

Title: Visual and verbal representations of AI: A Cross-Cultural and Cross-Linguistic Analysis of British, German and Polish Weekly Magazine Covers (2023-2025)

Keywords: multimodality, magazine covers, AI, cross-cultural comparison

The study examines how AI is represented on the covers of three opinion-forming weekly magazines: *The Economist* (UK), *Der Spiegel* (Germany), and *Polityka* (Poland) – between 2023 and 2025. The proposed analysis encompasses both linguistic and non-linguistic forms of expression, highlighting their unique potentials and various ways they interact on magazine covers, viewed as “language-image-texts” (cf. Stöckl & Pflaeging 2022). As van Leeuwen & Kress (1995: 25) point out, visually and verbally communicated meanings can mirror each other, complement or expand one another, or even contradict. By adopting a multimodal approach (cf. van Leeuwen 2005, Stöckl 2004, 2009, Stöckl & Pflaeging 2022), the research explores the interplay between language, typography, and visual elements in the AI-themed covers, identifying cross-linguistic and cross-cultural similarities and differences.

The analysis reveals several prominent verbal and visual strategies used to depict AI. One common representation is the humanoid robot – an image symbolizing AI’s potential to replace human intelligence. Another frequent motif is the fusion of human and machine, emphasizing AI’s integration into human cognition. Some covers adopt dystopian imagery, presenting AI as an invisible force manipulating information, and thus reinforcing societal fears about misinformation and loss of human agency. Conversely, more optimistic portrayals highlight AI’s role in medicine or science, positioning it as a beneficial tool for progress.

Linguistically, AI is occasionally integrated into wordplay and typography to create eye catching headlines. Notable examples include the word “AI” embedded within other lexemes, such as “WAR” or “AI voted” (a variation of the “I voted” badge), reflecting AI’s perceived role in elections and governance. The juxtaposition of AI’s visual and textual representation underscores the complex and often ambivalent media and societal narratives surrounding artificial intelligence – ranging from revolutionary potential to existential threat.

This cross-cultural comparison of magazine covers provides insights into how different linguistic and cultural contexts shape the portrayal of AI. While all three publications engage with similar visual tropes, the emphasis seems to vary: British media often link AI to economic and political implications, German media highlight ethical concerns, and Polish media seem to focus on AI’s impact on labour. These findings contribute to a broader understanding of the semiotics of AI in media discourse and its role in shaping public perception.

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