

# Experimental Studies of Translation Reception: Eye-tracking the Reader Experience of Style

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Given the centrality of notions such as equivalent effect, adequacy and acceptability to Translation Studies, and the long-standing debates in literary circles over the merits of critical approaches centred around authorial intent, reader response criticism, and others, it is surprising that more experimental studies have not been conducted in both TS and literary studies on how real readers actually read literary texts. Umberto Eco's (1990) 'intention of the text' (*intentio operis*) construct goes some way to reconciling the contrasting positions of the author and the reader in the literary transaction, but such analyses are still reliant upon critic-driven, subjective assessments of textual features and assumptions about interpretations and effects. Drawing a parallel with Eco's notions of 'open' and 'closed' texts (1979), the eye-tracking experiment presented in my monograph *An Eye-Tracking Study of Equivalent Effect in Translation* explores the effects of what I have dubbed 'stylistically open' and 'stylistically closed' textual features to explore and compare how readers experience salient stylistic features in the source and target texts.

The presentation draws on a case study of Raymond Queneau's *Zazie dans le métro* (1959) and its English translation by Barbara Wright (1960). As a renowned member of Oulipo, a French experimental literature group, Queneau had long commented on the illogical orthography of French compared with spoken French. In *Zazie*, he employed what he called 'néo-français', a morpho-syntax and quasi-phonetic eye dialect typical of spoken Parisian urban French, which he juxtaposed with interjections of 'standard' and, at times, quite elevated French.

Using this case study as an example, the paper outlines the innovative experimental method, the key findings from the experiment, and looks at the wider implications of the data in terms of the connection between stylistic complexity and the idiosyncrasies – as well as the commonalities – in individual readers' experiences. The underlying objective of this research and future work is to provide experimental data from real readers with a view to situating the reader and the reading experience more firmly in reader-oriented critical frameworks. The paper therefore presents as this proof-of-concept, some tentative responses to fundamental questions about how source and target texts are experienced, and posits some wider questions about scope for future biometric reception research in Translation Studies.

Keywords: eye-tracking, reception, style, equivalent effect