

EFFECTIVENESS OF TRANSLATED MUSEUM LABELS AND VISITOR ENGAGEMENT: A STUDY OF TEHRAN MUSEUMS

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ABSTRACT: Museums are important educational spaces where exhibit labels serve as key tools for conveying information. For labels to be effective, they must capture visitors' attention, sustain their interest, and encourage reading. According to Bitgood (2010), visitor attention progresses through three stages: capture, focus, and engagement, with label effectiveness contributing to the engagement stage. This study evaluates the effectiveness of 706 Persian labels and their English translations across 14 museums in Tehran, employing a framework of 23 effectiveness criteria. To further examine how label effectiveness translates into actual visitor behavior, an observational phase was conducted in two museums, where local and foreign visitors' reading behaviors were analyzed in relation to the most effective labels in their respective languages. This phase aimed to assess whether highly effective labels successfully engaged visitors.

KEYWORDS: Effectiveness, Exhibit label, Museum Translation, Visitor Engagement

1. Introduction

Museums play a crucial role in education, particularly in expanding public knowledge of the past (Kidd, Cairns, Drago and Ryall, 2016). As Rounds (2004, p. 50) states, "In the museum, people experience the world through material representations", with exhibits serving as primary examples of such representations. A museum exhibit is a physical or virtual presentation designed for public display and can take various forms (Serrell, 2015). Monti and Keene (2016) argued that visually captivating exhibits are more effective in attracting visitor attention than those that are less visually appealing.

In addition to exhibits, most museums provide a variety of exhibit labels, which contribute to visitor engagement through their content (written verbal text), structure (organization, information density, etc.), presentation format (sound, video, etc.), and context (environmental conditions such as lighting) (Strachan, 2017). While visually engaging exhibits capture initial attention, labels play a critical role in sustaining visitor engagement. The effectiveness of labels can be attributed to a variety of linguistic and non-linguistic elements and is directly tied to how well they adhere to their intended functions which is attracting visitors' attention and engaging them with the content (Screven, 1992). Indicators of engagement include reading the label and deriving educational value from it. Eliason (2007) emphasized that enhancing label effectiveness ultimately strengthens the educational value of a museum and can be achieved through the application of attention-related principles. However, Gammon (1999) reported that most museum visitors tend to

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avoid reading exhibit labels. Hein (1998, p. 14) similarly observed that “the visitor’s interaction with labels is part of a larger whole to which a visitor both responds and contributes”. Screven (1992) further identified text structure as a crucial factor influencing readability and comprehension, noting that syntactic and semantic complexity affects how well visitors process label content. He proposed strategies to improve readability, including chunking text, using attention-grabbing headlines, incorporating specific and descriptive language, and employing a personal and active voice. Bitgood, Dukes, and Abbey (2006) also found that visitors were more likely to read shorter labels than longer ones, suggesting that text length has a greater impact on engagement than the perceived level of interest in the content itself.

To ensure accessibility for diverse audiences, museums must prioritize language and translation as part of their communication strategies (Ravelli, 1996). Museums function as contact zones and translation zones where multilingual exchange is central (Neather, 2025, p. 164). Translation within museums operates on two levels: first, museums themselves serve as cultural translations, mediating knowledge for their audiences (Neather, 2020, p. 306); second, translation occurs within the museum through textual materials, exhibits, visuals, and other signage, all of which contribute to a broader process of cultural translation (Neather, 2020). Rizzo (2022) reinforced this perspective, describing museums as metaphorical sites of translation where cultures are interpreted and presented through multimodal displays tailored to specific audiences. Liao (2018) classified museum translation into five key functions: the informative function, which focuses on content delivery; the interactive function, which fosters visitor engagement and reduces institutional distance; the political function, which reflects institutional ideology; the social-inclusive function, which promotes language equality; and the exhibitiv function, which showcases translation as an object.

Jiménez Hurtado, Seibel, Soler Gallego, and Herrero Díaz (2012) have advocated collaboration between museums, translators, and interpreters to enhance accessibility. However, such collaboration requires addressing knowledge gaps. While museum professionals possess domain-specific expertise, translators may lack familiarity with specialized terminology, necessitating the use of glossaries, feedback mechanisms, and in-museum translator training to improve communication and accuracy (Neather, 2012b).

Liao (2015) observed that museum translation research has traditionally focused on ensuring equivalence, primarily aiming to identify and address deficiencies in translated texts. Yu and Hirzel (2022) supported this claim, noting that studies in this field have largely prioritized micro-level linguistic issues, such as translation errors, while often overlooking macro-level cultural considerations, including museum roles and text styles, despite their significant influence. Research on museum translation can be broadly categorized, according to their primary focus, into two main orientations: textual aspects and multimodal/semiotic aspects. The first category includes studies on quality assessment and translation accuracy, with notable contributions from Huang and Lei (2024), Herianto (2017), Nurpermadi, Hartono, and Sutopo (2020), and Sun (2023). This category also

encompasses investigations into linguistic shifts and translation changes, as explored by Deny (2018) and Gijssels (2020), as well as analyses of intertextuality, such as those conducted by Neather (2012a). The second category focuses on multimodal and semiotic elements, particularly the interaction between visual and verbal components, as examined by Neather (2008) and Jiang and Zhu (2018). Additionally, research on the spatial dimensions of translation in museum settings has been explored by Liao (2019) and Spiessens and Decroupet (2023). Collectively, these studies underscore the complex nature of museum translation and its role in facilitating visitor comprehension and engagement.

Despite the growing body of research on museum translation, existing studies have predominantly focused on micro-level issues, particularly translation quality, accuracy, and linguistic equivalence. These approaches tend to analyze written text in isolation, often overlooking broader factors that shape how labels function within museum environments. The present study addresses this gap by adopting a broader notion of effectiveness—one that encompasses not only the wording of the label but also its design, structure, and mode of presentation. This corresponds to Neather's (2025) micro level of the 'individual object level' in museum studies. At the same time, by incorporating visitor experience and examining how labels operate within their physical and exhibition settings, the study also engages with macro-level considerations, aligning with Neather's (2025) 'exhibition level'. In doing so, the study extends the analytical perspective beyond text alone, integrating both micro and macro viewpoints to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how labels function within the spatial and experiential context of museum settings.

Building on this foundation, the present study examines how Persian-to-English translation influences the effectiveness of museum labels by analyzing their linguistic and non-linguistic features as well as their performance in visitor engagement. The study compares Persian labels with their English translations to assess how the translation process influences the overall effectiveness of the labels. This analysis seeks to identify which specific criteria of label effectiveness are most impacted by translation. In addition to label comparison, the study includes an observational phase, testing the real-world performance of the most effective labels in each language through local and foreign visitor interactions. By evaluating how these labels function in the context of museum visits, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of the factors that contribute to label effectiveness. The research questions guiding this investigation are as follows:

1. How does translation from Persian into English impact the overall effectiveness of labels in Tehran museums?
2. Which specific criteria of label effectiveness undergo the most significant changes during the translation process in Tehran museums?
3. How do the labels identified as most effective perform in authentic museum environments, as observed through visitor engagement?

2. Method

To address these research questions, the study adopted a two-phase approach for data collection and analysis. In the first phase, 32 museums in Tehran were initially visited. Based on specific criteria – including the presence of bilingual Persian-English labels, the inclusion of diverse label types, a notable volume of domestic and international visitors as evidenced by online reviews, and permission to take photographs – 14 museums were selected for detailed analysis. The selected museums, listed below, collectively provided a dataset of 1,412 labels (706 in Persian and their 706 English translations):

1. The Museum of Royal Kitchen
2. Omidvar Brothers Museum
3. Takht-e-Marmar Royal Terrace (Marble Throne)
4. Howzkhaneh (The Pool House)
5. Shams-ol-Emareh (The Building of the Sun)
6. Diamond Hall
7. Main Part of the Golestan Palace
8. Niavaran Private Palace
9. Mellat Museum Palace (White House)
10. The Exclusive Library of the Niavaran Palace
11. Shah Exclusive Cars Museum
12. Tehran Municipality Museum
13. Hall of Fame Museum
14. World Art Museum

These fourteen museums were revisited to photograph bilingual labels for detailed analysis. The photographed labels were categorized into five distinct types based on their purpose and length (Serrell, 2015): ‘introductory labels’, which orient visitors by summarizing the museum’s primary themes and layout; ‘object identification labels’, which provide basic details such as the maker and date of individual exhibits; ‘caption labels’, which offer additional context or interpretation for specific items; ‘group labels’, which describe multiple related exhibits; and ‘wall texts’, which deliver comprehensive overviews of exhibitions and their overarching themes.

To evaluate the effectiveness of the Persian labels and their English translations, the Effectiveness Measurement Framework was developed, grounded in Bitgood’s psychological model (2000), which identifies factors enhancing visitor attention and label effectiveness. This framework was further informed by guidelines from Serrell (2015), Screven (1992) and Monti and Keene (2016). The framework comprises two primary components: 1) Minimizing Reading Effort, and 2) Maximizing Cognitive-Emotional Arousal. The first component evaluates the cognitive load required to read a label. Effective labels minimize this load, as excessive effort leads to fatigue, and reduces initial motivation and the ability to maintain attention. This component encompasses 9 features with 16

associated criteria. The second component examines a label’s ability to provoke thought and spark interest. Engaging labels enhance visitor interaction by fostering meaningful connections with exhibits. This component encompasses 5 features with 7 associated criteria.

In total, the Effectiveness Measurement Framework encompasses 23 criteria for assessing label effectiveness. Details of the features and criteria for both components are provided in Tables 1 and 2, which include descriptions and scoring methods for each criterion. All 1,412 labels were scored based on their adherence to the 23 criteria, receiving 1 point for meeting a criterion and 0 for not meeting it.

Each Persian label was then compared with its English translation for effectiveness. In many instances both languages appeared together on a single board or paper. In such cases the Persian and English labels were treated as independent entities and counted separately.

In the Effectiveness Measurement Framework, the features and criteria are drawn from Bitgood (2000), Serrell (2015), Screven (1992), and Monti and Keene (2016). However, the scoring method applied to each criterion is original and has been developed by the authors of the present paper.

Table 1. Effectiveness Measurement Framework: 1) Minimizing Reading Effort

No.	Features	Criteria	Description	Scoring
A	Chunking	1. Content Chunking	Paragraphs exceeding 50 words should be divided into smaller, manageable chunks. Each chunk should consist of a single paragraph no longer than 50 words. For labels without paragraphs, each independent sentence or phrase is treated as a separate chunk.	Labels with chunked content score 1; others score 0.
		2. Acceptable Word Count per Chunk	Chunks should be limited to 50 words or less to increase the likelihood of being read.	If the average words per chunk is under 50, the score is 1; if over 50, the score is 0.
B	Proximity to the Exhibit	3. Acceptable Placement Height	Labels should be positioned no higher than two meters to ensure they are noticed.	Labels below two meters score 1; those above score 0.
		4. Acceptable Placement Distance	Labels should be within one meter of the exhibit to allow simultaneous viewing and reading.	Labels within one meter of the exhibit score 1; those beyond score 0.
C	Ease of Cognitive Processing	5. Use of Bullets	Information in short phrases, functioning as bullet points, is more effective even without the “•” mark.	Labels with bullet points score 1; those without score 0.
		6. Use of Pictures, Diagrams and Graphics	Visual aids such as pictures, diagrams, and graphics complement text and engage visitors with informative visuals.	Labels with visuals score 1; those without score 0.
D	Figure-Ground Contrast	7. Acceptable Color Contrast	Figure-ground contrast refers to the color difference between text and its background. High contrast improves readability and attracts attention. To assess contrast, Coolers’ contrast checker is used, with ratings of ‘Very Poor’, ‘Poor’, ‘Good,’ ‘Very Good’, and ‘Super’. Only text-background combinations rated ‘Super’ or	Labels with a text-background contrast rated ‘Super’ or ‘Very Good’ score 1; those rated ‘Very Poor’, ‘Poor’, or ‘Good’ score 0.

No.	Features	Criteria	Description	Scoring
			'Very Good' meet the criterion. If the background is not monochrome, the dominant color is evaluated.	
E	Minimized Sensory Overload	8. Acceptable Word Count in Labels	To avoid overwhelming visitors, label word counts should match their purpose: Introductory (50-150 words), Object Identification (1-20 words), Caption (20-75 words), Group (20-150 words), and Wall text (300-800 words).	Labels score 1 if their word count falls within the optimal range for their type; otherwise, they score 0.
F	Minimized Syntactic Complexity	9. Acceptable Word Count in Sentences	Labels should have an average sentence length of under 30 words, and phrases or text blocks should also average fewer than 30 words.	If the average sentence length is under 30 words, the score is 1; if over 30, the score is 0.
		10. Absence of Non-Informative Content	Labels should consist of only informative and meaningful sentences and phrases, avoiding non-informative content, concluding phrases, repetition, and meaningless structures.	Labels score 1 if they contain no non-informative content; if they include any, they score 0.
		11. Absence of Subordinate or Relative Clause	Labels should use simple, straightforward sentences, avoiding subordinate or relative clauses.	Labels score 1 if they contain no subordinate or relative clauses; otherwise, they score 0.
		12. Absence of Passive Voice	Active structures are easier to understand, so avoiding passive voice can improve label effectiveness.	Labels score 1 if they avoid passive voice; if they use passive voice, they score 0.
G	Minimized Semantic Complexity	13. Absence of Vague or Technical Word	Vague or technical words can be difficult for readers to understand without clarification. If a label contains an unclear or potentially technical term, it should be searched online to identify its field. The word should then be checked in a relevant field's dictionary, and if found, it is considered a technical term.	Labels score 1 if they contain no technical words or if technical words are defined. Labels without definitions for technical words score 0.
		14. Absence of Abstract Language	Labels should prioritize concrete, tangible words over abstract terms like 'justice' or 'courage', as abstract language is harder to understand. While abstract words with commonly understood meanings are acceptable, those with highly variable interpretations or meanings not widely shared are deemed unacceptable.	Labels score 1 if all content uses concrete or easily understandable abstract words; otherwise, they score 0.
H	Absence of Conflicting Message	15. Absence of Conflicting Message	Discrepancies between what visitors see and read should be avoided.	Labels score 1 if they contain no conflicting messages; if they do, they score 0.
I	Good Lighting	16. Good Lighting	Labels should be positioned in lighting that is neither too dim to render the text unreadable nor too bright to cause reading difficulties. To ensure consistent natural lighting, all labels were analyzed and photographed between 1 PM and 3 PM. The photographer maintained a distance of less than 1 meter from the labels, as distance can affect the perceived impact of lighting.	Labels score 1 if the lighting is optimal; if the lighting is too dim or excessively bright, they score 0.

Table 2. Effectiveness Measurement Framework: 2) Maximizing Cognitive-Emotional Arousal

No.	Features	Criteria	Description	Scoring
J	Presence of Questions	17. Presence of Questions	Labels that ask questions can effectively engage visitors and encourage them to read.	Labels score 1 if they contain questions; otherwise, they score 0.
K	Misconception Confrontation	18. Confronting Misconceptions	Addressing misconceptions, highlighting key points, providing additional details, and explaining rationales can enhance interest.	Labels score 1 if they address misconceptions; otherwise, they score 0.
L	Good Writing Style	19. Use of Analogy	Analogies, which compare unfamiliar concepts to more familiar ones, can improve label effectiveness by making the information more relatable and easier to understand.	Labels score 1 if they contain analogies; otherwise, they score 0.
		20. Balance between Formality and Informality	Labels are more effective when they adopt an approachable tone, balancing informality and formality. The words used should be neither too formal nor too informal, with the level of formality assessed using the Oxford Learner's Dictionary online.	Labels score 1 if they do not include overly formal or informal words; otherwise, they score 0.
		21. Absence of Alliteration, Poetry and Humor	Alliteration, poetry, and humor in labels can be risky, as they may not appeal to all visitors and could diminish the labels' effectiveness.	Labels score 1 if they do not contain alliteration, poetry, or humor; otherwise, they score 0.
M	Instruction on What to Look for and What to Do	22. Instruction on What to Look for and What to Do	Effective labels guide visitors, instructing them on what to look for or do, and encourage engagement by prompting them to alternate between the label and the exhibit.	Labels score 1 if they provide instructions on what to look for and do; otherwise, they score 0.
N	Absence of Subjective Comment	23. Absence of Subjective Comment	Labels should remain neutral and avoid subjective comments. If subjective remarks are included, they should be supported by logical reasoning to encourage objective thinking and enhance effectiveness.	Labels score 1 if they avoid subjective content or justify subjective remarks. They score 0 if subjective content lacks justification.

The scoring was carried out by a single coder; however, to address reliability concerns, the coder re-examined a subset of labels after the initial scoring round to assess intra-coder reliability. After scoring, each Persian label was compared with its English counterpart to assess changes in effectiveness. The study then proceeded to its second phase: an observational phase designed to investigate visitor engagement with museum exhibit labels, focusing on both foreign and Iranian visitors. This phase was informed by Bitgood's (2010) framework, which identifies three stages of visitor attention: capture, focus, and engagement. In the capture stage, attention is initially unfocused, driven by strong stimuli or goal-directed scanning, such as approaching an exhibit. In the focus stage, attention narrows to a single exhibit, influenced by factors like isolation, though this level of attention lasts only briefly. The engagement stage, which was the central focus of this study, means deeper involvement with the exhibit content, drawing on sensory, mental, and emotional processes that require sustained concentration. The indicator of engagement is reading labels. The objective of this phase was to determine whether the labels identified as 'most

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effective' genuinely captured visitors' attention and prompted them to engage with the provided information; i.e. whether the visitors actually read the texts.

The *Omidvar Brothers Museum* and the *Mellat Museum Palace* were selected for this phase due to the higher number of foreign visitors at these museums during the data collection period. The study focused on the labels identified as most effective in the first phase. At the *Omidvar Brothers Museum*, three Persian labels scored 21 out of 23, with their English translations achieving the same effectiveness score. These Persian labels were used to observe Iranian visitors, while the corresponding English versions were used for foreign visitors.

At the *Mellat Museum Palace*, one Persian label scored 17 out of 23, making it the most effective label at this museum, but its English translation did not achieve a comparable score. Therefore, only the Persian label was used for Iranian visitors. Among the English labels, one scored 17 out of 23, but its corresponding Persian label scored lower. As a result, only the English label was used for observing foreign visitors.

Data collection took place over two days, beginning with Iranian visitors. For each effective Persian label, researchers spent 45 minutes observing Iranian visitors who engaged with the label and read it. After each visitor finished viewing the label, they were asked, "Did you read the label for this exhibit?" This question was intended to confirm that the visitors had indeed engaged with the label's content. Direct questioning was integrated with researchers' observational data to mitigate researcher bias and limit potential inaccuracies in self-reported information. The same process was then repeated for the three effective English labels, with foreign visitors observed in the same manner. In total, 111 Iranian visitors and 24 foreign visitors were observed.

3. Data Analysis

The effectiveness of 1,412 museum labels was evaluated using the 23-criterion effectiveness measurement framework (see Tables 1 and 2), with each criterion scored as 1 if met and 0 if not. While all labels were assessed against all criteria, the examples presented here (1–9) focus on one or two criteria each for clarity. A case of visitor observation is also included (example 10) to illustrate the application of the approach.

Example 1

The first example is an 'object identification label' from *The Exclusive Library of the Niavaran Palace* (Figure 1) where both the Persian and English labels are presented together in one frame. This label is examined here based on criterion 5 (use of bullets) and criterion 15 (absence of conflicting message).

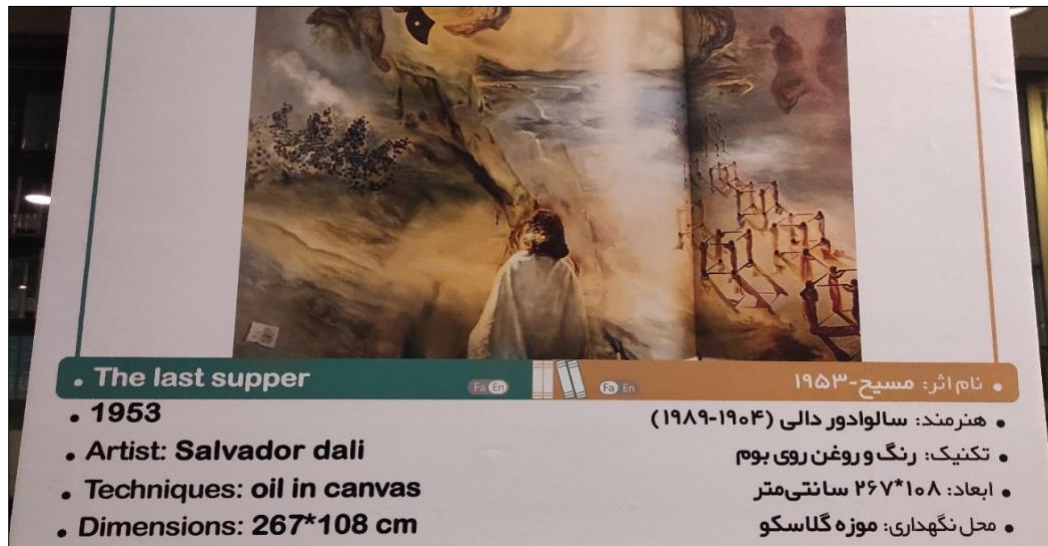


Figure 1. Object identification labels from *The Exclusive Library of the Niavaran Palace*

Presenting information in bullet points is generally more engaging and easier to scan than using paragraphs. Both the Persian and English labels in Figure 1 present the information in bullet points, so both labels receive a score of 1 for criterion 5.

However, when evaluated against criterion 15, which requires labels to avoid creating discrepancies between what visitors see and read, both labels score 0. The Persian label inaccurately identifies the painting as 1953-مسیح (Christ-1953), a title that does not match the depicted artwork. The text implies that the painting portrays Christ, but the image does not support this claim, resulting in a conflicting message. A Google Lens search confirmed that the correct title of the painting is “Galacidalacidesoxyribonucleicacid”. Similarly, the English label refers to the painting as “The Last Supper”, which differs from both the Persian label and the actual title of the painting. As a result, the English label also receives a score of 0 for criterion 15. Such discrepancies may result from insufficient post-editing. Although museum staff confirmed that a human translator produced the English labels, the lack of thorough post-editing could have allowed inconsistencies between the text and images to persist.

Example 2

This example analyzes an object identification label from the *Main Part of the Golestan Palace* (Figure 2) based on criterion 8, which evaluates whether a label’s word count matches its purpose. A label is considered effective if its word count falls within the optimal range for its type. The Persian label and its English translation in Figure 2 are both classified as ‘object identification labels’, which should contain between 1 and 20 words. Since both labels meet this criterion, they each receive a score of 1, indicating that effectiveness is preserved after translation.

The labels are also assessed against criterion 22, which requires effective labels to guide visitors by instructing them on what to observe or do. The Persian label directs visitors to examine the design of the dishes, which feature floral and avian motifs, thereby making

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it effective and earning a score of 1. However, this detail is omitted in the English translation, rendering the English label ineffective for this criterion and resulting in a score of 0.

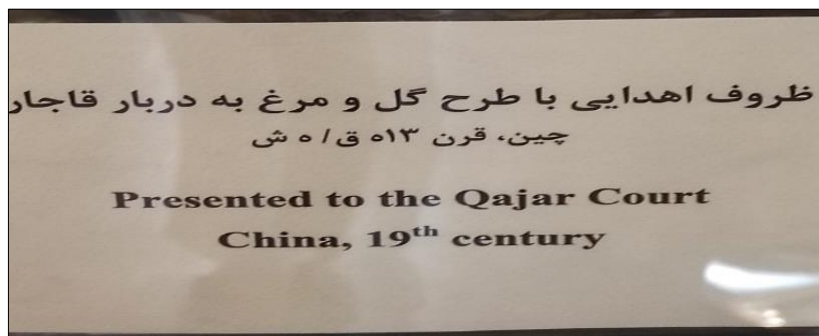


Figure 2. Object identification labels from the *Main Part of the Golestan Palace*

Example 3

The English and Persian labels in Figure 3 are group labels from the *Niavaran Private Palace*. These labels are evaluated based on criterion 4 (acceptable placement distance) and criterion 13 (absence of vague or technical terms).

To enhance the user experience, effective labels should be placed less than one meter away from the associated exhibit. In Figure 3, the group label corresponds to multiple exhibits, all located more than one meter away. As a result, both the English and Persian labels fail to meet criterion 4, receiving a score of 0.

The use of technical terms can hinder visitors' understanding and may discourage engagement with the content. To maintain effectiveness, technical terms should either be avoided or clearly defined. In the Persian label, the term لیتوگرافی (lithography) is a technical term explained with the parenthetical definition چاپ سنگی (stone printing), improving comprehension for Persian visitors and earning a score of 1 for criterion 13. In contrast, the English translation uses the term "Lithography", a technical term in visual arts referring to a planographic printmaking process where a design is drawn onto a flat stone, without providing a definition. This omission may confuse foreign visitors, reducing the label's effectiveness and resulting in a score of 0 for this criterion.

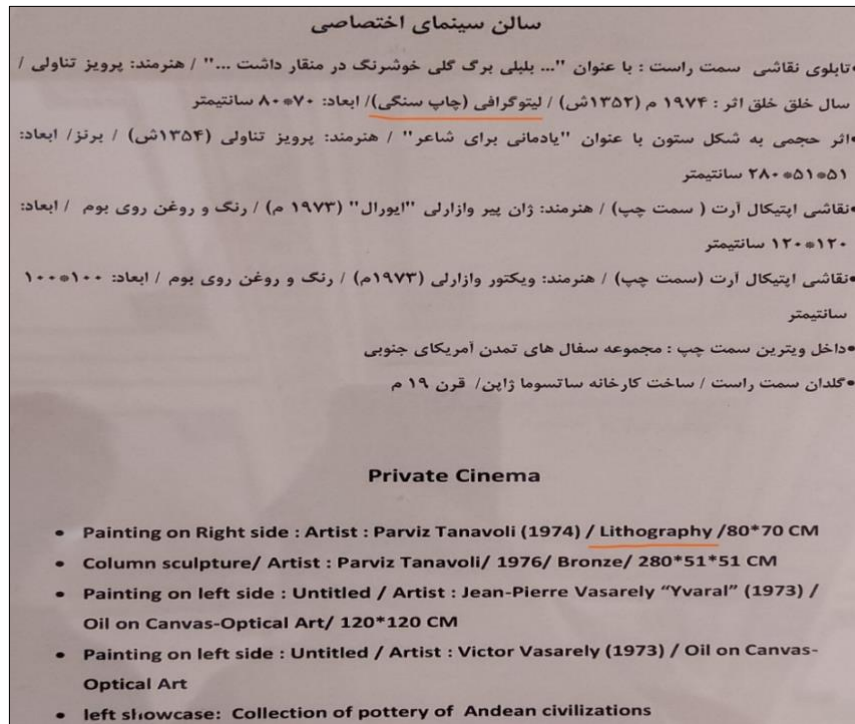


Figure 3. Group labels from the *Niavaran Private Palace*

Example 4

Figure 4 features a wall text from the *Omidvar Brothers Museum*, evaluated based on criterion 3 (acceptable placement height) and criterion 7 (acceptable color contrast). For criterion 4, effective labels should be positioned at a height below two meters to ensure readability and accessibility. The wall text in Figure 4, which includes both Persian and English labels, is placed at a height exceeding two meters, making it challenging for many visitors to read. Consequently, both labels receive a score of 0 for criterion 4.

Regarding criterion 7, the text-background contrast of the labels was assessed using the Colors Contrast Checker.¹ This tool rates contrast levels as 'very poor', 'poor', 'good', 'very good', or 'super'. Only combinations rated 'super' or 'very good' meet this criterion and receive a score of 1. All other ratings result in a score of 0.

To identify the background color in Figure 4, the background color was uploaded to the Color Name Finder.² The identified color was then tested on the Colors Contrast Checker, with white selected as the text color. The results indicated a 'Poor' contrast rating. Thus, both the Persian and English labels fail to meet the required contrast standards and receive a score of 0 for criterion 7.

¹ <https://colors.co/contrast-checker/000000-e6dbac>

² <https://colors.artyclick.com/color-name-finder>



Figure 4. Wall Text from *Omidvar Brothers Museum*

Example 5

The fifth example evaluates an object identification label from the *Diamond Hall* (see Figure 5) based on criterion 10 (absence of non-informative content). Non-informative content, such as repetitive phrases or meaningless words, diminishes the effectiveness of labels by failing to convey relevant information. In the Persian label, *مرقع ناصری* refers to the book *Naseri Manuscript* or *Naseri Garment Scrapbook*, which includes designs, calligraphic exercises, and notes by Naser al-Din Shah Qajar. However, its English translation, “Naseri but*”, is both incorrect and meaningless. This mistranslation fails to provide any useful information to foreign visitors, significantly reducing the label’s effectiveness. This likely stems from inadequate post-editing of the machine translation. As a result, the English label receives a score of 0 for this criterion, highlighting its diminished effectiveness compared to the Persian label.

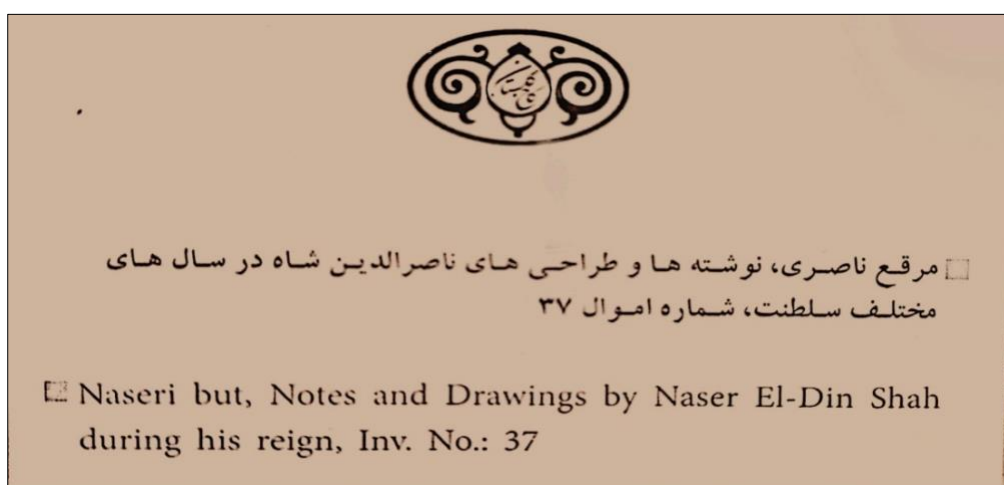


Figure 5. Object Identification Label from the *Diamond Hall*

Example 6

This example features a wall text from the *World Art Museum* (Figure 6). When evaluated against criterion 6, which emphasizes the role of visual enhancements like pictures and diagrams in improving engagement, appeal, and comprehension while reducing the need for lengthy explanations, both the Persian and English labels in Figure 6 receive a score of 0. The labels provide detailed descriptions of various forms of Indian arts, such as handicrafts, but lack accompanying visual aids. This omission reduces their effectiveness in presenting the information clearly and engaging visitors.

The labels are also assessed using criterion 9 (acceptable word count in sentences), which specifies that sentences in labels should not exceed 30 words. Both the Persian label and its English translation meet this requirement, with an average sentence length below 30 words, earning a score of 1 for this criterion.

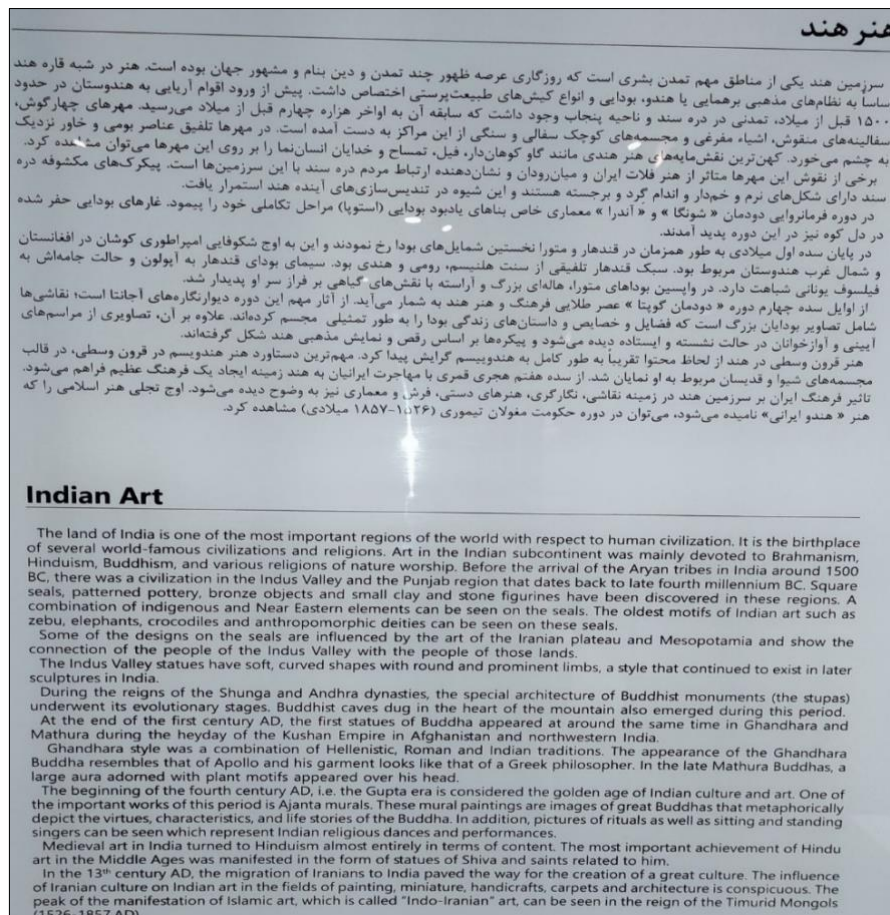


Figure 6. Wall text from the *World Art Museum*

Example 7

Example 7 illustrates a Caption label from *The Hall of Fame Museum* (Figure 7), evaluated against criterion 11 (absence of subordinate or relative clauses) and criterion 12 (absence of passive voice).

Simpler sentences without subordinate or relative clauses are considered more effective, as they enhance readability and reduce cognitive load. The Persian label in Figure

7 achieves a score of 1 for this criterion, as it does not contain such clauses. In contrast, the English label includes two relative clauses: "... visitors of Milad Tower, Azadi Tower, Toghrol Tower, and Shams al Emareh and Bagh-e-Melli, *which are four major historical structures of Tehran city ...*" and "... on each corner of the carpet surrounding Milad Tower at the center, *which is the contemporary symbol of Tehran ...*", resulting in a score of 0.

Active voice is generally more straightforward and easier to understand, making it preferable for effective labels. However, both the Persian label and its English translation in this example use passive structures. The Persian label states, "فرش «هرگردشگر یک گره» در سال ۱۳۹۳ با دو میلیون و ۲۳۲ هزار گره بازدیدکنندگان داخلی و خارجی در برج میلاد بافته شده است. در گوشه های این فرش چهار بنای تاریخی تهران از جمله برج آزادی، برج طغرل، شمس العماره، سردر باغ ملی و در قسمت میانی آن برج میلاد به عنوان نماد نوین پایتخت و تبلور ترکیب اصالت و نمادهای مدرن بافته شده است." [backtranslation: The carpet "One Visitor, One Knot" was woven in the year 1393 [2014] with 2,232,000 knots by Iranian and foreign visitors at Milad Tower.]. Similarly, the English translation follows a passive construction, "'One Visitor, One Knot' handmade carpet, with 2,232,000 knots, was made in 2014 by Iranian and international visitors ...". As a result, both labels receive a score of 0 for criterion 12.

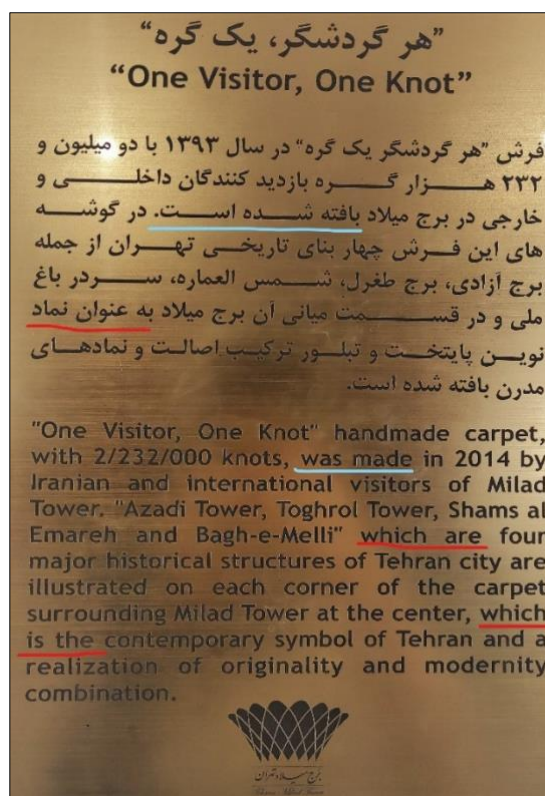


Figure 7. Caption label from *The Hall of Fame Museum*

Example 8

This example examines caption labels from *Mellat Museum Palace* which are evaluated against criterion 16 (good lighting).

Adequate lighting is essential for readability, preventing glare or dimness that forces visitors to adjust their position to read the text. The Persian label in Figure 8 and its English translation in Figure 9 were photographed simultaneously from the same distance (less

than one meter) to assess lighting conditions. Both labels are positioned in a way that the chandelier's light creates glare, making the text difficult to read and requiring visitors to reposition themselves multiple times. Additionally, reflections from the protective glass barrier in front of the display further reduce clarity. Due to these poor lighting conditions, both labels are considered ineffective and receive a score of 0 for this criterion.



Figure 8. Persian caption label from *Mellat Museum Palace*

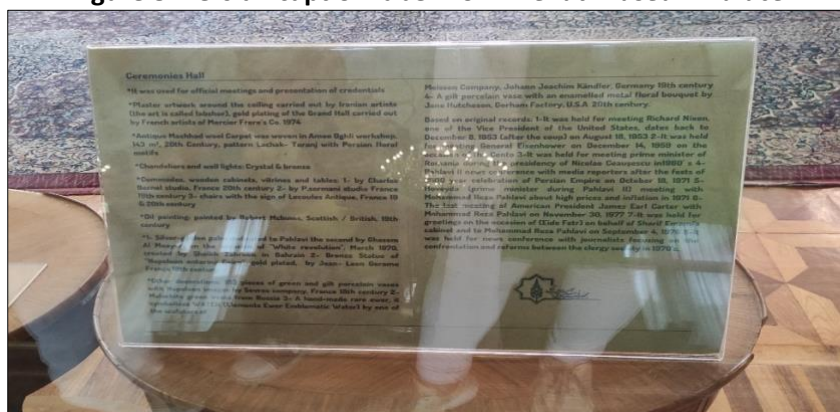


Figure 9. English caption label from *Mellat Museum Palace*

Example 9

This example illustrates group labels from the *Niavaran Private Palace*. The labels are assessed based on criterion 18 (confronting misconceptions). Addressing misconceptions by emphasizing key points and providing supplementary details in parentheses can enhance visitor engagement and clarity.

In Figure 10, the first line of the Persian label states: “اتاق خواب فرحناز (دختر اول محمدرضا) و فرح پهلوی، تولد 1342 شمسی”، which literally translates to: “Farahnaz’s bedroom (the first daughter of Mohammad Reza and Farah Pahlavi, born in 1963)”. Including her parents’ names, birth year, and birth order within the family clarifies which Farahnaz is meant, since the name is common and simply referring to a female’s bedroom could be ambiguous. This added context makes the Persian label more informative, earning it a score of 1. However, these details are omitted in the English label, reducing its effectiveness and resulting in a score of 0.

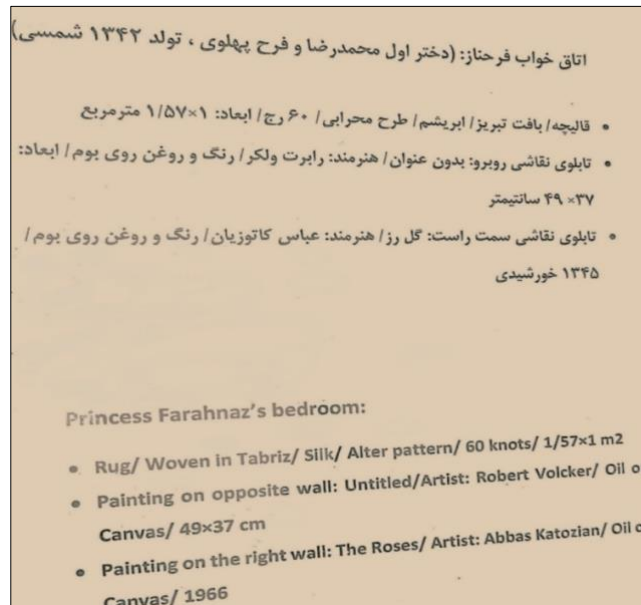


Figure 10. Group labels from the *Niavaran Private Palace*

Example 10

This final example demonstrates the analysis of visitors' behavior in the second phase of the study. The Persian label in Figure 11 was one of the most effective Persian labels at the *Omidvar Brothers Museum*, and the analysis focused on the behavior of Iranian visitors toward this label. The researchers received permission from the museum curator to conduct visitor observations.

The label was placed near the museum's front entrance, and one researcher stood close to it for 45 minutes. During this time, 10 Iranian visitors who entered the museum paused to examine the picture and its label. After each visitor had finished viewing the label and began to move on, the researcher approached them, introduced herself, and asked, "Did you read the label of this exhibit?" Out of the 10 visitors, 8 confirmed that they had read the label. One visitor even mentioned that she had read the label first before looking at the picture. This suggests that the label, based on the effectiveness framework in this study, was not only effective in its design but also engaging in actual practice, as demonstrated by visitor behavior.



Figure 11. Effective Persian label at the *Omidvar Brothers Museum*

4. Results

The effectiveness of 1,412 labels – comprising 706 Persian labels and their 706 English translations – was evaluated using the Effectiveness Measurement Framework. The goal was to determine whether the effectiveness of Persian labels changed after translation by analyzing the scores assigned to each label based on the 23 effectiveness criteria. Table 3 presents these changes for each criterion separately. Figures in red indicate a decrease in effectiveness after translation, figures in green indicate an increase, and zero signifies no change.

Table 3. Changes in label effectiveness after translation

No.	Criteria	Criterion satisfaction percentage in Persian labels	Criterion satisfaction percentage in English labels	Changes after Translation
1	Content Chunking	97.16%	95.89%	- 1.27%
2	Acceptable Word Count per Chunk	95.46%	92.20%	- 3.26%
3	Acceptable Placement Height	98.72%	98.72%	0
4	Acceptable Placement Distance	86.82%	86.82%	0
5	Use of Bullets	58.07%	57.93%	- 0.14%
6	Use of Pictures, Diagrams and Graphics	19.68%	19.68%	0
7	Acceptable Color Contrast	96.45%	96.45%	0
8	Acceptable Word Count	58.07%	57.08%	- 0.99%
9	Acceptable Word Count in Sentences	97.30%	98.15%	+ 0.85%
10	Absence of Non-Informative Content	97.16%	95.04%	- 2.12%
11	Absence of Subordinate or Relative Clause	85.97%	85.26%	- 0.71%
12	Absence of Passive Voice	86.11%	66.99%	- 19.12%
13	Absence of Technical Words	65.58%	71.52%	+ 5.94%
14	Absence of Abstract Language	16.28%	20.11%	+ 3.83%
15	Absence of Conflicting Message	99.43%	99.15%	- 0.28%
16	Good Lighting	71.95%	69.97%	- 1.98%
17	Presence of Questions	0	0	0
18	Confronting Misconceptions	29.88%	26.77%	- 3.11%
19	Use of Analogy	3.25%	2.54%	- 0.71%
20	Balance between Formality and Informality	100%	100%	0
21	Absence of Alliteration, Poetry and Humor	100%	100%	0
22	Instruction on What to Look for and What to Do	47.45%	42.35%	- 5.10%
23	Absence of Subjective Comment	96.17%	96.60%	+ 0.43%

As shown in Table 3, the most significant decline in criterion satisfaction after translation occurred in the “Absence of passive voice” criterion, with a decrease of 19.12%. This suggests that the English labels relied more heavily on passive constructions, which may

reduce clarity and reader engagement. Other notable declines were observed in “Instruction on what to look for and what to do”, “Acceptable word count per chunk”, and “Confronting misconceptions”. These patterns indicate that the English translations tend to present information in longer, less digestible chunks, omit supplementary clarifications that could aid understanding, and provide less explicit guidance for foreign visitors on how to engage with the exhibits. Such omissions could negatively affect visitors’ comprehension and overall museum experience. To mitigate these issues, museum translators should ensure that key elements of effective communication are preserved or even reinforced in the translated labels, while maintaining readability and coherence.

Conversely, the English labels performed better on some criteria. In particular, the labels performed better for “Absence of technical words” and “Absence of abstract language,” indicating that the English labels used more accessible wording and reduced abstract terminology. This likely improved their effectiveness in communicating with a wider audience.

Several criteria remained unchanged after translation, including “Acceptable placement height” and “Acceptable placement distance”. This consistency is expected, as the physical positioning of the labels was identical in both languages, with Persian and English versions typically appearing on the same display boards rather than being placed separately.

It is important to note that a higher criterion satisfaction rate in either the Persian or English labels does not necessarily indicate superior quality. For instance, while the English labels demonstrated greater satisfaction in the “Absence of abstract language” criterion compared to the Persian labels, only 20.11% fully met this criterion. This relatively low percentage highlights the need for improvement in both Persian and English labels to ensure they consistently adhere to all effectiveness criteria. These findings underscore the importance of refining museum labels in both languages to enhance clarity, engagement, and accessibility for diverse audiences.

Figure 12 summarizes the changes in effectiveness after translating Persian labels into English. It shows that in approximately 54% of label pairs, the effectiveness remained unchanged following translation. In 14% of cases, the translation led to an improvement in effectiveness, making the labels more engaging to foreign visitors. However, in about 32% of label pairs, the translation resulted in a decrease in effectiveness, potentially diminishing the museum experience and accessibility for English-speaking visitors. Overall, while some improvements were observed, the results suggest that, on balance, the English labels were less effective than their Persian counterparts. The net effect indicates a reduction in label effectiveness post-translation as the 14% increase cannot fully offset the 32% decrease.

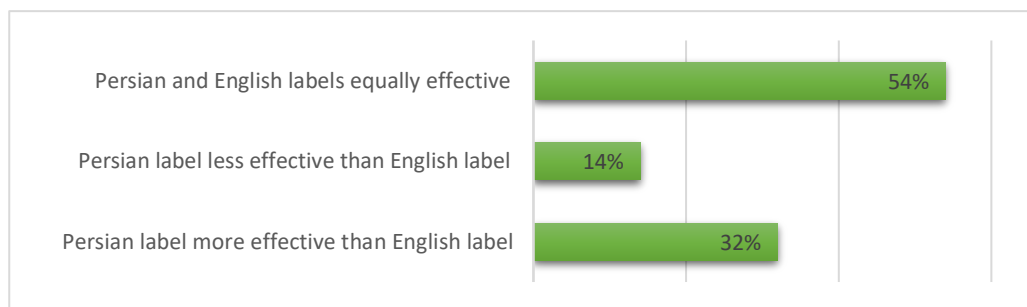


Figure 12. Comparison of effectiveness in 706 Persian-English label pairs

The second phase of the study sought to assess whether the labels identified as most effective in the initial phase performed well in real-world settings. “Most effective” refers to labels that achieved the highest scores out of 23 when evaluated with the effectiveness measurement framework. This phase specifically aimed to determine if these labels successfully captured visitors’ attention and prompted them to engage with the text and read it. Table 4 presents a summary of the overall results from this phase.

Table 4. Number of visitors reading most effective labels

Visitors	<i>Omidvar Brothers Museum</i>	<i>Mellat Museum Palace</i>	Average number of visitors reading most effective labels
Iranian visitors reading most effective Persian labels	41 out of 52 (78.84%)	37 out of 59 (62.71%)	78 out of 111 (70.27%)
Foreign visitors reading most effective English labels	11 out of 14 (78.57%)	8 out of 10 (80%)	19 out of 24 (79.16%)
Total (Iranian and Foreign visitors)			74.71%

The results indicated that approximately 70% of Iranian visitors engaged with the most effective Persian labels, while about 79% of English-speaking foreign visitors interacted with the most effective English labels. These findings provide evidence that the labels deemed effective by the effectiveness measurement framework successfully foster engagement in real-world museum settings. Overall, 74.71% of the visitors observed in this study interacted with and read the most effective labels.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of structural and content-related elements in determining the effectiveness of museum labels. Pireddu (2022) emphasized that quality control in museum translation extends beyond the accurate transfer of information and must also consider how effectively translations engage visitors. Consistent with this view, the present study found that while approximately 74% of visitors interacted with the most effective labels, the level of engagement varied across different label pairs. Moreover, Huang and Lei (2024) stressed the importance of accuracy, conciseness, and

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informativeness in museum translations. The results of this study similarly revealed that nearly 97% of Persian labels and approximately 95% of English labels were free from non-informative content, reinforcing the significance of informativeness as a fundamental criterion for effective museum labels.

However, the study also identified challenges in the translation process. While most labels adhered to the effectiveness criteria, some English labels contained nonsensical phrases, likely due to machine translation errors, which diminished their overall effectiveness. Such issues may stem from financial and staffing constraints faced by museums, as noted by Neather (2025), leading to a reliance on machine translation rather than professional translators. These limitations directly impacted visitor engagement and accessibility, particularly given that label effectiveness decreased in approximately 32% of label pairs after translation. These findings emphasize the need for more rigorous translation practices to ensure that both Persian and English labels maintain their effectiveness and align with visitor expectations.

The results of this study also invite comparison with Gijssels' (2020) research on translation shifts in multilingual texts from the *Red Star Line Museum*. While Gijssels observed a tendency toward increased subjectivity in translated texts, the present study found that English labels, in contrast, were more objective than their Persian counterparts. Similarly, whereas Gijssels noted a decrease in formality in translations, the current study found a more balanced use of formal and informal language. Additionally, while Gijssels reported a greater use of active voice in translations, this study observed a stronger tendency toward passive constructions in English labels. Both studies, however, noted the use of short, easily processed sentences, with the present research showing that English labels were even shorter and more concise. Despite certain improvements, such as a reduction in abstract language in English labels, overall adherence to effectiveness criteria remained insufficient, highlighting the need for continued refinement in museum translation practices.

Previous research has also explored the role of label structure in visitor engagement. McManus (1990), in an observational study at a history museum in London, found that 66% of visitor groups read exhibit labels. Similarly, Borun and Miller (1980) reported that visitors were more likely to read an entire label when it contained only a few lines of text. The present study builds on these findings by focusing on structurally effective labels, demonstrating that the majority of visitors, both Iranian and foreign, engaged with the most effective labels in their respective languages. These results further reinforce the importance of optimizing museum labels for clarity, conciseness, and engagement.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the impact of translation on the effectiveness of museum labels by comparing Persian labels with their English translations across 14 museums in Tehran. The analysis of 1,412 labels (706 Persian labels and their corresponding English translations) revealed that the translation process influences label effectiveness. While more than half

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of the labels retained their effectiveness after translation, a considerable portion (32%) experienced a decline, highlighting the challenges of maintaining clarity, engagement, and accessibility in multilingual museum contexts. In contrast, 14% of the translations demonstrated improvements in effectiveness, indicating that certain translation strategies can enhance visitor experience.

Beyond textual analysis, the study incorporated real-world observations from two museums to validate these findings. Results showed that a majority of visitors engaged with the most effective labels in their respective languages, confirming that well-crafted labels – whether in Persian or English – encourage interaction and contribute to a more meaningful museum experience. However, the variations in effectiveness between Persian and English labels suggest that translation alone is not a neutral process but one that can influence how museum content is perceived and understood.

The findings underscore the need for a more strategic approach to museum label translation – one that goes beyond linguistic accuracy to consider readability, engagement, and accessibility. Given that museum labels serve both informational and experiential functions, curators and translators must work together to ensure that translated texts preserve the intent and impact of the originals. This collaboration is especially important because translation decisions inevitably shape how cultural narratives are framed for diverse audiences, influencing what aspects of history, identity, and memory become foregrounded or obscured. In this sense, the effectiveness of a translated label is intertwined with broader socio-cultural dynamics, and acknowledging these implications helps ensure that museums communicate their stories in ways that are both accurate and culturally responsible. To achieve this, curators can clarify the interpretive intent and essential content, while translators adapt this material into clear, culturally resonant language. Through this joint process, translated labels are more likely to retain the purpose and impact of the originals. Additionally, the role of non-linguistic factors, such as layout and visual presentation, should not be overlooked, as these elements contribute to how visitors process and engage with exhibit information.

Future research could explore the effectiveness of other museum communication formats, such as audio guides and digital displays, to develop a more comprehensive understanding of multilingual museum accessibility. By refining translation practices and broadening the scope of label design considerations, museums can create more inclusive and engaging experiences for diverse audiences.

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