Delivering Messages to Foreign Visitors – Interpretative Labels in the National Gallery of Slovenia

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Introduction – Museums as Informal Contexts of Learning

Contemporary socio-economic circumstances and a great mobility across different domains of life have resulted in a continuous need for the transformation of peoples' identities, skills and competences. In order to empower citizens to make a successful transition from one job setting to another or from one country to another, the EU considers necessary to support learning in different contexts, through different media and in different stages of one's life, or in other words, lifelong learning. It is officially defined as "learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective" (Commission of the European Communities, 2001).

Museums have assumed an important position in today's society as places of informal learning – "learning that occurs in daily life (...) through interests and activities of individuals (...)" (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2012). Museum and museology researchers who early on recognized the importance of informal learning, especially approaches grounded in constructivism (Falk, Dierking, 1992, 2006; Hein, 1998).

In the context of museum's educational role, art museums have witnessed different, often conflicting views on what sort of experience they should provide. Throughout their history, the ontology and epistemology of art has had a great impact on the definition of the museums' social and educational role (McClellan, 2003). More than any other museum, art museums have been concerned with aesthetic aspects of the visit and, in many cases mu-

seum staff consider interpretation an imposition on its visitors' impressions and aesthetic experience. Any sort of interpretational aid is still considered by many art curators to be out of place because of the view that visitors' encounters with art should be unmediated. Countering views, on the other hand, favour interpretation because "a work of art has meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence, that is, the code, into which it is encoded (...). A beholder who lacks the specific code feels lost in a chaos of sounds and rhythms, colours and lines, without rhyme or reason (...)" (Bourdieu 1998, pp. 323-324). Unmediated communication between museum objects and visitors is not only the "surest way possible for a museum to retain an 'exclusive' status" (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994, p. 20), but also a major reason why people are reluctant to visit art museums.

In recent years, however, art museums have opened their exhibitions spaces to interpretive media, mostly in the form of labels (Whitehead, 2012) to allow visitors to learn and understand museum topics. "Providing interpretation was the single most important thing museums could do to engage visitors with their collections" (Roberts, 2004, p. 214).

The focus of this paper are two interpretive texts in the National Gallery of Slovenia in Ljubljana that provide interpretation of individual artworks to its visitors. It is an exploratory research whose findings have implications for interpretation and informal learning in art museums in terms of contribution of text-based information to aesthetic experience and use of English as a lingua franca in museums. The theoretical framework is informed by constructivist theory, a theory of aesthetic experience and visual literacy, and social-semiotic perspective of language which is used as a tool for museum text analysis and theoretical basis for content analysis of empirical data.

Text-based Interpretation in Art Museums

Labels most commonly stand for texts in museums or galleries where they serve as tools for helping visitors "interpret and relate to exhibit content, have an emotive impact, or motivate attention and effort" (Screven, 1992, p. 183). They have a broad range of functions that include focusing attention to objects, instructing visitors to do or look for something, eliciting curiosity, connecting unfamiliar objects and topics with familiar ones, providing various types of information and the like. In addition to written texts, they can take forms in other modes and media, such as audio or graphics.

Serrell (1996) differentiates between interpretive and noninterpretive labels. The latter include identification labels, donor information,

credit panels and different types of signs that instruct visitors or help them orientate. Unlike them, interpretative labels are all those that serve to "explain, guide, question, inform or provoke in a way that invites participation by the reader" (Ibid, p. 10) and they are divided into four categories: title labels, introductory or orientation labels, section or group labels and captions.

Labels are one of the most important ways in which visitors can gain information and with which learning can be facilitated in the self-guiding environment of a museum. Those who do not feel confident or happy enough by merely observing art works, or who cannot read visual cues provided by them, are helped with words which "give a new, deeper dimension to our visual experience" (Ekarv, 1994, p. 201). In fact, they have been almost a canonical medium for providing information about museums' material collections. A reason for not exploiting a full potential of multisensory, multimedia and multimodal opportunities that displaying objects and the use of ICT offer us, might be the cultural preferences for textual (or verbal) modes of learning. This could also explain why even hypermedia environment digital content is defined in terms of text-and-image relationship and often following a standard practice of label writing (Parry et al, 2007). It is, therefore, not surprising that the topic of museum exhibition texts encompasses a rather large body of literature that ranges from theoretical and critical to advisory to strictly practical.

Psychologically grounded research into the relationship between the museum environment and museum visitors (Bitgood 2003, 2006; Gutwill, 2006; Screven 1992) produced findings which show that "visitors do read labels if they perceive that labels will meaningfully help relate exhibit content to them, or will provide feedback and follow-up of exhibit experiences. It can also be a general conclusion that visitors have a need for communication (Perry, 2012, p. 74) and they will use interpretation to find out what they want to know. Empirically derived data often serve as groundwork for different types of advice on ways in which to create successful labels (Ekarv, 1994, Gilmore and Sabine, 1994). Some authors consider labels as having an overall importance for exhibitions (Dean, 1994; Serrell, 1996) and they emphasise the need to develop different types of texts, positioned in specific places within the exhibition that represent different levels of the exhibition concept.

The most common informational format in art museums are section labels, which interpret a subgrouping of artworks, and identification labels with minimal information such as the name of the work, maker, date, material and the like. Captions, which are specific to an object or small group of objects and provide more information and inter-

pretation, have become more present at exhibitions though their use as a meaning-making resource could be even more widespread. Captions are "the 'frontline" form of interpretative labels" (Serrell, 1996, p. 24) because they allow visitors to make their own pathways in the exhibition space who can find out more about the objects that draw their attention rather than follow the exhibition route defined by curators. In addition, they are usually the only texts that visitors read because they are short and are placed close to objects. That is why texts of captions need to make sense independently of other texts in the exhibition. This sort of interpretation strategy supports to the highest degree the notion of free-choice learning in museums.

Interpretative Labels in National Gallery of Slovenia in Ljubljana

The National Gallery of Slovenia in Ljubljana launched an interesting and praiseworthy interpretation project which took into consideration opinions of its visitors. A survey was conducted asking visitors which of the paintings on display at the permanent exhibition Art in Slovenia they would like to be interpreted[1]. The paintings which received the biggest number of votes were given interpretive labels, or more precisely, captions. This type of collaboration between a state gallery and visitors can safely be called unconventional, especially for this part of Europe.

Since the works of art chosen for interpretation were put on show earlier, as part of a curatorial concept, they have been left hanging in their places. The gallery chose to deliver text-based interpretation in the least intrusive way by placing QR (quick response) codes on the wall next to the chosen artworks. By scanning the code with their smartphones, visitors get interpretation for individual paintings. The first thing that appears on the phones after scanning the code is a digital photograph and an option to choose either the Slovenian or the English language. After choosing English visitors get two types of texts – identification label containing basic information and approximately a page long caption (Fig. 1 & 2[2]). Those who wish to choose Slovenian have the option of reading a piece of text or listening to an audio file. In spite of this multimedia approach, the research presented in the paper does not take into consideration the technological aspect and focuses only on the linguistic aspects of the two interpretative texts.

1 This information is available on the gallery's official website http://www.ng-slo.si/en/visit-us (12.09.2015.)

2 The texts have been copy-pasted from the gallery's website and they are presented in exactly the same format as they appear on the site (bolded phases, paragraphs)

Jožef Tominc (Gorizia, 1790 – Gradišče nad Prvačino, 1866)
Family of Dr Frušić
oil on canvas, 130 x 170 cm
NG S 463, National Gallery of Slovenia

Jožef Tominc had a reputation for being a prestigious portraitist with an excellent oil painting technique that included the ability of realistically depicting facial physiognomy, a convincing display of material and presentation of a variety of materials, a quick way of working, as well as high prices. He made individual or group portraits of the aristocratic and bourgeois society of various nationalities. He gained his academic education in Italy, worked in Gorizia, a short time also in Ljubljana, but mostly in Trieste, which was experiencing fast economic growth.

The Frušić family portrait also showed Tominc as a clever observer. He thoughtfully gathered the members of the bourgeois family around a table in their home salon, in front of an animated tripartite background. He placed the parents comfortably on each side of the settee, with the children ranging between them, from the youngest behind the mother to the oldest in front of the father. In contrast to the ostentatious props of the Moscon family, Frušić holds a book of texts by Hippocrates in his hands, which alludes to his medical profession.

The home furnishings, clothing and jewellery indicate stability, yet modesty. By reducing additional objects and by using calm hues in his colour palette, Tominc shifted the attention to the expressions of those portrayed. With their fixed gazes and resolute postures, the members of the family express self-confidence and the moral virtues of the bourgeois – intellectual class.

Fig. 1. Object label for the painting Family of Dr. Frušić, by Jožef Tominc, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana, photo and text retrieved from: http://www.ng-slo.si/si/qr/NGS0463 (23.02.2015.)

Matej Sternen (Verd, 1870 – Ljubljana, 1949)
The Red Parasol
oil on canvas, 125,5 x 85 cm
NG S 2013, National Gallery of Slovenia

Sternen's oeuvre is characterised by the female figure. Due to the facts that he sojourned in Munich for a long time becoming well-acquainted with the bourgeois culture and that he perfected his feel for drawing and colour in the private school of his compatriot Anton Ažbe, it is not surprising that he focused on portrait and the nude already early on.

Among Sternen's more traditional portraits of Impressionist muses or melancholically dreamy girls, The Red Parasol is given a special status. Exceptionally, the female figure appears outdoors. The fashionably dressed lady is most likely Sternen's partner Rozi Klein, also a painter, who was frequently depicted. Sternen exhibited Roza Klein in an armchair, her most representative portrait, in 1904 at Miethke's in Vienna. The lukewarm response from the critics probably encouraged him to thoughtfully take on the Impressionist issues in the same year at his home in Verd. He chose an established motif within European Impressionism – a woman with a parasol – and instead of dealing with a realist depiction of physiognomy, he focused on the Impressionist technique of applying paint and finding suitable lighting. He maintained the spatial relations between the figure and the background mostly by using warm-cool colour contrasts.

Fig. 2. Object label for the painting The Red Parasol, by Matej Sternen, National Gallery of Slovenia, Ljubljana, photo and text retrieved from: http://www.ng-slo.si/si/qr/NGS2013 (23.02.2015.)

Methodology

The theoretical framework of the research combines three approaches - constructivist learning (Falk, Dierking, 1992, 2006), aesthetic experience (Csikszentmihalyi, Robinson, 1991; Housen, 1987) and visual literacy (Rice, 1988, 1989), and social semiotic analysis of museum texts (Ravelli, 2006). Although stemming from different schools of thought, they are relevant for learning in museums because they emphasize the active role of visitors in creating their own meanings. Aesthetic experience can be seen as an active process supported by prior knowledge which builds on *outside* information, which in art museums, is provided most frequently by curatorial or education staff.

Research based on aesthetic approach to learning about art in galleries and museums has shown that museum visitors with low knowledge of art and museum rely heavily on the museum's help in their encounters with art (Stainton, 2002) and that their understanding and enjoyment of art increases when artworks are interpreted through texts (Cupchik, Shereck and Spiegel, 1994; Temme, 1992). In addition, people's aesthetic experience and their responses to art have been proved multidimensional. Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson's (1991) study on art museum professionals' responses resulted in four categories according to the following aspects of their experience: perceptual (elements of art), emotional (reactions to the emotional content and personal associations), intellectual (art historical and theoretical issues) and communicative (relating artist and painting to their culture and time). Each of the four dimensions can be more or less relevant for an individual's aesthetic experience and they can overlap in different ways when encountering art. What the authors consider the prerequisite for meaningful interactions with works of art is confidence.

Confidence in terms of launching into communication with art works depending on one's own facilities mostly characterizes visually literate people, that is, those who have the ability to understand and use the fine arts (Rice, 1988). Understanding here refers to skills of analysing objects visually or making sense or art, while using is related to "being able to apply to daily life the learning and experiences derived from original objects in the museum setting" (Rice, 1988, p. 13). "A visually literate person (...) is someone who can make sense of art objects, both by knowing how they fit into a historical context and by having the skills to analyze objects visually" (Rice, 1989, p.97). This is where art museums and galleries can play an important cultural and social role. They can engender confidence and help develop visual literacy that resonate with visitors' own understandings and experience.

One of very frequently cited and applied theory that is grounded in a visitor-based approach to learning in museums were developed by Falk and Dierking's (1992, 2006) who propose a contextual model of learning that defines learning as a highly situated process on two levels. On the macro level, museums and their visitors are shaped by general socio-cultural circumstances of the area in which they function, which, in turn, determine learning. On the micro level, specific individual characteristics of visitors (motivation, education interests and the like), people with whom they visit or who they meet and speak with in the museum (family, friends, museum docents) and physical characteristics of the museum (crowding, lighting, design, quantity and quality of information etc.). Spatial characteristic of museums allow visitors to move in whatever direction and choose whatever elements (museum objects, interpretative media) they want, for as long as they want it. It is important to stress that the personal context of visitors determines the course and intensity of learning since, for example, momentary interests in or appeal to certain elements of the physical environment will guide visitors to create their meanings or to explore content more deeply. On the other hand, dissatisfaction with the physical and/or social contexts, for whatever reasons, may motivate visitors to leave the museum as soon as possible.

Properly shaped elements of museums' physical context, including labels, are an important condition for a meaningful museum experience.

Informed by said theory and aesthetic experience research this study aims to broaden the scope of the discourse related to interpretive labels by analysing texts and users' responses to these texts. The linguistic approach chosen for this task is based on Halliday's notion of language as a set of meaning making resources used by the speaker (in this case the National Gallery of Slovenia) in a particular social context (Halliday, 1993). Its use is always dependent upon a (cultural and communicational) context, and motivations and interests of speakers to communicate with their interlocutors and achieve specific results. On the other hand, the interlocutors' interpretation also depends on their interests, knowledge of the language, cultural characteristics and so on. If these characteristics of all parties align, communication will result in understanding. However, communication in museums is not straightforward because exhibition texts communicate simultaneously with a great number of people whose linguistic, educational, cultural and other levels differ to various degrees.

Drawing on Halliday's social semiotic theory of language and his categories of language functions, Ravelli (2006) analyses museum texts in terms of the following functions: representation of experiences (representational framework), meaningful organization of representations

(organizational framework) and enactment of social relationships (interactional framework).

The same three frameworks have been used in an analysis presented in this paper of two English translations of the Slovenian interpretive labels accompanying two paintings on display in Ljubljana's National Gallery of Slovenia. The labels are English translations of the texts originally written in Slovenian, also available for use at the gallery. A survey was conducted with Croatian students who gave their opinions about the texts. This research was undertaken with the goal of answering the questions:

1. What linguistic aspects of labels contribute to and/or hinder understanding of texts and, consequently, painting?
2. What conclusions can be made about the interpretive approach or strategy of the gallery?

In the first part of the research the text of the two labels have been examined in relations to three frameworks. The second part of the research comprises a survey of students, i.e. readers of the texts. Their written responses have been analysed by using qualitative content analysis which takes Ravelli's theoretical approach as a foundation of the study. In other words, the communication frameworks serve as a scheme within which categories are developed on the empirical material with the aim of identifying themes pertaining to the three frameworks.[3] Although the majority of captions share similar linguistic characteristics, the main focus has been on two specific texts which interpret the paintings entitled Family of Dr Frušić by Jožef Tominc (Fig. 1) and The Red Parasol by Matej Sternen (Fig. 2). The choice of these two texts depended on the pictorial characteristics of the paintings (human figures depicted in different artistic styles) and properties of the captions (similar type of information and slightly different language style).

Analysis of Two Gallery Texts Within Three Communication Frameworks

Ravelli's three frameworks for understanding museum texts show that meanings produced through language are complex and that they reflect

3 It is important to emphasize the limited scope of this study since both the author of the paper and survey participants are not native English speakers, but speakers of the so called International English. Consequently, the analysis of linguistic aspects of texts and responses of the survey participants related to linguistic aspects is therefore less detailed than it could be if the texts were read and analysed by native speakers. However, any research where analysis is performed on a lingua franca cannot avoid constraints posed by limited knowledge and "feeling" of the language.

different ways people engage with one another and with the world. The two gallery texts will here be analysed according to the three frameworks.

Representational framework relates to what can simply be explained as what the text is about. If representation is seen as an active construction of reality, and not simply as its passive transmission into words, the meanings arising within this framework reflect the worldviews of the speakers. Terminology the structure of sentences reveal how reality is constructed through language. Relations between the subjects and verbs in clauses – who is affected by what action and the role the subject plays are only some of grammatical and lexical markers indicating a dominant framework of understanding.

The main discourse of the gallery's interpretive texts focuses on the painter – his life, work and artistic choices and procedures. In addition to the short identification label where the name of the painter is the first information and emphasized in bold letters, the first lines of the (majority of) interpretive texts are related to the painter or his oeuvre.

The entire body of texts shows a connection to the painter in one way or another. The first paragraph is usually reserved for biographical information, then several clauses about how the painting was created by the painter and lastly, a part in which certain characteristics of his painterly technique is shortly explained. The author of the texts consistently places Tominc and Sternen as the main agent of all that can be said about the paintings.

The art historical discourse is also evident in the technical terminology that is generally used for art historical description of paintings – *facial physiognomy*, *animated tripartite background*, *calm hues*, *resolute postures*... By using phrases such as "Among Sternen's more traditional portraits of Impressionist muses..." and "at Miethke's in Vienna" the author presupposes that visitors already have considerable knowledge about Sternen's works, what Impressionist muses looked like, and that Miethke's was one of most progressive galleries in Vienna in the early 20th century.

An interesting example of dissonance between the author's and the visitor's familiarity with the displayed art is illustrated by the sentence: *In contrast to the ostentatious props of the Moscon family, Frušić holds a book of texts by Hippocrates in his hands, which alludes to his medical profession*. The text asks the visitor to notice contrasting elements between the Family of Dr. Frušić and another family which is not in any way shown, explained or indicated in the text. The Moscon family is, in fact, Tominc's other painting, that hangs to the left of the Frušić,'s but there can be no guarantee that visitors have already seen the Moscons or that they would realize they are shown in the painting next to the one in front of them.

Organisational framework relates to meanings that stem from the organisation, shape and connections between clauses. In order for a text to be comprehensible, it is not only necessary to be about something (representational meaning) but its elements should be connected in such a way as to make sense and to information to flow undisturbed. The organisation related issues can affect the structure of a whole text (macro level), sections of a text or groups of texts and their mutual relations (mid-level) and at the level of sentence (micro level).

One of the main organizing devices on the macro level is genre and it changes depending on overall purpose, and structure which supports that purpose there. Ravelli defines several genres of museums texts that include Procedure (instruction), Narratives (story in a particular time or place), Report (describing things as they are), Explanation (explain how things happen), Expositions (put forward a point of view), Directives (attempt to influence people's behaviour), Discussions (present multiple sides of an argument). Each genre tends to have its own grammatical features, such as, for example, present tense, verbs of being and having, and no temporal sequences in Reports. The gallery texts show a mixture of genres, which adds to the dynamics of meaning creation. The first paragraph is mostly *narrative* since it brings biographical information on the education and career of the artists. *Reporting* occurs when the texts switch to general statements about artists work, his status, or the status of the interpreted painting, statement of the period the painting belongs to etc.

The mid-level organisation relates to sections of texts in which pointers to different meanings can come in the form of linguistic or visual elements. Headings which summarize and topic sentences which point to relevant parts in the text guide the visitors through different levels of meanings. Visual pointers are aspects of layout and design within the texts (bold, italic, different colour or size of letter and parts of texts)

Organizational meanings in the two selected texts (Fig 1, 2) reside in the visual pointers: the bolded name of the painters which emphasizes the importance of the paintings' creators and support the representational meanings, and the division of texts into paragraphs which is also closely related to the representational framework because different type of content is distributed in the paragraphs.

The micro-level concerns the structure and ordering of sentences which influences the flow of information. The ordering principle is set as a relationship between Theme and New. The theme of a clause is a departure point for the message, while the new continues onto the theme moving readers on from the starting point. As the very name say, the new of the clause is new information, while the theme is the familiar informa-

tion or a reference to it. In terms of micro-level organisational meanings, almost each clause in the two texts in Fig. 1 and 2, as well as the majority of other texts, has a different point of departure which makes reading more difficult. The biggest breakdown of information flow is the relationship between the information in the painting and the texts. The painting is (or at least should be) a starting point for visitors from which they move to texts. Instead of leaning on to the painting with the theme which will then develop into new information, the texts opens with a statement about the painters.

Interactional framework is linked to meanings whose aim is to establish relationship between exhibits and museum visitors. Interactional meanings which are often produced in the museum contexts take different shape, from the most basic level of physical interactivity through three-dimensional models that can be explored by touching, to sophisticated digital exhibits developed with touchscreen technology that invite and encourage interaction, both physical and intellectual, with their content. Museum staff such as docents and curators also establish interpersonal interaction with visitors. In fact, every act of communication, by its interactive nature and regardless of the media, belongs to the interactional framework and conveys interactional meanings to different degrees. Even though text is least considered to be least communicational because there can be no reciprocity in written forms of communication, it can still enable interactional meanings. Ravelli sees written texts as sources of interactional meaning because language in general conveys social roles and it can show power difference and social distance between interactants in communication acts. Language, and therefore, texts can either enable or prevent interaction through different linguistic means. Tone and voice of text (formal/informal, personal/impersonal) can equally indicate power relations as speech roles which either give or demand information. Statements and offers provide information and place museum visitors' reactions in the position of receivers. In contrast, questions and commands enable greater reciprocity by inviting visitors to respond. The reason why questions and commands are favourable ways of engagement through texts is "because they invite more explicit or more physical responses, and represent a more explicit degree of interaction" (Ravelli, 206, p. 75). Naturally, commands in imperative should be avoided because they sound abrupt and can evoke negative responses. More preferable are oblique forms of demands, such as questions or statements.

The two gallery texts are comprised solely of statements and are shaped as strongly informative resources which establish one-way communication.

Judging by the expert art historical vocabulary, long and complex sentences, impersonal voice, statements and the language style, the texts could be characterised as formal, although they would not be placed at the extreme end of the formality – informality continuum. What softens the formality are the adjectives that describe artists' procedure such as "he thoughtfully gathered", or descriptions of the depicted people, as in "fashionably dressed lady" and that reveal the attitude of the author and of the texts.

Analysis of Informants Responses

The second part of the research was a survey on opinions about the texts which was conducted in laboratory circumstances. Twenty-six students between the age of 18 and 27 were recruited from several courses of the study programme in Information and Communication Sciences at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb during the summer semester of 2015. Their knowledge and skills related to art and their use of English were not measured prior to the study and therefore have not been taken as variables.

Materials for the research included printed-out photographs of the two paintings and their respective labels (Figs 1,2): Family of Dr Frušić (text length 262 words) and The Red Parasol (text length 223 words).

The informants were asked to read the texts and answer the following questions on the same pieces of paper.

1. What do you find positive and/or negative about the text?
2. Why was that positive or negative?
3. What would you change or add.
4. Why would you change/add it?
5. Were there any words in the texts which you cannot understand or were not sure about the meaning? If yes, underline or encircle them.

The written responses of the informants were first coded according to the three frameworks with individual themes within them arising from the material. The themes were subsequently categorized as Satisfactory, Unsatisfactory and Should Be Included on the basis of informants' explicit and implicit comments (Table 1).

Table 1. Themes of linguistic aspects of texts based on the data provided by survey participants

THEMES	REPRESENTATIONAL FRAMEWORK	ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK	INTERACTIONAL FRAMEWORK
Satisfactory	Description of Paintings Meaning of Details Information on Artists (life, education, career) Artists' Intentions	(none of the responses relate to this category)	(none of the responses relate to this category)
Should be included	More about Portrayed People More about Artistic Context More about Historical Context More Focus on Paintings Importance of Painting (reasons for creating it, cultural value)	Another Paragraph (Red Parasol)	(none of the responses relate to this category)
Unsatisfactory	References to the Unfamiliar Expert Terminology* Redundant information (about what is visible)	Unclear Statements Too Long Sentences Complicated Phrases / Sentences	Difficult Vocabulary* Complicated Language (style) (Overly) Subjective Interpretation

*The words informants underlined as difficult to understand include both expert terminology (oeuvre, physiognomy, hues) and the higher register vocabulary than the one with which they feel familiar and comfortable (ostentatious, sojourned, tripartite, lukewarm, bourgeois, depicting).

Research Findings and Discussion

It is not surprising that the biggest number of themes came out of comments related to the *representational framework* because the first question that probably comes to everybody's mind when viewing a painting is *What does it show and what does it mean*? which calls for some kind of description. The theme *Description of Paintings* and *Meaning of Details* represent positive features of the texts which provide descriptions of the imagery and explanation of the content (iconology and symbolism) such as the book Dr Frušić holds in his hand that functions as attribute of his profession, or the furnishings and clothing that "indicate stability yet modesty" (Fig 1). Works of art generally present a wealth of symbols from many different times and cultures and explanation of these meanings, even

with a simple phrase, establishes connection between art and a broader socio-cultural context. Particular socio-cultural context also frames the people in the painting as well as the artists, their life, education and career. By merely suggesting a story about on these things which takes place in a specific historical period can help visitors make meanings through association to the ways in which they themselves organize their own experiences – through contexts (Roberts, 1997). That is why the informants were satisfied with the information about the artists and wished they could get more information about the artists, portrayed people and the historical context (represented by the themes *Information on Artists*, *Artists Intentions, More about Portrayed People, More about Historical Context*).

Information on artistic context, which was found lacking (*More about Artistic Context*), stand at the intersection of what Csikszentmihalyi and Robinson (1991) call the intellectual and communicative modes of aesthetic experience which they consider to be more important than perception and emotional responses. Housen's (1987) study of aesthetic development of non-expert art viewers places the same type of information on the third out of five stages. Style and painting technique is deemed important for all subsequent development stages on which this type of information merges with all other, contributing thereby to the skill of making sense of art. The same stage comprises the notion of the importance of a specific artwork that does not relate to personal attitudes and value but values ascribed to it by the museum. *Importance of Painting* is the theme which reflects these issues. This is something that people unexperienced in art viewing often rely on – some external justification for why the artefact in front of them is art, why is it in the museums, why is it important for a national gallery and a nation. This issue is more related to cultural meaning of art and social meaning of museum which contribute to the cultural aspect of visual literacy (Rice 1988).

An interesting, though unfortunately, unsatisfactory aspect of the texts is the lack of focus on the paintings which can be linked to the artist-based discourse of the texts (theme *More Focus on Paintings*). If the gallery had tried to achieve object-centred interpretation, which the choice of captions instead of group labels seems to suggest, the captions should have provided interpretation that directed people to observing the painting. Texts should have acted as mediators rather than supplements to the visual elements because "readers turn to labels to discover what it is they are looking at and then to find out information about it" (Ravelli, 2006, p.37). On the other hand, there are comments by the respondents that the texts contain redundancies in that they describe elements in the painting that are clearly observable but that do not give additional informational

value. This can be illustrated by the phrase in the text about Dr Frušić's family: "He placed the parents comfortably on each side of the settee". Comments such as this one echoes previous research (Cupchik, Shereck and Spiegel, 1994) in which description of figurative paintings decreased both affective and cognitive effect of the artworks. This suggests that visitors can immediately decode clearly visible qualities of artworks.

References to the Unfamiliar, a theme which both gallery texts have in common, have been noticed by the informants and judged as a negative aspect of interpretation (Miethke's in Vienna and the Moscon family have already been mentioned in the analysis of the representational frameworks of the texts). Although the decision to mention these types of information can be justified as the author's wish to broaden the context of the artists' work, they are directed at people knowledgeable about art, or in the case of the Moscon family, other works by the same painter. As such, they are irrelevant to all those who do not have that knowledge. When trying to broaden the scope of messages that relate to concrete, visual material it would be wise to present this particular material. Otherwise, it will only intrigue the visitors and call them to compare the works in front of them with something they cannot see. Another issue arising from the same theme concerns culturally specific information which Croatian visitors, even if they were highly skilful in reading visual images, would most likely fail to understand, for example, where Verd or who Anton Ažbe is. Information about Ažbe exists in the interpretation of his paintings, but that does not mean visitors will choose to find out more about them. That is why captions need to provide interpretation independent of other texts.

Interactional framework is illustrated with Expert Terminology, which, in addition to difficult art historical vocabulary as part of representational framework, makes for a highly salient theme. It is linked with *Complicated Language,* which points to the formality of both the texts and the institution. The formal register of English can be interpreted as the institutional choice to keep a social distance from its visitors, which is remarked on by an informant who thinks that "the excessive use of 'sophisticated' English, most likely in attempt to show expert knowledge, seems more pompous than refined".

The theme of *Subjective Interpretation* shows that respondents identified the institutional voice as being subjective and they judged it as rather a negative characteristic although the information in the third paragraph of the text about Dr Frušić's family provides a social interpretation by talking about values and convictions of the original cultural context of the artwork. And this is exactly a type of information that supports cultural literacy development. However, the subjective voice seems to have

annulled a potentially positive effect that this type of information could have if the mode of the text was different. Instead of firm statements that were probably the main contributor to the negative effect of the last paragraph, the author could have used a linguistic resource called modality – modal verbs such as *might*, *may*, *could* or expressions such as *it seems*. Modality introduces "the negotiability of facts" (Ravelli, 2006, p.89) and softens the objective stance of the speaker. An alternative might be a question at the end of the sentence (for example, *Would you agree or disagree*?) which could invite debate and open to multiple interpretations of what is being said, lowering thereby the authoritative voice of the institution. This can be both a tool that can bring the institution closer to its visitors in terms of communication, and an opportunity to engage visitors in a relevant meaning-making process. Thinking in advance of possible effects of certain linguistic choices might be useful for shaping texts into resources that support and facilitate free-choice learning.

Organisational framework contains several unsatisfactory elements, which makes a large impact on meaning-making process of the informants. Long sentences, complicated phrases and unclear statements are largely the reason informants judged certain words and expressions irrelevant. They include the underlined words in the expressions "he thoughtfully gathered...", the fashionably dressed lady (Fig 2), and the entire phrase "*a convincing display of material and presentation of a variety of materials*" (Fig 1) where confusion most likely stems from seemingly two identical meanings in two slightly different expressions (display of material & representation of materials). The theme *Unclear Statements*, represented by respondents' comments such as "I don't understand the connection with Rosa Klein and his decision to switch to Impressionism" (Fig 2), or "Why is the artist a 'clever observer'" (Fig 1) also owes part of its unsatisfactory status to the organisation of the text.

If the statement of Tominc as "a clever observer" was placed at the end of the paragraph and brought into a causal relationship with the previous sentences, it might be clearer that the author of the text wants to say that the artist deliberately made arrangements of the characters in such a way so to convey a specific message to the observer. Shorter sentences and a more logical order of familiar and new information in them could result in a more effective flow of information and improve legibility of the texts.

Conclusion

The analyses of the texts and informants' opinions about them based on Ravelli's frameworks provides nuanced answers to the research questions. The empirical data show on the one hand, how informants established a

relationship with the interpretative texts as, say, regular visitors. They focused on the parts of the texts that were related to the elements of the paintings that interested them the most. Their responses can therefore be interpreted without any reference to them being foreign visitors. What they found positive about interpretation is: description and explanation of pictorial details whose meaning does not arise from mere observation of the paintings, i.e. explanations of certain pictorial elements, and information about artist. These types of information contribute to the comprehension of the paintings and enjoyment in them.

On the other hand, the language they used for getting information about the paintings was not their mother tongue and they are not familiar with the Slovenian cultural context which influenced their understanding of the texts or the lack thereof. The language is too complex for their level of the use of English and it contains information which are related to Slovenian art and geography. This points to the need to pay attention to culturally-specific information in the process of translating texts from the source language as well as to the need to adapt the language to a wide range of speakers of English as a lingua franca, many of whom might be less than proficient in it. .

The results also indicate an interpretation approach that is not strictly discipline-based and includes interesting information about a cultural context. Nevertheless, the delivery of these information is not done sufficiently well in terms of either quantity and quality of information and the language style. The latter, represented by complicated phrases, long sentences, unclear statements, and expert terminology might be even more problematic than the former because it can easily discourage visitors from reading the texts in the first place and prevent them from accessing even the interesting information.

What analyses as this one might bring out in relation to museum texts is that the scope of meanings – representational, organisational and interactional - should not foreground institutional priorities but should take into consideration visitors' (and non-visitors') expectations and knowledge levels. This is why formative evaluation needs to address these issues so that the meanings pertaining to all three frameworks could be relevant to the audiences.

Nevertheless, this project is doubtlessly an interesting example of the museum practice, and it deserves to be singled out because of the efforts of the staff to establish a closer relationship with museum visitors through both interpretation and cooperative decision-making concerning the interpretation project they conducted.

Acknowledgement

This work has been fully supported by Croatian Science Foundation under the project 4153 Croatia and Central Europe: Art and Politics in the Late Modern Period (1780-1945)

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