

Study on the Application of Multimodal Theory in College English Vocabulary Teaching-- Taking the Classroom Practice of the New College English Integrated Course as an Example

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Abstract. English vocabulary is an indispensable part in the whole second language teaching process. Language experts and teachers have been devoting themselves to the exploration of effective English vocabulary teaching models. With the extensive application of information technology in recent years, multimodality has been integrated into the classroom and multi-modal teaching mode has been widely used in teaching. This paper tries to expound the feasibility of integrating multimodal teaching model into vocabulary teaching, and discuss the practical strategies of multi-modal teaching in English vocabulary teaching from the perspective of teaching implementation combined with teaching examples, hoping to provide beneficial enlightenment for the exploration of vocabulary teaching.

Keywords: Multimodal theory; Teaching Practices; Multimodal Teaching; Vocabulary Teaching.

1. Introduction

The development of information science and technology has enhanced the ability of deepening teaching reform and innovation in all fields of education in China. With the popularization of Internet and big data, teachers have gradually increased the proportion of multimedia assisted teaching, and multi-modal teaching modes such as videos, audios, pictures and sounds have been widely used in teaching. According to Zhu Yongsheng and Zhang Delu [2, 3], the multi-modal teaching mode can stimulate students' hearing, tactile sensation and vision by using symbolic systems such as texts, icons and sounds. Proper and reasonable use of multimodal means is of great benefit to classroom teaching. Therefore, in English vocabulary teaching, teachers' classroom design should keep up with the latest development, teachers should adopt applicable multi-modal teaching techniques to guide teaching activities, so as to optimize students' learning efficiency and lay a solid foundation for students' further development.

2. Flaws of Traditional English Vocabulary Teaching Model

Vocabulary teaching has always been one of the key points in English teaching. The weak foundation of English vocabulary will have a certain impact on the comprehensive quality of English ability. However, due to many factors (such as exam-oriented education, limited class hours, etc.), teachers mostly adopt simple traditional teaching methods in English vocabulary teaching. For example, when explaining vocabulary, some teachers explain almost every word in the vocabulary list in details, instead of teaching key words in a targeted way. This "broad and comprehensive" and "non-classified" vocabulary teaching mode not only aggravates the workload of vocabulary learning for students, but also reduces the interest and interactivity of classroom learning. On the one hand, some teachers' vocabulary teaching methods are outdated and students are required to memorize mechanically, which may make students resistant to English vocabulary learning. On the other hand, some teachers place too much emphasis on the grammar knowledge related to vocabulary and pay little attention to whether students can have a solid memory of English vocabulary, whether they can use the word appropriately in the specific context and expand their knowledge. Therefore this kind of English vocabulary teaching model makes it impossible for students to feel the artistic value of language and the proper usage of vocabulary in specific context, which leads to the decrease of interest in learning and low efficiency of learning. The traditional model has been difficult to meet the development of times and the requirements of educational reform. With the development of the

society, students' ability to accept new things is far beyond teachers' imagination. Therefore, in English vocabulary teaching, teachers should master the core of the English vocabulary teaching idea, take the student as the center, arrange teaching activities according to students' aptitude and construct knowledge tasks according to the students' English levels, thus provides strong support for students' further English learning.

3. The Feasibility Analysis of Multi-modal Teaching Mode in English Vocabulary Teaching

First proposed in 1996 by "the new London group", the ideal of multimodal teaching encourage teachers to combine the regular class activities with animation, sounds, pictures, as well as the use of nonverbal symbols, which can stimulate the students' various senses and provide a pleasant teaching environment, so that students are more willing to get involved in the class engagement, thus improving classroom teaching efficiency. With the development and innovation of modern information technology, this novel teaching model guided by the concept of multi-modal teaching has been favored by the majority of teachers and students, and has been gradually perfected and applied in language teaching, which further promote the reform of English teaching model in China [4]. In English classes, many English teachers organize the class in combination with the specific teaching content, advanced education technology, innovative English teaching mode and method, through the widespread adoption of multimodality and material means, such as text, network, sounds, images, graphics, audios and videos, etc., to attract and stimulate their interest in learning and help students acquire more knowledge and communication skills [2]. Multimodal teaching model constructs and promotes the innovation and effectiveness of English vocabulary teaching. Royce [5] believed that in vocabulary learning, word meaning could be taught in the form of pictures and texts first, because various modal symbols could be complementary to each other, which could further improve students' learning efficiency. By comparing the experimental results of traditional vocabulary teaching and multi-modal vocabulary teaching, Li Ping et al. [4] found that with the help of multi-modal vocabulary teaching, students' cognition and memory of vocabulary are more profound and lasting, and students' vocabulary learning efficiency is improved. Therefore, in English vocabulary teaching, teachers can learn from the multi-modal teaching model, optimize the means and methods of classroom vocabulary teaching, fully mobilize students' various senses and learning enthusiasm, and help realize the teaching goal of improving students' comprehensive English application ability.

4. The practice and application of multimodality in English vocabulary teaching

Multi-modal English vocabulary teaching has the characteristics of specialization and diversification. The specific teaching needs to adopt different teaching methods according to the specific situation. In the whole process of real classroom activities, teachers' pre-class preparation and students' active participation are the key to the success of classroom activities. However, the use of modal teaching means is a flexible integration throughout all aspects of teaching, rather than a fixed set of rigid procedures. In order to facilitate the narration, this subsection expounds how to subtly integrate multi-modal teaching and vocabulary teaching from three aspects: vocabulary teaching, knowledge supplement and teacher creativity.

4.1 Vocabulary Teaching of Multimodal Theory

From the perspective of presentation mode, vocabulary teaching mainly uses the combination of picture mode and text mode in multi-modal. Due to the limited classroom time, when teachers explain a certain word and language phenomenon, they cannot always play the whole video clip for

explanation. They usually combine pictures to quickly stimulate the formation of images in people’s minds, and form specific memory points related to words. On the other hand, through specific teaching practice, teachers’ general experience will find that not every kind of vocabulary can be displayed with a fixed single mode, and diversified combination and flexible processing should be carried out. However, the consumption of considerable time and energy of teachers in preparing language points is unimaginable, which meanwhile exercises teachers’ language ability a lot. In the next section, the author gives some teaching examples of multimodal applications from the perspective of classification of vocabulary.

4.1.1 Noun

When learning nouns, teachers can use pictures, real objects and other static forms to display them. For example, when the word “beacon” appears in the specific context, students have not met in their real life. At this time, specific pictures can be displayed, and students can directly connect with real life experience and encyclopedia knowledge through vivid pictures. Moreover, the image mode of pictures can stimulate students’ visual senses, so as to enhance students’ memory of vocabulary.

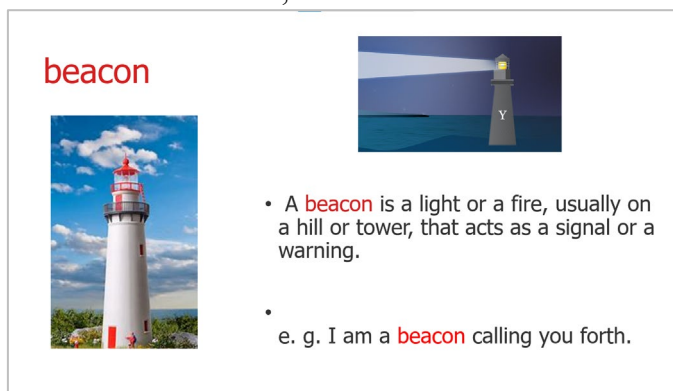


Fig.1 The slide of “beacon”

When we learning relatively abstract meanings, rather than simple entity nouns, teachers can replace them with related scenes and simpler concepts. Such as in the word “remittance”, to tell student the meaning, which is a sum of money that you send to someone, teachers can display the picture to the students as below in Fig.2: a person is sitting in front of a computer with a bank card, with the screen of his computer saying “Money Transfer \$_”, and the person is putting the amount of money to be transferred on the keyboard. Through such a scene, students can completely accumulate the usage of the word. At this time, the teacher can add a simple description and an example sentence, which can greatly enhance students’ memory.

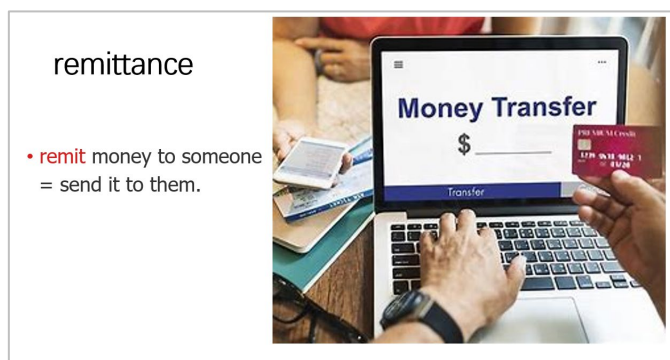


Fig. 2 The slide of “remittance”

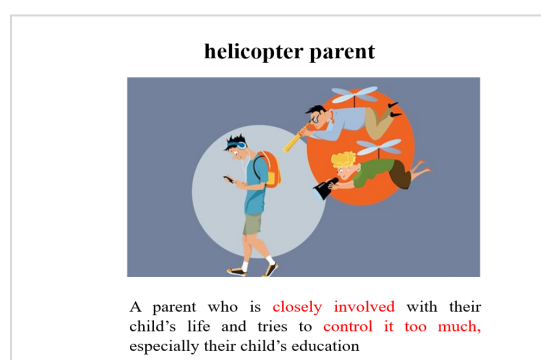


Fig. 3 The slide of “helicopter parent”

When we are teaching the text Learning,Chinese-Style written by a Harvard professor named Howard Gardner in New College English Integrated Course 2 [1], the author has mentioned helicopter parent, which has also been used to describe a cultural phenomenon. Helicopter here is a metaphorical image to describe parents who constantly monitor and control their children’s life. By showing a vivid

picture in Fig 3, students can immediately understand the cultural metaphor meaning of helicopter here.

4.1.2 Verbs and Verb Phrases

When learning verbs or phrasal verbs, teachers prefer animated videos or pictures with action or vectors of action. For example, to learn the verbal phrase “insert the coins into the slot.” Through the screenshot below in Fig4, teachers can clearly let the students know how to “insert” the coin into then slot, thus the word meaning is self-evident and clear-is to put one object into another or between two things. So as long as teachers can set his or her wits to work, even a static picture can represent dynamic meaning as well.

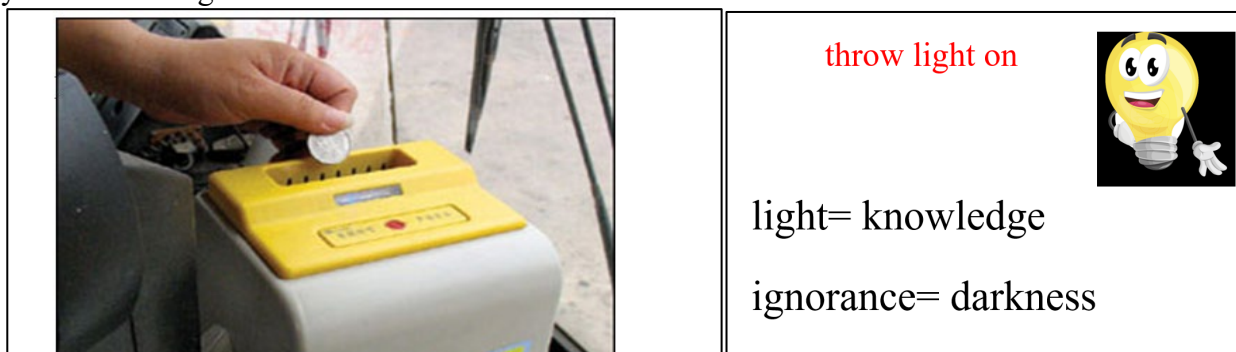


Fig4. The slide of “insert into”

Fig5. The slide of “throw light on”

Some phrasal verbs are metaphorical, so it is quite difficult to use specific pictures with proper meanings to directly imply the word. In this case, some images or icons with metaphorical meaning should be used to get twofold results with half the effort. The expression “throw light on”, for example, has something metaphorical in common between Chinese and English cultures. In two cultures, ignorance is associated with darkness, while light is a symbol of enlightenment and understanding. At this time, you can put pictures of light bulbs or stage lights. The teacher first explains the cultural connotation of light like this: If a person knows nothing about a certain problem, then his mind is totally underneath darkness. If someone gives him a little enlightenment, he will suddenly get the idea or logic behind it and have a better understanding, just like a ray of light illuminates the dark world. In combination with the simple two equations in Fig5, students can understand that the phrase “throw light on” is actually equivalent to providing information or knowledge on something.

Adjectives

Adjectives are used to describe specific features of things. At the beginning, we think it would be difficult to use multimodal forms to illustrate adjectives, but when we actually try to do it in teaching practices, you will find it's not as difficult as we think. Above all, there are many ways to classify adjectives. One way among them, is to divide adjectives into dynamic adjectives and static adjectives according to lexical meaning. Static adjectives describe the static features of a person or object, such as tall, short, big, small, ugly, blue, etc. Most adjectives are static adjectives. Dynamic adjectives usually carry action meanings, such as ambitious, brave, hasty, naughty, noisy, obstinate, untidy, witty, etc.

For static adjectives, we can match nouns to find pictures that contain the characteristics of the adjective. For instance, to illustrate the word “deceptive”. From the picture below in Fig6, we can see two contrasting things. On the left is a burger, the caption above says “As Advertised”, which features food that looks fresh and tasty. The hamburger on the right has the title “in reality” on the top. In terms of shape and appearance, it is smaller than the food on the left and apparently the color is not so attractive. At this time, with some simple description, we can learn the meaning of deceptive as well as deceptive—which means that likely to make you believe something that is not true as in a deceptive advertisement.

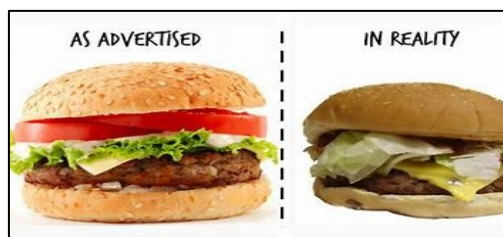


Fig 6. The picture used to illustrate “deceptive”

For most static adjectives, we can highlight this feature with a circle in the picture. For example, when you’re talking about the word “wrinkle”, you can put a picture of a human face, circle the parts of wrinkles and label the word with the spelling form as in Fig7. In the same vein, dynamic adjectives can be transformed into pictures with verb meanings by conversion, which is a common word formation method. For example, to explain the word “abusive”, teachers can choose pictures containing “abuse” as in Fig 8. Through the pictures, students can grasp the main meaning of words and experience the realistic meaning of words from the emotional aspect. For example, when students see the boy suffered from abuse, they can’t help but feel sympathy and pity with him and leave students with a deep impression.



Fig 7. The slide of “wrinkle”

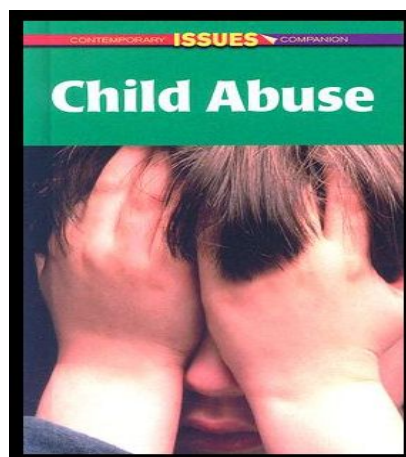


Fig 8. The slide of “abusive”

Qualitative adjectives, for example, can be shown by concrete things. For example, when explaining transparent in Fig 9, students will be shown a transparent glass fish tank on the slide. After seeing the image, students can understand the meaning clearly. Then the teacher can analyze the prefix and root of the word to supplement lexicology knowledge.

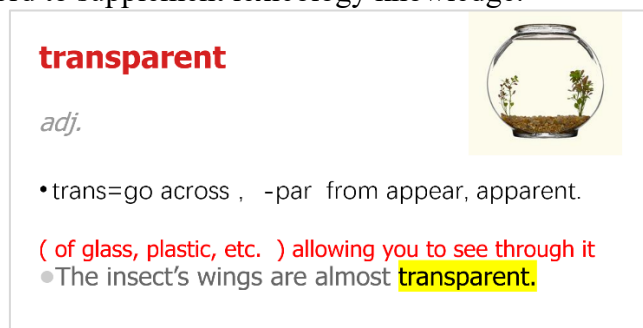


Fig 9. The slide of “transparent”

4.2 Knowledge supplement function of multimodal teaching

4.2.1 Introduction in class: author and background knowledge

In college English classes that mainly focus on text, teachers usually choose video mode as the introduction of knowledge background. For example, to learn the text entitled Public Attitudes

towards Science, which is written by Professor Hawking. For the great scientist, teachers often tend to choose a short video that gives a brief overview of Hawking's major academic contributions and life experiences.

Another example, in text *The True Height*, [1] Michael Stone, an American blind pole vaulter, overcame his psychological stress at the Youth Olympic Games, and his childhood experience with his parents. When talking about this article, the principle of pole vault and the enjoyment of the competition can be supplemented by showing some clips of pole vaulters' tournament clips. Students will have a better understanding of the psychological anxiety of pole vaulters in fierce competition, as well as the hardships they overcome in daily training. In particular, some students in the class who are interested in sports will pay more attention to the skills and details of the text content, which will arouse students' admiration for the competitive spirit of sportsmanship.

4.2.2 Theme Presentation

When supplementing materials centered around the unit theme, teachers can choose classical film and television clips and music to express the theme, which can set off the teaching atmosphere, and can also be helpful to express the meaning of the theme, reflecting the unity of the humanities and instrumental function in English classes.

For example, when talking about the American Dreams, teachers can use this strategy. The American humor master, Chaplin's *Modern Times* and *Gold Rush* can well mirror the social situation at that time. e.g. The video clips of the movie *The Great Gatsby* by Francis Scott Key Fitzgerald can also be used. At the same time, teachers can recommend relevant English books and movies to students for study and extended reading.

4.2.3 Key Knowledge Points

There are always some key language points in the text that can be expanded, such as the difference in meaning of synonyms. Take sympathy and empathy as an example. When looking for classroom resources, the author came across a psychological analysis related to the two words, and explained the difference between the two words in the form of an easy-to-understand animation. The concept of sympathy is shown by such a scene that one small animal falling into a well and another looking over the top saying sorry; Empathy, on the other hand, sees the former fall into the mouth of the well, the latter jumps in to share his pain. So empathy is the ability to stand in somebody else's shoes; to look at the world through their eyes. Students can make a very clear distinction between these two concept through this video [6]. And this also requires teachers to accumulate more relevant language materials in their leisure time, especially to enrich themselves and know more about the means of acquire relevant resources. It is highly recommend that teachers sort and store your class preparation materials.

4.3 Body Languages and Gestures of Teachers

According to the research, teachers' gestures and movements can convey a lot of knowledge expression by attracting students' attention and make great effects. When teachers are elaborating on the some certain language points in the text, teachers can use some gestures and moves to catch students' eyes. The sentence below is extracted in *New College English Integrated Course 1, Writing For Myself*. [1]

The idea of becoming a writer had come to me off and on since my childhood in Belleville, but it wasn't until my third year in high school that the possibility took hold.

When explaining the phrase "off and on", the teaching design adopted by the author is to go to the light switch of the classroom and turn on and off the light. The phrase itself has the meaning of "on and off", and then explain to the students: the mind and electricity current are similar, so if a person's mind is like the light switch on and off, in the text, which probably means "the idea that the author wanted to be a writer was something that came to mind from time to time, not a fixed idea". Then students can get right to the heart of the phrase.

Another example, in the interpretation of the verb “thump”, in order to explain the onomatopoeic rationale behind the word. The author can deliberately push the book off the desk to make a loud, dull sound, so as to let the students understand what this word means. A pounding sound made when an object falls, so the word can describe the beating of the heart as well. By doing this, some creative and simple classroom designs can attract students’ attention, thus forming a new word memory point. Then the author add a colorful picture as in Fig 10, containing some sound elements to remind students the word means a heavy sound.



Fig 10. The slide of thump

5. Conclusion

Multimedia technology brings multi-modal teaching into the classroom, and also promotes experts, scholars and teachers to devote themselves to the research of multi-modal teaching. The combination of multi-sensory and multi-modal teaching methods can make learners get twice the result with half the effort, change the traditional vocabulary teaching mode, and point out the direction for future teaching practice. At the same time, multimodal vocabulary teaching also puts forward higher requirements for teachers’ teaching skills. In the future research, we need to further explore the methods and strategies of multimodal vocabulary teaching.

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