

Cultivation of Translators for Multimodal Translation in the New Media Age

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Abstract: In the 21st century, the development of digital and new media technologies has ushered in an age of pervasive multimodal communication, which has significantly amplified the role of multimodal translation in facilitating cross-cultural exchanges. Despite the profound impact of these developments, the prevailing translation pedagogy remains predominantly focused on the enhancement of linguistic translation skills, with noticeable neglect of the imperative to cultivate students' competencies in multimodal translation. Based on the distinctive characteristics and challenges that multimodal translation presents in the context of new media, this study delves into the formulation of educational objectives and curriculum design for the training of multimodal translators. The intent is to propose a framework that can guide the preparation of translators who are adept and equipped to navigate the complexities and demands of the contemporary age.

Keywords: Multimodal communication; Multimodal translation; Multimodal translation competencies; Visual literacy; Ability to integrate verbal and non-verbal modes; Curriculum design

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1. Introduction

As we stepped into the 21st century, the burgeoning evolution of new media has ushered in an era where the use of images in communication has become ubiquitous. The rapid advancements in internet technology, coupled with the widespread adoption of mobile devices, have integrated images as a fundamental component of our daily discourse. From the vivid snapshots shared on social media platforms to the compelling visual narratives in news reports and even novels, images have emerged as a powerful and evocative medium for the conveyance of information and emotions. The proliferation of images has not only transformed the way we consume information but has also reshaped the landscape of our communication paradigms, with multimodal texts that integrate various semiotic modes such as language, images, and sound playing an increasingly significant role in information dissemination. Correspondingly, in the field of translation, the scope of translation has vastly expanded beyond the traditional linear text paradigm ^[1]. Translators are more often required to handle multimodal texts or to utilize non-verbal modes to facilitate the translation of textual content. In other words,

multimodal translation, which involves the integration of non-verbal resources such as images, sounds, and colors in addition to verbal resources in recreating and conveying the meaning of the source text ^[2], is becoming a norm in the field of translation.

Multimodal translation, which involves a variety of semiotic resources, requires translators to be aware of and competent in handling not only the linguistic content but also the non-verbal elements such as layout design, images, audio tracks, and other forms of representation, thereby introducing new requirements for the training of translators. Therefore, it is highly necessary to incorporate multimodal translation tracks in current Bachelor of Translation (BTI) or Master of Translation and Interpreting (MTI) programs to cultivate professionals adept in multimodal translation.

2. Studies on the cultivation of multimodal translators

Despite the growing attention to multimodal translation in recent years and its emergence as a hot topic in translation studies, with some scholars even proposing a multimodal turn in translation research ^[3], discussions on the cultivation of multimodal translators within the academic community remain limited. Current discourses on multimodal translator training predominantly focus on the training of audiovisual translation professionals, like the studies on audiovisual translation competencies by Skuggevik ^[4], Wang and Li ^[5], curriculum design and cultivation plans for audiovisual translation by Díaz-Cintas ^[6], Zhang ^[7], as well as Xiao and Du ^[8].

Audiovisual translation is a quintessential example of multimodal translation, but multimodal translation is not limited to audiovisual translation alone. Beyond audiovisual translation, Chen and Wang ^[9] focused on tourism translation and, drawing on the New London Group's multimodal teaching "designed learning" model, explored teaching models for tourism translation in multimodal contexts to enhance students' multimodal literacy.

Overall, current studies on the cultivation of translators for multimodal translation emphasize the importance of fostering students' multimodal translation competencies. Nonetheless, when examining the detailed curriculum design and teaching strategies, the emphasis is largely placed on linguistic translation competencies. The integration of verbal and non-verbal modes in translation, which should be central to the training, is not given its due importance. In light of this, this paper, grounded in the typical characteristics of multimodal translation in the new media age, investigates the foundational aspects of nurturing multimodal translators, focusing on the delineation of educational objectives and the strategic organization of the curriculum, with the hope to provide some references for the training of translators who are capable of working effectively in the multimodal landscape of contemporary communication.

3. Objectives for the cultivation of multimodal translators

Multimodal translation, whether it involves the translation of multimodal texts or the employment of multimodal strategies to interpret texts only represented by the verbal mode, demands a comprehensive grasp and adept utilization of an array of semiotic modes. Consequently, the competencies required by translators in this domain are inherently distinct from those needed for traditional linguistic translation. As such, the development of multimodal translators must commence with the establishment of distinct educational objectives that set it apart from monolingual translation training. These objectives then inform the thoughtful construction of tailored curricular frameworks.

The objective for the cultivation of multimodal translators is to develop translators who are capable of engaging in multimodal translation across various fields and possess the necessary multimodal translation

competencies. Given that multimodal translation encompasses the interpretation and conveyance of meaning across a diverse array of semiotic modes, practitioners in this field must possess not only the linguistic translation expertise but also proficiency in interpreting and conveying the meanings represented by non-verbal signs, commonly referred to as visual literacy. Moreover, due to the inherent multifaceted nature of multimodality, which necessitates the seamless integration of various communicative modes to encode and decode messages, multimodal translators must also exhibit a facility for harmoniously blending verbal and non-verbal elements within their translations.

3.1. Visual literacy

Visual literacy can be described as “the ability to interpret, use, appreciate, and create image and video using both conventional and 21st-century media in ways that advance thinking, decision making, communication, and learning.”^[10] More specifically, “visual literacy refers to the same competencies as phonetic literacy-decoding and comprehension-to decipher, comprehend, and interpret images, and critically evaluate the messages such images attempt to convey.”^[11] In the context of translation, visual literacy takes on a heightened complexity, as it involves a cross-cultural comprehension of images, transcending mere recognition to embrace an understanding of the diverse meanings and connotations that visuals may carry across different cultures.

During the translation process, the translator assumes a dual role: a reader of the source text and a creator of the target text. When confronted with multimodal texts, the translator’s task extends beyond mere comprehension of the linguistic content of the source material; it necessitates a sophisticated understanding of the nonverbal visual symbols in the original work. The translator must engage in a professional exegesis of these symbols presented, evaluating their semantic resonance from a cross-cultural perspective. This involves a critical assessment of whether the target readers, hailing from diverse cultural backgrounds, can accurately decode the visual messages as the original readers do. Consequently, the translator must make decisions regarding the elucidation of visual information within the translation, providing necessary clarification to ensure that the target readers can apprehend the meanings conveyed by the visual symbols with precision and clarity.

Visual symbols, akin to linguistic constructs, “are constructed in social settings and used by artists to convey meanings beyond the literal level”^[12]. In view of Panofsky’s seminal classification, three levels of meaning are encapsulated in visual symbols: pre-iconographic (pertaining to primary or natural meaning), iconographic (encompassing secondary or conventional interpretations), and iconological (involving ideological and cultural implications)^[12]. These three levels correspond to the referential, connotative, and symbolic meanings of language. Among these, the first level, the referential or denotative meaning of visual symbols, is the most accessible due to the immediacy and vividness of images. In contrast, the iconographic and iconological levels are intimately intertwined with specific sociocultural contexts, suggesting that a given image may evoke distinct connotative and symbolic interpretations across diverse cultural landscapes. Therefore, it is imperative for translators to engage in systematic study to fathom these complex layers of visual signification. Therefore, an integral aspect of honing students’ visual literacy lies in fostering their comprehension of the connotative and symbolic dimensions of visual symbols.

In the process of translating a verbal text through multimodal approaches, the translator is tasked with the responsibility of generating or selecting appropriate visual imagery to articulate information that may elude clear expression in the target language or that may not be readily comprehensible to the target readers through linguistic cues alone. While the creation of such images may not necessarily fall within the translator’s purview and can be effectively delegated to graphic design experts, it is imperative that the translator maintains a clear understanding of the visual requirements for the translation. This involves a collaborative relationship with

the designers, where the translator provides guidance on the desired visual outcomes and adapts the linguistic translation in accordance with the visual information to harmonize the interplay between text and image.

In the realm of translation, which inherently bridges two distinct cultures, the visual literacy demanded of translators involved in multimodal translation must extend to a cross-cultural dimension. The images might be fairly culture-specific^[13], with the potential to elicit varied interpretations across different cultural contexts. This is particularly pertinent when considering the connotative and symbolic meanings of visual symbols, as previously discussed.

Translators, acting as intermediaries between cultures, are thus required to comprehend visual information not only within the parameters of their own cultural milieu but also within the cultural settings of the target readers. It is their task to discern which visual cues, emblematic of specific cultural phenomena, may pose interpretive challenges for the target readership and to elucidate these nuances through linguistic translation.

Moreover, translators must exercise caution to avoid the incorporation of visual symbols that may be taboos to the target culture, thereby preempting any inadvertent cultural transgressions. An illustrative example of such cultural sensitivity is the avoidance of depicting a samurai wielding a sword in his left hand, which carries specific connotations in Japanese culture. In instances where the source text is inherently multimodal and contains images that may be culturally problematic, translators must navigate a delicate balance. They may opt to alter the visual design to align with the cultural sensibilities of the target readers. Alternatively, if modifying the image is impractical, the linguistic translation must be augmented with explanatory annotations to mitigate the risk of misinterpretation or cultural resistance from the target readers, thereby facilitating a seamless and empathetic cross-cultural exchange.

3.2. Ability to integrate verbal and non-verbal modes

Engaging in multimodal translation involves understanding and producing texts that integrate both verbal and non-verbal modes, which requires not only proficiency in linguistic translation and visual literacy but also a sophisticated ability to synthesize diverse modes. In multimodal texts, as verbal mode and non-verbal semiotic resources are interdependent, the accurate interpretation and construction of multimodal texts are predicated upon the discernment of the dynamic relationship between textual content and visual imagery, given that this interrelation is pivotal to the generation and comprehension of discourse meaning^[14]. Translators should therefore give careful consideration to the manifold connections between verbal and non-verbal resources in the source text, overlooking them may be detrimental to the target reader's holistic perception of the overall semiotic ensemble^[15].

When translating multimodal texts such as films, picture books, comics, and illustrated advertisements, translators first need to meticulously discern the interrelationship between verbal and non-verbal modes. This analysis involves a thorough examination of whether these elements are redundant, conveying identical information, complementary, expressing distinct content, or reinforcing each other. Furthermore, it is essential to evaluate whether non-verbal resources serve to provide contextual background, such as setting and environment, or if they expand upon the linguistic text.

Only through a precise elucidation of these multifaceted relationships can translators make decisions regarding the appropriate treatment of non-verbal modes in the translation process. For instance, when confronted with a redundant relationship between verbal and non-verbal modes in the source text, translators may opt not to apply special treatment to the non-verbal elements. Conversely, when non-verbal modes augment the information presented verbally, translators must engage in a critical assessment: Can the target readership from diverse cultural backgrounds grasp these supplementary messages in the same manner as the

original readers? If there is a possibility of misinterpretation or if the target readers cannot comprehend these messages as intended, should the non-verbal symbols be substituted, or should they be supplemented with verbal explanations to ensure clarity?

In addition to these considerations, translators must also reflect on the suitability of the source text's interplay between text and images in the target linguistic and cultural context. It may be necessary to reconfigure this relationship in the translation to align more closely with the expectations and conventions of the target readership.

When translating monolingual texts using multimodal means, translators are required to identify which parts of the original text could benefit from non-verbal modes to aid the target readers' comprehension. Translators should also carefully consider how non-verbal modes interact with verbal content, aiming for a cohesive integration that avoids misinterpretation and maintains the text's essence. This process involves a deep understanding of the target culture and readers, allowing for the effective use of non-verbal resources that enhance, rather than obscure, the verbal message.

After determining the relationship between text and images, translators must strategically integrate these elements to form a cohesive unit within the target culture. In the process of translation, if the original correlation between verbal and non-verbal modes is disrupted in the target language due to linguistic and cultural differences, adjustments must be made. This may involve modifying the linguistic expressions or substituting non-verbal images to ensure a coherent representation in the translated discourse.

When employing multimodal translation for monolingual texts, for information that can be clearly expressed by illustration, sound, or video in the translation, appropriate reductions or downplaying in the language description can be made. Conversely, for non-verbal content that may confuse or be inaccessible to readers, the linguistic component of the translation should be augmented with clear explanations to prevent misinterpretation and guide accurate understanding of the visual elements.

In summary, for translators engaged in multimodal translation in the new media age, in addition to linguistic translation skills, visual literacy and abilities to integrate verbal and non-verbal modes are essential, which should be the primary objectives for the cultivation of multimodal translators and supported by the specialized curriculum.

4. Curriculum design for the cultivation of multimodal translators

Curriculum design is paramount in fulfilling the goals of talent development. For any educational program aimed at nurturing specialized skills, including translation talent, a well-structured and logical curriculum is indispensable. The design of the curriculum content must be purposeful, scientifically sound, and oriented toward the development of the age ^[16]. It is imperative that curriculum development remains agile and responsive, with adjustments made in a timely fashion to align with the evolving needs of learners and the feedback from society at large. As highlighted by Li and Hu ^[17], a curriculum that fails to adapt to the dynamic and progressive requirements of students and societal demands can have dire consequences. It not only squanders the valuable time and financial investments made by learners but also jeopardizes their potential for success and undermines the urgent need for skilled professionals within society.

In the realm of translation curriculum design, while there may be variations in the specific courses offered by different institutions, the core structure typically revolves around the competencies essential for translating verbal representations of meaning. The curriculum is generally organized into several major modules: language knowledge and skills module, translation knowledge and skills module, translation-related general knowledge

and skills module, professional knowledge and skills module, and specialized knowledge and skills module ^[18].

For these translation courses, most institutions regard courses involving language knowledge and skills, translation knowledge and skills, such as translation theory and practice, as core courses, and those involving other abilities, general knowledge and skills, professional knowledge and skills, and specialized knowledge and skills, as auxiliary courses. However, upon examination of the current landscape of translation courses, a notable absence emerges: there is a scarcity of specialized courses tailored explicitly to the unique skill set required for multimodal translation, which suggests a need for curriculum innovation within translation programs. As previously discussed, fostering visual literacy and multimodal integration abilities is a critical goal in the development of multimodal translators. To this end, the curriculum for multimodal translation must be designed with this objective in mind. It should encompass not only the foundational courses that focus on language proficiency and translation expertise but also a specialized array of modular courses that are tailored to enhance these specific competencies.

Therefore, the curriculum for multimodal translation would include a tiered system of courses, which may be categorized into core courses, required courses, and elective courses. Core courses would form the essential foundation, providing students with the basic skills and knowledge necessary for multimodal translation. Required courses offer more in-depth study and practice in areas that are directly related to the development of visual literacy and multimodal integration skills. Elective courses can be designed to broaden students' exposure to the field of visual communication. By offering a diverse range of elective subjects, students will have the opportunity to delve into areas that extend beyond the core requirements of multimodal translation, equipping themselves with a wider skill set that complements and enhances their ability to engage in multimodal translation, while also building expertise in related or complementary fields. Therefore, a comprehensive, modular curriculum for multimodal translation education should be developed as shown in **Figure 1**.

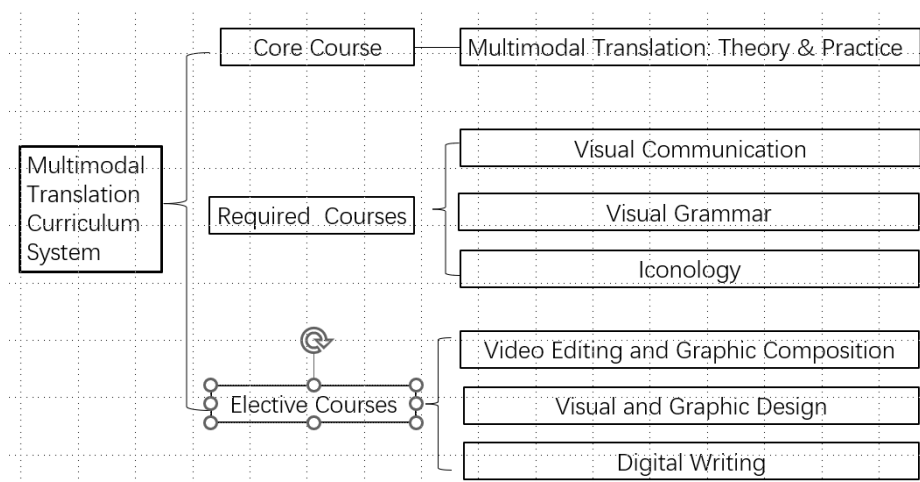


Figure 1. Multimodal translation curriculum system

The modular courses for the cultivation of multimodal translators can center on “Multimodal Translation Theory and Practice” as the core course. This core course would cover a spectrum of multimodal translation scenarios, offering students a comprehensive understanding of the field. By combining theoretical frameworks with a wealth of case studies drawn from real-world multimodal translation projects, students will gain insight into the unique traits and demands of multimodal translation. This course can foster a profound appreciation for the nuances of multimodal communication and hone students’ multimodal translation acumen, making them well-versed in the prevalent strategies employed in the field.

Beyond the core course, the curriculum can incorporate a suite of required courses that delve into the theoretical and practical aspects of visual communication. Courses such as “Visual Communication,” “Visual Grammar,” and “Iconology” would form the core of this component, providing students with a solid grounding in the principles and practices of visual analysis and design, which is quite essential to decoding and encoding meaning in the process of multimodal translation.

Additionally, the elective offerings could encompass subjects that are oriented toward new media communication, including but not limited to “Video Editing and Graphic Composition,” “Visual and Graphic Design,” and “Digital Writing.” These courses, still drawing from the disciplines of visual communication and new media, are designed to furnish students with an in-depth and systematic understanding of the various visual elements that constitute multimodal texts. Through these electives, students will learn to recognize the patterns and characteristics of visual symbols in the context of meaning-making and to appreciate their strengths and limitations in the dissemination of information. They will also become familiar with the fundamental principles and standards that underpin visual communication, as well as the common configurations of text-image relationships.

Distinct from the teaching of these courses in other academic fields, for students majoring in translation, the pedagogical approach to these courses such as “Iconology,” “Visual Grammar,” and “Visual Communication” must be tailored to the specific needs of translation students. The primary objective of these courses should be to enhance students’ competencies in multimodal translation, which inherently involves the cross-cultural transfer of information. To achieve this, these courses should integrate contents that involve cross-cultural comparison, which is essential for students to grasp the nuances of cultural differences in the way non-verbal resources construct meaning. By incorporating such content, students will be better equipped to address potential comprehension challenges or misinterpretations that may arise for the target readers. They will learn to provide clarifying explanations for images that could be problematic or to deliberately select images that resonate more effectively with the cultural sensibilities of the target readership.

In short, with these courses, the students are expected to be equipped with a robust set of interdisciplinary and composite skills, to navigate the complex interplay of verbal and non-verbal modes in this multimedia-driven world.

5. Conclusion

The development of new media in the 21st century has established images as a prevalent and influential force in communication. In today’s world, we have already lived in a highly visual society where images are omnipresent, and ideas and information are increasingly disseminated through visual forms ^[19]. Multimodal discourse has become the mainstream of information dissemination. Correspondingly, in the field of translation, multimodal translation is bound to play an increasingly significant role. To meet the translation demands of this age, it is imperative to cultivate translators who excel in multimodal translation. Multimodal translation is characterized by its complexity, which surpasses that of monolingual translation, and thus the objectives for the cultivation of multimodal translators should extend beyond linguistic translation skills to encompass the development of visual literacy and multimodal integration abilities.

To achieve this goal, specialized design of modular courses is required, with the establishment of core courses such as “Multimodal Translation Theory and Practice,” and auxiliary courses that involve non-verbal communication in the fields of visual communication and new media transmission. These courses together can foster students’ awareness of multimodal translation and instruct them in multimodal translation strategies and

methods, preparing them to navigate the intricacies of cross-cultural visual communication effectively.

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