

**VISITOR STUDIES GROUP, EDINBURGH 2007  
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**EXPLORING LANGUAGE REGISTERS IN EXHIBITION TEXTS**

**WHY?** The emotional response to the perceived personality of the author can affect the reception and retention of communications. Also, museum visitors still think of museum people as authorities in their subject and reaction to authority, and statements from authorities, can have attitudinal implications which affect communications.

**WHAT'S A LANGUAGE REGISTER?** It's a tone and style of language use that people adopt, consciously or unconsciously, for particular language situations.

**WHAT TO DO** During an in depth interview, ask the visitor the following :

'Thinking about the things you read about when you looked at the display, and trying to imagine what the person who wrote the information was like, how would you describe that person? Their personality, their attitude to visitors, anything at all.'

**WHAT SORT OF RESPONSE MIGHT YOU GET?**

The person was just interested in getting his information across. They indicated they knew what they were talking about. I could not really identify anyone behind the labels. The individual didn't come across as interested or enthusiastic about the subject. No personality. The person was precise, and expert, but though providing expertise at the level of an observer, seemed to be showing off.

**POSSIBLE SOLUTION**

To avoid this sad state of affairs, a writer could imagine a visitor looking at the thing they are writing about *while looking at the object themselves*. What will the visitor see and be curious about? Tell them that and then give something extra that is really special museum information.