barongan masks and drums to frighten invaders and drive away evil spirits.

Many of the cultural terms in the source text lacked direct English equivalents, prompting participants to search online or use machine translation to assist in rendering the content appropriately. According to Piña (2024), translating cultural content requires linguistic skill and awareness of symbolic and contextual meanings.

Table 1 presents the examples of translation outcomes. The data show that participants only attempt to apply functional translation principles to a limited extent. Many culturally specific terms and expressions, such as santri, keprak, or gamelan, were left untranslated, indicating that they did not rely on machine translation but made contextual judgments about when to retain source-language terms. This strategy reflects some awareness of the importance of preserving cultural authenticity. However, the absence of explanatory additions or adaptations limited the accessibility of these terms for non-Javanese audiences. Tukhtarova et al. (2021) stated that successful linguocultural translation depends on the translator's ability to identify implicit cultural meanings and apply appropriate techniques to convey national identity.

As Al-Jarf (2021) emphasized, helping students produce coherent translations involves focusing on contextual meaning rather than literal word-for-word rendering. Translators must develop strategies to infer and convey meaning based on context in real-world translation scenarios. While digital tools like Google Translate helped them generate rough drafts, their reliance on such tools may have limited their engagement with deeper cultural adaptation. Daems (2022) observed that while many literary translators are aware of basic technologies, newer developments such as adaptive machine translation remain underutilized, despite their potential value in translating cultural content.

The translation outcomes align with prior studies highlighting the difficulty of conveying nuanced meanings in museum settings. Failure to adapt cultural terms appropriately can compromise a museum text's effectiveness (Kamilia et al., 2024; Khrisna et al., 2023). Zagood et al. (2023) also found that the translators often struggle to find cultural equivalents, especially when expressions are unrecognizable or nonexistent in the target culture. In this study, the dominance of literal translation—although understandable at the beginner level—still poses a barrier to cross-cultural communication. Literal renditions of terms often failed to convey cultural depth due to a reliance on literal rendering or machine-assisted tools. It aligns with the findings of Nurpermadi et al. (2020) that literal translation remains dominant in museum captions, even though more culturally adaptive strategies are needed for clarity and resonance.

Conclusion
While the translation practice marks a promising step toward strengthening cultural tourism, the participants require further support and training. Translation practice can serve as a strategic tool for cultural preservation and expanding public access to and appreciation of regional heritage nationally and internationally. A deeper understanding of functional translation ensures that local cultural content resonates with global audiences. For future studies, it is recommended that structured proofreading or editorial review stages follow the translation process to enhance the readability, cultural accuracy, and display readiness of translated texts. This additional step would help ensure the translations meet a professional standard suitable for public exhibition and cross-cultural engagement.

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