

The Study of Multi-modal Teaching on the Development of L2 Learning

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Abstract: Based on the multi-modal teaching theories, this study conducted an experiment and a survey to explore the efficacy of this mode in the video-aural-oral course, through questionnaires and interviews of the students, the results indicate that: 1) As a teaching style, multimodal teaching has been widely used in English teaching class of colleges because it can improve students' interest in learning and activate classroom atmosphere; 2) The purpose of learning English affects student's attitude towards multimodal teaching; 3) Different personalities of students show different expectations on teacher body language. Inefficient gestures and expressions from teachers will add difficulty to their comprehension; 4) Multimodal teaching in some way activates classroom atmosphere and enhances the students' interest in learning, enhances the maintenance of students' memory in class, strengthens students' autonomous learning ability after classes and promotes their participancy in classroom activities. However it has not been confirmed that whether it will help improve the students' academic performance.

Introduction

Along with the significant expansion and increased use of information and communication technologies, multimedia facilities have been employed in education field especially in classroom settings. As a result, Computer-assisted instruction (CAI) challenges education, especially in the field of language learning and teaching.

With the popularity of multi-modal discourse communication, the research on it has become a hot topic in the international language field since the end of the 20th century. Classroom instruction is completed by a variety of modes, which includes space, gesture, gaze, kinesics, movement, voice, accent, music, three-dimensional things, spoken and written language, graphics, tables, pictures, animation, etc.(Jewitt,2009:14) With language dominating, the other non-verbal means plays an role of assistance, intensification and supplement to some extent. So, it is far from comprehensive to do the research only from language itself, the researchers must explore the construction process of classroom discourse combining language with other modes.

College English Curriculum Requirements point out that language teaching is no longer aimed only for developing language skills and knowledge, but expands to developing learners' positive attitude, motivation, confidence as well as strategies for life-long learning along with cross-cultural knowledge, awareness and capabilities. Here put the questions in front of all teachers. How to meet the requirements of College English Curriculum Requirements and to make the class teaching efficient? Of course it requires teachers to focus on updating their teaching skills basing on the new requirements. College English Curriculum Requirements advocate task-based teaching, and emphasize the communicative function of language, and put forward to new requirements on instruction proficiency of English teachers. Teachers' instruction plays a vital role in the organization of classroom teaching and language acquisition process. Therefore, it is essential to investigate and analyze the multimodal teaching situation in college English classroom basing on the College English Curriculum Requirements.

Microsoft PowerPoint, as the most typical carrier of multimodality, has become the most popular application in Chinese educational institutions and it also causes many scholars attentions. It has become the dominant teaching tool to facilitate communication in classroom setting which is widely used in different levels of English teaching covering from high school to college English despite its

shortcomings. That is the reason why we have to expand our discussion on its history and progress to some extent.

Therefore, it is worthy to note that multimodal teaching poses a great challenge to so many teachers as well as students to investigate and analyze English classroom teaching instructions in colleges from the multi-modal perspective and by means of multi-modal theory.

Conceptual Framework

Multimodality. Multimodal has emerged as a term out of studies published in just last decade or so. It arose out of the academic composition of the New London Group due to the technological advancement.

As Kress and Van Leeuwen stated: Media are the material resources used in the production of semiotic products and events, including both the tools and materials used (e.g. the musical instrument and air; the chisel and the block of wood). They usually are specifically produced for this purpose, not only in culture(ink, paint, cameras, computers),but also in nature(our vocal apparatus)...Only eventually, as the particular medium gains in social importance, will more abstract modes of regulation (“grammars”) develop, and the medium will become a mode.(Kress and Van Leeuwen; 2001:22)

Multimodality calls for at least two response modalities to present information which could be visual, auditory, tactile, etc (Baber, 2001). Human interaction with the world is inherently multimodal (Bunt et al., 1998; Quek et al., 2002). All discourse is inherently multimodal; hence it is not possible to achieve a complete understanding of spoken discourse unless both linguistic and non-linguistic features are jointly analyzed. Multimodality contains design process which means a continuous choice of semiotics, is a multimodal form of communication which can be represented and studied in systematic way.

Multimodal Teaching. Classroom instruction is accomplished by a variety of modes, which includes space, gesture, gaze, kinesics, movement, voice, accent, music, three-dimensional things, spoken and written language, graphics, tables, pictures, animation, etc.(Jewitt,2009:14) With language dominating, the other non-verbal means plays an role of assistance, intensification and supplement to some extent. It is far from comprehensive to do the research only from language itself; the researchers must explore the construction process of classroom discourse combining language with other modes.

Multimodal Teaching in this study refers to a teaching progress during which a variety of multiple modes chose and employed simultaneously by teacher to achieve teaching objectives, which includes space, gesture, gaze, kinesics, movement, voice, accent, music, three-dimensional things, spoken and written language, graphics, tables, pictures, animation, etc.

In language instruction, teachers have to make choice about which modes to use and how to develop a concept or content that will be realized or expressed through one or more media in classroom settings. A language instructor may bear teaching material and teaching objectives in one’s mind which influence his/her multimodal design and choosing.

Theoretical Framework

The main theory that forms the basis of this study is the multimodal discourse analysis theory, which is grounded on systemic functional linguistics proposed by Michael Halliday. It holds that apart from language as the main communicative modes those other sign systems are also the sources of meaning. Put in another words, when one single mode cannot accomplish speaker’s meaning, other modes are needed in the process of meaning making to achieve the interpersonal communication. When one mode cannot express the meaning fully, another mode or other modes are needed to make the meaning clearer and more exact.

In the study, a synthetic theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis will be employed which developed by Zhang Delu(2009). He concluded that multimodal discourse systems

at 5 levels: 1) the level of context of culture; 2) the level of context of situation; 3) the semantic level; 4) the formal level and 5) the level of media. According to Zhang, it is the culture context determines the choice of modes in multimodal communication, and context of situation constrains the means of communication through configuration of the three variables, i.e. tenor, mode and field.

At the level of media, there are two types of media, verbal and nonverbal, which is the material realization of the world. Zhang classified the two systems into several subsystems that contribute to a network of media system (see Figure 3-1). Media, as the carriers of meanings, but they cannot make meanings in a direct way. It is at the level of media that different forms of media are integrated to make meanings.

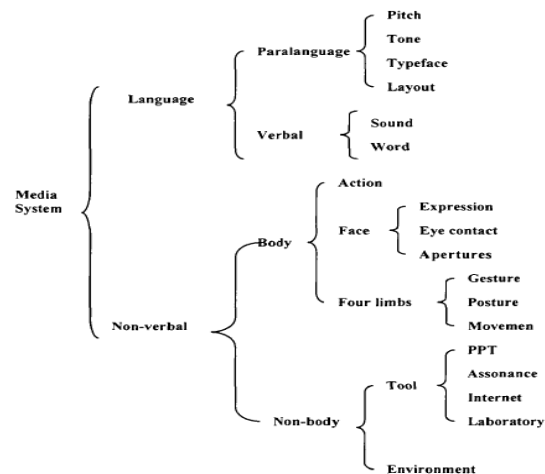


Figure. 1 Multimodal media system (Zhang, 2009)

General Research Hypotheses. There is a significant relationship between the multimodal teaching and the improvement of college students' listening and speaking abilities.

Specific Research Questions.

Questions 1

What are the students' perceptions of multimodal teaching?

Questions 2

What are the teachers' attitudes on multimodal teaching?

Questions 3

What are the problems existing?

Research Methodology

Participants. The participants in this research are ten classes of students and English teachers from two college Freshmen and Sophomore of Non-English Majors. Among the 373 students from 10 different classes, there are 195 males and 178 females. 146 students are from science classes and the left 227 students are from arts classes. Among the students, 130 students are from freshmen, 131 students are from sophomore and the last 112 from Junior.

75 English teachers had taken part in the research consist of 23 male and 52 female.

Among all the participants, 12 students and 6 teachers were selected to be interviewed respectively. And follow-up classrooms observe to their English class.

Instruments. The major instruments used in the research are two questionnaires, semi-structural interviews, and classroom observations. All items and data of the questionnaires were analyzed by the statistics software SPSS 17.0.

Questionnaires. The "multimodal teaching Questionnaire for students" aims to gather information on the present multimodal teaching in College English class from the perspective of students. Twenty-two items in the questionnaire are related to the students experience and perception which based on Jewitt (2009:14) definition of multimodal classroom teaching. As stated by Jewitt, the classroom teaching is mainly accomplished by a variety of modes, which includes space, gesture,

gaze, kinesics, movement, voice, accent, music, three-dimensional things, spoken and written language, graphics, tables, pictures, animation, etc.

Among the 22 questions, from Q1 to Q5 was designed to investigate the present situation on multimodal teaching in senior high school English class; from Q6 to Q13 was to test students attitude towards teacher's multimodal teaching; Question Q14 to Q21 was to check the influence of multimodal teaching on students English learning.

The Interviews. After the collection of questionnaires, we selected eight students randomly as the representatives to take part in the interview half boys and girls. Interviews are adopted to gather information about students' viewpoints on the multimodal English class, and their feeling upon teachers' multimodal instruction. Hopefully, they offered their enthusiastic suggestions.

Classroom Observations. In addition to questionnaires and interviews, classroom observations were also carried out during the period of this research.

Presentation of Findings and Discussions

Questionnaire Results and Analysis. 1. Results and Analysis of Students' Questionnaire. 373 valid questionnaires of students are returned. 1) The present situation on multimodal teaching in senior high school English class. 299 of the students, occupies 80.2% of all participants, confirmed that multimodal teaching such as PowerPoint courseware, multimedia, sketches and body language have been applied frequently in their College English class. 60.1% of all students expressed their positive attitude of using PowerPoint assist teaching in English class; while 7.8% of the students showed objective using it and 32.2% of them not sure about their attitude. We can see both from the questionnaires of teachers and students that the top two welcomed multimodal lesson type are warming up and writing, and multimodal teaching is most frequently applied in warming up class. In this case, but there are 50.1% of students complained the comparatively dull of the teaching methods which make them feel boring. 2) . Students attitude towards teacher's multimodal teaching. Most of the students admit that pictures, video and text could help their better understand the language point to some extent; while still 30.3% of the students prefer teachers' handwriting to electronic text. From independent sample T-test, we can see that students attitude vary from class to class. As a result we may conclude that the effectiveness of the multimodal teaching vary from teacher to teacher. 3) . The influence of multimodal teaching on students' English learning. There are 43.2% of students find that the multimodal teaching promote their autonomous English learning outside the classroom. 61.7% of the students stated that they acquire English through English learning website, 31.9% choose movie and cartoons, 6.2% prefer listen to English songs. And 67.8% of the students express that the interaction between teachers and students and students and students maximize their participancy in classroom activities. Multimodal teaching model is represented by PowerPoint courseware assistant teaching, blackboard writing, teacher gesture, facial expression, etc., which is much more welcome than the traditional teaching model, on the other hand, it mainly depends on teacher's instruction, which we also got the result from independent sample T-test that students attitude vary from class to class towards their teacher's effectiveness of the multimodal teaching.

2. Results and Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire. Among all participant teachers, there are 61.3% graduated with masters' degree majored in English education, 37.3% have bachelors' or doctors' degree majored in English education, only 1.3% with other majors. 1) the present situation of multimodal teaching applied in English class from teachers' point of view. 79.7% of the teachers design the multimodal teaching by themselves, only 4.3% prepare lessons collaborate in team workshop and 16% download from internet resources. 60% of the teachers reported they need more than one hour preparing a forty minutes lesson and they think that the lack of relevant theoretical guidance and training contribute to the major factors of the application of multimodal teaching, while most of the teacher reported never had chance to attend an in-service training. 26.7% of the teachers have no knowledge on that the different social distances such as public distance, unity interactive distance and interpersonal distance conveying different affections to students. 2) teachers' attitude towards multimodal teaching. 66.7% of the teachers think that the multimodal teaching promote

students learning to some extent. 62.7% of the teachers express their wishes to attending on-job training which could be organized by school or educational organization and 25.3% would like to learn from other teachers through collaborate lesson planning; only 6.7 choose to listen to the advice from students. 3) Teachers' knowledge about multimodal instruction. As far as teachers theoretical knowledge about multimodal, 44% teacher report they select material and design the multimodal lesson taking the students into consideration firstly; while 56% teachers think that the content the text book comes in the first place. It is worthy our attention that 32.7% of teachers reported that they have never heard of the term of "multimodal analysis"; only 10.7% of the teachers have some knowledge on it to some extent. 22.7% of the teachers have never heard of teachers' cooperation in lesson planning and development of teacher community which is an effective way of teacher development overseas.

Interview Results and Findings. 1. Interview Results and Findings of Students. 1) The present situation on multimodal teaching in College English class. Two of the students from Freshmen reported that their teachers more frequently adopted multimodal teaching such as PowerPoint courseware teaching, interactive activities, etc when they are Freshmen than as Sophomore. And they are sure that the learning atmosphere is more relaxing and they are quite enjoyable at the time of Freshmen. There are more lessons of academic writings when they are Sophomore .Three of the students suggested that it is not necessary to use multimodal teaching in Sophomore learning stage, for they think there are a lot of practice of language points and examinations to learn or take. 2) students attitude towards teacher's multimodal teaching. The purpose of learning English affects student's attitude towards multimodal teaching. Some (from Freshmen) like all these modalities for they think that the use of multimode is eye catching and it could offer a relaxing learning environment, some (from Sophomore) disprove the use of PowerPoint courseware as lecture courseware in some kind of lessons such as academic writings, they appreciate printed materials and blackboard writing for they think that using of multimodality is flowery and time wasted rather than practical; 3) the influence of multimodal teaching on students' English learning. Students' opinions vary when being asked about their preferences to pure texts, pictures, audio and video. Most of the students like video most which contains visual and audio modes. They agree that video is attractive and interesting. One of the students from Sophomore reported he prefers pure texts to other modes. Different personalities of students show different expectations on teacher body language. They largely prefer teachers' moving around in classroom rather than keeping in a place. Reported to be self-abasement Student1 stated that she prefers that teacher may keep her away when she is answering questions. All of the students have reported that inefficient gestures and expressions will add difficulty to their comprehension, and they may think the teacher is passionless and the class is dull. While too much expressions and gestures may cause easily tired and they have an impression on the teacher of less trust and authority. However, they reported the above situations occurred sometimes. 4) existing problems. All the students reported that bold, italic and color variance of text on PowerPoint courseware could stress the important points. But they also pointed out that color variance of text cannot be seen clearly from the different angle of classroom, which happens occasionally. The entertainment of the video may distract their learning concentration by causing discussion and laughter among students. They are not sure if the multimodal teaching enhances their performance in English examination although they all agree that the multimodal teaching do facilitate their learning to some extent. And they think the decisive point in learning English lies in themselves consistently practice rather than the way the teaching is used. They all reported that the multimodal teaching may promote their interactions. 5) students' expectations. The interviewed students gave different suggestion to the multimodal teaching. The self-reported excellent in English wished to have the text as the primary mode in lecture slides. Four of the students have detected incoherence in teachers' instruction and called for less download from internet, they prefer teachers' authentic work. Most of the students reported their expected English teachers' role not just as a controller but as an organizer, a participant and a resource provider or other shifting roles at times.

2. Interview Results and Findings of Teachers. 1) attitude towards multimodal teaching. All of the interviewed teachers hold the positive attitude towards multimodal teaching although they had

admitted there existing demerits in multimodal teaching, none of them reported to have adequate knowledge on multimodal design, “multimodal teaching” as a term was even new to four of the teachers, although their teaching experiences are closely related to the use of multimodalities. Four of the teachers shared the common view that multimodalities are much more adopted in warming-up and reading class. Comparatively, integrated lessons are more boring. While in listening, and academic writing class, the adoption of multimodality depends on teachers. Three of them reported that they only use PowerPoint courseware to present the exercises and language points, whereas only one teacher even uses PowerPoint courseware teaching in all kinds of lessons. She gave an example on listening lesson; sometimes she uses music to check students learning results by taking away some lyrics for students to fill in as post-listening activities. Two teachers from the same school have particularly mentioned that slow-learners are more beneficial in multimodal teaching as it could catch their attention and the presentation of materials are more understandable. As for top students, the input methods are not that important for them, they may take notes and get information even through teachers’ oral English. It seemly wastes resources to use multimodal teaching such as Microsoft PowerPoint to present learning contents. 2) existing problem. The employ of lecture slides and other multimodal may be time and resources wasting at some occasions when it is not necessary to adopt multimodalities. And it is the same with designing and misuse. One of the teachers mentioned that it is dilemma to decide whether to permit the students to copy the lecture slides or not. If permitted, the students may largely rely on the lecture slides being allowed to take home that hamper their concentration on class; if not permitted, the students will have a bad attitude towards the teacher by doubting their teacher’s confidence and his unselfishness. 3) career development. Being asked the related teaching theories such as multimodal teaching, all of the teachers reported that they never heard of the term, let alone have some knowledge about the theory. And they express their expectation to have some opportunities to get to know some teaching theories and more chances to be trained, on the contrary, but they have little time and chances to have in-service trainings programs presently. When talking about cooperative preparing lesson, opinions of teachers vary. Three of the teachers argued that it is inapplicable. They emphasized the importance of originality for it is disconnected and unorganized when using others designs or ideas. Only one of the teachers holds that they benefit a lot from cooperative lesson planning. She also gave detailed steps on the cooperating way. She said that cooperative lesson planning could save time and do good to the teachers whoever is the cooperative member. It provide environment for less experience teacher to learn from elder teacher, but also provides chances for senior teachers to share opinions with others.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, findings of this study have revealed that multimodal teaching has a significant influence on students’ L2 language learning abilities and teachers’ initial professional development. Results have also enabled us to interpret the multimodal teaching from a broader perspective, i.e. the students’ standpoints, possibly closer to the real situation on multimodal teaching in senior high school, showing the significant role that multimodality such as PowerPoint courseware teaching, paralinguistic and kinesics features play in the classroom discourse. Thus the call for students-oriented teaching as stated in the College English Curriculum Requirements is yet to be literally carried out. This study offers new evidence as well that the purpose of learning English affects student’s attitude towards multimodal teaching. Different personalities of students show different expectations on teacher body language. Inefficient gestures and expressions from teachers will add difficulty to their comprehension. Multimodal teaching in some way activates classroom atmosphere and enhances the students’ interest in learning, enhances the maintenance of students’ memory in class, strengthens students’ autonomous learning ability after classes and promotes their participancy in classroom activities. The teachers’ ability to render multimodal design is unstable because they do not understand and familiarize them with multimodal discourse analysis theory. Teacher’s cooperation in lesson planning is yet common practice in College English teaching. What’s more, The government should establish more policies and guidelines to support students-oriented

teaching practice. Colleges should promote the practice of teacher's cooperatively lesson planning, as one form of professional development of teacher community, we need supports from education authorities, experienced teachers as well as students. Teachers should sincerely listen to the students' as well as value their opinions and suggestion.

Only when we cope properly with the relations of multimedia and the input and output of multimodal teaching can we say we will have an optimizing teaching effect by taking advantages of multimodalities.

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