



## REVIEW

**Monica Boria, Ángeles Carreres,  
María Noriega-Sánchez & Marcus Tomalin:  
*Translation and Multimodality: Beyond Words***

(London & New York: Routledge, 2019. 225 pages)

**Lisheng Liu**

Xuchang University  
China  
kevinlls@163.com

ONOMÁZEIN 55 (March 2022): 195-200  
DOI: 10.7764/onomazein.55.11  
ISSN: 0718-5758



In essence, various modes like speech, writing, image, and sound are involved in translation process, and a language-centered communication will conceal the complexities and leave the other modes in the source text inadequately represented or totally neglected in translation practice. Nowadays, the greater prevalence of various forms of communication and meaning-making practices have called into question the time-honored definition of translation which centers on monomodal linguistic transference, and encouraged us to have a deeper understanding of translation practice in this increasingly cross-cultural and social semiotic landscape.

Building on the premise that translation practice is a multimodal semiotic act, *Translation and Multimodality: Beyond Words*, by Monica Boria, Ángeles Carreres, María Noriega-Sánchez, and Marcus Tomalin, seeks to encourage and facilitate more extensive interactions between translation studies and multimodality studies (p. 17). The eight contributions included in this volume showcase the interplay of different modes in the translation of literature, dance, music, TV, film, and visual arts, and constitute the latest development in the field of multimodal translation studies.

Apart from the 'Introduction', in which the editors Boria and Tomalin analyze the urgent need of multimodal studies in translation practice and the rise of multimodality, and 'Beyond Words: concluding remarks', by Carreres and Noriega-Sánchez, who remind us of the future key research areas, the main body part of the volume can be further categorized into the following four areas: concepts of translation redefined, multimodal analytical framework in translation studies, new research methods, and specific case studies.

Gunther Kress' article, titled 'Transposing Meaning: Translation in a Multimodal Semiotic Landscape', concerns the boundary of translation. In recent years, various emerging translation practices have, on the one hand, enormously expanded the research scope of translation studies, while at the same time increasingly prompted a trend to re-conceptualize translation and delineate its boundary with other disciplines (Dam et al., 2019). By taking the Chinese whisper game of describing images in writing and then back to image, the author emphasizes the distinct modal potentials for making meaning, and moves away from the centrality of language to semiotic meaning-transposing in his tentative reconfiguration of translation, i.e. transposing the potentials for meaning and reconstituting the meaning in terms of the affordances of the modes used and the site in which it is done (p. 38). Thus, the boundary of translation has been significantly expanded to encompass the semiotic affordance of different modes and the conditioning factors in the places where translation practices take place.

In his article 'A Theoretical Framework for a Multimodal Conception of Translation', Klaus Kaindl expounds on the three building blocks of a multimodal theory of translation, and emphasizes the value of adopting a multimodal approach to translation studies. To verify the plausibility of his theoretical framework, Elvis Presley's song *Hound Dog* is taken as an

example to illustrate how changes are made at the levels of mode, medium, and genre in its German version, and how the song is represented as a coherent multimodal whole. His framework provides some general procedures for classifying semiotic resources and enables us to view translation as a modal, medial, and generic practice when analyzing their meaning and functioning of the different modes in the multimodal ensemble.

Elisabetta Adami and Sara Pinto, in their article ‘Meaning-(re)making in a World of Untranslated Signs’, take a “co-text” approach to assume complementarity of semiotic resources, and regard meaning as multimodally constituted in the shared/non-shared semiotic resources across linguistic communities (p. 77). It allows us to revisit some of the fundamental concepts in translation practice and reflect upon the implications of multimodal analysis of speech, writing, image, sound, and movements for translation studies. To facilitate multimodal analysis of nonverbal resources, they attempt to design a joint research agenda in the aspects of research hypothesis, research areas, research methods, and theoretical integration. Their research outlines ways to holistically address the relation between multimodality and translation practice, and paves a way forward in multimodal translation studies.

In the article titled ‘From the “Cinema of Attractions” to Danmu’, Luis Pérez-González concentrates on the evolving role of subtitling in the modern media landscape (p. 96), from the ontology of referentiality backing up the dominant narrative regime of western modernity to the ontology of deconstruction favoring democratic spectatorial engagement. In the same vein, Chinese *danmu*, a form of barrage commenting and participatory spectacle, is used as a specific example by the author to demonstrate the discursive space of translatorship involved in the deconstruction of representation. By drawing upon the affordances of this synthesizing technology, ordinary people have gained greater visibility and agency and established new participatory sites for expressing their spectatorial experiences, which exposes the crisis of the traditional representational viewpoint of subtitle translation, and poses some challenges for future translators in dealing with the multimodal ensemble.

The translation of the sign *I* in Dante’s *Divina Commedia* is analyzed by Matthew Reynolds in his article ‘Translating I: Dante, literariness, and the inherent multimodality of language’ to address the problems translators will face when translating the multimodal meaning-creating aspects of the spoken and written text. According to him, Dante’s *I*, a vertical line presented as the original name for God, is not only an image, but a mode of gesture, writing, and speech, problematizing the multimodal character of the poem. Since sometimes it is hard to distinguish between translating across two modes and reiterating within one mode, translators should create another ambiguously multimodal mark serving the same purpose when translating such a multimodal symbol, instead of expounding and clarifying its original meaning. Reynolds’ analysis also prompts us to focus on the classificatory problems of what counts as a mode, which, if not delineated clearly, might potentially destabilize the analytical presuppositions in multimodal translation studies.

Similarly, in Marcus Tomalin's article titled 'The Multimodal Dimensions of Literature in Translation', translation difficulties posed by a French poem *Le Dromadaire*, a multimodal ensemble of poem-text and woodcut image, are tackled by the author by introducing a (quasi-)mathematical formalism to explore the impact of translation process on the multimodal ensemble. In the process of transposition and meaning (re)constitution, the modal hierarchy perceived by the translators indicates that the prioritizing of certain modes is subject to an intricate mixture of literary considerations and personal convictions and aptitudes (p. 148). The introduction of such a mode-marking system helps to categorize the various modes involved in the translation process, and facilitates the evaluation and comparison of different types of translation. The author's findings reveal that it is possible to formalize and quantify translator's strategies in translating the multimodal ensemble, though elucidating the complex translation process is still a daunting and delicate business.

Minors' article 'Translations between Music and Dance' endeavors to explore the role and process of translation in the context of choreomusical studies. Three case studies, i.e. Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*, the controversial Stravinsky-Nijinsky collaboration *Le sacre du printemps*, and Erik Satie's *La Parade*, are conducted to illustrate how translation can offer new perspectives to interpreting choreomusical works. A model is developed by the author to map the music-dance interdependency through the translation of languages, senses, and culture, and her findings reveal the interplay between musical movements and dance movements through translation, which requires cognitive mapping, gestural interpretation, and an awareness of somatic experience. Her analysis facilitates our understanding of the significance of translation relevant to the creative dimension of these multimodal arts.

In the final contribution, titled 'Writing Drawingly', Tamarin Norwood makes an analogy between drawing a life model and translation, and concentrates on how a new method of writing can be derived from the technique of "half-blind" drawing. Her experimental chapter demonstrates that the derivation can be interpreted as a form of multimodal translation process in which the drawing method is firstly extracted from its original mode and then reconstituted in the mode of writing (p. 179). Though it is still preliminary in the translation of multimodal drawings, the method of "translating drawingly" provides a new perspective for us to understand the decision-making in the process.

Based on the analytical framework of Multimodal Studies (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001), the eight contributions in the volume *Translation and Multimodality* are innovative both in theoretical exploration and research methods. Arguably, it is the latest volume dedicated to discussing how to engage in multimodal translation research in a diversity of fields. The contributors have greatly expanded the research scope of multimodal translation studies and laid a solid foundation for its future establishment as a sub-discipline within the discipline of translation studies.

Firstly, it moves beyond previous publications in research scope. Despite the fact that multimodality has received considerable attention in translation studies over the past decades and has yielded fruitful results in the field of audiovisual translation (Pérez González, 2014; Gambier & Pinto, 2018), especially in subtitling translation, a field traditionally assumed to refer to multimodal translation, the potentials offered by multimodal theory have not been fully exploited to date. The volume has extended its focus to some other under-researched areas; the modes of images, music, dance, drawing, and fansubbing have come under the scrutiny of many pioneering contributors. Their insightful findings elicited from the various case studies demonstrate the plausibility of incorporating multimodal framework in the field of translation studies.

Secondly, the volume is innovative both in theoretical exploration and methodological considerations. It is certainly necessary to clarify terminologies before establishing a theoretical framework for multimodal translation studies. To this end, multiple concepts involved in multimodal translation practice such as the terms ‘transposition’, ‘transcription’, and ‘transduction’ are redefined according to social semiotic theory to develop translation-relevant analysis instruments, and to ensure that the distinct modes function as semiotic resources and facilitate communication in translation process. Moreover, the volume clarifies their interrelations, examines their functions and cultural specificity. Methodologically speaking, it has introduced some new methods for gathering multimodal data (Norwood’s writing drawingly), balancing large-scale quantitative investigations and in-depth fine-grained qualitative research (Adami & Ramos Pinto’s research agenda), or checking the impact of translation process on the multimodal work, which, in turn, provides valuable reference for future multimodal research.

However, it should also be noted that the book still leaves much to be desired. For one thing, though many contributors endeavor to establish a theoretical framework for multimodal analysis, including the one based on the building blocks of mode, medium, and genre, the framework is not consistently applied in other case studies. In addition, there are many parts in the contributions focusing on the clarification of concepts of modes and modality and summarizing the development of multimodal translation studies, revealing the fact that the application of multimodality in translation is still an inchoate interdisciplinary field. For the second, it is much hoped that the research scope can be further extended to children’s books, hypertextual fictions, and dialogue interpreting to check its feasibility in some other under-explored fields. Finally, translator training should also become an essential part to recognize the importance of raising multimodal competence in translation practice in the era when multimodal interaction has become the normal state of human communication.

Nevertheless, as a ground-breaking volume exploring many important issues in relation to multimodal translation, *Translation and Multimodality* provides us with many insightful results from some related, yet distinct disciplines of literature, dance, music, TV, film, and the

visual arts. The research agenda contributors in this volume proposed is sure to further consolidate the theoretical basis for multimodal translation studies. Overall, the world-leading experts in translation theory and multimodality and their profound analyses both in depth and width make the volume an essential reading for advanced students, researchers, or anyone interested in translation studies, linguistics, and communication studies.

## Funding

This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China under Grant number 20BYY036.

## References

DAM, H., M. BRØGGER, & K. ZETHSEN, 2019: *Moving Boundaries in Translation Studies*, London and New York: Routledge.

GAMBIER, Y., & S. PINTO, 2018: *Audiovisual Translation: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges*, Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

KRESS, G., & T. VAN LEEUWEN, 2001: *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, London and New York: Arnold.

PÉREZ-GONZÁLEZ, L., 2014: *Audiovisual Translation: Theories, Methods and Issues*, London and New York: Routledge.