Language ideologies in Xu Bing’s text-based art

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Contemporary art has been a site of intense linguistic production for several decades. Visual artists experiment with language in their efforts to develop new ways of displaying language in the transformative processes of creativity and symbolic manipulation that, at times, contravenes or subverts dominant language ideologies. In this way, artists produce new ‘regimes of language’ (or ‘regimes of discourse’, Pennycook, 2002: 92) that regulate or unsettle ‘moral and political visions that shape attitudes and behaviour’ (Tollefson, 2011: 370). In this paper, four major, text-based pieces by the artist Xu Bing are examined in terms of their apparent, underlying language ideologies. In the course of the discussion, we see language ideologies not as homogeneous cultural templates but as processes ‘involving struggles among multiple conceptualizations [of language] and demanding the recognition of variation and contestation within a community as well as contradictions within individuals’ (Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994: 71). By teasing out these language ideologies, I argue, we can discern the artist’s different visions of the world and explain some of the publics’ reactions to the works and their uptake.

Bio

Adam Jaworski is Professor of Language and Communication in the School of English at The University of Hong Kong. He has previously worked at, inter alia, Cardiff University and at Birkbeck College, University of Londonas well as held visiting posts at the University of Florida, Gainesville, and at The American University, Washington, D.C. Adam is a widely recognised expert in language and globalization, display of languages in space, media discourse, silence & nonverbal communication, and text-based art. He is the author of numerous publications on those topics incl. two recently co-edited journal special issues: *Journal of Sociolinguistics* on *Sociolinguistics and Tourism* (2014, with Monica Heller and Crispin Thurlow), and *Social Semiotics* on *Typographic Landscaping* (2015, with Johan Järlehed). Adam is on the editorial board of several international journals, including *Discourse & Society; Visual Communication; Journal of Sociolinguistics; Multilingua; Linguistic Landscape; Language and Intercultural Communication*. With Nikolas Coupland he also co-edits the Oxford University Press book series, *Oxford Studies in Sociolinguistics*.

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