

Computer Network-based Multimodal Teaching of British and American Literature

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Abstract

Guided under the multimodal teaching theory, the researchers mainly discuss the practice of the computer network-based multimodal teaching of British and American literature. This article emphasizes that the teachers take advantage of pictures, network screenshots, movies, video, sound, and other resources in the classroom lectures to mobilize the coordination operation of the auditory, visual and tactile senses, to enhance the students' impression of the writer and his works. By doing so, the students have a good understanding of the original work, instead of having the boring sense of the single text-mode teaching and the distress of comprehension of literary works, and have no difficulties in comprehending the text and then the classroom teaching is improved.

Keywords: computer network, teaching of British and American literature, multimodality, image mode, sound mode

Introduction

In the information age, the computer network provides people with various information which include both excellent pictures and texts audio-visually in a quick and convenient way. People no longer rely on a single text to get the information in the form of books, newspapers, etc. Students no longer obtain knowledge only through books and classroom attendance, while they can acquire knowledge, update knowledge and accumulate knowledge through the computer network. The interactive learning

environment with friendly interface and intuitive image as well as a rich source of information provided by the computer network helps students to get more knowledge, help to stimulate students' interest in learning and collaborative learning and help students to take the initiative in finding and exploring. Therefore, the mode of teacher-centered classroom teaching can not meet the individual needs of students.

Because of this, the computer network or multimedia has been successfully applied to modern English teaching process, presenting unprecedented multimodal forms of the English teaching. Through information and communication technology (ICT), curriculum resources are rationally used and actively developed. Abundant teaching resources on the Internet are fully used. Students are provided with curriculum resources which can present students with actual life, and whose content is rich and instructive. The ways of learning and using English are also expanded. And teachers can enrich teaching content and forms to improve the effect of English teaching by using a variety of audio-visual resources and network resources. At the same time, teachers can take advantage of the computer and multimedia teaching software to explore new teaching modes to promote personalized learning. Therefore, the computer network technology changed the original single and monotonous books teaching, and made multimodal teaching feasible.

2. The Multimodal Teaching Theory

Multimodality refers to the combination of different semiotic modes in a finished communication or communication activities. Semiotic modes are these different systems for meaning-making, or possible “channels” such as speech, writing, images, etc. Semiotic modes can include visual, verbal, written, gestural and musical resources for communication. They also include various “multimodal” ensembles of any of these modes (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001). Multimodality, the multiple presentations of modality, is the most important factor in teaching. Multimodal educational and pedagogical approach promotes not only the teaching through the means and principles of ICT education, e-learning and modern technology, but also the reforming of traditional culture (Kanari & Potamias, 2011).

This theory, mainly in the perspective of social semiotics and based on the theory of Halliday’s functional grammar, holds that the traditional paralinguistic images, colors, music and action symbols are no longer in the auxiliary position in modern social communication, but form a broader semiotic resources along with text symbols to make meaning.

Multimodal teaching advocates that teachers should take advantage of more channels and more teaching methods such as websites, pictures, role-plays, etc, to mobilize students’ multiple senses engaging in language teaching. According to Kress et al., (2001), teachers often use gestures together with speech to draw attention to images and other references within the classroom. In particular, they maintain: various modes are interacting and interplaying: gestures, drawings, speech, objects. Each mode contributes to meaning construction: speech to create a difference, an image on the blackboard to get a visual background, manipulation of an object to locate the discussion in the physical

setting, action to make clear the dynamic nature of the concept, the image in the textbook to do a stable summary, cohesion is achieved through repetition, synchronization, similarity and contrast.

3. Characteristics of the British and American literature course and the feasibility of multimodal teaching

3.1 Characteristics of the British and American literature course

3.1.1 Situational

The course of British and American literature includes British and American literary history, writers, and selected reading materials. All these aim at depicting beautiful pictures for readers. While reading, the readers can imagine seeing the Paradise that God has built for Adam and Eve and the enormous marlin that the old man Santiago catches, entering the palace where Prince Hamlet lives, landing the island where Robinson Crusoe lives lonely. The sense of these pictures is the manifestation of the literature class scenarios.

3.1.2 Episodic

The writers, works and the characters in the works in the British and American literature are all related to some moving stories. While reading works, the readers can “experience” the plots, accomplishing the missions and overcoming the innumerable hazards and hardships, such as Bewulf’s fighting closely with the monsters, Hamlet’s revenging, Adam and Eve’s being expelled from the Garden of Eden, Tess’s being hanged, Rip Van Winkle’s long sleeping, etc. The characters and their stories in the works contain the complex plots.

3.2 The feasibility of multimodal teaching under computer network-based conditions

Moreno and Mayer (2007) believe that

multimodal learning environments use different modes to represent content knowledge, for example verbal and non-verbal, where the non-verbal mode is the pictorial mode including static and dynamic graphics. These different presentation modes (verbal and non-verbal) are used to attract students' different sensory modalities (visual, auditory and tactile). Once the stories of a literary work and the pictures depicted in it are combined with the languages, the work is alive, which make the readers a sense of reality. Thus, every literary text is an integration of various modes, instead of a single text mode. Moreover, the computer internet happens to be able to provide the multimodal sounds, texts, images, or even different colors and fonts for English and American literature teaching, fully facilitating students' auditory, visual, tactile and other senses, which make this course organic integration of many means of languages, images, sounds, texts and symbolic resources.

4.Multimodality teaching construction of British and American literature course

The British and American literature teaching under computer network conditions, is a multimodal auxiliary teaching mode based on its own curriculum characteristics, the multimodal teaching theory and on the use of computer network platform.

Nowadays, the network culture is very popular, and it is necessary for teachers to offer the students who are addicted to internet culture some English and American Literature learning websites, and guide students to visit and browse them, learn something and finish a certain amount of job. Therefore, the teaching mode of British and American literature can be transformed from the mode of single teacher-centered lectures to the teaching mode

based on classroom teaching supplemented by students' online study, and teaching presents three main modes, whose positions in the teaching process are as follows: text mode, image mode and sound mode.

4.1 text mode

In the course of British and American literature teaching, text mode is always playing a leading role. It includes the text in students' book, the text in the courseware, the text in the reading materials which students complete reading online as a task, the writing text which includes the literary essay writing assigned, the adaption of literary screenplays, etc.

4.2 image mode

The image mode includes all kinds of image materials that are displayed for literature learning, such as the course videos which the teachers upload to the LAN, network ppt courseware including the pictures, drawings and screenshots in the courseware, literary movies adapted from literary works, and even literary drama performances with living images. This mode makes text mode more vivid and intuitive.

4.3 sound mode

The sound mode regards the sound as the carrier, including the ppt courseware for classroom teaching, the network ppt courseware, course videos, adapted movies, drama recording, which makes text mode and image mode more vivid.

Among the three modes, text is the main mode, in charge of providing key information, while image and sound are auxiliary modes, in charge of providing the background information. Although they emphasize different aspects, they are used to achieve the same macro purposes as is to enhance communication purposes of literature teaching content.

5.Multimodal teaching practice of British and American literature course

In the course of multimodal teaching, text mode plays the leading role, but they interact to and reinforce one another, build the same discourse meaning of British and American literature. In one case, image mode and sound mode make the features of text mode prominent; in the other case, text mode also makes the features of image mode and sound mode obvious.

We will take the teaching of Shakespeare and one of his masterpiece Romeo and Juliet for example in the following to present the whole process of the three modes.

5.1 text mode

When we introduce Shakespeare's life story and the four periods of his works, we mainly use the text mode, supplemented by ppt courseware. The text mode in the courseware always plays the leading role. For example, Shakespeare's writing career has been often divided into four periods. In the first period (1590-1594), he wrote mainly comedies influenced by Roman and Italian models and four history plays in the popular chronicle tradition. His second period began in 1595 with the tragedy Romeo and Juliet and ended with the tragedy of Julius Caesar in 1599. From about 1600 to about 1608, his third "tragic period", Shakespeare wrote mostly tragedies, and from about 1608 to 1613, the fourth period of mainly tragicomedies, also called romances. All these are presented by text mode, because only the text mode can express the boundaries of time and classification of the works. We use the text to express the time and classification, supplemented by pictures, screenshots, videos, etc. Because of its strong visual impact, the image mode, as the background of the teaching, emphasizes the literal meaning of the expression, and highlights the text mode. Meanwhile, we

add sounds to the same page of ppt courseware using a custom animation effect, which causes the combination of the clear text, the obvious image and the striking sound. For example, when we add the "typing sound" to the page together with the voice in the video shots, we will make the student's auditory senses involved in the text mode. At this time, the auxiliary role of image mode and sound mode will deepen the students' impression of the text mode.

In addition, extracurricular literary reading is also based on text mode. After the teachers' guiding in class, the students can read the original works, or read the materials downloaded in the the designated campus network platform to expand literary background. Accordingly, the students must read the original works and download "film and television scripts" from the network platform to perform it in the later literary practice. Moreover, the teacher will teach the students how to analyze the literary works, the films adapted from the lietry works, and how to write critical literary essays, which is also based on the text mode.

5.2 image mode

Image mode is the auxiliary mode in the classroom lectures or the display of text mode. However, the image is the main mode in the image-based pages of some parts of the ppt courseware, or the course videos, online videos, screenshots, while text mode and sound mode are the auxiliary modes. For example, when the teacher uses the pictures to illustrate the story of Romeo and Juliet, the picture will take most of the entire ppt page, while the text is at the bottom of the picture, only as the role of the caption.

Likewise, the image is the main mode in film videos, or screenshots, while text mode is the auxiliary mode as the form of the caption at the bottom of the picture and sound mode is the

auxiliary mode synchronizing with the screen character language. At this point, the text mode highlights the image mode for its function of interpretation, and the sound mode makes the image mode vivid for its synchronization, which also has a strengthening effect.

The primary modal role of the image is also reflected in the student network learning. Through the course network platform, students can watch the course videos, browse the network courseware to consolidate the content of school textbooks. According to the problems set by the teacher, after reading a work, the students can also see the movie adapted by the original work on the websites recommended by the teacher. For instance, after reading the work of Romeo and Juliet, students are encouraged to see the movie of different editions, such as 1936 edition, 1954 edition, 1968 edition, and 1996 edition. The students can understand the interpretations of the work by different directors and also form their own understanding of the work. The movie image mode is the interpretation of text mode of the work, and the sound mode synchronized with it enhances the image mode.

Another manifestation of the image mode is the students' drama performances based on the adaptation of literary works. In the play, according to the text description, the students set the classroom and the small stage, and play the roles based on the pre-recorded lines. Although the performances are based on the text mode, and occasionally, the switching of the scenes also needs the notice board, the image mode (live image) is the major mode before the audience. The text mode provides the performing situations for the image mode, and the sound mode – pre-recorded sound provides a clue for the performances.

5.3 Sound mode

Sound mode is always responsible for providing

background information. In the ppt courseware, a text or picture to enter or exit needs the hints of the sound background to emphasize the input of a new piece of information. In the course videos, movie videos, sound is the guarantee to make the characters of the pictures lifelike.

However, when the students make drama performances after they record beforehand in accordance with the need of the scenes, tasks, background, drama performances recording – the sound mode becomes the main mode. Still take Romeo and Julia for example: The students download the related script from the teaching platform, adapt it according to their own understanding, pre-record the lines in accordance with the role assignment, soundtrack according to the story, make the mp3 format of the play. While playing the roles, the students just perform and converse based on the recording of the musical situation. At this moment, the playing sound dominates every performer on the stage, and also the development of the story. Thus, it becomes the major mode. On the contrary, the notice board (text image) of the sub-scene for live performances and the whole scene (image mode) play a supporting role.

6. Conclusion

Compared with the text mode of the past teaching material, the computer network-based multimodal teaching makes every mode interdependent and promote mutually in the use of the computer network technology. The different modes (verbal and non-verbal) are used to appeal to students' different sensory modalities (visual, auditory and tactile, etc). Moreover, multimodal courses allow instructional events or elements to be presented in more than one sensory mode (multiple representations), and then have been used to further facilitate student's learning (Shah & Freedman, 2003). Based on

this, British and American literature classes become more vivid, lively and effective.

In the multimodal teaching, the text mode runs throughout all aspects of teaching, and always bears the irreplaceable role in the interpretation of the other modes; at the same time, the text mode, along with the sound mode, image mode, complement each other, which makes the text vital. The visual and auditory impacts of the sound mode and image mode supplement the lack of sense of pictures in the original works, fill students' sensory gaps, fully mobilize students multiple senses such as hearing, vision, strengthen the significance of the original works, as well as largely eliminate the difficulties in the students' comprehending the text.

The quick pace of change from text-based to more modes of presentations of information involves a quick response from language teachers to take advantage of multimodality to engage learners in meaningful cognitive, critical understandings. More close attention to the meaning-making potential of the multimodal teaching and learning can help language teachers and learners to cope more efficiently as they face new modes of information presentation.

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