

It's All Greek to Me:

How Museums Use Language to Connect to Community

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Abstract

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Museology

How museums engage with visitors who speak different languages is seldom looked at in museum literature. The goal of this research was to examine the characteristics of museums who are using non-English and non-Spanish language within the museum. To accomplish this a qualitative multiple method approach was used. Five semi-structured interviews were conducted with museum professionals from four different institutions. In addition, document analysis was used on the museum's website. The research suggests that museums who want to incorporate language to engage with communities should engage in conversations and build relationships with that community. Asking the community how or if they would use bilingual exhibit panels, and asking for help from the community to accomplish the museum's linguistic goals are some examples that museums can do to develop those relationships.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

“The relationship between language and power makes it a world of unequal languages.

Languages of the marginalized people are treated with discrimination at all levels in society, stripped of their instrumental significance... [a] child internalizes that some languages are more prestigious, more useful and [more] powerful than others.” Ajit Mohanty

Over 300 languages are spoken in the US (US Census Bureau, n.d.). Trying to be accessible to even a portion of these languages is a daunting task for museums. Translating signs and hiring multilingual staff is an expensive and time consuming task. However, something gets left out when museums separate language from culture. Adamantia Koliou argues that “language is an inseparable element of the history and of the culture of peoples which museums have to protect and conserve for future generations,” (Koliou, 1997, p. 72). The 2013 American Community Service survey, produced by The Census Bureau, found that 61.8 million, nearly 20%, of American residents speak a language other than English at home (Camarota & Zeigler, 2014). In order to better serve the growing portion of Americans who speak a language other than English, museums need to start looking at how using language in the museum can build a connection with communities outside of the typical museum visitor. The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of museums that are using language deliberately and strategically to build a community connection in non-English and non-Spanish speaking communities.

20% of Americans speak another language besides English at home. The Association of Science-Technology Center’s (ASTC) *Multilingual Interpretation in Science Centers and Museums* study, found that “only 10% of US based institutions [111 responded to the survey] offer most or all visitor information in more than one language.”(Garcia-Luis et al., 2011, p. 4 , 7). Figures are better for international museums. The same ASTC study found that “55% of

international institutions [33 responded to the survey] offer most or all of their visitor information in more than one language.”(Garcia-Luis, McDonald, & Migus, 2011, p. 4, 7). This is definitely an improvement, but it still means that many non-English speaking visitors are being left out of the conversation.

American museums fear that having bilingual, let alone multilingual, signage will confuse patrons and clutter exhibits (Serrell, 2015, p. 106). Additionally, it is a difficult, time consuming task to create a bilingual exhibit. There are many benefits to incorporating another language. The Bilingual Exhibition Research Initiative (BERI) study found that bilingual interpretation was able to facilitate intergenerational engagement. A grandparent and grandchild who may have spoken different languages were able to interact together. As the report says, “when successful these interactions elicit a sense of inclusion and cultural validation in addition to familial bonding” (Yalowitz, Garibay, Renner, & Plaza, 2013, p. 36).

When an American museum does include another language, it is typically Spanish. ASTC found that 92% of the US institutions who provided another language used Spanish (Garcia-Luis et al., 2011, p.7). Spanish is the second most common language spoken in the US so providing content in Spanish is understandable. However, Spanish may not be the best fit in every institution, and that leaves many communities voiceless in museums. The literature mirrors this trend. There are some papers written about incorporating non-Spanish languages into museums, but the majority of the sources talk only about Spanish speakers. Every language provides its own challenges both in translation and in how to connect with the community that uses the language. The Discovery Children’s Museum of San Jose discovered this when they attempted to use techniques that were previously successful with the Spanish community with the Vietnamese

community. Things as simple as marketing and advertising had to be readjusted (Martin & Jennings, 2015, p. 87).

Building a community in a museum is not an easy or quick process. There are many barriers for a museum to be accessible to underrepresented people. By looking at and incorporating other, non-English and non-Spanish languages, into museums then museums can start building relationships with other communities. Incorporating more languages is only the first step (N. O. Renner, 2003, p. 13). It shows that the museum is thinking and cares about the community. Museums show where we all come from, where we are, and where we are all heading. By incorporating other languages museums are opening their doors and saying we want you to join us. Your culture is valuable and important. One ASTC study participant summarized it best, “multilingual exhibits aren’t just a way to make the content available. It demonstrates that the Museum is for them” (N. Renner, Garibay, Plaza, & Yalowitz, 2015, p. 71).

The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of museums that are using language deliberately and strategically to build a community connection in non-English and non-Spanish speaking communities. The following questions helped guide the research:

1. How and why did you pick the languages that are offered in the museum?
2. In what ways are you providing for non-English/non-Spanish patrons?
3. What are any major take a ways or advice for others interested in pursuing multilingual/translingual/bilingual work?

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Linguistics

Schools have been discussing how students should be using their native languages since the 1970's. The Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) enacted a policy on Student's Right to their Own Language in 1974. This policy said that students should have the ability to use their own language in their works. As they note, "the claim that any one dialect [or language] is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another... A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial variety will preserve its heritage of dialects [or languages]," (Conference on College Composition and Communication, 1975). However, how this should look is still being debated.

More recently the discussion has focused on the idea of multilingualism and translingualism. Multilingual, in the linguistic context, means providing more than one language, but keeping both languages separate. Translingual is more of a negotiated process. This allows individuals and groups to create their own codes and develop their use of English on their own terms. The multilingual approach is seen as the worse choice between the two. Bruce Horner describes multilingualism as pluralized monolingualism (Horner, 2016). Suresh Canagarajah similarly writes, "the term multilingual typically conceives of the relationship between languages in an additive manner...different language groups occupying their own niches in separation from others," (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 7). This doesn't disrupt the power dynamic between the languages.

Linguists see language as an ever changing process rather than a rigid system. In his pushback from monolingualism Bruce Horner says "monolingualist ideology assumes languages

themselves to be stable, uniform and discrete ‘codes’ that can be readily taught and learned” (Horner, 2016, p. 102). This is where the translingual approach comes into play. In discussing translingualism, Canagarajah suggests that, “in translingual practice, there is mutual respect and engagement on all sides of the production/reception continuum,” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 131). In this context the engagement refers to the co-creation of mutual codes in order to understand each other. For example, in his book Canagarajah describes how different students approached using language. One of the students, Buthainah is trilingual, French, Arabic and English. In the course of her writing class she debated the effectiveness of completely translating poetry and phrases from one language to the other. In the end she chose to leave some aspects untranslated. As Canagarajah notes “this way, she encourages the reader to be more alert and proactive in creating meaning” (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 139). The other students in the class had some initial pushback against not translating everything, but once Buthainah explained the reasons behind her choices the other students understood why she wouldn’t translate parts and were open to it.

An excellent example of translingual philosophy is the case of Lu one of Canagarajah’s students. In Lu’s native language ‘can’ and ‘be able to’ are interchangeable. This is common for other multilingual students who are learning English (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 190). The class of multilingual students discussed various options of words and phrases to use. Most picked whatever felt most comfortable to them. Lu chose to use ‘may be able to,’ but other variations existed in the class. The phrase ‘can able to’ became something of an inside joke within the class (Canagarajah, 2013, p. 191). Creating and understanding shared codes is at the core of translingual philosophy. Most people do this without thinking in most situations. Even among native English speakers there is a wide variety of dialects and codes. There are the larger groups like American English, British English, Indian English, Singaporean English etc, but there are

also other dialects like African American Vernacular English and job focused English. Translingualism allows all of those types to mesh and blend together on an individual to individual level. For example, if a scientist is describing some aspect of cell anatomy they might use all the proper terms and list all of the intricate parts when discussing with another scientist, but if they were talking to an elementary school child they may instead choose to use common terms or descriptions if it becomes obvious that the technical writing is going over the student's head. In both situations they were using English but what was being said was not always understood by both parties.

Bruce Horner argues that multilingualism is just pluralized monolingualism (Horner, 2016). However, the ways intergenerational bilingual families used bilingual signs in the Bilingual Exhibition Research Initiative study was much more similar to a translingual engagement than separated monolingualism. Multilingualism is not a perfect term because of its linguistic baggage, however it is a term that is easily grasped by most people. For the purposes of this paper I will be using the terms multilingual or bilingual interchangeably instead of translingual. Primarily, because multilingual is a more recognizable term than translingual. Museums may use multilingual methods, but they produce translingual results.

## Museums

There are museums interested in doing bilingual/multilingual work, but there is little research on how to best connect to non-English speakers. In 1997 Adamantia Koliou wrote that “the need to have provision in foreign languages is rarely mentioned in the museum literature,” (Koliou, 1997, p. 72). This is still largely the case 20 years after Koliou's piece was written. When research is done, it typically looks at incorporating Spanish. Among the museums that responded to ASTC and the Exploratorium study on multilingualism, 82 used English, 76 used

Spanish and 48 used another language (including German, Braille, French, American Sign Language, Italian, and others). Those responses were just from the museums that used more than one language (Garcia-Luis et al., 2011, p. 12). This study suggests that museums are working with languages other than Spanish, but not a lot is being published about these other languages in museums.

While museums are slowly embracing multilingualism, there does seem to be more and more pressure for museums to use multiple languages. This is especially the case when the exhibit is themed around a specific group associated with a non-English language. One recent example is the exhibit *Paint the Revolution: Mexican Modernism 1910-1950*, which was coproduced by the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City and received criticism for only using English text panels. While the exhibit was in Philadelphia none of the signage or programming was in Spanish. All of the painting titles were in English. The videos that were shown in the gallery had English subtitles when there was someone speaking Spanish, but no Spanish translation when the language was English. This was an exhibit which was going to go up in Mexico after it closed in Philadelphia (Collazo, 2017).

Julie Collazo questioned Mark Castro, the Project Assistant Curator, about why the exhibit was in English only, his response was “partly on space and ‘partly about the ways in which museum visitors interact with text’” (Collazo, 2017). They had done some interviews with patrons and determined “that they neither expected nor would they necessarily use wall text in Spanish” (Collazo, 2017). Philadelphia has a 14% Latinx population (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2016, p. 1), and Mexican culture was at the heart of the exhibit. Collazo questions both Castro and the museums decision not to be bilingual. She writes that “if you’re not asking the right

questions of the right people, it's unlikely the answers will reflect the needs and wants of your target audience" (Collazo, 2017).

While there is limited research, there are strong voices calling for, and emerging research supporting, the use of bilingual signage. In 2013 the Bilingual Exhibit Research Initiative (BERI) looked at 22 different museums that were using bilingual displays. They found that having bilingual signage facilitated intergenerational learning. In a non-bilingual exhibit, adults who speak Spanish need to rely on their children, who speak English, in order to understand everything. This disrupts the typical adult/child power dynamic. However families recorded during the BERI study, bounced back and forth between Spanish and English. This helps encourage language use and builds bonds within the family (Yalowitz et al., 2013). Robert Janes takes this idea one step further. He thinks that "[museums] are perhaps the only public spaces that are equipped to support intercultural and intergenerational dialogue" (Shelley, 2015).

The *Coast to Cactus: In Southern California* exhibit at the San Diego Natural History Museum looked at several ways to engage with both Spanish and English speaking populations. They tested whether it was better to have a toggle switch so visitors could choose Spanish or English or to have both languages on the screen at the same time. They also experimented with a novel approach. *Desert at Night* is a set piece/ theater where audiences listen to a conversation happening in a tent, while other visuals come and go. What makes this interesting is their choice of using Spanglish as the language of communication. One participant noted that "I thought the Spanglish was great! That's how I speak with my son! It's a real thing that's happening, because we are at the border. My husband and I are Mexican, but he [points to her son] is American. We are living this." (Randi Korn & Associates, Inc., 2015).

Local participants were largely in favor of using Spanglish. The feedback against using Spanglish came largely from Spanish speakers. One interviewee did not actually experience the exhibit but said that she “discourages the use of Spanglish because it is not proper” (Randi Korn & Associates, Inc., 2015). Besides how or if to use Spanglish most people appear to enjoy seeing other languages in exhibits. Koliou’s paper supports the idea that people are willing to have multiple languages in an exhibit. She found that “92% said that they would welcome with pleasure provision in a range of different foreign languages in the museum, and would stress it as a positive element if they were to recommend the museum to friends,” (Koliou, 1997, p. 75). That figure may be higher than average since the interviewees were foreign visitors to museums, but it does show that people are at least open to the idea of providing more language options in museums.

*Sustaining Indigenous Culture: The Structure, Activities and Needs of Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums* found that 45% of the 130 tribal archives and museums interviewed offer tribal language classes (Roy, 2013). It is unclear how these archives and museums use their language in their museums, but it does show the importance of teaching native languages. Unfortunately, this subject will not be covered in more depth in this paper. There are hundreds of indigenous languages and there is an ongoing effort by some tribes to revitalize those languages. I felt this was beyond the scope of what I could do in this research, and instead deserves its own research.

While this discussion has largely been based on US institutions, the debate over how to use non-English languages is not just an American problem. The *Multilingual Interpretation in Science Centers and Museums* study found that “55% of international institutions [33 responded to the survey] offer most or all of their visitor information in more than one language.”(Garcia-

Luis, McDonald, & Migus, 2011, p. 4, 7). In comparison, only 10% of American institutions offered all or most information in more than one language. That is a substantial increase over the US, but there is still plenty of room for growth. In 1995 37% of visitors to London museums were from outside the United Kingdom. This prompted an examination of London museum language offerings. The study found that 45% of foreign visitors had difficulties understanding written English. Additionally, they found that “49% of the visitors felt that they could have understood more and could have spent more time in the museum if additional information or activities were available in their native languages,” (Koliou, 1997, p. 74).

The San Diego Natural History museum made their commitment to bilingual signage a policy in the 1990’s. Erica Kelly noted that making this policy “takes a lot of pressure off the exhibit team. There is no handwringing over whether we should or shouldn’t, over how and how much,” (Kelly & Leyman Pino, 2016, p. 50). Koliou is another proponent of making multilingualism a museum policy. For her it is more of an issue of clearly dividing responsibility between departments. This will create a consistent approach for the institution (Koliou, 1997, p. 76). None of the museums that Koliou interviewed had a written policy. The BERI study found that 14 of the 22 museums, which participated in the study, had a formal policy. The staff at museums that didn’t include a written policy tended “more often to express concern about limitations of exhibit space and budget money, and finding the appropriate information delivery mechanism for bilingual interpretation,” (N. Renner et al., 2015, p. 76).

### The Future of Language

Museums are not the only group that is interested in looking at how we use language. Notably, Google is working on making the internet more and more accessible in multiple languages. There are an estimated 30 languages which have over one million speakers, but aren’t

accessible online (Frenkel, 2016). Linne Ha, a Google Program Manager, said that “we are biased because all of the equipment is designed for us. The first thing, the default, is an English-language keyboard, but what if your language doesn’t use those characters, or what if your language is only spoken, but not written?”

The limited use of the technology touches on the idea from Mark Castro and the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In a world with a population of seven billion it is unlikely that a majority of people would use or care to have languages like Batak, Khmer, or Bengali online. However, that’s exactly what Google is addressing. It’s not cheap and it’s not easy. It costs roughly \$30,000 to design and code just the font for a new language. Then comes hours of interviews and recording multiple native speakers. Nurhaida Sirait-Go lives in Indonesia and is a Batak speaker reflected that, “I don’t think my grandchildren or great grandchildren will learn Batak and that makes me sad. If they cannot speak it on the internet they will not learn it” (Frenkel, 2016).

Other languages are taking advantage of the internet to develop tools. The program Leb Keys facilitates the Latinization of Arabic script. Typically this requires two shift keys and a lot of switching between numbers and letters. The app makes it easier to text for the Arabic speakers, who make up 36% of internet users (Thompson, 2015). These examples suggest how the internet will be changing how languages are used and interact.

As the tech world continues to develop linguistic tools, questions arise over the quality and value of programs like Google Translate. In 2010 Nina Simon wrote a blog post on Museums 2.0 in which she addresses how museums deal with language in countries with multiple national languages. One of the suggestions she lists at the end is to use a machine translation. She writes “machine translation is by no means perfect, but for short two-sentence

comments, it's probably good enough,” (Simon, 2010). This begs the question, is machine translation a viable resource? In 2010, Franz Och led the team at Google who were responsible for creating machine translations. Och wrote that programs like Google Translate “can make the language barrier go away... It will allow anyone to communicate with anyone else,” (Adams, 2010). In the years since Och and Simon’s comments there have been advances in machine translation

In October 2016 Google launched an improved translation program called Google Neural Machine Translation. They have translated between English and Spanish, French, and Chinese, but the only translation available to the public is Chinese to English. Google says that the new system is “60 percent more accurate than the old Google Translate tool” (Turner, 2016). The new system is not perfect, but it is an improvement over the old system. However, due to its limited availability currently it may be better for museums to stick with human translators.

In another example of using technology to overcome language barriers, the Amsterdam Museum incorporated the use of QR codes in their exhibit *Amsterdam DNA* (Mir, 2014). If you are unfamiliar with QR codes they are similar to barcodes. However, instead of having vertical lines they use a jumble of white and black blocks to encrypt data. With the right program, smartphones can scan the code and gain access to the material. A museum could have multiple QR codes for different languages while taking up less space than a complete translation. QR codes are not universally used so this is not a perfect solution.

Judy Rand has another approach to solving the space issue. Simply write less. She, along with Stephen Bitgood, argue that people will read more labels when there’s less material to be read. For example people will be more likely to read three 50 word blocks of text than one 150 word block. The USS Constitution Museum did an evaluation between two exhibits where one

exhibit used over 4,500 words and the other only used 1,500. Families stayed longer and talked more in the exhibit with less words (Rand, 2016).

The USS Constitution Museum could provide signage for three languages if they only used 1,500 words per language and still be under the word count of the other exhibit. This does take away the streamlined appearance that is gained with limited text. However, if it's a choice between a 450 block of text in English than only a handful of people will read or three languages in blocks of 150 words that are read by most people wouldn't you go with the latter option? Sarah Watkins, the exhibit designer at the USS Constitution Museum, said that "50 word labels that people read are better than longer labels that they ignore," (Rand, 2016). There are other issues and conversations that can be held around this idea of smaller amounts of text, but it does give museums another option.

There are ways to engage with audiences without having to incorporate language at all. Xu Bing's book *Book from the Ground* is written in only emoji. Some museums are taking a similar approach. At the BOZAR Centre for Fine Arts in Belgium they used a trio of mimes that were Silent Guides. These silent guides acted as a go between for the exhibition and the audience. The mimes would engage with visitors in typical slapstick and other playful ways. The team "wanted to establish a more concrete link between the family activities and the exhibition in order to encourage families to visit both" (Shelley, 2015). This engagement was only scheduled for a couple days, but it shows that museums can interact with visitors without using language at all.

Corporations like Lego and Ikea have been incorporating non-verbal communication for years. Their instruction manuals have little to no language at all, and yet people from across the globe figure out how to put tiny blocks together to form massive structures. This level of non-

verbal instruction may not be a perfect fit for every museum, but there may be ways of incorporating strategies like this within museums. The KidsQuest Children's Museum in Bellevue, Washington, approached their museum map in a similar way. They do include English on their map, but it's limited. Instead they use pictures and artistic renderings of their exhibits to help guide visitors. Jamie Bonnett, Director of Education, spoke to a group of University of Washington Museology students in the spring of 2017, and she mentioned that this was done because it allowed visitors of all ages to figure out where everything was. The museum serves families from a diverse cultures and backgrounds. Their artistic map facilitates exploration of the museum for people who may not have strong English skills.

While non-verbal exchanges can be interesting there is some risk, especially across cultures. Marvin Carlson argues that in the postmodern cultural landscape, "theater makers can no longer create work under the assumption that its message will be understood any one way by a homogenous speech community"(Shelley, 2015). This becomes increasingly difficult when adding more and more cultures to the mix. A simple gesture in one culture can mean something drastically different in another.

Another thing to be aware of with both unconventional and conventional displays is how they affect groups like the Deaf community. Many museums and other institutions include Deaf visitors in the disability category. However, they consider themselves to be a community and a minority language group (Goss, Kollman, Reich, & Iacovelli, 2015, p. 53). It is important to remember that artistic and esthetic choices have other ramifications. In *Understanding the Multilingualism and Communication of Museum Visitors who are d/Deaf or Hard of Hearing* the authors recount various exhibits used by Deaf visitors. Mary was a participant in an animal presentation. She is hard of hearing, but could read lips. However, in the presentation they turned

off the lights, and Mary ended up leaving because she couldn't hear anything. After the fact she mentioned that "of course, when the room went dark I couldn't understand anything at all.

Because the only way I was really understanding her was with lipreading" (Goss et al., 2015).

How museums can engage with the Deaf community is another topic that is large enough for its own thesis research. As with the discussion on Native American languages earlier, this topic is beyond the scope of this research, and won't be discussed more in this paper.

### Chapter 3: Research Methods

This goal of this research was to examine how museums use language to build a connection to non-English and non-Spanish communities. I used a multiple method approach. The main method was semi-structured interviews with museum professionals. Additionally I did some document analysis of the museum's website. I centered my study on three main research questions:

1. How and why did you pick the languages that are offered in the museum?
2. In what ways are you providing for non-English/non-Spanish patrons?
3. What are any major take a ways or advice for others interested in pursuing multilingual/translingual/bilingual work?

#### Sample

For this study I considered any museum who has used non-English/non-Spanish language either in the past or currently. The following institutions agreed to participate, and the reasons for their selection are provided.

| Name of institution                                | Why they were selected   |
|--|--|
| Museum Program <sup>1</sup>                        | The museum helped facilitate a Twitter conversation about how museums are using other languages. Offers museum programs in Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin. They've also offered programs in Tagalog, Arabic, Bengali, Croatian, Hindi, Nepali, Persian, Portuguese and Tibetan. |
| National Museum of Jewish American History (NMJAH) | Subject in a Hyperallergic article on multilingualism. They have a welcome banner in 14 languages. As well as, a visitor guide in  |

<sup>1</sup> Guido Garaycochea is the Program Manager at a museum. He agreed to speak to me about his personal opinions on the program and what museums can do. These are his opinions and don't necessarily reflect the opinions of the museum he works at. I won't list the museum name or the program name at his request.

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | five languages. With plans to expand to more languages. A multilingual audio guide is in progress         |
| New Bedford Art Museum                                    | Subject of a South Coast Press article. They created trilingual exhibit labels in Spanish and Portuguese. |
| Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience | They've done bilingual exhibits in the past in Korean and Khmer   |

The positions of the individuals varied. They were chosen mostly by their experience working on multilingual projects. Protocol was approved by university IRB.

| Subject Name      | Institution            | How they were selected        | Position                                |
|-------------------|------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Rob Levin         | NMAJH                  | Recommended by Yael Eytan     | Community Relations Liaison             |
| Michelle Kumata   | Wing Luke Museum       | Museum position               | Exhibit Director                        |
| Guido Garaycochea | NA                     | Publication about the program | Program Manager                         |
| Yael Eytan        | NMAJH                  | Publication                   | Director of Marketing and Communication |
| Jamie Uretsky     | New Bedford Art Museum | Publication                   | Exhibition Manager                      |

The semi-structured interviews took place between February 22 and March 31. They were conducted over recorded phone calls. Interviews started with a consent statement which included a request to record the interview. Doing semi-structured interviews allowed the conversation to build naturally, but also allowed me to get some consistent information from multiple institutions. For example, every participant was asked if they had any recommendations for other museums who wanted to become more multilingual. Other questions focused on how they provide a multilingual experience, or how the translation process worked. For my list of interview questions see Appendix 1. The questions based were inspired by questions used in the Bilingual Exhibition Research Initiative study and the *Multilingual Interpretation in Science*

*Centers and Museums* study. The interviews were then compared, looking for any similarities or differences in providing access in any language.

In addition to interviews, I explored the museum website looking for any reference to languages provided or language policy. This review showed other ways that museums engage with their audience. It also demonstrated how easy or how difficult it can be for non-English speakers to find out if the museum is accessible for them. Some museums make it very clear online that they are accessible to non-English speaking visitors. For example, the Polish Museum of America post their events in both Polish and English. Predominantly only the events page is bilingual, most of the other pages are solely in English (“80th PAC Art Exhibit Opening,” n.d.). Other museums like the American Museum of Natural History have a button to translate the page into 104 languages (“American Museum of Natural History,” n.d.). Other museums never mention that they are accessible in more than one language, or have that information buried in the website. The Chicago Botanical Garden states that they are welcoming to all languages. However, to get to this statement you must first go to the museums strategic plan, then from there click on mission, and then it’s on the bottom. Clicking on mission from the main page will get you different information that doesn’t include information about language.

## Analysis

The interviews were all transcribed using NVIVO. They were coded using emergent coding. There were a total of 15 codes which included Advice to other Museums, Translation, Which Languages, and Costs. For example “Google Translate is not a thing that actually works. There's my advice,” was coded in both Advice to other Museums and in Translation. “[What] we were trying to do last year was to get a cultural center to come up and do tours with us” was coded as Work Together/ Partnerships. See Appendix 2 for the complete coding rubric. Only two of the museum

websites listed anything about language. Because of this the websites were not coded. Instead I compiled a list of every mention of language across the sites.

## Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

The goal of this research was to understand the characteristics of how museums use non-English and non-Spanish languages to engage and connect to the community that uses those languages. I used a qualitative multiple methods approach. Including semi-structured interviews with five museum professionals from four different institutions, and document analysis. Each museum website was examined for any mention of their multilingual offerings.

### Findings:

#### Language Choices

| Institution<br>Interviewee  | Language offerings (past or current)  | How they incorporate language  |
|---|---|--|
| Museum Program<br>Guido Garaycochea   | Main languages: Spanish, Korean, and Mandarin<br>Additional languages: Tagalog, Braille, Arabic, Bengali, Croatian, Hindi, Nepali, Persian, Portuguese and Tibetan. | Workshops and classes taught by immigrants. Museum has some Braille signage.<br>Website lists bilingual events in both languages. Tours available in Spanish and other languages.  |
| National Museum of American Jewish History (NMAJH)<br>Rob Levin<br>Yael Eytan | Chinese, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, French, Romanian, Braille, ASL,   | Visitor Guides: Chinese, Korean, Russian, Spanish and Hebrew. Plans for adding five more languages.<br>Welcome Banner: Polish, Hebrew, Arabic, English, French, Hindi, Korean, Japanese, (Simplified) Chinese, Portuguese, Spanish, German, Italian, Russian and Dutch<br>Guided Tours: Hebrew, Spanish, Russian, French and Romanian.<br>Audio guide is in the works.<br>Some signage within museum: Yiddish, Ladino, and Braille |

|   |                        |   |
|---|------------------------|---|
|   |                        | ASL is occasionally used in programs.   |
| New Bedford Art Museum<br>Jamie Uretsky | Spanish and Portuguese | Audio guides, they used to have completely trilingual signage throughout museum. Education department offers classes in those languages. One art piece had trilingual components. |
| Wing Luke<br>Michelle Kumata            | Korean and Khmer       | Bilingual signage in past exhibits produced with the help of the community  |

Table 1. Interview sites

The community around the museum was the largest factor in determining language choice across the sites. For example, the Providence Metropolitan area in Rhode Island (which is about 40 minutes from the New Bedford Art Museum) is home to the largest Portuguese-American community in the United States (New England Historical Society, 2015). So the New Bedford Art Museum added Portuguese labels. Guido Garaycochea supported working with the community around the museum. He said that “90% of the people that we serve are local. I mean local, local, that are not from other boroughs.” Because of this they give the highest priority to languages that were used in the neighborhoods surrounding the museum such as Spanish and Mandarin. The Wing Luke operates a little differently than the other museums so they are kind of an exception to the rule. When the Wing Luke has done bilingual exhibits in the past it has been the community that made the decision, not the museum. Michelle Kumata said that “for the Korean American exhibit there are a lot of first generation community members that they wanted to engage and so they suggested having a text... We create exhibits with the community members... They help develop the exhibit, and they shape the exhibit in the way that they choose.”



Word Cloud: Top 50 most used words in the interviews.

Community:

The term community was one of the most used terms in my interviews. It was used 115 times throughout the five interviews. How museums should engage with community can be broken down into two closely related sections, talk with the community and learn about the community.

The most consistent piece of advice in the interviews was to talk to the community. The primary reason to talk to the community is to help the museum determine who they are doing this for. Both the NMAJH and Garaycochea's program work with or focus on immigrant communities. Yael Eytan said "we are a museum all about immigrants so we want people of all different backgrounds to feel welcome here." Jamie Uretsky mentioned that the New Bedford Art Museum prides itself on being a community museum. When she was hired she asked herself what that actually meant. So she helped instigate trilingual signage throughout the museum

because “both Spanish speaking and Portuguese speaking folks are part of our community. And ideally we want to be representing them. Not only in our labels but in the shows we bring in and the programs that we do.”

Talking to the community about every facet of programming including adding multiple languages was important. For example, when Garaycochea started his job he asked everyone for advice on what worked and what didn't. This included asking both staff as well as participants questions such as “what were the problems? What do you feel that was not working at the time that we can improve?” He went on to say, “I think that is the way you have to. You have to ask those that have been in the program for many years.” Jamie Uretsky mirrored this sentiment when she said “I wished that from the spark of the idea [of creating bilingual labels] I would have went to the Portuguese community and said I have this vision help me.” Uretsky went on to clarify that this “doesn't mean exploit them for their labor but ask them advice on who to hire [etc.]”

The Wing Luke's style of community engagement follows this approach. Since it is the community who is creating the exhibits they already know whether or not bilingual signage will be helpful. Kumata mentioned that in their *Khmer American: Naga Sheds its Skin* exhibit they offered audio translations and help coordinate group tours. This was partly done because among older Khmer refugees the literacy rate is low. Kumata said that the audio portions provide accessibility to community members because “even if they can't read it they can hear it or someone can walk them through and guide them.”

Talking to the community builds into the second aspect about community, learn about them. The Wing Luke knew that literacy rates were low amongst Khmer elders, and so they took steps to facilitate their time at the museum. They organized group visits with bilingual tour

guides. They also provided iPads with an audio tour for people to use. By working so intimately with the community the museum was aware of these challenges before the exhibit opened.

Garaycochea also talks about getting to know where visitors come from. He said that “in order to understand the presence of the person or try to and be more empathetic you have to understand the history of those countries [they came from] and how did they end up here.” Yael Eytan advised other museums to “find out who their visitors [are], where their visitors are from. If they can ask about ethnic background they should.”

This relationship can be a personal relationship as well as business. Garaycochea said that, “I’m learning about cooking Chinese. Yeah we have talks and learning about history and learning about other politics and different perspectives.” It helps him build relationships within the community. Which can then help build bridges between the community and the museum. Kumata encompassed why talking to and listening to the community is important when she said “I think that just the whole process of building the exhibits with community members is saying a lot about relationship and trust. And so we're getting in touch with the community and what they want to show and how they want to show it and what they want to share. Then it's our duty to help produce their vision.” Uretsky would also love to get more dialogue between the museum and the community. She said that “there were people who did come in and were like wow thank you for doing this, and that sentence doesn't make any sense... Your translation needs to be better. But it was cool because then I got to follow up with that person who was an academic at University of Massachusetts Dartmouth... that is how museums should be working. Where the community feels comfortable enough to say ‘hey this adjustment needs to be made,’ and someone on the museum staff follows up and says ok tell me talk to me about it.”

When a museum takes the time to build the trust on an individual level it pays off.

Garaycochea noticed an increase in museum visitors, which he believes might be because of the programs they run. During the programs visitors often split time between the museum and another partner site. This gets them into the museum and they get to experience the museum in a way that other visitors wouldn't. The programs work most often with Chinese and Latinx immigrants. They try to make these immigrants as comfortable within the museum as possible. Garaycochea said that they "don't ask for names, we don't ask for status. Yeah we don't ask anything." The important thing for them is getting people in the door.

Museums don't exist in a void. What's going on in the rest of the world has real ramifications. Between January and March the Garaycochea's museum noticed drastic decreases in visitors. Guido Garaycochea mentioned that he felt it was because many of the immigrant community around the museum felt scared around the Presidential Inauguration. When I interviewed Garaycochea on March 14, he mentioned that people were slowly starting to come back. He was definitely concerned, but he was still optimistic. However, with a changing political climate it is uncertain what program attendance will look like moving forward.

### Community Response

Do communities who use other languages actually come to the museum and use multilingual signage? There were two main responses from the interviews, yes and we're not sure. The Wing Luke works closely with the community when they make community exhibits. They let the community members decide whether or not bilingual translations would be helpful, because of this they have a good idea of the response they will get when the exhibit opens. After months of working together, the exhibit opening is finally a chance for the community to see their own stories and experiences within a museum. Kumata mentioned that working with

community members has an added benefit of getting people to bring their friends and families to also see what they've been working on. It is important to build a sense of trust with the community. Since they are the ones sharing their personal stories. She said that "a lot of them are sharing their own images and stories in the exhibits. So it's really great because they are bringing their friends and families to come see their story. It's very powerful and it's very validating for them to see their own stories in museums." This does seem to indicate that people will come in more at least with exhibits that are co-developed with the community.

The National Museum of American Jewish History also believes that they are drawing people in with their banner and visitor guides. Rob Levin mentioned that the banner has several benefits; "we installed it not only for people who speakers of the languages on there but also for the general public no matter what languages they speak or what their first language is just saying that sends a message of welcome and accessibility and interest in being open and understanding everyone who might think to come into the museum. And also indicating that there will be something for everyone to connect to." Yael Eytan supported this in her interview. The banner that they've put up says in 14 languages, welcome and the first floor is free. Since they installed the banner Eytan thinks they've had a 220% increase in visitors in the first floor. They haven't done a formal evaluation, but they do believe that people are being drawn in because of it. Their visitor guides were only released this winter. It may be too soon to determine how often they are being used and what the community response has been. However, Eytan noted that they are "definitely being used."

The New Bedford Art Museum had a similar experience. They installed trilingual exhibits the same year they did popular exhibitions. The museum did hear from Spanish and Portuguese speakers that they were excited to see their languages in the museum. English

speakers also were excited to see other languages. However, they didn't get enough feedback to make it an ongoing budgetary priority. Uretsky mentioned that "last year was a huge push for multiple languages. But [we] didn't receive any, to enough, feedback to say that this is something that we should really, really push for in our budget." They've stopped doing trilingual signage for now, but they have plans to continue again once they have more money to do so. It appears that most of the feedback supports having these signs, but without more evidence the museum is just left wondering who they are doing it for. As Uretsky said "who is the audience here? Is the audience actually Portuguese speaking people? Are those people actually coming to the museum?"

#### Costs

Another issue that most interviewees raised was the cost of doing multilingual exhibits. Both the New Bedford Art Museum and Garaycochea mentioned that adding language had budgetary constraint. The New Bedford Art Museum is a small museum with big dreams. Unfortunately, they had to cut their trilingual signage. They were just not able to fit it into the budget. However she said that "we had to cut from our budget this year. It's not off the table for ever... we also had to cut making catalogues this year. Which is a hard decision but you know it's just for a year. We'll come back to it." Garaycochea's programs were getting a lot of attendees but since everything is free they still struggle. He said that "we have 60 something students and we had a budget for 20 students. So it is every week we have to provide the water color paper, with the water colors."

Despite the costs involved in creating multilingual content, having the museum partly or entirely free came up in two interviews. Garaycochea mentioned this in his advice to other museums. When museums charge money it deprives those who can't afford to go and learn.

Even when museums offer free days, people can't always get time off work. People are the most important thing to Garaycochea and putting cost restrictions prevents people from coming. He said that "museums are alive organizations they are not just a window that shows things that are dead. So you need the people." The NMAJH have noticed a 220% in visitors to their first floor gallery since they put up the banner indicating that the floor is free. This does seem to give support to Garaycochea's idea that museums should be free.

Professional translators are expensive and sometimes problematic. Some museums were able to work around this issue. Garaycochea's program is run mostly by immigrants. He has a role in developing the ideas and content, but he leaves the translating to the class leaders. Since they are immigrants they already speak the language and are more likely to know which dialects to use. Other museums struggled with translation. Translation struggles included finding the balance between academic and casual exhibit labels. Other times it appeared that the translation company used a program like Google Translate instead of an actual translator. Wrong dialects were used as well as the wrong words. For example one site mentioned "we had water fountain very clearly and the person translated it to the word that in the other language would mean a fountain, like a fountain in a public square... those are very, very different things." This company had been suggested by the city, but in the future they will be looking for other companies to take on translations.

There are other ways to work around using professional translators. Both Rob Levin and Michelle Kumata recommended taking translations to native speakers and double checking their quality. This unfortunately isn't always a possibility. Uretsky mentioned that they tried to do a tour with community members to help with the translation. They tried to do this once or twice but the idea never really got off the ground.

Time was also mentioned several times as a challenge. The interviews suggested that it takes twice as long to create a bilingual exhibit. If you have community members that you need to work around their schedule as well. Setting up programs takes time and can involve thousands of emails to coordinate everything. Even when the translation is limited to things like visitor guides it can take several months to create.

### Websites

A review of the websites led to some interesting findings. Only two of the museums listed what languages are used/found in the museum. The museum that Guido Garaycochea works for did the most with at least six webpages mentioning languages and consistently listing their events in whatever language the class is being taught as well as English. The NMAJH mentioned which languages they offer tours in. The multilingual visitor guides are a new addition to the museum, and are not yet advertised on the website. Neither the Wing Luke nor the New Bedford Art Museum lists language at all.

| Institution    | Mentions Language offered, bilingual, etc.  |
|----------------|---|
| Museum Program | The Museum Program website mentions lists all of the languages that the programs are typically taught in and the languages they have used in the past. In the events calendar all of the program's events are listed in both English and the language the class is taught in. For example if it is a Spanish drawing class the information is given in both Spanish and English. The museum's website also includes mentions that they do Spanish and English tours on the weekends. Group tours are offered in a variety of languages but the website never lists which languages the group tours are offered in. Braille and Sign Language interpreters are talked about on the visit page. |

|                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| NMAJH                  | The museum website twice mentions language. On their info/FAQ page they list Braille signage in their special needs section. Additionally, they mention that they have guided tours in Hebrew, Spanish, Russian, French and Romanian. To get to that info though you must first click on Group Tours and then Booking a Visit. |
| New Bedford Art Museum | Language is never mentioned on the museum website. The audio guides are located online. Using the Internet Archive I was able to find the audio guides for past exhibits. However, the website does not appear to have mentioned that they offered the audio guides or exhibit panels in more than one language.               |
| Wing Luke              | The Wing Luke never mentions language on the website. Using the Internet Archives I found the description of the <i>Khmer American: Naga Sheds its Skin</i> exhibit. It never mentions that it is bilingual.   |

Table 2 Websites as reviewed on April 22, 2017

Jamie Uretsky mentioned that “I think we should have done better marketing around the fact that we're doing it [trilingual signage]. We sort of found out that we had these labels but then you know we weren't. I don't know if we were doing the work of getting those inviting those demographics into the museum.” This information shows there is still work to be done even when museums are doing a good job at incorporating language into the museum.

#### Discussion:

There appears to be several approaches that a museum can use to develop a relationship with people from any language group. There are also several recommendations for museums moving forward. First, having bilingual signage does not automatically make a museum accessible. I believe that multilingualism is a step towards an increased accessibility for the

community. The Alliance of Museum Professional Interests, which is run by University of Washington Museology students, had a panel on Community Engagement. Minh Nguyen spoke at that panel and said something that really stuck with me. Underrepresented communities don't need museums. They have their own community structures in place, but museums need them. Not only financially, but in order to offer to provide an inclusive experience. To paraphrase Garaycochea, without people museums are houses of the dead. Museums only come alive if there are people there.

### Build connections

Building connections with the community was the most consistent advice given from the different museums. Ultimately multilingual signage is about accessibility and inclusion. Building a connection between the community and the museum facilitates the process of creating multilingual exhibits. Multilingual signs can also help build connections within groups. The Bilingual Exhibition Research Initiative (BERI) study found that having bilingual signage facilitated intergenerational learning. This helps encourage language use and builds bonds within the family (Yalowitz et al., 2013).

Museums can't just take from the community it has to give back. Both the Wing Luke and the New Bedford Art Museum recommended hiring someone either from the community or who can speak the language. Jamie Uretsky advised other museums to "hire someone that speaks that language to take this [multilingualism] on. Or hire someone from that community to take this on. Put money into that community." By installing bilingual exhibits it shows that the museum is at least thinking of the people it wants to visit. At the 2017 American Alliance of Museums (AAM) Annual Conference, Eduardo Díaz, Director of the Smithsonian Latino Center, took this idea further. The goal of the Smithsonian Latino Center is to ensure Latinx voices are

heard at higher levels of the Smithsonian. They currently have 10 Latinx curators and other managers in various Smithsonian institutions. In his portion of the session at AAM Díaz said that curators are the guardians of the portal. They dictate what objects are bought, what research is being done, and what exhibits are going up. Hiring under represented people at these levels ensure that their voices are being heard (Díaz & Curtis, 2017).

In an Advocacy and Social Change class in 2015, Tom Deihm spoke about an LGBT exhibit at the Tacoma Art Museum. He mentioned how they didn't have tissues in the gallery when it was clearly going was an emotional exhibit. It would have been a small gesture but it shows that the museum was aware of its visitors. Using other languages is one way that museums can say to the community 'we're thinking of you.' Uretsky mirrored this when she spoke about the Portuguese community "we see you. We're here and we see you. We're not going to lump you into the umbrella of Hispanic or something, we recognize that you are different." Or as one ASTC study participant noted "multilingual exhibits aren't just a way to make the content available. It demonstrates that the Museum is for them" (N. Renner et al., 2015, p. 71).

Museums occupy a space that allows people from all backgrounds to come together. It's fantastic to build bridges between the community and the museum. However, visitors from different communities can also come together in unexpected ways through museums. At AAM's 2017 conference, Taylor Miatello spoke about the Royal Ontario Museum's recent outreach to the tattoo community in Ontario. As part of their outreach, the museum collaborated with several organizations to do live tattooing offsite every day for seven days. One day an elderly couple came up to the tattoo artist who was in the middle of working on a tattoo. They started talking, and the couple admitted that for their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary they had been thinking about

getting tattoos. However, they didn't know who to talk to or where to start the process. They had never felt comfortable just going into a random tattoo shop. Because the museum brought the two groups together they were able to start a conversation in a way that was comfortable for all parties (Miatello, 2017). This story isn't about language, but it does show that museums can facilitate people's interactions no matter what their community is.

It takes a while to build trust between communities and the museum. Rob Levin perhaps said it the best, "it's sort of the grassroots aspects of building community. Going out to the communities, visiting, understanding, bringing folks to the community. Creating, asking what's best who it's for, the institution and what's going on here. And much like you said ultimately becoming a cross roads for intercultural exchange. It's not just coming and learning about one particular aspect of American history through a particular lens, in this case the Jewish lens, but it's about connecting to a variety of folks who come here to learn, and so doing learning about ourselves as much as others. We see that time and again it's really cool really rewarding to see that."

## Policy

Policy was never mentioned in any of the interviews, but it did come up in the literature. Without policy in place, the multilingual discussion must start again every time there is a new exhibit. The BERI found that museums without a language policy tended "more often to express concern about limitations of exhibit space and budget money, and finding the appropriate information delivery mechanism for bilingual interpretation," With a policy in place it interrupts that dialogue. Adamantia Koliou wrote about how London museums are engaging with their foreign visitors in 1995. One of her pieces of advice was to create a language policy. She said that "a written foreign languages policy seems to be necessary. It is important to divide

responsibilities between museum departments and staff in an open and logical manner, which will result in consistency of approach within the institution,” (Koliou, 1997, p. 76).

### Ask for help

Creating multilingual exhibits is a difficult expensive process. It takes a lot of time and energy for the museum to create bilingual or multilingual exhibits. However, museums don't have to do it by themselves. Once they have a relationship with the community they can ask the community for help. Museums can compensate them to help translate signs, and get feedback on how accurate the translations are.

The program that Guido Garaycochea manages is co-produced with a local library. This helps pool resources and divide tasks. Even if you haven't worked with a community before you can approach them for a joint project. In 2016, the Japanese Community and Cultural Center of Washington partnered with the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe for a Bunka no Hi festival. This is a Japanese festival that celebrates culture and the arts, and the 2016 celebration was designed to highlight the similarities between the two cultures. They had events like dancing, language classes, and drums from both groups (Japanese Cultural & Community Center of Washington, 2013). Rob Levin mentioned a past project that the NMAJH put on called Faces of Migration. These photos were taken either in the museum or another cultural institution. When the project opened the museum created an event that they called a Community Reunion. Levin said that the event, “was a non-stop day of people from different backgrounds coming through different places... The fact that we were able to communicate in ways that transcended [language] and the understanding that we were inviting them and we cared. They were very touched by the experience on a number of different levels.” This is an example of how museums are using multilingual content in order to allow translingual engagement with the community.

Levin mentioned several organizations that museums can work with. The NMAJH is a Zone of Peace with the Interfaith Center. There are other organizations like Peace Parks or Peace Poles that can help unite communities from a variety of backgrounds. Doing collaborations with other museums and cultural institutions is another good step. Museums should be proactive, but it does need to be a partnership. Ideally it shouldn't be a one off event either.

#### Advertise

Koliou's recommends that "it is important to let people know when a museum provides material in foreign languages. Therefore, marketing inside and outside of the museum environment is essential," (Koliou, 1997, p. 75). It is not entirely clear why museums are not doing more to advertise their language offerings. It could be that they worry regular visitors would disprove of the signs. However, the interviews all said most people supported having more languages in the museum. Adantia Koliou found that "92% said that they would welcome with pleasure provision in a range of different foreign languages in the museum, and would stress it as a positive element if they were to recommend the museum to friends," (Koliou, 1997, p. 75). Advertising that they have multilingual offerings can show that the museum is proud of its efforts, and relationship with the community.

These advertisements could be as simple as a line on the website. However, it's good to advertise to the community directly and in that language. In 2014 the Guggenheim and the Queens Museum co-facilitated a conversation on Twitter discussing how museums are using language. In the post the Historic House Trust shared a photo of a flier in Korean that they distributed for one of their events. Other fliers had multiple languages on them (Mir, 2014). If a museum wants to go even further it can advertise on radio or TV channels that are from the community. The Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose did this when they created both

Vietnamese and Spanish exhibit labels. This created some challenges for the Children's Discovery Museum. The Spanish TV and radio channels were all owned by the same companies. In the Vietnamese community there were multiple companies that the museum had to deal with (Martin & Jennings, 2015, p. 87). Museums should keep this in mind when they work with different groups.

### Cost

Doing multilingual work requires a lot of staff time and money, and it can take away wall space. This is why policy is important. It interrupts the issue of cost and demands that the museum takes steps regardless of the cost. However, this doesn't mean that museums need to be multilingual overnight. Koliou recommended that "museums should at least try to produce either guidebooks or leaflets or even simple information sheets in the major foreign languages," (Koliou, 1997, p. 75). This can be a great way to start offering multilingual content without costing too much. It can also let the museum gage the community's response, and then do more multilingual work based on that response. If you have bilingual staff you could give them a button that indicates that they speak two languages and can help answer questions. Money and other resources are tight at every museum, but there are small steps that can be taken by any museum.

### Differences between Languages

One of the first pieces of literature read for this research was a piece about the Children's Discovery Museum of San Jose. This piece discussed the museum's attempt to add Vietnamese labels after they had added Spanish labels. The article mentioned how not every technique is perfectly compatible between cultural groups. For example, the Spanish speaking community

had consolidated ownership of their radio and TV media, but the Vietnamese media were owned by several companies which made advertising more complex than for the Spanish groups. The way the Vietnamese community interacted with the museum needed to be examined as well, because the museum wasn't currently getting many visitors from that community (Martin & Jennings, 2015). This article had a major influence on the focus of my research. The article said that "many of the strategies that were successful in the work with the Latino community translated well to the work with the Vietnamese community," (Martin & Jennings, 2015). However, I interpreted this to mean that the differences were greater than they perhaps were in reality.

The Martin and Jennings article was one of the reasons I decided to exclude Spanish bilingual exhibits in my study. I was hoping to see if there were major differences to approaching languages other than English and Spanish. All of the interviewees mentioned there being some differences working with different language groups. Guido Garaycochea said that "even between the Asian community and the Latino community how we use words, how do we express with our bodies and the distance between the bodies. There are a lot of those, a lot of differences between those communities." However, none of the sites mentioned similar difficulties to what the Children's Discovery Museum faced. The interviews suggest that the differences between languages are not as extreme as I had imagined going into the study. Every community is going to need a unique approach, but the interviews suggest that similar lessons can be learned from no matter what language is being used.

### Limitations

The results of this study can have implications for a variety of institutions. However, the variety of museum types interviewed were limited. Two of institutions were directly related to a

group or culture (Jewish Americans, Pacific Islanders/ Pacific Asian). Two of the museums were art museums, and I did not include science or natural history museums. All of the museums interviewed were either small or mid-sized institutions. The NMAJH had the largest income at \$10,392,732 (NEED TO CITE GUIDESTAR OR 990). While the New Bedford Art Museum had the smallest income at \$453,639 (AGAIN CITE GUIDESTAR or 990). Whether or not size affects their interest in multilingualism is unclear.

Additionally, three of the four institutions were located on the east coast of the US. It is unclear if this influences why and how they are doing multilingual interpretation, but the lack of geographic area may influence who can benefit from this study. No museum visitors were interviewed in this study. So any judgement on the interpretation is influenced by how the museum feels. On a more personal level, I don't speak any other languages. I know a little bit of Spanish, but nowhere approaching fluency. So any language use in the museum has to be judged through the museum's own lens. This was also my first experience doing one on one interviews. Which may have impacted the questions I asked and the follow up questions.

#### Future research

There are several gaps in the literature that could lead to other research. The first is how Native American museums are using and embracing traditional languages. Seeing if or how museums can help with the process of teaching the language to newer generations would make an interesting study. Additionally, examining how Deaf and Blind communities use language (Braille, ASL, etc.) within museums would also be an interesting study. Specially because many museums list ASL and Braille as offerings in their accessibility/disability sections and typically don't seem to think of them as languages.

There are other parts of the museum, besides exhibit labels, that need to be made accessible. None of the museums I interviewed had extensive translated webpages. Some museums such as the Waterloo Region Museum use Google Translate to translate their website into multiple languages (Waterloo Region Museum, n.d.). When I'm not writing about language my museum passion lies in museum collections. Are museum catalogues accessible in other languages? Do museums record indigenous names and make those terms searchable online? I don't know those answers. It would be difficult to make that happen, but it seems important especially for source communities to be able to find their own cultures artifacts in their own terms. This research ended up focusing on exhibit labels and programs because those were the most visible. Examining how museum websites are translated or being able to search the collection in a variety of languages does not get talked about often.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

The United States is becoming an increasingly diverse country linguistically as well as culturally. Museums have struggled to incorporate bilingual or multilingual accessibility into their institutions. According to one survey in 2011, only 10% of US institutions offered all or most of their content in a language other than English (Garcia-Luis et al., 2011, p. 4 , 7).

Multilingual signs allow a museum to better connect to their community, as well as build relationships within the community themselves. For example, the Bilingual Exhibition Research Initiative study found that bilingual signs allowed for better intergenerational communication. (Yalowitz et al., 2013, p. 36).

This goal of this research was to examine how museums use language to build a connection to non-English and non-Spanish communities. When the literature does talk about bilingualism in museums it almost exclusively talks about how museums use Spanish. This creates a gap in the literature for other languages. This study focused on museums using non-English and non-Spanish languages. The research centered on three main questions:

1. How and why did you pick the languages that are offered in the museum?
2. In what ways are you providing for non-English/non-Spanish patrons?
3. What are any major take a ways or advice for others interested in pursuing multilingual/translingual/bilingual work?

To answer these questions I used a qualitative multiple methods approach. There were five semi-structured interviews with museum professionals from four institutions: The Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience, the National Museum of American Jewish History, the New Bedford Art Museum, and Guido Garaycochea agreed to tell me his

own personal feelings about the program he runs. The opinions were his own and did not necessarily reflect the opinions of his institution. In addition to the interviews the museum websites were examined to see if they referenced the languages that they offered.

## Findings

The research suggests that talking to the community is the best path for museums to take when incorporating another language. Talking to the community facilitates the whole process. Museums will know the ways the community would use language within an exhibit. For example, the Wing Luke created a Khmer audio tour and did guided tours for the elder Khmer community members who have a larger portion of illiteracy. Incorporating community members can help with the translation process. They know the local dialects, and can help check that the translations don't have any mistakes before the signs go up. Finally both the Wing Luke and National Museum of American Jewish History both mentioned that when you get the community to help create the exhibit they will feel a personal connection with the museum and bring friends and family into the museum to show off all the hard work they just worked on.

It is important to mention that incorporating the community is a relationship. It can take time and patience. Museums need to give back to the community in addition to seeking their help. Several museums mentioned investing back into the community. One way to do this is by hiring people from that community. Having staff who can speak the language can help visitor experience at the museum, but also having staff at higher levels in the organization helps ensure that the community is represented in all parts of the museum including collections and research.

An analysis of the museums' websites showed that only one of the four museums included any bilingual language. The bilingual text was only located on the event pages of

classes which were taught in another language. Two of the museums did not mention that their museum had any language offerings other than English.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

Multilingualism does not mean that museums are accessible. It is a step towards being an accessible institution. Multilingualism is a way for a museum to connect with a community and continue developing a long term relationship. Museums should list the languages that they offer on their websites. Finding institutions that are using language was difficult. Letting visitors know that they are bilingual before they enter the building may help lower the barrier of entry for non-English speakers. Jamie Uretsky mentioned that she wished that they would have done more marketing on the fact that they were trilingual.

Another recommendation is to hire people from the community when possible. If the museum can't afford to or there is not a person available, give back to the community in some way. If community members are helping with the translations, pay them. Ensure that this is a relationship and not just the museum demanding help and giving nothing back. Museums need the community. Lots of communities already have their own organizations and networks and don't need museums in the same way that museums need them.

Finally talk to the community. Find partnerships or individuals who have similar goals or interests. Learn about the people around the museum. Find out why they are here, where they came from, their history and their culture. Knowing who they are can help inform the museum what interests and topics are relevant to them. Gaining this knowledge can help museums plan exhibits and grow collections to match what is of interest around them.

Any museum can embrace multilingualism. It's an intimidating idea. There are a lot of costs involved. It can be expensive, bilingual signs can take up space, it takes more time and more money. However, there are also benefits both to the institution and to the visitors who come to museums. This doesn't have to happen overnight, and museums can work with other institutions to help alleviate costs. Multilingualism can take the form of completely bilingual signs or it can be as simple as a laminated visitor guide. In the end museums are for the community. To paraphrase Guido Garaycochea, museums are houses of the dead without people. People make museums come alive. One participant in the *Multilingual Interpretation in Science Centers and Museums* report put it the best, "multilingual exhibits aren't just a way to make the content available. It demonstrates that the Museum is for them" (N. Renner et al., 2015, p. 71).

## Appendix 1

### Sample Questions for Semi-Structured Interviews

1. In what ways do you provide for bilingual patrons (e.g. signage, website, audio tours, staff, etc.)
2. How would you describe your institution's interest with regard to bilingual exhibits?
3. How did your institution decided to begin presenting bilingual exhibit?
4. What have you learned in the process of making bilingual exhibits
5. Have you noticed any difference/or feedback from the community?
6. Regarding your bilingual exhibit development process, what do you think works well or doesn't work well?
7. Do you have bilingual staff members, volunteers an advisory committee or others that contribute/assisting creating bilingual exhibits if yes how
8. In what ways does your institution show they are welcoming/friendly for non-English speakers?
9. Would you try to do bilingual exhibits again?

## Appendix 2

### Coding Rubric

| Code                    | Description  | Example   |
|-------------------------|--|---|
| Advice to other museums | Interviewee's advice to other museums who are interested in providing multilingual | Google Translate is not a thing that actually works. There's my advice. |

|                                      |  |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|--|
|                                      | offerings. What they've learned from the process   |  |
| Ask/Talk to Community                | Interviewee mentions asking or talking to the community  | You have to ask those that have been in the program for many years.  |
| Community Input                      | Community input about multilingual signs or advice given from the community  | Still to this day I hear people say that certainly have made a difference. In gathering information from people that come through this is how they heard about the museum or why they thought to come, and people do reference the signage |
| Costs                                | Difficulties in creating multilingual exhibits. Not exclusively financial. Includes space, time, etc.  | It depends on how much text is being translated. I think we did have to. But it's almost like doing it twice.  |
| Differences between languages        | Any known differences from having worked with multiple languages in the past. For example marketing worked differently for Spanish speakers than it did with Korean speakers | Even between the Asian community and the Latino community how we use words, how do we express with our bodies and the distance between the bodies. There are a lot of those, a lot of differences between those communities.               |
| Free offerings                       | Any mention of free museums or free sections   | In addition we say "welcome the first floor is free" in 14 languages. So that actually increased attendance to our first floor by something like 220%.   |
| General community                    | General reference to community that doesn't fall into other sections   | The museum is like creating a new niche. As a museum / community center.   |
| How the museums provide the language | How the museum provides the languages that they use, e.g. signs, tours, etc.   | We put multiple text [languages] for the main text panels, not for everything but the main text panels.  |
| Immigration                          | Mentions immigrants, immigration, etc.   | We are a museum all about immigrants so we want people of all different backgrounds to feel welcome here.  |

|                              |   |   |
|------------------------------|---|---|
| Learn about the community    | Mentions learning about the history, culture, how they would use language, etc. | I think the first thing I would recommend is you know look at the visitor data. Find out who their visitors where their visitors are from. If they can ask about ethnic background they should. They shouldn't be afraid of doing that. |
| Space                        | Mentions the physical space of the museum or safe space                         | The museum, one of the difficulties that we have in the museum is that it is inside of a park.  |
| Translation                  | How they went about the translation process, difficulties, suggestions etc.     | For the Korean American exhibit the professor that works at UW worked on the translation. We had another individual who has done a lot of translation work to do proof read, because we don't have the capacity to do or the skill.     |
| Which languages              | Which languages the museum offers within the museum                             | Mostly we provide workshops in English, Spanish and Mandarin.   |
| Why those languages          | Why the languages that are offered were chosen                                  | I will say that 90% of the people that we serve are local. I mean local, local.   |
| Work together / partnerships | Mentions working with other institutions, organizations, or individuals etc.    | [What] we were trying to do last year was to get a cultural center to come up and do tours with us.   |

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