Do readers agree with analysts?
An eye-tracking experiment of reader reaction to translated book covers
Professor Long LI and Dr. Sixin LIAO

Abstract

There have been a growing number of recent publications (cf. Lee, 2015; Mossop, 2018; Batchelor, 2018; Jiang, 2021) on translated book covers, a highly prominent form of paratext (Genette, 1997) but was, until recently, an unchartered territory of research (Sonzogni 2011). Among these, multimodal social semiotic approaches (cf. Yu 2019) offer a systematic common framework for studying both verbal and visual elements. The first author has proposed a social-semiotic framework for translated book covers (Li *et al.*, 2019; Li, 2021) by drawing on the visual grammar of Kress and van Leeuwen (1996/2021). While the framework systematizes dimensions of multimodal meaning-meaning resources on translated book covers, it remains unclear if and to what extent textual analyses can reveal dominant patterns of readers' perception and reaction. Further, contrastive differences require critical examination of the application of visual grammar to non-Western contexts such as Chinese. This presentation reports on an experiment that employs both online (eye movements) and offline (questionnaires) measures to understand viewers' perception of and reaction to translated book covers. Ten front covers were taken from translations (in traditional Chinese characters) of English books by prominent Chinese migrant writers. The experiment explores if empirical evidence supports the application of visual grammar to the analysis of translated book covers by exploring how different dimensions of multimodal meaning-making, as identified by Li (2021), impact reader comprehension of the books and their purchasing interest. The presentation concludes on the implications of advancing book cover studies by combining multimodal social semiotics with eye-tracking methods.

Biographies

Professor Long LI is Assistant Professor in the Department of Translation, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. His research interests include ideology in translation, multimodality, SFL-based contrastive linguistics between English and Chinese, and AI tools for English language proficiency. He is also an Australian NAATI certified translator/interpreter and NAATI examiner.

Dr. Sixin LIAO is a teaching and research fellow in the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University. Her PhD project and recent publications focus on using eye tracking combined with post-hoc measures to understand language processing in multimodal contexts, such as reading subtitles when watching videos and performing technology-based translation or interpreting tasks.