

Multimodal English Vocabulary Teaching

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Abstract

With the wide use of digit, internet and multimedia, Multimodal foreign language teaching is becoming a brand-new teaching model. Recent years, there has been a great number of experts and scholars doing research on foreign language teaching using Multimodal theories. However, the application of Multimodal theories in English vocabulary teaching is very rare to see. Therefore, the author tries to do some research and apply Multimodal theories to the practice of English vocabulary teaching. This paper gives a brief introduction about the formation and development of Multimodality and its influence on foreign language teaching, especially English vocabulary teaching and demonstrates how to promote foreign language teaching effectively with Multimodal theories.

Keywords: Multimodality; Unimodality; Multimodal foreign language teaching; Multimodal Theory; English vocabulary teaching

1. Introduction

With the wide application of internet, digit and multimedia in teaching, information of education is no longer single-mode communication, but presenting an indication of Multimodality. The era that language is just a single-mode communication has gone forever while Multimodality has become the main trend. In traditional grammar, pictures, colors, sounds and actions are all regarded as paralinguistics, which are no longer on the

subordinated position, but gradually on the center place. Multimodality is widely existed in our life. Therefore, our foreign language teaching should also be multimodal. Traditional unimodal teaching is supposed to be transformed into Multimodal teaching so as to meet the requirement of society.

Vocabulary is the existing backbone of a language. If you want to be proficient in a foreign language, mastering vocabulary of this language is the key to learn it well. Therefore, the importance of mastering vocabulary is evident and obvious. Although experts of linguistics at home and abroad have gained great achievements in teaching English vocabulary, vocabulary acquisition is still a weak link. Traditionally, students tend to learn the new words by rote, and as a consequence, they forget the words they learn by rote very easily. Therefore, to explore a new way of teaching vocabulary is of vital importance. Multimodal English vocabulary teaching will bridge the gap of traditional English vocabulary teaching and it is also the supplement and development of traditional English vocabulary teaching methods.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definitions of Multimodality

Modality, that is symbol, means the interactive ways between sense-organ and outside environment. If three or more sense organs are involved, we call it multimodality(Gu Yue guo 2007). Multimodality means three or more symbols involved in the interaction, including verbal and written language, picture, graphics, space and other symbol resources which could construct meaning (Baldry & Thibault, 2006).

2.2 Theoretical Basis of Multimodality

Experts and scholars in foreign language teaching at home and abroad have different views about the definition of multimodality, but they are in basic agreement on this point. These experts and scholars in foreign language teaching all believe that the theoretical basis of multimodality is Halliday's Systemic-Functional Grammar. According to Systemic-Functional linguistic theory (Halliday1973;1975;1985), language should embody three kinds of functions, or we can call it Metafunctions: Ideational Function, Interpersonal Functional and Textual Function. From the perspective of Multimodal discourse, in addition to language itself, other semiotic systems also belong to Metafunctions, which also can involve in meaning construction.

2.3 Research Findings Done Abroad

Foreign experts in this field, Kress and Van Leeuwen(2001) , argue that Multimodal discourse is the one that has combined a variety of communicative modality, for example, sounds, texts, images and so on in order to transfer information. Therefore, the key to

differentiate unimodality and multimodality is that how many symbols are involved in the construction of discourse. Hodge and Kress (1998:186) hold that meaning widely lies in the resource system of other social symbols, such as sight, audition, behavior, expression, action.etc. There is not a single symbol that can be perfectly understood because it is far enough for only laying emphasis on written language alone. Royee made a detailed research on how teacher use modalities, such as vision and audition in class presented by computer to assist students in cultivating their Multimodal communicative competence.

So far, researches on the application of multimodality to English vocabulary teaching have been quite rare to see. Therefore, based on the research findings of the precedent researches in this field, I try to find out a more reasonable and effective method of teaching English vocabulary with the application of multimodality.

2.4 Research Findings Done at Home

Hu Zhuanglin(2007)believe that in Systemic-Functional linguistic theory, the theory of language is social semiotics has promoted Multimodal research. In traditional grammar, pictures, colors, sounds and actions are all regarded as paralinguistics, which are no longer on the subordinated position, but gradually on the center place and are jointly taking part in meaning construction. Zhu Yongsheng, one of the experts who has gained come achievement in Multimodal teaching, believe that modality is the medium and channel of information communication. Modality includes semiotic system of pictures, sounds, colors, technologies and so on besides traditional language teaching(Zhu Yongsheng 2007). GuYue guo analyzed multimedia Multimodal learning. Li Zhanzi(2003)did research on Multimodal discourse theory using Systemic-Functional linguistic theory. He believes that modality is not only include texts but also include the semiotic discourse of graphics, pictures and so on.

Although experts of linguistics at home and abroad have gained great achievements in English vocabulary, vocabulary acquisition is still a weak link. Multimodal teaching provides a new way for English Vocabulary Teaching.

3. Multimodal Teaching & Foreign Language Teaching

The method of traditional foreign language teaching is so outmoded and obsolete which needs to be transformed and improved. Multimodal foreign language teaching conforms to the development of the times and is becoming a mainstream of English class teaching.

3.1 The Origin of Multimodal Teaching

A new term, Multimodal teaching was put forward by New London Group in 1996, which creates a precedent of applying multimedia to language teaching. As a new type teaching theory, Multimodal teaching is inclined to use all kinds of channels and means to mobilize a variety of senses of students into the process of learning. This kind of teaching

approach attaches great importance to students' multiliteracies.

3.2 Comparisons between Multimodal English Teaching and Traditional English Teaching

A distinctive feature of traditional English teaching classroom is just using chalk and blackboard, sometimes with a tape recorder. Such kind of instructional mode is quite monotonous and tedious without more diversities, which will easily lead to students' aesthetic fatigue. In traditional instruction, teachers are always pumping and hammering knowledge into students while students receive knowledge passively instead of positively. In reality, such a circumstance has reversed students' subject position and teachers' dominant position in the process of teaching and learning. Emphasizing students' subject position is the key to do the class teaching well. Methods of imparting knowledge should not be limited to language modality but including non-language modality, such as gestures, postures, actions, facial expressions and so on. Turning to these symbols is conducive to receive new knowledge for students. It is the appropriate modality that can enhance teaching contents, attract students' attentions and deepen their understandings about teaching materials. In the process of making up multimedia courseware, more and more modalities should be involved, such as texts, pictures, colors, animations, music, videos and so on. Only in this way, better results in teaching can be attained. Therefore, in the process of teaching, more modalities should be adopted to supplement teaching and stimulate students' enthusiasm so as to foster their all-round abilities.

3.3 The Application of Multimodal Teaching to English Classroom Teaching

In recent years, with the advent of multimedia and information technology, English class teaching is turning into Multimodal foreign language teaching from the single traditional teaching mode. With the leading of science and technology, modern classroom is bidding farewell to traditional teaching mode, which only includes textbook, chalk and blackboard. Multimedia courseware is gradually taking the place of traditional blackboard and adopted by a majority of teachers, especially college English teachers. Multimodal Teaching in English Classroom Teaching can not only mobilize more senses of students to get involved in teaching and learning, but also it can deepen their understandings of new materials and contents. This will finally improve the effectiveness and efficiency of classroom teaching.

4. The Application of Multimodal Teaching to English Vocabulary Teaching

Mastering vocabulary is the key to learn English well. English vocabulary teaching is an indispensable part of the whole English teaching. Language teachers have been placing great emphasis to teach English vocabulary. However, the results of mastering vocabulary is not desirable, because words remembered by the way of rote can be forgotten very easily and

won't last long. Therefore, it is of great necessity to adopt a new way to promote English vocabulary teaching. The application of Multimodal foreign language teaching will be sure to facilitate English vocabulary teaching.

4.1 Comparisons between Traditional English Vocabulary Teaching and Multimodal English Vocabulary Teaching

Multimodal teaching is the supplement and development of traditional teaching. With the advent of a new approach of English vocabulary teaching, that is Multimodal English Vocabulary Teaching, traditional vocabulary teaching is plausibly outdated and can not meet the minimal needs of modern students. Therefore, it is of great significance for students to adopt a new way to learn English vocabulary well, for vocabulary is the most important link in learning English well. D.A. Wikins, one of the most famous British linguists once said: Without grammar very little can be conveyed; Without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed (Wikins, 1976:111). It is obvious that vocabulary is of great importance. However, traditional way of vocabulary teaching is very much behind the time, not alone to use a brand-new approach of Multimodal vocabulary teaching. Traditionally, vocabulary teaching is always following these steps: first, teachers read the new word list while students listen to the teachers carefully; second, teachers begin to lead the reading while students read after teachers; third, teachers start to teach the new words while students take notes as they listen to the teachers; last, teachers give their students assignments while students should do all kinds of pattern drills after class to consolidate what teachers taught in class. Students recite new words by rote instead of turning to sounds, actions, pictures, colors, etc. to deepen their memory.

Traditional students are lacking in effective vocabulary learning strategies. Such class teaching is of great tedium, let alone to mobilize a variety of senses of the students taking part in teaching interactivity. Multimodal English vocabulary teaching will compensate the lack of traditional English vocabulary teaching. Combining Multimodal theory with English vocabulary teaching will lead to easy memory of new words. The combination of Multimodal theory with English vocabulary teaching will be sure to solve some problems existing in English vocabulary teaching. The application of Multimodal theory to English vocabulary teaching is becoming more and more popular.

4.2 Some Methods Used in English Vocabulary Teaching with Multimodal Theory

In modern vocabulary teaching, however, teachers pay much attention to language, picture, image, sound and the alike in teaching new words. If visual sense, aural sense, tactile sense can be brought into full play, the difficulty of learning English vocabulary will be surely decreased. The teaching of vocabulary with PPT courseware is not just presenting new words with sheer written words, such as words, phonetic symbols, English paraphrase,

Chinese paraphrase, fixed collocations, example sentence and so on but with illustrated supplements, pictures, natural voice pronunciation, English songs or videos.etc to teach new words. In this agreeable and relaxed atmosphere, vivid paraphrase to the new words will be surely to deepen students' understanding and memory of them. Besides, presenting teaching contents with PPT courseware, teachers should also consider the selection of spatial layout, background setting, typeface, color, special effects and so on so as to stimulate students' visual and aural sense.

In the practical teaching of English, When teaching your students some new words, you can resort to an episode of music or a song which is related to the words you are going to explain to them. For instance, in one class you are going to teach some new words such as hold, lift, touch, love, heart and mind, in fact, these new words are exactly existed in a popular song : *Proud of You*. Some lyrics in this song are: Hold me up hold me tight, lift me up to touch the sky; Teaching me to love with heart, helping me open my mind. In the process of listening to this sweet song, students may understand the meaning and usage of these new words more thoroughly. This way of learning new words will not only make words recitation more interesting but also arouse student's learning interest. Actually, this kind of method of learning new word has adopted both visual and aural modalities. Generally speaking, the results of using more than one modality is better than the only one in the process of learning new English words.

4.3 Some Strategies Used in the Application of Multimodal Teaching to English Vocabulary Teaching

The application of Multimodal teaching mode should pay close attention to certain strategies. First, the application of Multimodal teaching mode should attach great importance to the selection of mode. The selection of modality is not arbitrary. Inappropriate selection of words will run counter to the desire of Multimodal teaching. Therefore, appropriate modality should be selected according to different subjects and students' learning habits. Second, synergic relations between different modalities should be emphasized. Generally speaking, the selection of teaching modality should center on one master mode while other modes work in coordination with the master mode. If the synergic relations between different modalities can not be handled well, it will distract students' attention from class, which may exert great impact on effects of learning. Third, using Multimodality should also handle well the concrete and abstract principle. The concrete and abstract principle means selecting two or more modalities: one expresses concrete, abstract and uncommon meaning, the other one provides examples, illustrations, paraphrases and instructions in order to be understood easily (Niu Haihua,2012).

In the process of teaching, when teachers teach their students a new word about a kind of flower in class, which is chrysanthemum, a very long word, generally, this complicated

word can be presented on PPT by the way of text and given simple English paraphrase. At this time, if the students still do not understand the word, we can show them a picture of chrysanthemum or give them a chance to watch an episode of video about the presentation of chrysanthemum. It is believed that at this time, every students will have completely understood this word.

5. Conclusion

Throughout the research of recent years pertaining to Multimodal teaching, we can see that experts and scholars at home and abroad all have gained delectable success and gratifying achievements. However, Multimodal foreign language teaching, especially English vocabulary teaching, is still at a nascent stage. Owing to the limitations of the current conditions and the influences of traditional language teaching, Multimodal teaching has not gained adequate popularity, and also it has not gone into classroom. So far, teachers' awareness and understanding to this brand-new teaching mode is not so adequate and complete, so Multimodal language teaching needs further development and exploration. Even so, the profound effects and active role of Multimodality to foreign language teaching are undeniable, which will be sure to inject new life into English vocabulary teaching.

In the meanwhile, we can see that the application of multimodality to English vocabulary teaching makes a higher demand on teachers: First, teachers in this information age are required to make the best use of a variety of modalities in the process of teaching and to master how to make PPT courseware proficiently; Second, Multimodal English vocabulary teaching requires English teachers to be skilled in more than one method in teaching vocabulary, because multimodality means more methods will be involved; Third, in the information age today, teachers are required to use internet resources instead of confining themselves to the mere textbooks. With the improvement of teaching conditions and teachers' abilities to use Multimodal teaching, Multimodal foreign language teaching is inevitably going to be a mainstream in the field of language teaching.

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