



Gateway of the Americas: International Efforts at The Miami Museum of Science and Planetarium

by Sean Duran

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Perhaps more than any other city in the United States, Miami exemplifies the qualities of an international gateway. In addition to 2.1 million residents representing 157 different nationalities, Miami also plays host each year to over 14 million visitors from around the world who come to work, purchase services, study, and enjoy the city's natural and cultural attractions. With 59% of our residents and 61% of our visitors originating from Latin America and the Caribbean, Miami's role as a commercial and cultural nexus is clear.

In terms of exhibits, Miami is proving to be a favorable environment for bridging cultural boundaries and, potentially, national borders. Two-thirds of the staff at the Miami Museum of Science and Planetarium is bilingual: primarily English and Spanish, but also English and Creole, Portuguese, French, and German. Our comfort level with language has opened doors to collaboration with Latin America and the Caribbean. Most recently, *Amazon Voyage: Vicious Fishes and Other Riches*—a 5,000-square-foot, National Science Foundation-funded touring exhibit featuring bilingual interpretation—has swung into production. One of our strategies for the interpretation is to introduce international scientists and allow them to speak to the Museum audience about their field research in their own words. Our ability to interface with an international team of science advisors from Brazil, Venezuela and the United States is bolstered by a multilingual Brazilian-born exhibit-developer.

Approximately 70% of visitors to the Miami Museum of Science and Planetarium are Florida residents (which, as noted before, represent many different nationalities), while 30% are out-of-state residents and foreign nationals. In response to this linguistically diverse audience, the Museum has grown exceptional capacity in the development of Spanish exhibit-related media. Employing a Spanish-speaking and -writing exhibit developer and an equally capable graphic designer, the Exhibit Department has experimented with a variety of regional forms of Spanish to tailor messages to the largest possible audience. *Amazon Voyage* primarily utilizes Spanish and English interpretation. Considering the Brazilian Amazon is primarily located in an area where Portuguese, not Spanish is spoken Portuguese interpretation will also be created. These efforts will focus on a Portuguese language visitor guide and a variety of planned special events at the Museum with the local Brazilian community.

One challenge that has faced the Miami exhibits team is how to regularly and cost-effectively interpret national traveling exhibits that are developed for English-speaking audiences. Different combinations of component-based Spanish interpretation, Spanish-language exhibit guides specific to a gallery area, and trained bilingual interpreters have all been tried. Initial anecdotal evidence has led to a more systematic effort to test Spanish-language brochures. We'd like to know if the pamphlets, which are both time-and resource-consuming to produce, give Spanish readers the ability to interact with the traveling exhibit component in the way they were intended. The museum employs no full-time evaluator but is conducting its assessment under good guidance from evaluation professionals. NSF funding for *Amazon Voyage* has allowed us to regularly work with exhibit evaluators from Randi Korn and Associates who are conducting all phases of evaluation *Amazon Voyage*. In recognition of the highly bilingual nature of the Miami community and the intergenerational family-learning environment



promoted by the museum, we prototype our exhibits using both English and Spanish language interpretation. These are created at the same time. The exhibit is not translated at some point after the script is completed, but is written in Spanish at much the same time it is written in English. This allows exhibit developers, writers, scientists and other team members the opportunity to debate meaning as it develops. Formative evaluation in Miami is scheduled for two sessions, one in late August and then in December '04. Results will be made available at the *Amazon Voyage* website. <http://www.miamisci.org/www/exhibits/vf/>

US natives have been a minority in Miami for decades. According to the United Nations report, titled *Cultural Liberty in Today's World*, Miami now has the highest percentage of immigrants of any large city worldwide. Miami's immigrant population is 60 percent. (Coming in a distant second and third: Toronto, with an immigrant population of 44 percent, and Los Angeles, at 41 percent.) Considering these facts, the Miami Museum of Science and Planetarium recognizes that in terms of local outreach, Spanish-language interpretation is not aimed at some "economically disadvantaged" community, but simply at the community. For example, the Museum's excellent education programs have consistently worked with the growing Haitian immigrant population. The Exhibits Department has not yet expanded its language efforts to serve that group. This is a key and necessary next step, and plans are developing to work with youth program participants and educators to reinterpret in the Creole language two components of the Museum's physics exhibit, *Newton's Notions: Force, Motion and You*.

Amazon Voyage is currently being introduced to both U.S. and South American venues with tentative plans for the production of a second copy oriented specifically for South American and Caribbean touring. Please contact Lucia Enrico for more information at vicious@miamisci.org

