

Integrating Multimodal Stylistics in Literary Translation: The Case of *Massage*¹

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Abstract: This study examines the semiotic modes of meaning-making in literary translation from the perspective of multimodal stylistics. Taking Bi Feiyu's novel *Massage* and its English translation as a case study, this research finds that typographical choices reinforce the transmission of tone and the representation of characters' psychological states; punctuation modifications reshape the rhythm of reading and literary effect; and spatial layout accentuates narrative emphasis through visual adaptation, thereby enhancing the narrative tension of the translated text. In addition, the cover of the English version constructs multimodal meaning through visual metaphor and typographic design, foregrounding the novel's theme. The transformation of multimodal semiotic resources in literary translation exemplifies a process of multimodal repragmatization, while such semiotic reconfiguration enables multilayered meaning-making across cultural contexts. These multimodal translation strategies not only enrich the expressive potential of the translated work but also provide target readers with a multidimensional reading experience.

Keywords: multimodal stylistics, literary translation, *Massage*, multimodal reconfiguration

CLC: H059 **Document Code:** A **Article ID:** 2096-4374(2026)01-0054-13

DOI: 10.53397/hunnu.jflc.202601005

1. Introduction

Stylistic studies of literary translation have long centered on meticulous analyses of texts, with particular attention to the relationship between linguistic forms and their aesthetic or communicative effects. Studies have focused on the stylistic analysis of translated literary works (Lou and Zhao 157–166), translator studies from the perspective of translational stylistics (Si and Huo 55–60), and theoretical frameworks for translational stylistics (Shen 85; Wang and Liu 105–109). Mary Snell-Hornby emphasizes the significance of stylistics within translation studies, though systematic research in this area remains underdeveloped (119).

Research in translational stylistics has been grounded in traditional paradigms of linguistics, stylistics, and translation studies, focusing primarily on the transmission of linguistic features, the recreation of narrative style, and the cross-linguistic transformation of texts. However, social semiotics recognizes that meaning is constituted multimodally, thereby challenging the primacy of language. Multimodal forms such as images, symbols, sound, and typography also participate in meaning construction. This theoretical shift has led to the emergence of multimodal stylistics, offering a new research perspective for the study of literary translation.

Currently, there is a growing body of research on multimodal stylistics (McIntyre 309–334; Nørgaard 6), yet its application in the field of literary translation remains in its nascent stage. On the one hand, existing studies have largely concentrated on pragmatic genres such as news texts and advertising discourse. On the other hand, they tend to emphasize theoretical elaboration, with limited engagement in the multimodal transformations and empirical analysis of literary translations. Grounded in this context, this paper adopts a multimodal stylistic perspective, taking Bi Feiyu's novel *Massage* and Howard Goldblatt and Sylvia Li-chun Lin's English translation as a case study, with a focus on how multiple semiotic modalities contribute to the preservation or reconstruction of stylistic features and aesthetic values in the translated text.

2. Multimodal Stylistics and Translation Studies

Stylistics refers to the ways in which language is employed for particular purposes within specific contexts (Leech and Short 9). Its origins can be traced back to ancient Rome, where attention was directed toward the styles of oral expression, which later developed into the study of rhetoric (Nørgaard et al. 2). The flourishing of stylistics in the 1960s was largely propelled by Russian Formalism, after which the scope of stylistic inquiry continued to expand.

As an emerging interdisciplinary paradigm, multimodal stylistics draws primarily on three theoretical foundations: stylistics, multimodal discourse analysis, and social semiotics. This framework emphasizes that meaning-making in literary texts does not rely solely on language. Rather, it is realized through the interaction of multiple semiotic modalities, such as text, images, sound, typography, and gesture.

Stylistics has long been concerned with the relationship between linguistic form and literary effect, emphasizing the role of lexis, syntax, and rhetoric in the construction of textual style. Traditional stylistic research, however, has primarily focused on the internal structures of verbal texts, paying relatively little attention to semiotic dimensions beyond the verbal. Multimodal stylistics, while inheriting the traditional concern with style and effect, further transcends the limitations of language by situating texts within multimodal contexts of communication.

Michael A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics highlights three metafunctions of language: the ideational, interpersonal, and textual (60). Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen extended this model to other semiotic modes, arguing that all semiotic resources possess meaning potential and can be mobilized within socio-cultural contexts (*Multimodal Discourse* 42). Building on this, Kress and van Leeuwen proposed the theory of multimodal discourse analysis (2), viewing meaning-making as a cross-modal social semiotic practice in which images, symbols, spatial arrangements, sound, and language collectively function in communication. This framework

emphasizes the complementarity and interaction among different modes, offering analytical dimensions such as the representational, interactive, and compositional functions of visual communication.

Drawing on this perspective, the present study examines literary translation through the lens of multimodal stylistics, with Bi Feiyu's novel *Massage* and its English translation as a case study. Specifically, it investigates the multimodal synergistic relationships in the translated text by analyzing three dimensions—typography, punctuation, and spatial layout—so as to explore strategies of modal transformation and reveal how these elements collectively contribute to the narrative construction of the translation.

3. A Multimodal Stylistic Analysis of the English Translation of *Massage*

As a novel that places the blind community at the center of its narrative, Bi Feiyu's *Massage* not only exhibits distinctive narrative strategies at the level of language but also conveys a complex aesthetic experience through multiple semiotic modalities at the level of form. Multimodal stylistics underscores that the literary meaning does not rely solely on the verbal dimension. This study categorizes the semiotic modes involved in *Massage* and its English translation, with a special focus on the interaction and transformation of modalities such as typography, punctuation, spatial layout, and book cover.

3.1 Typography

The English translation of *Massage* manifests multimodal features not only in its narrative content but also in its formal presentation. As an explicit semiotic resource, typography functions to convey tone, reinforce psychological depiction, and highlight character traits, thereby playing a crucial role in shaping the stylistic effect of the translated text.

Example 1

ST: 她们两个实在好得有些过, 连高唯自己都说了, 说她们是“同志”, 说自己是很“好色”的“哦”。(Bi 275)

TT: They were going a bit overboard in their intimacy; even Gao herself once referred to them as *tongzhi*, a gay couple, adding that she was the lustful type. (Bi [trans.] 269)

While the term “同志” (*tongzhi*; comrade) is conventionally used as a form of address, in the source text, however, it represents a case of polysemy, with the source text employing exaggeration to convey the intimacy between two characters. A direct translation as “gay” would misalign with Western cultural contexts and carry potentially offensive connotations. Consequently, Goldblatt and Lin opted to render the term through an embedded pinyin form, presented in italics as “*tongzhi*” in the English translation.

Typographical variation itself constitutes a semiotic resource. While the source text foregrounds “同志” through the use of quotation marks, the translators avoided this convention and instead employed italics. This typographical choice does not merely serve as a visual marker but also creates a sense of estrangement and emphasis, alerting readers to the semantic and

pragmatic particularity of the term.

This strategy preserves the foregrounding effect of the original on a visual level, while simultaneously conveying its cultural heterogeneity. Italics, as a conventional typographical device, can signal foreignness and introduce a slight pause in reading, thereby indicating the culturally specific nature of the word. In other words, the translation achieves a cross-modal shift from Chinese quotation marks to English typographical resources through visual emphasis.

This transformation partially recreates the defamiliarization effect of “同志” in the source text and accentuates the contextual nuances depicted in the novel, with a focus on the construction of interactive meaning. Thus, the differentiated use of typography in literary translation is not merely a superficial substitution of signs, but rather a cross-modal reconstruction of narrative style and cultural connotations.

Example 2

ST: [...] “小女人”的目光更为妙曼，是妩媚的姿态，还有“烟笼寒水月笼沙”的劲头。[...] 沙复明动了动嘴唇，一时找不到合适的词。要让一个十六岁的少年描述现在的心境是困难的。沙复明的脑子乱了，但是，还没有糊涂。没糊涂就记得唐诗。沙复明说：“此情可待成追忆。”他粗粗地喘了一口气，对自己的回答分外满意。(Bi 126–127)

TT: [...] that girl had a more graceful charm, something akin to a line of poetry: ‘*Mist blankets the cold water and the moon looms over the sand.*’ [...] He moved his lips, but was unable to find the right words; it was not easy for a sixteen-year-old to describe his feelings of the moment. A jumble of thoughts flooded his head, but his mind was clear enough to recall a line of Tang poetry: ‘*This feeling creates an eternal memory.*’ He breathed deeply, fully satisfied with his answer. (Bi [trans.] 127–128)

From the perspective of multimodal stylistics, the embedding of poetry within narrative prose is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but also a visual and formal strategy of foregrounding. In this scene, which takes place in a bar, the first poem functions as a descriptive evocation of the environment, highlighting the girl’s indulgence in pleasure, while the second serves both as a reflection on transience of joy and a portrayal of Sha Fuming’s contradictory and pessimistic character.

In the source text, the poetic lines are demarcated by quotation marks, creating a visual separation from the main narrative text. The quotation marks not only function as a conventional marker of citation but also as a device that generates a foregrounding effect, signaling to readers the special status of the poetic lines in relation to the narrative atmosphere and the characters’ psychological states. Such formal treatment allows the poems to remain integrated within the narrative while simultaneously preserving their autonomy, thus exemplifying the cross-modal tension inherent in literary texts.

In the English translation, the translators did not retain the double quotation marks but instead rendered the verses through a combination of single quotation marks and italics. This strategy achieves a striking visual and pragmatic effect in the English context. Firstly, italics function to emphasize and mark foreignness, alerting readers to the distinct nature of these lines compared to the conventional narrative. Secondly, the single quotation marks preserve the function of citation, signaling the verses as external insertions. In other words, through the combination of typography and punctuation, the translation accomplishes a cross-modal shift by adapting the original punctuation into typographical conventions familiar to the target readership. This approach not

only reproduces the foregrounding effect of the poetic lines in the source text but also enhances readability and accessibility by adopting typographical conventions familiar to the target readers.

More significantly, this multimodal transformation reveals the dual significance of the embedded poetry within the novel. On one hand, as a cultural code of Tang poetry, it embodies the characters' inner emotions and aesthetic aspirations. On the other, its visual formal differentiation, whether through quotation marks or italics, creates a contrast with the surrounding narrative, thereby highlighting the characters' psychological experiences. Thus, from the perspective of multimodal stylistics, the adjustment of punctuation and typography in translation is not merely a technical choice but a semiotic re-creation, allowing the Tang poetry to retain its cultural depth and aesthetic force in a cross-linguistic context.

3.2 Punctuation

In literary translation, punctuation is often regarded as a peripheral element. However, from the perspective of multimodal stylistics, punctuation functions not only as a grammatical marker but also as a stylistic resource that carries auditory, visual, and affective modalities. The visual presentation of text and punctuation offers a new analytical lens for literary translation studies, revealing how their synergistic interaction constructs multimodal meaning.

Example 3

ST: 一个女孩子向他发出了邀请, 这邀请千娇百媚。——“逃课”怎么样? ——“一起”
逃课怎么样? ——“我们”一起逃课怎么样? (Bi 120)

TT: A girl extended an invitation, a fetching one at that: ... cut class, what do you say? ... cut
class together, what do you say? Let's cut class together, what do you say? (Bi [trans.] 122)

In the source text, the dash, commonly used in Chinese to introduce supplementation, contrast, progression, or emphasis, possesses strong visual salience and a cohesive function. It evokes a sense of extension and intensification, highlighting the gradual progression of discourse. By contrast, the ellipsis in English typically conveys pause, hesitation, or semantic incompleteness. Visually, it suggests a vague cohesion rather than a sharp progression, producing a softer, more ambiguous advance. In this case, the translator transformed the Chinese emphatic progression into an English tentative continuation, shifting from the rhythm of cumulative escalation to an elongated intonation that blurs directness, thereby realizing a cross-modal transition in both visual and perceptual effect.

At the narrative level, the source text employs successive dashes to guide the progression of “逃课——一起逃课——我们一起逃课” (“cutting class—cutting class together—us cutting class together”), reflecting a gradual intensification of the proposal, with strong logical and emotional progression. In the English translation, however, the ellipses create a sense of hesitation and suggestiveness, attenuating the logical progression while enhancing the coy and ambiguous tone of the young girl's invitation. Such a shift not only aligns more closely with the narrative atmosphere but also exemplifies the construction of interactive meaning.

By shifting from the visually progressive dash to the suspensive ellipsis, the translators reconfigured the semiotic function of punctuation, highlighting a tone of playfulness and flirtation. This strategy not only aligns more closely with colloquial English expression but also renders the narrative tone more natural and contextually appropriate.

Example 4

ST: 沙复明相信王之涣的那句话, “欲穷千里目, 更上一层楼”。这两句诗谁不知道呢? 可是, 对沙复明来说, 这不是诗。是哲学。是励志。一本书就是一层楼。等他“爬”到一定的楼层, 他沙复明就有了“千里目”: 荡胸生层云, 决眦入归鸟; 吴楚东南坼, 乾坤日夜浮。沙复明相信自己是“复明”的, 一如父母所期盼的那样。(Bi 35)

TT: He set great store by the lines of the poet Wang Zhihuan that ‘One must go up another floor / To see far into the distance.’ Everyone knew those lines. But to Sha Fuming they weren’t poetry, they were philosophy, they were an inspiration. A book represented a floor and he, Sha Fuming, would be able to ‘see far into the distance’ once he reached a certain level. ‘One’s heart stirs at the roiling clouds / One’s eyes strain at the sight of homeward birds / Wu and Chu are separated by a vast lake / Its surface reflects the boundless universe.’ Sha Fuming believed he would regain his sight, as implied in the name his parents had given him, *fù*—to recover, and *míng*—brightness. (Bi [trans.] 37)

The source text incorporates two poetic quotations. The first is excerpted from 登鹳雀楼 (“On the Stork Tower”), marked with quotation marks to emphasize its citational nature. The second is a composite of two poems: the opening two lines come from 望岳 (“Gazing at Mount Tai”), while the latter two are taken from 登岳阳楼 (“Ascending Yueyang Tower”). In the English translation, Goldblatt and Lin employed the phrase “the lines of the poet” as an anticipatory signal, presenting the verses within single quotation marks and using slashes to divide poetic lines. This typographical strategy segments the lines while simultaneously indicating their rhythmic structure. Visually, the slashes create horizontal rhythmic markers, prompting pauses during reading and thereby enhancing the readability and rhythmic salience of the poetry. This approach exemplifies the representational and interactive functions of multimodal resources.

In the source text, quotation marks reinforce the authority of poetry as cultural memory, framing it as universally acknowledged truths. By contrast, the translators’ use of slashes presents the verses as more vivid, concrete, and performative. This typographic choice aligns with Western conventions of poetic reception, allowing the target audience to perceive Sha Fuming’s psychological expectations and heroic sentiment within a familiar poetic form, thereby intensifying emotional resonance.

3.3 Layout

From the perspective of multimodal stylistics, translation involves not only the transfer of linguistic meaning but also the negotiation of visual semiotic differences between the visual semiotic systems of the source and target texts. These seemingly subtle variations in layout and formatting play a crucial role in shaping readers’ psychological perception and aesthetic experience.

Example 5

ST: 这一天中午进来了一个过路客, 来头特别大的样子, 一进门就喊着要见老板。推拿房的老板沙复明从休息室里走出来, 来客说: “你是老板?” 沙复明堆上笑, 恭恭敬敬第说: “不敢, 我叫沙复明。”客人说: “来个全身。你亲自做。”沙复明说: “很荣幸。你里边请。”便把客人引到客房去了。(Bi 2–3)

TT: On this particular day a walk-in client appeared at noon. With airs of self-importance, he asked to see the owner, drawing Sha Fuming out of the therapists’ lounge.

‘You’re the owner?’ the man asked.

‘I’m afraid so,’ Sha replied respectfully. ‘My name is Sha Fuming.’

He smiled broadly.

‘A full body massage. And I want you to do it.’

‘It will be a great honour. This way please,’ said Sha, leading the man into one of the therapy rooms. (Bi [trans.] 2–3)

Different textual layouts are often closely tied to cultural traditions. For instance, in the Jewish Talmud, the oldest text is placed at the center while other texts unfold around it, with medieval commentary later arranged concentrically around the central text (Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images* 178). For example, the entire scene is condensed into a single paragraph in the source text. The characters’ entrances, movements, and dialogues unfold within the same visual space, forming a tightly knit narrative whole. Within Kress and van Leeuwen’s framework of visual grammar (42), such a single-block arrangement can be interpreted as a “real” mode of representation: readers are confronted with a continuous progression of events, and the text visually conveys its narrative integrity and coherence. In contrast, the English translation adopts a multi-paragraph layout strategy. Each character’s utterance is separated into an independent paragraph, creating a clear segmentation of the visual space. This approach not only alters the rhythm of reading but also establishes a “top–bottom” composition. The first paragraph (the “top”) assumes the “ideal” function, highlighting the independence and salience of the character’s speech, while the dialogues and narrative descriptions embedded within the remaining paragraphs (the “bottom”) serve the “real” function, situating the dialogue in a concrete context.

Accordingly, the single-paragraph format of the source text functions as a holistic narrative framing, in which readers’ attention is concentrated on the coherence of events as a whole. By contrast, the multi-paragraph layout in the translation produces the interplay of “ideal–real” relations, effecting a layered reframing of the narrative. This redesign highlights the independence of character voices while aligning with the conventions of English novel layout. Beyond enhancing the visibility of dialogue and the hierarchical distribution of information, it visually reconstructs the narrative rhythm and tension.

In other words, the transformation from a single-block to a multi-paragraph structure is not merely a linguistic translation but also a visual-grammatical reconfiguration. Through the reallocation of top-bottom composition, it demonstrates the multimodal nature of literary translation.

Example 6

ST: 从来就没有冷过	因为有你在我身边
你总是轻声地说	黑夜有我
你总是默默承受	这样的我不敢怨尤
现在为了什么	不再看我
我是不是你最疼爱的人	你为什么不说话

白天和黑夜只交替没交换
无法想像对方的世界
我们仍坚持各自等在原地
把彼此站成两个世界

你永远不懂我伤悲
像白天不懂夜的黑

九妹九妹漂亮的妹妹
九妹九妹透红的花蕾
九妹九妹可爱的妹妹
九妹九妹心中的九妹

原来给你真爱的我 是无悔是每一天
原来只要共你活一天
凡尘里一切不挂牵
原来海角天际亦会变

(Bi 99)

TT: <i>I've never been cold</i>	<i>because you're by my side</i>
<i>You're always saying softly</i>	<i>I'm here on dark nights</i>
<i>You always silently bear with</i>	<i>me like this, without complaint</i>
<i>And now for some reason</i>	<i>you no longer look at me</i>
<i>Am I the one you love most?</i>	<i>Why aren't you saying anything?</i>

Days and nights alternate without exchanging places
Unable to imagine what the other's world is like
We still insist on staying where we are and waiting
Turning each other into two worlds
You'll never understand my sorrows
Just as daytime doesn't understand the darkness of the night

Jiumei, Jiumei, pretty little sister
Jiumei, Jiumei, like a bright red flower bud
Jiumei, Jiumei, lovely little sister
Jiumei, Jiumei, the one in my heart

<i>I gave you my true love</i>	<i>I've never regretted it</i>
<i>If I could be with you for one day</i>	
<i>I wouldn't miss anything in this world</i>	
<i>For even the ocean's edge and</i>	
<i>heaven's end will change</i>	

(Bi [trans.] 101–102)

The typographical layout of literary works possesses a strong visual immediacy and constitutes an important manifestation of literary aesthetics. In the source text, after his girlfriend leaves him without farewell, leaving behind only a letter, the usually introverted and timid Xu Tailai lies alone on his dormitory bed, refusing to eat or drink, and attempts to alleviate his inner sorrow by singing loudly. The passage is organized around individual songs, each functioning as a distinct textual block that corresponds to the psychological trajectory of Xu's sorrow, unrequited love, and resignation. Typographically distinct from the main body text, these song lyrics are rendered in

rounded serif decorations at the ends of the letters. The concatenation of multiple songs forms an extended discourse block, thereby mirroring the character's repressed emotional state.

In the translation, this section achieves a dual effect through the combined deployment of italicization and typographical arrangement, whereby the organization and visual presentation of the translated text fundamentally reshape the reader's reading experience. The use of first-person pronouns foregrounds the reader's emotional involvement, imbuing the interpersonal metafunction with a strong affective orientation. Notably, the translator renders all the songs in italics, thereby creating a visually foregrounded device designed to command the reader's attention (Fowler 305). The visual form constituted by the juxtaposition of textual blocks functions as a salient visual marker. In addition to representing factual and informational conceptual meanings, it reveals the dynamic trajectory of the protagonist's psychological activity and articulates the nuanced transitions in his emotional and mental states.

Jacques Derrida was among the first to draw attention to the phenomenon of blanks in literary works, what he termed the *parergon*, arguing that the margins and blank spaces of a work provoke reflections on the transmission of meaning such as: what constitutes an inseparable part of the work? What does not? Why not? And what do such supplements signify for the reader's perception of the work? (as cited in Dijk 407). Since the 1970s, extensive experimental research has been conducted on the relationship between textual layout and textual comprehension. These studies have identified three presentational styles, namely "internal vertical justification," "square span," and "spaced unit," as typographical modes that employ horizontal and vertical spatial arrangements to segment text into discrete chunks, thereby constituting meaningful discourse units (Walker 20).

The source text and its translation exemplify these three characteristics: each song lyric block is vertically justified, each textual block assumes a square-span structure, and they are delineated by spaces as units of separation. The compact and concise typographical modules establish an innovative formal configuration that disrupts the habitual reading patterns of target-language readers, whereby the perception of new form itself constitutes a dimension of literariness. In this way, the distinctive spatial arrangement of language in literary works enables readers to experience the aesthetic beauty of visual space (Wang 47).

Furthermore, the translator renders the target text in italics, thereby foregrounding the informational focus of the discourse. This graphic and visual mode of presentation enhances readability, while the translator's purposeful intervention directs readers' attention and reinforces the interactional function of the text.

Example 7

ST: 小马是一个很闷的人，几乎不说话。碰到这样的時候小马反而把话挑明了，不挑明了反而要说更多的话。“你想知道这块疤吧？”小马说。客人只好惭愧地说：“是。”小马就拖声拖气地解释说：“眼睛看不见了嘛，看不见就着急了嘛，急到后来就不想活了嘛。我自己弄的。”

“噢——”客人不放心了，“现在呢？”

“现在？现在不着急了。现在还着什么急呢？”小马的这句话是微笑着说的。他的语气是安宁的，平和的。说完了，小马就再也不说什么了。

既然小马不喜欢开口，王大夫在推拿中心就尽可能避免和他说话。不过，回到宿舍，王大夫对小马还是保持了足够的礼貌。[...]

就说沉默。在公众面前，盲人大多都沉默。可沉默有多种多样。(Bi 44)

TT: Normally taciturn, he rarely talked to his clients, but at moments like this he was direct, knowing that even more would have to be said if he beat around the bush.

‘You want to know about my scar,’ he’d say.

‘Yes.’ Curiosity trumped shame.

‘Well, I lost my eyesight. I got desperate when I couldn’t see,’ he’d answer in a singsong voice, ‘and all that desperation made me lose the will to live. I did it to myself.’

‘Oh—how about now?’ the worried client would ask.

‘Now? I’m no longer desperate. What good would that do me?’ He’d finish with a smile, in a calm, tranquil voice. Then he’d stop talking to the client altogether.

Wang Daifu tried to avoid speaking with his bunkmate at the *tuina* centre, owing to Xiao Ma’s aversion to conversation, but he had to maintain the appearance of civility in the dorm. [...]

Take silence for example. The blind are normally silent in public, but there are different kinds of silences. (Bi [trans.] 45–46)

Each chapter in *Massage* is titled after a character, with the narrative unfolding around their respective life stories. The example is drawn from Chapter 3, titled “Xiao Ma,” focusing primarily on the experiences of the blind massage therapist Xiao Ma at the Sha Zongqi Massage Center. However, this chapter is interspersed with the backstory of another blind masseur, Wang Daifu. In the source text, there is no explicit typographical demarcation between the two characters’ narratives. The transition to the story of Wang Daifu is signaled merely by a standard paragraph break.

In the English translation, Goldblatt and Lin have strategically inserted a blank space between the two paragraphs to distinguish the narratives of the two protagonists. Furthermore, the initial line following this blank space is presented without indentation, while the subsequent paragraph resumes the conventional two-character indentation. Such typographical intervention is a deliberate consideration of coherent textual layout in relation to narrative content. The narrative preceding the white space details Xiao Ma’s experience of losing his sight in a car accident, namely acquired blindness, whereas the content following the gap recounts the experiences of Wang Daifu, who was born blind, and further elaborates upon the distinction between congenital blindness and acquired blindness.

Kress and van Leeuwen, in their framework of visual grammar, propose the concept of compositional meaning in images, which encompasses three interrelated dimensions: information value, salience, and framing (*Reading Images* 177). Framing elements function to connect or separate visual components in particular ways. In this example, the visual blank line demarcates transitions between narrative units. The lack of indentation in the initial paragraph and the resumption of the first-line indentation in the subsequent paragraph are typographical choices that themselves constitute a manifestation of visual rhetoric. On the one hand, it differentiates the progression of narration, distinguishing the preceding account centered on Xiao Ma from the ensuing narrative focusing on Wang Daifu. On the other hand, the blank space acts as a visual indexical device, establishing a reading orientation through the interplay of visual white space and layout structure, thereby assisting target readers in calibrating and sustaining a coherent reading rhythm.

From the perspective of compositional meaning, the blank space functions as a device for segmenting content, while from the perspective of interactive meaning, it acts as an ordered visual

cue for target readers. The typographical transformation of discourse layout serves as a subtle indicator of meaning transition, whereby the formal deployment of white space corresponds to and signals a shift in topic.

In addition, this study observes a typographical error in the chapter arrangement of the first Chinese edition of *Massage*. Excluding the prologue and epilogue, the work should comprise 21 chapters in total. However, this edition lacks a table of contents, and two errors occur in the chapter sequencing of the main text: Chapter 9 and Chapter 17 each appear twice, resulting in a total of only 19 chapters and the omission of two chapters. In the English translation, Goldblatt and Lin corrected these errors, and the English version comprises the full 21 chapters. Notably, this error was subsequently corrected in the 2011 revised edition by People's Literature Publishing House, which also included a table of contents. Consequently, the role of visual form in the overall transmission of informational value of a literary work must not be underestimated.

3.4 Book Cover

The interaction between linguistic and non-linguistic modes in the cover design of literary works reflects specific social and cultural relations. In the process of literary translation, cover design involves the combination and reconfiguration of diverse semiotic resources. The multimodal information presented on book covers across different language systems therefore differs fundamentally from purely monomodal text translation.

Taking the cover of the English translation of *Massage* as an example, this section examines the multimodal meanings and diversified characteristics constructed through different modal resources in cover design.

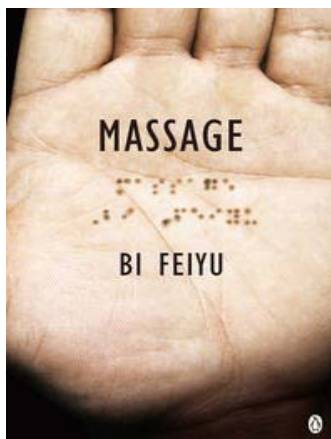


Figure 1. Cover of the English Translation of *Massage*

The title of the English translation is rendered in all capital letters, generating a visually intensified effect characterized by increased typographical weight and horizontal extension. The cover image is composed primarily of black and white tones. The title and author information are presented in black, while the white portion features a human palm occupying most of the cover surface, thereby producing a strong effect of visual foregrounding. The marginal areas of the background are rendered in black. The palm, the black-edged background, the word “MASSAGE,” and the Braille elements together constitute a part-whole analytical process within the framework of visual conceptual representation. The possessive attribute of the represented participants marks

carrier properties, whereby the “part” attributes cumulatively construct the “whole” identity. Through these visual signs, target readers are able to infer the novel’s theme of blind massage therapy.

In addition, the intrinsic qualities of the represented participants generate a visual metaphor. The palm symbolically suggests the means upon which massage therapists rely in their professional practice, while the black background metaphorically evokes the perceptual world of blindness. This configuration thus realizes a symbolic suggestive process within conceptual representation, where the deeper thematic essence is conveyed through implicit semiotic associations.

The close-up representation of the palm and its horizontal perspective establish an intimate distance between the represented participant and target readers, thereby constructing a sense of social proximity. In terms of color as a modality marker, the stark contrast between black and white produces a high degree of color differentiation. At the level of contextualization, the minimal background elements give rise to a simplified decontextualized setting. With regard to representational force, the palm is rendered as an actual photograph, with the lines of the hand clearly visible, thereby achieving a maximal degree of detail. In terms of illumination, the fingers at the top remain clearly discernible, whereas the lower section extending from the palm toward the wrist gradually recedes into visual obscurity. Furthermore, the black margins of the cover may be interpreted either as a black background or as areas beyond the reach of the light source illuminating the palm. The surrounding regions not covered by light are consequently weakened into shadow. Through this interplay of light and shadow, the palm is visually foregrounded as the visual focal point, thereby realizing the interactive meaning with the readers.

Overall, the cover adopts a monochromatic black-and-white tonal scheme, and the contrast between the dark background and the foregrounded palm effectively arouses readers’ curiosity. In particular, the palm occupies almost the entire visual frame, naturally encouraging readers to associate the hand with the novel’s theme. The black background and the Braille embedded within the palm further provide semiotic cues for target readers, signaling that the cover depicts the hand of a blind person. The title “MASSAGE” then functions as the linguistic mode that enables readers to integrate these visual participants, thereby inferring that the novel centers on the lives and experiences of blind massage therapists.

4. Conclusion

From the multimodal stylistic perspective, the English translation of *Massage* not only achieves meaning transfer at the linguistic level but also constructs multifaceted expressive significance through visual resources such as typography, punctuation, and layout.

The typographical forms not only reproduce the tone and emphasis but also shape the intensity of emotion and the psychological traits of characters in the translation. The transformation and adaptation of punctuation alter sentence rhythm, thereby influencing target readers’ perception of discourse coherence and the flow of emotion. The arrangement of layout further reinforces the structural organization and emotional atmosphere of the narrative, allowing the translation to visually sustain narrative rhythm and tension. The multimodal configuration of the cover demonstrates that visual form is not merely supplementary to literary translation, but an integral semiotic resource in shaping thematic interpretation and facilitating the international dissemination

of Chinese literature. Overall, this multimodal transformation exemplifies the repragmatization of semiotic resources in literary translation, enriching the expressive potential of the translated text and providing readers with a multidimensional cross-cultural reading experience.

Note

1. This work was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (Project No. 21BYY008) and the Research Project on Economic and Social Development of Liaoning Province (Project No. 2025lslqnkt-040).

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