

A Teaching Research on the Course *Introduction to Western Culture* Based on the Multimodal Theory

Huafang Hu

School of Foreign Languages, Jiangxi Science and Technology Normal University, Nanchang, China

1138559703@qq.com

Keywords: Multimodality; *Introduction to Western Culture*; Teaching

Abstract: Based on the multimodal theory, the paper mainly discusses the application of multimodality in teaching content, teaching design, teaching activities and teaching assessment respectively in order to realize the multimodal teaching in the course *Introduction to Western Culture*. This teaching method is expected to improve the teaching efficiency and students' learning abilities by integrating different modal elements.

1. Introduction

The curriculum *Introduction to Western Culture* aims to make students understand the rich western social culture and deepen the cognition and theory of multi-culture, focuses on training students' ability of independent thinking, analyzing and innovating to improve their ideological and moral quality, cultural quality, enhance their awareness of cross-cultural communication, and promote the cultural exchange and cooperation between China and the west. Multimodal foreign language teaching is a new teaching mode based on multimedia and other modern teaching techniques. Based on the multimodal theory, this paper aims to explore the multimodal factors in teaching of *Introduction to Western Culture*, discusses the relationship among them and how to carry on the reasonable configuration in teaching, in order to achieve establishment of multimodal simulating context in teaching of *Introduction to Western Culture*, effectively promote the English majors' mastery of knowledge of western culture.

2. Multimodality and Multimodal Foreign Language Teaching

Many scholars have elaborated on the definition of "mode" from different perspectives. Kress & van Leeuwen believed that multimodality is the way or mode of information communication among people, machines and people under the influence of some media through simultaneous use of several symbolic modes.[1]Zhu Yongsheng described modes from the aspect of sign system, and pointed out that communicating channels and media mainly include language, technology, music, image, color and so on.[2] Gu Yueguo interpreted modes from the perspective of interaction, and proposed that modes are interaction between human beings and external environments (humans, animals, objects, machines, etc.) through senses (such as hearing and vision), and defined "single modality", "double modality", and "multimodality".[3] The New London Group was the first Group to apply multimodality to language teaching. They put forward the concept of "multiliteracy", which emphasizes the cultivation of students' multiliteracy ability and utilizes network, pictures, group cooperation and other means to participate in the class. [4]

Domestic research on multimodal foreign language teaching originates from foreign research on multiliteracy teaching, which is mostly based on social semiotics of systemic functional linguistics." Hu Zhuanglin, Gu Yueguo, Zhu Yongsheng, Zhang Delu et al. have carried out multi-angle research on multiliteracy, developed the theory of multimodal discourse analysis, combined with discourse analysis and foreign language teaching, and developed the ability to critically understand and read information provided multimodal basis through multimodal forms (such as language, hearing, vision,

etc.). Their introduction and research on the theory of multimodal discourse analysis provide a theoretical basis for the study of multimodal education and a new dimension and perspective for the study of language teaching design.

3. Teaching Characteristics of the Course Introduction to Western Culture

Introduction to Western Culture is a professional course for English majors in Chinese colleges and universities. As a compulsory course for English majors, the overall objective of the course is to systematically introduce knowledge of history, politics, economy, geography, education in western countries and their cultural tradition, strengthen students' sensitivity to the Chinese and western cultural differences, tolerance, and deal with the flexibility of Chinese and western cultural differences. It also makes the students understand the main relevant background knowledge of western countries, particularly on the current situation of the development of these countries, cultural traditions, customs and other cultural situation, to broaden students' knowledge, enhance students' recognition and understanding of western culture. Students may understand the culture of western countries in the process of learning English, and understand, master and use English for effective communication and successful communication, so as to cultivate and improve students' intercultural communication ability.

Introduction to Western Culture for English majors in universities is a highly practical cultural knowledge course and an indispensable part of the knowledge structure of English majors. Mastering these cultural knowledge will certainly promote students' English learning and their mastery of professional knowledge. In the long run, it will be beneficial to their language and communicating skills. The course content contains a large amount of information, many new words and proper nouns, with a wide range of knowledge coverage. The course covers much content of social background, history and culture. However, the teaching hour of the course is relatively short (mostly 32 credit hours). This undoubtedly increases the difficulty of reading, aggravates the task of memorization, and greatly affects students' understanding of what they have learned. As a result, some students are afraid of difficulties and even tend to give up learning. Therefore, it is difficult for teachers to effectively explain classroom teaching content and stimulate students' interest in learning. How to deal with the plentiful content of teaching materials has become a difficult problem for teachers.

With the development of society, teaching equipment is constantly updated. Therefore, it is a trend of English teaching development to optimize teaching technology and make full use of modern information technology. The course *Introduction to Western Culture* is characteristic of much knowledge and information, and modern multimedia teaching equipment should be used to assist teaching. Through language, image and video and other kinds of communicating modes, teachers have to deal with large amount of information about the teaching content, transform original single text mode into multimodality, bring students a feeling of intimacy to actively participate in classroom and become the main body of the class. Internet can provide the course *Introduction to Western Culture* with various teaching modes of different colors and fonts, video, text, images, fully mobilizing students' various senses such as hearing, vision, touch to make the course achieve organic integration of various symbols resources such as images, text, language, sound and stimulate students' interest in learning.

The modes involved play an important role in the teaching process, which can influence and even determine the effectiveness of students' learning of western cultural knowledge. Language teaching involves teaching content, teaching design, teaching activities, teaching evaluation and other aspects, all of which serve for teaching. Only by combining these links organically and effectively, can the optimization of teaching be achieved. The following will discuss the possible modes of cooperation from various aspects of the course *Introduction to Western Culture*, so as to achieve a more effective mode configuration and improve the teaching effect.

4. Application of Multimodality in the Course Introduction to Western Culture

4.1. Multimodality of Teaching Content

A single teaching material can no longer meet the needs of students. Teachers can organically integrate various teaching materials, audio and video materials, online resources and teaching software to enrich the teaching content. Language acquisition is a process from language input to output. In the selection of language input materials, learners should be provided with adequate, authentic and understandable language input. The process of acquisition includes the input, understanding, internalization and absorption of language information and the formation of interlanguage system. Although not all comprehensible input can be noticed by learners, nor can all understood input be converted into internalized language absorption, sufficient and real language input is the premise of effective language output. To ensure that students provide more authentic pronunciation and language expression materials through audio, video materials, network resources and other resources for teaching services, multimodal teaching can help promote students' learning of western cultural knowledge. For example, when teaching Roman culture, teachers can prepare relevant BBC documentary, pictures and audio materials to show the architectural and artistic achievements of the enlightenment. Then students can be spared from boring classroom explanation, and teachers can save a lot of time to study and sort out complicated and clueless chapters, and input the teaching information to students in a concise and clear way, which will greatly improve the classroom efficiency.

4.2. Multimodality of Teaching Design

The application of multimodality is also reflected in teaching design. The optimal allocation of resources can be achieved through the mutual supplement and adjustment of each mode. Compared with immediacy of traditional classroom teaching methods, teaching materials which are integrated by network multimedia technology are richer in content, and can be used many times without limitation of time and space. In the classroom teaching of western culture, teacher should consciously integrate various multimodal methods into classroom teaching in the teaching design, which fully reflects the principle of teacher-led and student-centered teaching. In the teaching design of each chapter or class, teacher may adopt different modes according to the teaching content and characteristics. For example, in the part of "Jewish culture", students can learn the Jewish history by watching video, reading bible stories, and discussing and comparing Jewish teachings with other religions. Students can understand the depth of Jewish culture in a comprehensive way.

4.3. Multimodality of Teaching Activities

Multimodal learning resources provide a platform for enriching multimodal teaching activities. According to Krashen, people do not acquire the ability to speak fluently directly from professors, but naturally through extensive listening, reading and exposure to large amounts of language input.[5] Teachers present related knowledge of linked reading through text, image, animation or video and other modes to create a real and interesting language learning environment. Role-playing and other activities can help students learn language in an all-round and multi-sensory way. Multimodal teaching means also help to extend classroom teaching activities to extracurricular activities. The use of the Internet and multimedia to enable students to conduct independent learning, group cooperative learning and other activities can not only cultivate students' learning ability, but also enhance their multimodal application and practical ability. Internet provides a beneficial role in assisting students to gain various material, achieving the effect which classroom teaching cannot do. Before class, students can search the background information of relevant chapters on the Internet and seek help in the huge network database according to the tasks assigned by teachers. On this basis, they can form their own understanding and expand their knowledge. In class, students can fully present the content they prepared before class by combining online resources, which can impact other students' audio-visual functions and provide more ways to understand the content of class.

4.4. Multimodality of Evaluation

As a relatively complex course, *Introduction to Western Culture* not only includes an introduction to the basic of some common sense, also includes the change of various fields in western history and development, which increase the difficulty of the examination. The traditional examination paper is no longer suitable for the teaching mode developed in the multimodal framework. Such questions types as concept memory or judgment of right and wrong are only limited to test whether the basic knowledge is well memorized or not, and cannot comprehensively test the students' mastery of this course. Reasonable teaching evaluation can play a comprehensive role in teaching evaluation, have a positive backwash effect, enhance students' learning motivation, and improve their independent learning ability. Multimodal evaluation should also be reflected in the course *Introduction to Western Culture*. Teachers can evaluate students' multimodal learning process by means of classroom participation, homework, written examination and oral examination. The use of speech to guide students and the verbal evaluation and feedback of learning effect is also an auditory mode of communication.

5. Summary

The application of each mode is not isolated. Multimodality needs to work together in classroom teaching. Meanwhile, attention should be paid to the balanced application of each mode. The priority should be given, and the needs of students should be taken into account, so as to produce and construct specific and profound meanings. Therefore, in teaching of *Introduction to Western Culture*, teachers should choose the most effective mode according to specific teaching requirements, strive to create a real discourse environment, stimulate students' interest, maximize the enthusiasm of students, and achieve multimodal teaching strategies

Acknowledgements

This thesis was financially supported by Teaching Reform Project of Jiangxi Science & Technology Normal University in 2018 "Classroom Teaching Research on the course *Introduction to Western Culture* from Multimodal Perspective". (Project NO. JGZD-18-07-07).

References

- [1] Kress, G.&T. van Leeuwen. *Multimodal Discourse: the Mode and Media of Contemporary Communication* [M]. London: Arnold, 2001.
- [2] Yongsheng Zhu. *Theory and Methodology of Multimodal Discourse Analysis*, *Foreign Language Research*, 2007(5):82-86
- [3] Yueguo Gu. *On Multimedia Learning and Multimodal Learning*. *Computer-assisted Foreign Language Education*, 2007(1):3-12.
- [4] New London Group. *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Features*[M]. *Harvard Educational Review*, 1996.
- [5] Krashen, S. *Principles and Practices in Second Language Acquisition*[M]. Oxford: Pergamon, 1982.