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<https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-024-03027-z>

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Analysing and evaluating the bilingual adaptation of English graded readers in China: A social semiotic multimodal discourse study

Kunkun Zhang ¹ 

International English-graded readers have been increasingly adapted, rewritten, and localised to cater to the specific needs of learners in different regions. This cross-cultural adaptation of materials has not attracted much scholarly attention, although it is an essential dimension of research on materials for language learning and teaching. The present study explores the textual transformations that occur in the bilingual adaptation of Cambridge English Readers, a series of original fiction books for learners of English, by a Chinese publisher. The analysis is underpinned by social semiotic multimodal discourse theory. Based on the analysis, the study evaluates the pedagogic potential of the bilingual edition of Cambridge English Readers as materials for English language learning and teaching. In doing so, it demonstrates a novel approach to evaluating bilingual adaptations of graded readers. It also shows that the original and bilingually adapted editions reflect different cultures of learning.

¹College of Foreign Languages and Cultures, Xiamen University, Xiamen, China. email: kunkunzhang@xmu.edu.cn

Introduction

Materials adaptation is an important issue in language teaching materials use and research (Harwood, 2010). Materials for learners of English can be adapted to “make them suitable for students in a different or more specific learning context” (Tomlinson, 2021a, p. 37). Extensive research has examined teachers’ adaptation of textbooks in English language classrooms (Islam and Mares, 2003; Tomlinson and Masuhara, 2004; McGrath, 2013). A few researchers have also explored the distinctive features of transculturally localised coursebooks (López-Barrios and de Debat, 2006, 2014).

Apart from textbooks, extensive reading materials for international markets have also been localised and adapted in different regions, and these adaptations shape the learning and teaching of English as a second or foreign language. For instance, in China, many English-graded readers published by international publishers are adapted and bilingualised. However, there has been little research on translanguaging and cross-cultural adaptations of extensive reading materials such as graded readers. Awareness and comprehensive knowledge of the textual changes occurring in these adaptations will facilitate Chinese learners’ and teachers’ efficient use and proper evaluation of bilingualised materials in and beyond the classroom. Moreover, an analysis of these textual changes can unveil often-hidden attitudes, beliefs and values held by the English learning community in China which are different from those held by the producers of the original international reading materials in the West. Learning about these intercultural differences, in turn, has implications for designing and localising English language learning materials as well as bringing about effective learning.

Therefore, this study analyses the textual transformations involved in the bilingual adaptation of Cambridge English Readers in China. The aim of the analysis is to evaluate the “contextual suitability” (Tomlinson, 2021a, p. 6) of the bilingual edition and its potential to shape English language learning and teaching. This article will also discuss the different cultures of learning reflected in the original and bilingual versions. Cultures of learning encompass “academic and professional expectations, perceptions, attitudes, beliefs and values about what good learning is” (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996, p. 74).

To analyse the textual transformations, the present study employs a social semiotic, multimodal discourse analysis approach. Multimodal discourse involves “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 20). The social semiotic approach encompasses a multimodal perspective that takes into consideration multiple modes of meaning-making and a contextual perspective to account for why meanings are made in particular ways within a given sociocultural context. The relationship between a multimodal text and context is dynamic. On the one hand, a multisemiotic text reflects and responds to contextual factors, but on the other hand, the text constitutes the context (Halliday and Hasan, 1985; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014).

For the present study, the multimodal perspective facilitates a comprehensive analysis of the textual transformations in the bilingual adaptation of English readers, which involves the use of written language, illustrations and layout. The contextual perspective is essential for examining the sociocultural dimensions of the cross-cultural adaptation, which is critical for evaluating its pedagogic potential and discussing cultures of learning. In fact, the multimodal and sociocultural dimensions of social semiotic, multimodal discourse analysis cannot be separated. The social semiotic analysis of multimodal texts discloses the mechanism of sociocultural factors in which the texts are produced and used. In O’Halloran’s (2011) terms, multimodal discourse analysis “reveals

how instances of multimodal semiotic choices function inter-semiotically in ways which ultimately create and answer to larger patterns of social context and culture” (pp. 135–136). In the same manner, this article analyses the semiotic choices made in the bilingual adaptation of Cambridge English Readers in a way that responds to and sheds light on the pedagogic potential of this book series and the Chinese culture of learning that this series reflects.

Adopting the social semiotic, multimodal discourse analysis approach, this study addresses the following research questions: (1) What textual transformations occur in the bilingual adaptation of English graded readers in China? (2) How do these changes potentially shape learners’ use of the graded readers? (3) Do the English and bilingual editions reflect different cultures of learning? The findings reveal that, while the Cambridge English Readers primarily serve as extensive reading materials, the bilingual edition demonstrates features of intensive reading materials. These changes may hamper fluent reading but make the series more suitable for classroom use. The bilingual edition also caters to learners’ need for success in examinations.

The next section reviews the literature on extensive reading in English as a second or foreign language, as well as the literature on textual adaptations of English teaching and learning materials, within which the present study is contextualised. Following that, the methodology is presented, including a description of the data and the procedure for data analysis. Then I give an introduction to social semiotic multimodal discourse theory, which underpins the analysis of the present study. The findings are then presented and discussed. Finally, the conclusion section presents the implications and limitations of the present study.

Extensive reading in English as a second or foreign language and reading materials adaptation

Extensive reading, which has been widely used in English language teaching and learning, “involves learners reading extended texts in order to gain enjoyment or information from them” (Tomlinson, 2021b, p. 13). Maley (2008) claims that extensive reading “is now widely regarded as the single most effective way of acquiring and maintaining a foreign language” (p. 133). Extensive reading has been shown to promote English learners’ language competence and reading proficiency as well as bring about affective and cognitive benefits in second or foreign language settings (Day and Bamford, 1998; Krashen, 2004; Grabe, 2009; Nakanishi, 2015; Suk, 2016). For example, it has been found to promote second language learning more quickly than intensive reading in a study involving 3000 children aged 6 to 9 in Singapore (Elley, 1991).

Defining features or criteria for extensive reading have been proposed by researchers. These include reading a large quantity of texts, self-selection of reading materials, focus on meaning rather than vocabulary and structure, and reading for pleasure or enjoyment (Susser and Robb, 1990; Day and Bamford, 1998; Tomlinson, 2021b). These features must be considered in the analysis and evaluation of the bilingual adaptation of extensive reading materials.

Implicit learning is another important concept to consider when researching English language teaching and learning through extensive reading. Implicit learning is “acquisition of knowledge about the underlying structure of a complex stimulus environment by a process which takes place naturally, simply, and without conscious operations” (Ellis, 2008, p.121). As extensive reading aims “to help learners develop a love of reading as well as to acquire language incidentally and subconsciously while doing so” (Tomlinson, 2021b, p. 3), it primarily involves implicit learning rather than explicit learning.

International extensive reading materials need to be rewritten and adapted for different regions to meet the needs of local learners. However, existing research on materials adaptation concentrates on 1) textbooks and 2) the classroom setting. Studies on English language learning and teaching materials adaptation tend to focus on how textbooks are adapted and used in the classroom as well as how different stakeholders, such as publishers, teachers and students, perceive the materials (Masuhara, 2022). A few studies focus on textual changes in localised coursebooks. For example, López-Barrios and de Debat (2006, 2014) identify four features of localised coursebooks for English language teaching: (1) contextualisation, including the use of local content topics, connection with local world and agreement with local curriculum, (2) linguistic contrasts, (3) intercultural reflection, and (4) facilitation of learning that promotes learner autonomy. Furthermore, al Majthoob (2014) discusses the process of adapting combined resources (including a coursebook and a workbook) for Bahraini learners of English in Grades 1 to 3. This adaptation includes adding more literacy exercises and activities, which are still written in English, and developing a handwriting framework, according to which Grade 1 students are required to start pre-writing activities.

Although these studies have implications both for research on materials development and use for English teaching and learning, their focus is on coursebooks, while no study has yet investigated the localisation of extensive reading materials for English learning. The adaptation of extensive reading materials differs from that of textbooks, as extensive reading materials are primarily used for leisure reading, have a weaker connection with curricula, and tend to have less exercises and tasks, among other aspects. The present study thus aims to explore the textual transformations in the bilingualisation of Cambridge English Readers in China.

Data and methodology

The present study conducts an in-depth discursive analysis of already existing texts of English-graded readers. Textual analysis of graded readers is important for educators and researchers to understand and use this type of materials. It is widely believed that textual content, along with materials production and consumption, is one of the three dimensions of English language teaching materials research (Harwood, 2014). This section presents the textual data as well as how the texts are selected and analysed, while the next section introduces the theory used for the textual analysis.

Data selection. This study does not involve collecting primary data. Cambridge English Readers and their bilingual editions published by Beijing Language and Culture University Press in China are selected for textual analysis. Firstly, Cambridge University Press, as one of the leading international publishers, has a tremendous impact on the content and form of English learning materials. The graded readers it publishes are thus representative of the dominant international extensive reading materials.

Secondly, the Cambridge English Readers have a series of innovative features (see the following subsection “Data introduction”) that meet the principles for selecting materials for extensive reading. Key principles for selecting materials for extensive reading include: (1) the purposes of reading are pleasure and understanding; (2) there are no exercises, questions or any other forms of tests; (3) there are no tasks such as summary writing; and (4) materials are multimodal texts in which meaning is made through multiple semiotic modes (Maley, 2008; Renandya et al. 2015; Tomlinson, 2021b).

The Starter level of the Cambridge English Readers (11 books) and its bilingual edition are selected for analysis in this study.

Data introduction: Cambridge English Readers and their bilingual adaptation in China. International publishers often produce materials, such as the Cambridge English Readers series, aimed at learners from a variety of countries. Cambridge English Readers are books of original stories written specifically for learners of English. Key features of this series are:

- Seven levels from Starter to Advanced provide reading material for every student’s ability.
- A wide selection of titles, from thriller to romance, with international settings appeal to a broad range of interests.
- Contemporary themes, gripping plots and believable characters inspire learners and stimulate classroom discussion.
- Audio recordings available online for free download.
- Free online resources for students and teachers including vocabulary placement tests, lesson plans, and worksheets. (Cambridge University Press, n.d.)

Cambridge English Readers are primarily produced as extensive reading materials. Reading for pleasure is highlighted in the “Teacher’s Guide” to the series which emphasises “students reading books on their own, books that they have chosen to read for enjoyment, in or out of class” (Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 8). The “Teacher’s Guide” document cites numerous research studies on the benefits of extensive reading and offers instruction on how to organise an extensive reading programme.

On the other hand, the “Teacher’s Guide” also acknowledges that “many teachers also like to use readers intensively” (p. 10) and, consequently, offers a worksheet for each book. These worksheets contain “Before reading” questions to motivate readers, “Check your reading” to support students in the process of reading, and “After reading” activities to foster language use.

In China, many graded readers have been bilingually adapted. The bilingual editions of Cambridge English Readers are published by Beijing Language and Culture University Press. The bilingual editions are for sale exclusively in the mainland of China. The various components of each book are shown in Table 1.

Of these components, many before-reading questions and after-reading activities are adapted from the Teacher’s Guide published on the Cambridge University Press website. The compilation of word and phrase lists, translation and annotation are completed by Chinese secondary school teachers. Thus, the bilingualisation reflects both the publisher’s demands and Chinese school teachers’ perspective on learning English as a foreign language.

Process of data analysis. The analysis of the bilingual adaptation of Cambridge English Readers in this study follows Kress’ (2005) twofold method which encompasses analysing the multimodal design in the texts and evaluating its pedagogic potential and cultural effects. In Kress’ (2005) social semiotic framework, the procedure for researching multimodal texts that represent knowledge, such as textbooks, consists of two steps: analysis of the design or multimodal composition in the texts and assessment of the pedagogic and social effects of textual changes. These two dimensions are not absolutely separated, as in social semiotics the multimodal analysis results in patterns of pedagogy and culture. Furthermore, following Kress (2005) and Bezemer and Kress (2008), both of which use social semiotic multimodal theory to explore the relationship between the changes in design of textbooks and their potential for learning, the present study does not

Table 1 Components of the bilingual Cambridge English Readers.

Components	Description	Language
Front cover	Title and an illustration	Bilingual
Inside front cover	Author bio and translator bio	Chinese
Flyleaf and copyright page		Bilingual
Preface from the Chinese publisher		Chinese
Table of contents		Bilingual
People in the story	Major characters in the book	Bilingual
Places in the story	Major places and locations in the story as shown in a map	Bilingual
Before reading	Before-reading questions. The original English version does not have this section.	English
Main text	Books of the Starter level and Level 1 have illustrations. Books of other levels do not.	English
After reading	After-reading activities. The original English version does not have this section.	English
Learning guide	It includes New words, Phrases & expressions, Cultural notes, and Reading exercises. The original English version does not have this section.	Bilingual
Translation	This original English version does not have this section.	Chinese
Back cover	Blurbs	Chinese

use any specific categorisation of semiotic resources (such as image types or types of text-image relations) and then assign the textual data to these categories. Instead, the qualitative analysis is organised according to the textual changes occurring in the data, and which multimodal aspects to focus on is also determined by the textual changes that actually occur. The principles of social semiotic, multimodal discourse analysis are introduced in the following section.

Theoretical underpinnings for the textual analysis

The present study draws upon the principles of social semiotic, multimodal discourse theory to explore the textual transformations involved in the bilingual adaptation of Cambridge English Readers and investigates the sociocultural contexts that underlie those textual changes. The social semiotic approach to multimodal discourse analysis originates from Halliday's (1978) conceptualisation of language as a resource for communicating meaning in situational and sociocultural contexts. This view of language as a set of meaning-making resources has been extended to other modes of communication such as image, layout and typography (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021[1996]; Jewitt et al. 2016). Social semiotic, multimodal discourse analysis has been employed to research how written language, tables, pictures and other multimodal resources are used in textbooks to represent cultures, ideologies and other aspects of the world (Weninger, 2021; Smith, 2022; Xiong et al. 2022) and construct pedagogic knowledge (Bezemer and Kress, 2008; Guo and Feng, 2015). To understand how the content of learning and teaching materials matters, researchers must take account of the deployment and organisation of multimodal resources in these texts.

Two important underlying principles of multimodal social semiotics are: (1) all communication and texts are multimodal, involving multiple semiotic modes such as language, gesture and image; and (2) all communication and texts shape and are shaped by situational and sociocultural contexts (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). Following the first principle, analysing language materials "entails researchers examining meanings expressed not only via linguistic means, but also through non-linguistic systems of signification" (Weninger, 2021, p. 135). The bilingual adaptation of graded readers that the present research focuses on, too, involves various multimodal resources. Thus my analysis of the textual transformations occurring in the bilingualisation will take into account written language, layout and image as well as their interactions.

The analysis of these semiotic resources in the bilingual adaptation of Cambridge English Readers encompasses three

types of meanings that are simultaneously made: ideational, interpersonal and textual. The meanings in all texts are categorised into these three metafunctions, following Halliday's social semiotic theory of language (Halliday, 1978; Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014) and social semiotic multimodal theory (Kress and van Leeuwen 2021[1996]; Jewitt et al. 2016). Ideational or representational meaning is about the representation of the world. Interpersonal or interactional meaning focuses on how language and other semiotic modes enact social relations. For instance, language and other semiotic modes in learning materials can be strategically used to engage and position readers in particular ways, which affects the pedagogical potential of these materials. Textual or compositional meaning is concerned with the organisation of the ideational and interpersonal meanings into a cohesive and coherent whole. Compositional devices, such as layout, shape both the representation of contents and the way how learners approach the text, e.g. what to read first.

Another aspect to be considered when analysing the semiotic modes used in the localisation of Cambridge English Readers is the intersemiotic relationships between words, images and layout. Intersemiotic relations, such as image-text interaction, are crucial for understanding reading materials and their pedagogical implications (Royce 2007; Unsworth and Cleirigh, 2009). In the present study, for example, the references to illustrations and book covers in before-reading questions is an important aspect to be examined. This necessitates considering the relationship between the verbal and visual modes. In summary, by taking into account the three types of meanings and the intersemiotic relationships, this study demonstrates a fine-grained analysis of semiotic resources in texts. Such a fine-grained analysis is a central part of the methodology of social semiotics (Jewitt et al. 2016).

In addition, multimodal communication often involves resemiotisation, which concerns "how meaning making shifts from context to context, from practice to practice, or from one stage of a practice to the next" (Iedema, 2003, p. 41), as is the case in the bilingual adaptation of graded readers in China. A social semiotic exploration of textual changes in such materials' adaptation can result in knowledge about how the use of semiotic modes changes "in ways significant for social relations between and across makers and users" of learning materials (Bezemer and Kress, 2010, p. 10). These semiotic changes both entail, and at the same time are brought about by, sociocultural changes (Bezemer and Kress, 2010). Therefore, in a social semiotic approach, the multimodal analysis and sociocultural consideration co-constitute each other. This social semiotic principle, which guides my analysis in the present study, agrees with analyses of language teaching materials by

researchers in materials development and research who deduce or make inferences about the practices of materials use by teachers and learners based on the analysis of texts (Littlejohn, 2011).

By combining the semiotic and sociocultural perspectives, this study views language learning and teaching materials as both “semiotic artefacts” (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001) and “cultural artefacts” (Gray, 2010, 2013). These materials are semiotic artefacts that make meaning through the selection from a series of semiotic modes (language, image, typography, layout and so on), which are further presented in print, electronic or other media formats. Language teaching materials are also, as Gray (2013) argues, “cultural artefacts which serve to make languages mean in particular ways” (p. 2). Therefore, beyond textual analysis, the present study also discusses the sociocultural aspects that shape the bilingual adaptation of English graded readers in China, particularly the culture of learning and the commodification of books.

Chinese society has a culture of learning, regarding what good teaching and learning is, that is different from Western cultures (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996; Hu, 2002). Qu and Tan (2010) show that different cultures of learning can be reflected in textual features, such as layout, table of contents, task instructions and visual images, as well as coursebook contents.

Furthermore, English textbooks and other learning and teaching materials are commodities (Apple, 1985; Gray, 2013). As Gray (2013) writes, “[c]ommercially produced materials are core commodities in textbook publishing and [...] this commercial aspect cannot be ignored in seeking to understand their contents” (p. 2). Specifically, “the need to maximise sales, satisfy shareholders, and achieve corporate goals may have a direct impact on the design of materials, quite distinct from their pedagogic intent” (Littlejohn, 2012, p. 284).

By drawing on the theoretical foundations of social semiotics and considering the cultural and commercial aspects of language learning materials, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the textual transformations and sociocultural dimensions underlying the bilingual adaptation of English graded readers in China. The multimodal textual features of graded readers imply their pedagogic potential. As Bezemer and Kress (2008) argue, the ensemble of multimodal features of a text “provides the ground for learning and in that way may shape what learning is and how it may take place” (p. 168).

The issue of what semiotic modes is considered in multimodal analysis is decided based on the nature of the texts and the aims of the research. When investigating the diachronic changes in meaning making in textbooks, Bezemer and Kress (2010) attend to four semiotic modes: writing, image, layout and typography. The multimodal analysis in the present study focuses on written language, image and layout, because these are the primary resources exploited in the bilingualisation of Cambridge English Readers that shape their potential to promote English learning.

In addition, some semiotic discourse theories are used for analysing particular parts of the bilingualisation of Cambridge English Readers in the present study. For example, the pattern of narrative structure developed within Martin and Rose’s (2008) social semiotic genre theory is employed to analyse the structure of the story synopses on the back covers of the bilingualised readers. Furthermore, van Leeuwen’s (2008) social semiotic concept of legitimation is used to investigate how the authors and translators of Cambridge English Readers are legitimised as experts and authorities, in the blurbs on the inside front covers. The next section presents the textual analysis.

Analysis of textual transformations

The bilingual edition of Cambridge English Readers incorporates several textual transformations, including the addition of Chinese

translation, cultural notes, before-reading questions, after-reading activities, lists of words and phrases, and exercises. These transformations shape the way these books can be read and the learners’ experience of English learning, and also reflect the cultures of learning prevalent in the English teaching and learning community in China.

Analysis of before-reading questions and after-reading activities. The addition of before-reading questions and after-reading activities turns the books from being mere fiction into de facto learning materials. Fifty-one before-reading questions are added to the 11 books of the Starter level, with 3 to 7 questions for each book. The majority of these questions focus on aspects of the stories and are aimed at motivating readers and stimulate engagement; while only 3 involve language skills (word meaning or phrase meaning), and 1 is about numeracy skills. Ideationally, these questions represent various elements of the narrative, such as events and characters. Interpersonally, the use of interrogative and imperative moods encourages readers to actively engage in these exercises. Compositionally, these questions establish connections with various parts of the text, including both the main text and its paratexts, thereby forming what Halliday and Hasan (1985) refer to “cohesive ties”.

A prominent feature of the before-reading questions is their references to pretextual elements. As shown in Table 2, these questions are frequently linked to the front cover, back cover, table of contents, “People in the story”, “Places in the story”, illustrations, and audio recording of a book. These are all paratexts, added elements to the main text, which serve as the “thresholds of interpretation” (Genette, 1997). The exploitation of paratexts in before-reading questions is a powerful strategy for stimulating learners to read the books and engage with the stories.

This multimodal paratextuality, such as references to maps, illustrations and audio recordings, in the before-reading questions motivates readers’ multisemiotic repertoires (e.g., knowledge of language and graphs) and multisensory channels (visual and acoustic senses), thus attracting their interest and facilitating their engagement with the stories. One of the before reading questions in one text, *The Penang File*, is as follows:

Look at the newspaper on page 9.

- a) How old is the newspaper?
- b) What happened in Malaysia on that day?
- c) Who did Malaysia belong to before it became a new country.

The newspaper depicted on page 9 reports the declaration of independence of the Federation of Malaya (1948–1963) on 31 August 1957. Before that day, the federation had remained a British protectorate since its establishment in 1948. This news previews the setting of the story, which tells how a British agent stops a murder in Penang, a city in Malaysia. The three questions direct readers’ attention to this historical event in Malaysia’s achievement of independence. However, these questions involve only limited intersemiotic relations. In terms of intersemiotic complementarity, the verbal questions and the newspaper convey the same experiential meaning. In other words, the only logico-semantic relationship present is that of “repetition” or “synonymy”, adopting Royce’s (2007) categories of intersemiotic complementarity. The three questions do not involve more complex relationships such as antonymy (opposite meaning), hyponymy (general-specific relation), or collocation (the relation of co-occurrence) (Royce, 2007). This overlooks the opportunity for learners to explore complex logico-semantic relations between the visual and the verbal, thus limiting the pedagogical potential of the bilingual Cambridge English Readers. However, it is worth noting that extensive reading materials typically do not encourage complicated questions, so simpler questions might be more suitable.

Table 2 Categorisation of before-reading questions.

No.	The questions refer to	Examples
9	Front cover	Look at the cover. What does it tell you about the story?
1	Back cover	Look at the back cover. What kind of story is <i>A Death in Oxford</i> ?
8	Title	What do you think the title of the book means?
2	Contents	Look at page 5, the Contents page. How many chapters are there? Whom do you think “my” and “I” refer to in Chapters 1, 3 and 4? Whom are Chapters 2 and 5 about? Do you think the story will have a happy ending?
12	People in the story	Look at People in the story on page 6. a) Who work together as British agents? b) Who work together in the Malaysian police? c) Who are the two criminal friends?
10	Places in the story	Look at the map on page 7. Which countries have their names on the map? Why do you think their names are given?
2	Illustrations	Look at the picture on page 9. Answer the questions. a) Who is the man in the picture? b) What can you see on the floor? Name three things. c) What is on the sofa? d) What is behind John on the right?
6	Recording	If you have the recording, listen to Chapter 1.
1	Other	

Salience is also an important aspect of the multimodal discourse analysis of printed pages combining words and images. On the newspaper, a picture of Tunku Abdul Rahman, under whose leadership Malaya gained independence, takes up considerable space. According to Kress and van Leeuwen (2021[1996]), readers tend to first look at pictures before reading the words on a newspaper. Therefore, Rahman’s photo can motivate readers themselves to search and learn more about the historical background. The reference to this news in the before-reading question added to the bilingual edition of the book might thus stimulate readers’ interest and motivation to read the story.

Furthermore, this example of paratextuality involves both sociocultural elements and multimodal meaning making, which are the two crucial elements in contemporary literacy education (New London Group, 1996). Incorporating culture and multimodality, the before-reading questions of the bilingual Cambridge English Readers suit the multiliteracies pedagogy, which encompasses two aspects: “the multiplicity of communications channels and media, and the increasing saliency of cultural and linguistic diversity” (New London Group, 1996, p. 63).

In summary, most before-reading questions serve to motivate the readers and help them to make predictions about the stories. These questions thus help in engaging learners in extensive reading for enjoyment; while, as they involve multimodal meaning making and cultural elements, they can also be potentially used for multiliteracy pedagogy.

The after-reading questions and activities mainly revolve around comprehension of and writing about the stories as well as some other activities, with a very small portion focusing on language skills. These questions can be categorised into six groups: (1) to comprehend, or comment on, the story in general or certain aspects of the story, e.g., characters, plot and themes; (2) to write about the story or write an email, report or news report about the story either as a reader or as a character in the story; (3) to write an email to the author to express the reader’s likes and dislikes about the story; (4) to describe the illustrations in the books; (5) exercises on language skills; and (6) other activities. Table 3 presents an overview of these questions and activities.

In social semiotics, interpersonal meaning making is conceptualised as a primary function of semiotic resources (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Accordingly, developing learner’s competence in interpersonal meaning making is a key dimension of second language education (Xuan and Huang, 2017). An

effective strategy of interpersonal meaning making used in the after-reading questions of bilingual Cambridge English Readers to engage readers is perspective taking. This strategy allows readers to assume a particular role or identity. Two examples from Table 3 illustrate this:

(1) *You are a reporter in the Peninsula News. Write the newspaper article about how the Prince was saved.*

(2) *Write an email from Sophia to her sister telling her all about the day in Norwich.*

This way of interpersonal meaning making enables readers to identify with a character or embody a given role, like that of a reporter in Example (1) or a sister in Example (2), and therefore facilitates the development of empathy, which is an important skill for interpersonal, interlingual and intercultural communication. In addition, these questions added to the bilingual readers give learners an opportunity to engage with diverse genres, such as email and news report, and to explore the cultural conventions associated with these genres. Given their suitability for intensive reading teaching, these questions contribute to transforming the readers into intensive reading materials.

In general, the after-reading questions and activities violate the principles of extensive reading. Researchers prefer “no activities at all to accompany extensive readers” (Tomlinson, 2021b, p. 65). Tomlinson (2021b) argues that tests are not necessary for extensive reading in learning English as an international language, and states that “[s]etting comprehension and summary tests does not assess the learner’s ability to read extensively” (p. 7). With the added after-reading activities, the bilingual editions of Cambridge English Readers thus show, instead, characteristics of intensive reading materials.

Analysis of lists of words and phrases, exercises, and cultural notes. Apart from before-/after-reading activities, a section called “Learning guide” is also added to each book. This part includes “New words”, “Phrases and expressions”, “Reading exercises” and “Cultural notes” for each chapter. “New words” is a list of words with phonetic transcription and Chinese translation. “Phrases and expressions” is a list of phrases and expressions with Chinese translation. The focus on language here thus deviates from the emphasis on reading for meaning in extensive reading.

“Reading exercises” consist of questions of different forms and contents. The forms of exercises include short question, multiple choice, matching, ordering, blank filling, and true or false question. The contents of exercises include story comprehension

Table 3 Categorisation of after-reading activities.

No.	Activity & Focus	Examples
33	Questions on the story	<i>Which character don't you like? Why?</i>
20	Writing about the story	Example 1 <i>Write a summary of the story in 150 words.</i> Example 2 <i>You are a reporter in the Peninsula News. Write the newspaper article about how the Prince was saved.</i> Example 3 <i>Write an email from Sophia to her sister telling her all about the day in Norwich.</i>
6	Writing to the author	<i>Write an email to the author, Philip Prowse, saying what you like and don't like about this story?</i>
9	Describe the illustrations	<i>Choose five of the pictures in the book and write one sentence about each one.</i>
3	Exercises on language skills	<i>Look at these adjectives (形容词) from the story.</i>
		<p><i>happy great famous rich small nice</i></p> <p><i>dirty flat wrong big afraid bad sad</i></p> <p><i>interesting funny good clean angry new</i></p>
15	Other creative activities (acting out the dialogue, making a quiz, choosing actors if the story is adapted to a film, and finding numbers in the text)	a) <i>Which of them describe feelings?</i> b) <i>Now use one of the "feelings" adjectives in a different sentence about yourself (e.g. I feel happy when ...).</i> Example 1 <i>You are making a film of Arman's Journey. Which actors play the role of Arman, Rose, Fred, Jacob, Leyla and Dani in your film?</i> Example 2 <i>Look at the dialogue on page 30. Work with another student and act it out. Choose some other dialogues in the book and work in small groups to act them out. Act them out for the class.</i>

and picture/illustration comprehension. The latter type refers to the illustrations in the main text. For example, in the detective story, *A Death in Oxford*, a question is as follows: "Look at the picture on page 10. What is the room like? Write sentences like these: *A chair is on the floor.*" The illustration on page 10 depicts a murder scene, where police officers are investigating. This question and the requirement to write sentences guide learners to re-examine the picture and might help them find clues that they did not notice during their first reading. This process enhances readers' reading comprehension and may help them become aware of how pictures tell stories, which is an important issue in contemporary literacy education (Painter et al. 2013). This example further underscores the significance of multimodal textuality and visual-verbal cohesion in the design and adaptation of extensive reading materials. The intersemiotic relationship between the illustration and the exercise question has implications for understanding the pedagogical potential of this type of exercises. Ideationally, the question only refers to the "room", "chair" and "floor" depicted in the illustration, without representing other more significant entities. This establishes a part-whole relation, or a relation of "meronymy" (Royce, 2007). This intersemiotic connection implies that the question serves as stimulus, motivating readers to closely examine and interpret the illustration rather than providing an exhaustive description of its details.

However, again, these reading comprehension exercises added to the bilingual readers contradict the extensive reading principle of reading for pleasure. As Tomlinson (2021b) argues, it is important not to threaten readers with tests in extensive reading. Thus, to a certain degree, the inclusion of both "Reading exercises" and lists of words and phrases in the bilingual edition shifts the Cambridge English Readers towards being intensive reading materials. When evaluating many graded readers that include comprehension exercises, Tomlinson (2021b, p. 6) writes,

"the learners spend time ... answering comprehension questions, filling in blanks, answering True/False questions or writing formal and demanding summaries... This turns extensive reading into intensive reading." Similarly, the bilingual adaptation of Cambridge English Readers turns these books into intensive reading materials.

Thirty-two cultural notes written in Chinese are added to the 11 books of the Starter level, with each book having at least one note. The major function of these notes is to introduce knowledge about Western cultures. For instance, the note on "coffee" introduces different types of coffee such as espresso, latte and cappuccino. However, some of them focus on language rather than cultural aspects. Several entries explain the usage of certain words, and sometimes examples are added to illustrate their usage. Occasionally, distinctions between several similar words are made; for example, the note on "country" presents different meanings of this word and explains how it is semantically different from "village" and "town".

The emphasis on comprehension exercises and explicit language learning in the learning guide section reflects the culture of learning in China, that language-based skills and doing exercises are central to learning English as a foreign language. Language skills and reading comprehension are particularly valued because these are useful in preparing students for standardised examinations.

Nevertheless, despite the tilt in favour of intensive reading, the layout of the bilingual edition helps to mitigate this trend. Layout, which determines the way in which different parts of a text are integrated, is incorporated as part of the "grammar of visual design" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021[1996]). How contents are organised through the choices in layout largely determines the reading path that readers take. Therefore, layout is a key aspect of the textual transformations occurring in the bilingualisation of Cambridge English Readers that shape the experience of reading,

and thus affects the pedagogic potential of the texts. As shown in Table 1 above, the learning guide section, including notes and exercises, is placed after the main text rather than following each chapter. In extensive reading, learners' enjoyment of reading should not be interrupted by exercises. Allowing learners to read the text as fiction without interruption provides an opportunity to enjoy the story without the immediate need to engage in exercises or focus on language-based skills.

The analysis of layout highlights the compositional function of semiotic resources and its pivotal role in shaping the pedagogical potential of graded readers. As stated in the "Theoretical Underpinnings" section, compositional meaning is one of the three dimensions of semiosis. Despite the content of the "Learning guide" section in the bilingual Cambridge Readers conflicting with the principles of extensive reading, careful attention to its layout may give researchers pause for consideration. This underscores the contribution of a social semiotic perspective in evaluating the textual adaptation of graded readers. Similarly, layout is also an important aspect to be considered in the analysis of translation in the following subsection.

Analysis of translation. The Chinese translation added to the bilingual adaptation of Cambridge English Readers might limit the chance for learners to immerse themselves in reading English but, at the same time, offers more choices to learners. The translation provides additional options for learners to engage with the graded readers. For example, in reading programmes using bilingual readers, students may choose to read the translated text first to familiarise them with the content, which can facilitate their subsequent reading of the English version. Students may also translate the foreign language text themselves and then compare it with the provided version. Since bilingual/multilingual speakers use their linguistic repertoire in its entirety rather than one language at a time to make meaning and learn languages (Li, 2018), learners may choose a way of using the translation that makes the most of their bilingual repertoire.

In addition, the translation aids learners in understanding words, sentences, or paragraphs that they may not comprehend when reading the English text alone. However, these practices are not typically encouraged in extensive reading. Fortunately, the layout of the bilingual edition minimises the interruption of reading for meaning, as the translation follows the main text rather than being printed in parallel with it. Otherwise, the arrangement of facing pages with foreign language on one side and translation on the other may "facilitate the accessing of the text" but may also interrupt fluent reading (Maley, 2008, p. 142). With such a layout, the Chinese translation in the bilingual readers is conceptualised as an added bonus rather than an obligatory element in reading this book series for learning English as a foreign language. This might be the publisher's conscious choice, considering that "[e]ducationalists everywhere have become aware of the increasing role of visual communication in learning materials of various kinds" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2021[1996], p. 15).

Finally, the above analysis of layout as a resource for transforming the original version also illustrates the role of compositional meaning in mediating the representation of contents and shaping how learners engage with the graded readers. As a crucial strategy of "semiotic arrangement", layout represents "an order produced by the designer, in which the learner is expected to engage with the selected elements in the order provided" (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 185). The decision to present the Chinese translation separately from the English text, rather than on the facing page in the bilingual edition of Cambridge English Readers, establishes a reading path that does not interrupt fluent reading and thus is in line with the principles

of extensive reading. Given that compositional resources, such as layout, affect learner's reading experience and learning outcomes, they should be considered when evaluating the localisation of extensive reading materials.

Analysis of blurbs. Materiality is a central part to be considered in multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001), and paratexts are closely connected with the materiality of the printed media such as books. The blurb is a type of paratext that influences readers' decision regarding whether to buy and/or read a book. In a comprehensive analysis of language learning and teaching materials, blurbs are often considered (Littlejohn, 2011). The blurb "is of interest to applied linguists as a source of data by which to investigate the norms and values of the intended readership, the discourse community targeted by the work" (Basturkmen, 2009, p. 68). To investigate the cultures of learning reflected in graded readers, the promotional role of blurbs thus cannot be overlooked. The analysis of blurbs in this subsection is underpinned by two branches of social semiotic theory, Martin and Rose's (2008) work on the genre of narrative and van Leeuwen's (2008) tool for critical discourse analysis.

The bilingual editions of Cambridge English Readers include blurbs on the back cover and inside front cover of each book. The back cover blurbs consist of three parts: a synopsis of the story, endorsements from renowned secondary school teachers in China, and features of the book series.

All the stories in the series are narrative fiction. In Martin and Rose's (2008) social semiotic narrative theory, a narrative consists of several stages including orientation, complication and resolution. The synopsis of each story firstly presents the orientation of the narrative, offering some information on the setting and certain character(s), usually the protagonist(s). It then gives the complication of the narrative, where an unexpected event happens, which causes a problem and creates suspense. The solution of the problem and ending of the narrative are typically not provided. For instance, the synopsis of *Let Me Out!* initially introduces the protagonist, a robot named Nolan ("I'm Nolan, a robot."), and then presents the complication of the narrative: The robot senses that its master prefers his dog over it. Then the synopsis concludes with the robot's resolve: "I'm going to take action ...". This leaves the reader curious about the action the robot will take and what consequence it will lead to, and therefore entices them to read or purchase the book. This way of synopsis writing, which is a common promotional strategy frequently used in best-selling books, thus serves to attract learner-consumers to read the books.

The endorsements from teachers highlight both the enjoyment that the stories bring and their suitability for English learning. The reasons provided for the books' suitability for English learning encompass both features that the original readers have—such as authentic language, contemporary themes, good illustrations and promotion of cultural diversity—and features specific to the bilingual edition, such as readable translation and Chinese notes.

The blurbs on the inside front cover, which are newly added to the bilingual edition, include author and translator biographies written in Chinese. These bios, drawing on van Leeuwen's (2008) social semiotic theory of critical discourse analysis, establish three types of authority: personal authority, expert authority, and role model authority. Firstly, personal authority is established through institutional roles. For example, all the translators are teachers from key national secondary schools with a high rate of student success in the Zhongkao examination (Senior High School Entrance Examination in China) and/or the Gaokao examination (National College Entrance Examination). Secondly, the authors'

bios highlight their expertise in English language teaching, writing experience, and experience in materials development. The translators' bios make prominent their teaching experience and skills, experience of guiding students to participate in various contests, and their students' scores in examinations. Thus, both authors and translators have expertise and expert authority. Thirdly, many of the authors and translators have won awards, so they are also role models. These types of authority provide a rationale for selecting these authors to write the stories and translators to rewrite these books and support the quality and legitimacy of the graded readers as English reading and learning materials. Therefore, the bio information functions as a blurb enticing readers to purchase the books.

The use of secondary school teachers' endorsements to promote the books and the presentation of their bios as blurbs reveal their high status among young learners of English in China. The legitimization of these teachers as authorities in teaching and being successful in helping students gain high scores in examinations reflects the high value placed on examinations, particularly the Zhongkao and Gaokao, in the Chinese English teaching and learning community. For example, one translator's bio explicitly states that in the Zhongkao exam of 2013, the average score achieved by the students under his instruction was 130 out of 150. In essence, as an important textual component that transforms the original Cambridge English Readers, the blurbs reveal the commercial nature of graded readers and reflect aspects of Chinese culture of learning, such as the emphasis placed on examinations.

Discussion

This article examines the textual changes that occur in the bilingual adaptation of Cambridge English Readers in China and evaluates the potential impact of bilingual adaptation on the use of graded readers by learners and teachers of English. Drawing upon a social semiotic, multimodal discourse analytic approach, the study analyses the added or changed elements of the book series during its bilingualisation, including before-reading questions, after-reading activities, lists of words and phrases, exercises, cultural notes, translation, and blurbs. In the analysis, this article attends to written language, its connections with illustrations, maps and paratexts, and the layout of the texts. Furthermore, it also considers how the textual transformations may shape the learning of English and reflect the culture of learning of the Chinese English teaching and learning community.

Although Cambridge English Readers are primarily designed for extensive reading, it is found that the bilingual editions exhibit features more characteristic of intensive reading materials. The inclusion of reading exercises and lists of words and phrases shifts the readers towards intensive reading, which contradicts the principles of extensive reading. Extensive reading materials should not include word lists, closed comprehension questions, or activities (Tomlinson, 2021b). It is worth noting that, in China, this tendency towards intensive reading is not exclusive to the bilingual Cambridge English Readers. Many extensive reading coursebooks in China also exhibit characteristics of intensive reading (Renandya et al. 2015).

These features observed in the bilingual Cambridge English Readers may impede fluent reading, reduce learners' enjoyment in reading, and consequently weaken their motivation for learning English. The addition of reading exercises and lists of words contradicts teachers' preferences regarding materials used in teaching English to young learners. A questionnaire survey conducted with 76 teachers across 28 countries shows that the most valued characteristic of materials for teaching English to young learners is being "based on fun or enjoyment", while being

"heavily vocabulary based" and "heavily grammar based" are considered least important (Arnold and Rixon, 2008).

Given their characteristics as intensive reading materials, the bilingual Cambridge English Readers are thus better suited for classroom use. For example, the before- and after-reading questions facilitate teachers' incorporation of the books into their classroom instruction. Teachers from various countries tend to support the use of graded readers as intensive reading materials. Claridge (2019) explored the perceptions of college English language teachers (from New Zealand, England, the US, Russia, Vietnam, and Canada) on what makes good graded readers, finding that "their perceptions of a good graded reader are often centred around the elements of the books that are useful for teaching purposes, rather than those that encourage reading for pleasure" (p. 13). In addition, the multimodal paratextuality, such as the visual-verbal connections between illustrations and before-reading questions, is found in the present study to be applicable for multiliteracies pedagogy in the classroom.

The textual changes occurring in the bilingualisation of Cambridge English Readers is considered to affect the potential of these books as materials for learning English as a foreign or second language. It is therefore suggested that, when designing, selecting, adapting, or using materials for extensive reading programmes, textual features are considered. How the content is multimodally organised matters as much as what content is presented; and at present, it is the latter, rather than the former, that is being prioritised in these Chinese publications.

The original and bilingual editions of Cambridge English Readers reflect different cultures of learning. The bilingual edition veers towards learning through exercises and language skill acquisition, departing from the emphasis on light reading and reading for meaning. Therefore, the bilingual adaptation gives more emphasis to explicit learning, whereas implicit learning is more often associated with extensive reading. This adaptation reflects the perspectives of both the publisher and the annotators, who are the secondary school teachers, on learning English.

These differences highlight the preferences, beliefs, and values regarding preferred learning approaches in the English language teaching and learning community in China. One significant reason for learning English among students in China is to prepare for Zhongkao and Gaokao examinations. Success in these examinations is highly valued by young learners of English as well as their parents and teachers. In contemporary China, success in Gaokao is almost a prerequisite for well-paid, decent jobs and a successful career. The importance attached to examinations in China originates from ancient times. Since the emergence of Keju (or the imperial examination) in the Sui dynasty (581–618), an exam culture has been developed in China and shaped Chinese people's mindset. Exams are closely connected with social mobility and bright personal prospects by the Chinese people in history and today. The textual arrangements in localised Cambridge English Readers cater to learners' desire for success in examinations.

As shown in the analysis of the blurbs, the bilingual adaptation of Cambridge English Readers has a commercial aspect, promoting the series as commodities to potential consumers. The involvement of secondary school teachers in annotating and translating the texts serves as a marketing strategy targeting both young adult students and school teachers. Students in Chinese secondary school are often influenced by their teachers' endorsements. The teachers may also have a say in the selection of books for their schools. This study thus points to the importance of analysing paratexts such as blurbs in the adaptation of extensive reading materials, and shows the value of social semiotic theories, such as Martin and Rose's (2008) work on genre and van Leeuwen's (2008) critical discourse analysis, for analysing the blurbs of graded readers.

This study has, more importantly, demonstrated the strengths of social semiotics in general in researching the cross-cultural adaptation of extensive reading materials for learning English as a second or foreign language. Firstly, in line with the dynamic relationship between text and context as conceptualised in social semiotics, the study reveals that textual changes occur in the bilingual adaptation of graded readers in a way that is significant for understanding the cultures of learning involved. Secondly, the consideration of multimodal resources such as layout may shed new light on the potential of materials to promote learning. For example, while it is clear that the addition of the “Learning guide” (including “New words”, “Phrases and expressions”, “Reading exercises” and “Cultural notes”) in the bilingual readers hinders fluent reading and reading for pleasure, the layout provides an opportunity for learners to read the text without being disturbed by these digressions.

Conclusion

This article has examined the textual transformations occurring in the bilingual adaptation of the Cambridge English Readers in China and finds that the bilingual edition has typical characteristics of intensive reading materials. Specifically, the added after-reading activities, reading exercises, cultural notes, lists of words and phrases, and Chinese translation accentuate explicit language learning and impose diverse types of comprehension tests on the reader, and thus to a certain degree turn the English-graded readers into intensive reading materials. These added elements, and the multimodal paratextuality such as the references to illustrations in before-reading questions, facilitate the use of the books in the classroom by teachers, and also meet learners’ need for success in standardised examinations, and thus capture the local market. Therefore, the bilingualized Cambridge English Readers demonstrate contextual suitability and cultural awareness, and reflect cultural values cherished by the English language teaching and learning community in China.

This study addresses the translingual textual adaptation of extensive reading materials, an area that has received little scholarly attention. The findings presented here have implications for more efficient design, adaptation and use of international extensive reading materials within a local context. As a form of cross-cultural communication, the bilingual adaptation of teaching and learning materials is shaped by, while at the same time constitutes, cultural differences. Therefore, this phenomenon should be paid more attention to in studies and practices of intercultural communication.

Finally, this study demonstrates the usefulness of the social semiotic approach to analysing textual transformations involved in localising extensive reading materials, exemplifying the strengths and values of social semiotic frameworks for examining intercultural textual resemiotisation. This approach can be extended to investigate the adaptation of other types of English teaching and learning materials in China and the adaptation of international English graded readers in other cultures.

This study has focused on the textual aspects of transculturally and bilingually adapted English-graded readers. Future research could explore the perspectives of teachers and learners on bilingual adaptation and investigate learners’ experiences with reading these books and how teachers and students use them in the classroom.

Data availability

No datasets were generated during the current study. The datasets analysed during the current study are not publicly available due to copyright restrictions but are available from Cambridge University Press and Beijing Language and Culture University Press. The dataset analysed include 11 books from the Starter level of the Cambridge English Readers published by Cambridge University

Press (<https://www.cambridge.org/us/cambridgeenglish/catalog/secondary/cambridge-english-readers>) and their bilingual versions published by Beijing Language and Culture University Press (2015 edition) (<https://blcup.com/SeriesBook/index/I418>).

Received: 26 August 2023; Accepted: 8 April 2024;

Published online: 23 April 2024

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Acknowledgements

The research was supported by the National Social Science Foundation of China (21BZW195).

Author contributions

Kunkun Zhang is the sole author.

Competing interests

The author declares no competing interests.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval was not required as the study did not involve human participants.

Informed consent

This article does not contain any studies with human participants performed by the author.

Additional information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to Kunkun Zhang.

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