A Study on the Cultivation of Multimodal Literacy in College English Reading Teaching

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Abstract: The traditional reading teaching centering on reading and writing only is no longer applicable for modern college English reading teaching because of the multimodality of modern discourses. Therefore, it is essential to cultivate students’ multimodal literacies in English reading teaching. This paper, on the theoretical basis of multimodal discourse analysis, analyzes the multimodal resources in English reading teaching classes and the modes to coordinate the relationship among multimodalities so as to achieve the communicative effect in reading teaching, and proposes some suggestions on the multimodal teaching for college English reading.

Key words: multimodality; literacy; college English reading teaching

I. Introduction

Nowadays, a large amount of news and information is released not only in traditional newspapers, magazines and other written media but also on the network and other new media, and many languages are not simply for reading and writing only. Because of the multimodality of modern discourses, the appropriate and effective modals should be chosen for the communication in college English reading classes in an aim to cultivate students’ literacies in reading multimodal discourses and help them adapt to the advent of an image era. This paper mainly discusses the necessity of introducing multimodal theory into English reading to cultivate students’ multimodal literacies and probes into specific modes for cultivation.

II. Theory of Multimodal Analysis and Its Methodology

There are varied ways for human beings to exchange information, and language is only one of them. Modality is a communication channel and medium, including such semiotic systems as language, technology, image,
color, music and so on. Zhu Yongsheng\textsuperscript{[1]} proposes two criteria standards for multimodal discourse. The first criterion relates to the variety of modality involved in the discourse, mainly covering five kinds of modality: visual modality, auditory modality, olfactory modality, tactile modality and gustatory modality. For example, we read novels by visual modality and listen to the radio by auditory modality. The second criterion refers to the number of semiotic systems involved. Some discourses only involve one kind of modality but may contain two or more semiotic systems. For example, magazine ads, which only involve visual modality but take on a number of semiotic systems, including wordage, pictures, color changes, adjustment of layout and printing techniques, are multimodal ones. \textsuperscript{[2]} The multimodality of modern discourses is manifested in that they have two or more kinds of modality and semiotic systems. Modalities can be classified into visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory and gustatory ones. Semiotic systems, in addition to linguistic form, touch upon paralanguage signs, such as acoustics, tone, font and layout, body language signs, like eye contacts, facial expressions and gestures, and non-body signs composed of the employment of modern scientific technologies, like PPT, audio amplification and network \textsuperscript{[3]}.

III. Multi-literacy and Multimodal Analysis in College English Reading Teaching

Multi-litertacies are composed of language literacy, technology literacy and social communication ability. To cultivate students’ multimodal literacies in English reading teaching, it is vital to make clear what multimodal resources exist in the reading classes and their significances. The features of multimodalities in college English reading classes include:

(1) Domination of visual and auditory modalities

Among five modalities, including visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile and gustatory ones, visual and auditory modalities are mainly employed in reading classes. Teachers may turn either to visual modality, like a PPT (displaying text, pictures or images) to enhance understanding, or to blackboard writing (in a rational layout and colors) for the analysis of key points, or to body languages (gestures, eye contacts, expressions, postures, costumes, etc.) to capture attention. Auditory modality is mainly manifested by teacher’s voice, PPT (music, English listening materials), tape recorder and other media. In classroom communication, oral language is mostly used to answer questions and carry out various classroom activities, and sometimes a variety of sound resources, such as playing audio by PPT, are employed to enhance classroom teaching.

For specific classroom activities, these two modalities are mutually integrated and coordinated. In terms of their relationship, the auditory sense, as the major modality, plays a dominating role in the communicative process;
while the visual modality works on the auditory modality primarily in two aspects: intensification and supplementation, i.e., to intensify the auditory modality for better accuracy and clarity, and to supplement unclear or missed information.

(2) Essentiality of instrumental media

The instrumental media in English teaching refer to audio equipment, PPT, network platform, laboratory and other devices. These instrumental media, especially PPT and network platform, can lay a good material foundation for the communication between teachers and students in English classes: when properly employed, they can help create a lovely and true-to-life teaching atmosphere.

As described above, the analysis chart for classroom multimodal resources can be constructed as below:

IV. Cultivation of Multimodal Literacies in College English Reading Classes

Combined with the actual level of English majors and teaching conditions in Anhui Sanlian University, and based on the three factors of multimodal resources involved in reading classes as shown in the above chart, the students’ multimodal literacies can be developed from the following three aspects.

(1) Multimodal resources of written discourses

The multimodal resources of written discourses mainly include printing styles, charts, images and genres. Specific to modal resources in written discourses, teachers in the reading teaching can increase the adoption of paper reading books abundant in illustrations and pictures, remind students to identify texts, pictures, colors, print formats and other modals in the books to enhance their sensitivity to non-text modals and thus help them master browsing, fast reading and other basic reading skills.
(2) Communicator factor

The communicator factor here mainly refers to the multimodality of the participation by teachers in classroom teaching. Learners normally acquire new knowledge through the teachers’ oral discourses. However, teachers can also make good use of their tones, gestures, movements, motions and other modals to complement and optimize their discourses in order to achieve the mutual synergistic effect of multimodalities. For example, in a study on teachers’ intonation, it is found that, in the process of “topic presentation-topic discussion-topic conclusion”, the most significant intonation is the falling tone which is used more frequently and often accompanied by stress, especially when the teachers give orders, express affirmation, make comments and do sum-ups. However, when attracting students’ attention, calling students to answer questions or praising students, they often turn to the rising tone. The employment of such phonological features will also facilitate teachers to carry out classroom teaching activities as the organizers.

(3) Media factor

The media here refer to technical means available to teachers in the classes, including PPT, teaching aids, blackboard writings, network platforms, etc. The multimodal application of PPT in the reading class teaching may be examined. In the topic introduction section, the teacher, mainly relying on linguistic means, utilizes a PPT and a network platform supplemented by texts, pictures or music to quickly guide students into the article associated context and background; in the process of text analysis, to enable students to understand key words and the content, the teacher gives specific explanations, questions or examples (with the aid of PPT display); in the linguistic performance section, the teacher presents relevant words on the PPT, raises relevant questions and helps students carry out topic discussion, role performance, sentence translation or related writing training; and in the content extension section, the teacher sorts out the views expressed in the article on the PPT and guides students’ discussion, concluded by a critical elaboration on the views.

V. Conclusion and Enlightenment

Compared with traditional language teaching, multimodal English reading teaching exerts a positive effect on the cultivation of students’ multi-literacies, which can not only improve students’ linguistic performance in reading and speaking, but also help cultivate their multiliteracies. In the future English teaching, teachers are expected to accept the idea of multiliteracy teaching, break the limitation of language-centered traditional teaching modal; especially, they are expected to pay particular attention to the trainings on students’ multiliteracies and abilities to identify a variety of
modalities for significance construction and to apply multimedia technology to selectively acquire information as well as cultural appreciation and critical abilities. Meanwhile, teachers should strive to construct the English reading class into a multimodal, three-dimensional one, which can integrate semiotic resources, such as texts, images, animations and colors, into multimodal language input and absorption, so as to facilitate students in their multimodal outputs and enhance their multimodal literacies.

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**References**

