

Pen and the Sword: The Linguistic Pedagogies of Chinese Taijiquan and European Longsword

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The broad spectrum of activities termed 'martial arts' hail from a variety of cultures and countries around the world. Asian styles often use foreign-language (and often ancient) terms such as qi, dantien, sensei and guru in their pedagogies, while European martial arts like fencing and Savate often draw on French and Italian terms for their movements and principles. Books house these terms in their glossaries, experts explain them in specialist magazines while these words are uttered within dojos and training halls. In countries such as Britain, non-native speakers of these languages do not typically speak these languages at all but rather translate terminology into their mother tongue. Instead, they see them as guiding points for their practices, and express these terms in speech, writing and action through their various training, teaching and social activities. This seminar will introduce a new two-sited ethnographic project taken from the perspective of an apprentice of two martial arts: Chinese Taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan) and the Historical European Martial Art (HEMA) of the longsword (following the Italian tradition). It will propose strategies to study their respective pedagogies in terms of how linguistic principles are embodied, expressed and transmitted between the members of both schools. The talk thus seeks dialogue on making an 'embodied' or 'carnal' ethnography consider language and linguistics.

Keywords: Martial arts; language; embodiment; literature; translation.

Author bio

Dr. George Jennings is a lecturer in sport sociology / physical culture at Cardiff Metropolitan University. He has been researching martial arts for over ten years, including an ethnography of Wing Chun Kung Fu, life histories of practitioners of Chinese martial arts and a case study of Xilam, a Mexican martial art. He is currently assisting with the online side of an ethnography of British Savate (French boxing), and is beginning two local ethnographies of Tai Chi and Historical European Martial Arts (HEMA).