

Research on the Current Situation of English Teaching from the Perspective of Multimodal Narrative

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[**Abstract**] This paper reviews the current situation of research on multimodal narrative in English teaching. The study reveals that: 1) Multimodal narrative teaching, as a novel teaching concept, integrates the advantages of both multimodal teaching and narrative teaching; 2) Multimodal narrative teaching not only revitalizes traditionally monotonous teaching methods, but also aids students in the deep processing of learned vocabulary; 3) Multimodal narrative teaching can further enhance students' understanding and application of English vocabulary, thereby improving their vocabulary learning and positively impacting their overall vocabulary proficiency.

[**Key words**] multimodal teaching; narrative teaching; English vocabulary

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Multimodality, as the term implies, involves multiple modes. The concept of “multimodality” has been defined in various ways in both domestic and international research. Kress & van Leeuwen (2001) proposed that multimodality involves the parallel and integration of multiple modal symbols. O’Halloran (2004) suggested that multimodality involves the theoretical analysis and synthesis of linguistic, visual, and other semiotic resources, and is manifested in print media, digital media, and people’s daily lives.

Gentle, Knight and Corrigan (2006) divided multimodality into five components: linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, and spatial. Linguistic elements include vocabulary and structure, visual elements include color and background, auditory elements involve sound effects and voices, gestural elements include behaviors and actions, and spatial elements encompass ecological and architectural spaces. Baldry, A. Thibault, and P. J. (2006) asserted that multimodality also refers to the various ways of using different semiotic resources to create meaning within a given text.

Chinese scholars place great importance on multimodal research and have achieved substantial results. Gu Yueguo (2007) posited that multimodality refers to the ways in which individuals interact with the external environment using three or more senses. Zhang Delu (2012) defined multimodality as human body’s capacity to perceive and communicate using various semiotic resources. The combination of multiple modes is used to facilitate information transmission among individuals.

In this study, multimodality refers to communication and interaction through the use of multiple senses (such as visual and auditory) and various media or semiotic resources (including language, images, sounds and actions).

1 Multimodal teaching

With the rapid development of modern information technology, the application of multimodal theory in foreign language teaching has led to the emergence of multimodal teaching. In 1996, the New London Group was the first

to study the effects of multimodal teaching on improving students' reading and writing abilities, marking its initial application in English education. This approach emphasizes the use of various modes, such as images, sounds, videos and role-playing, to stimulate students' multiple senses. Through the synergy of multiple sensory inputs, students can develop a strong interest in learning, and foster better understanding and retention of the material.

Stein & P. (2000) argued that multimodal teaching aligns with the educational concept of cultivating multiple intelligences (MI). By systematically explaining the design and application of multimodal teaching, the authors highlighted the basic principles to be followed and how to integrate multimodality with multimedia technology to achieve better teaching outcomes.

Jewitt & C. (2006) asserted that every communicative act in the classroom is multimodal, not just language-based. Guichon, N., and McLornan, S. (2008) explored the role of multimodal teaching implemented through multimedia in foreign language learning. They detailed the principles and methods for curriculum design in this context. Mills (2006) provided a detailed solution for constructing a multimodal classroom based on 18 days of teaching observations and teacher-student interviews. On this basis, further exploration was conducted on the role of multimodality in foreign language learning.

During their research, they found that the synchronous presentation of audio and video provides learners with a positive learning experience. However, the use of images by teachers in various language input tasks can impact information intake. Holsanova (2014) integrated cognitive theories of perception and attention, social semiotic theories of multimodal discourse grouping, and eye-tracking technology to investigate people's perception of discourse. Currently, multi-channel eye-tracking technology has been applied to test the theories of social semiotics and instructional design.

Later, Chinese scholars integrated multimodality with various teaching materials, presenting different perspectives from multiple angles. Researchers elaborated on the advantages of multimodal English teaching and proposed corresponding teaching recommendations.

Based on cognitive psychology, Gu Yueguo (2007) proposed a hypothesis about multimodal learning, suggesting that "multimedia and multimodal learning can enhance memory more than single-modal learning", and that "learning with both text and images is more effective than relying solely on text". These ideas have been widely accepted as effective principles in modern education. He also pointed out that if used properly and without distracting learners' attention, multimodality can be beneficial and improve learning outcomes. Otherwise, it can impair learners' memory and lead to "rote memorization". Therefore, he believed that multimodal learning is actually a double-edged sword.

Zhang Delu (2009) believed that multimodality provides a supportive teaching environment for foreign language instruction, enhancing the teaching of foreign languages and improving the effectiveness of teaching and learning. He also elaborated on the purposes of modal selection: filling gaps, reinforcing information, attracting attention, expressing emotions, and making target expressions easy to understand.

Furthermore, Chinese scholars have conducted numerous studies on the role of multimodal teaching in enhancing students' multimodal literacy in English classrooms. Research has shown that multimodal teaching methods increase students' learning opportunities, expand knowledge acquisition channels, and promote dynamic information exchange between individuals. These findings highlight the effectiveness of multimodal teaching in fostering students' autonomous learning. Song Qingwei (2013) conducted an empirical study based on multimodal discourse theory, comparing the effects of multimodal literacy teaching and traditional teaching methods in university English instruction. The results showed that the former teaching method is significantly better than the

latter, and it is consistent with the characteristics of university English teaching, holding great potential for widespread promotion.

2 Empirical research on multimodal teaching

The research found that modes play different roles at various stages of teaching, and the selection of modes depends on the distinct teaching goals at each stage. Zhang Sheru (2014) analyzed the importance of multimodal teaching in various settings. The study utilized multimedia to promote deep learning, enhance learning motivation, and facilitate internalization from the perspective of multimodal language research.

Jiang Yufeng (2015) pointed out that multimodal teaching in multimedia environments can enable teachers to better utilize various methods in transmitting and receiving information. Che Xiao (2022) conducted a 20-week multimodal reading teaching experiment on second-year non-English major students of Guizhou University. The study utilized questionnaires, classroom observations, interviews, and testing methods to examine students' acceptance and learning effect under the multimodal teaching model. The research found that utilizing multimodal teaching methods in English newspaper reading classes can effectively stimulate students' interest in learning, enhance their comprehension of the text content, and ultimately improve their overall reading proficiency.

From the above research, we can see that there are many examples of applying multimodality to education, and previous scholars have provided specific principles and suggestions. In recent years, research on multimodal teaching models has been increasing. However, most empirical research on multimodal teaching has focused on university students' speaking or other subjects, with little attention paid to high school students. Many studies have focused on teaching methods, but few have addressed vocabulary instruction.

3 Narrative teaching

Narrative has always been a part of human communication and culture, but the concept of narrative method is relatively new, emerging in the last twenty years of the 20th century. Narrative is a way for individuals to discuss their life events and behaviors in a meaningful and coherent manner (Goodson & Biesta, 2010). Bruner (1986) proposed that human perception can be classified into two types: paradigmatic perception and narrative perception. Narrative cognition views human actions as the product of interactions between prior experiences and knowledge.

Toolan (1988) proposed that every human behavior can be seen as a narrative, consisting of a beginning, a process, and an end, and containing elements such as characters, background, conflict, suspense, purpose, and implication. Richardson (1990) believed that narrative is the process of organizing one's experiences into concise and meaningful segments. She also pointed out that a narrative can be used as a tool for reasoning or as a means of expression. Herman (2003) believed that humans primarily organize their experiences and memories through narrative means, such as stories, reasons, myths, and behavioral motivations.

Xiong Muqing and Deng Da (2010) believed that traditional narrative is a model of discourse that embeds a specific sequence of events in a particular timeline to convey meaning. Currently, with the development of interdisciplinary narrative research, the concept of narrative has been extended to non-verbal communication and all human behaviors.

In daily life, narrative behavior is a cognitive process. Learning a language is also a cognitive process. Narrative plays a crucial role in this cognitive process, and narrative teaching has emerged in this context. Ur (1996) pointed out that narrative is an engaging activity that can be integrated into language teaching at any level. Therefore, narrative teaching is also suitable for students at various levels. According to Crandinin & Connelly (2000), narrative research comprises three elements: time, space, and society. Carroll (2000) proposed the concept of "story grammar" based on his research on narrative discourse processing. He suggested that "story

grammar” is a form of “semantic memory” and examined children’s language ability through storytelling and retelling.

In the late 1990s, narrative teaching was introduced to China’s education sector, becoming a frontier area of research in the country. Xiong Dashi and Deng Zhiyong (2009) initially proposed the concept of “narrative teaching” as a method for teaching foreign languages. This teaching method advocates for the use of narratives in foreign language teaching. It involves designing and presenting teaching processes and materials in a narrative format to create a realistic or ideal world. This approach fully engages students in learning, making their cognitive activities more vivid, and thereby promoting language acquisition.

Yu Baogang (2018) proposed that narrative teaching utilizes stories as teaching content, with teaching exploration as a crucial source and logical thread. It integrates teaching subjects, content, and methods organically, achieving a blend of teacher-led and student-centered narrative teaching.

In addition to theoretical discussions, scholars have also linked narrative to various teaching contents, particularly English vocabulary and grammar teaching. Liu Jia (2011) proposed that narrative teaching could be employed in English vocabulary teaching, enhancing students’ vocabulary understanding and usage through the creation or adaptation of stories, scenarios, and role-playing. In response to the low efficiency of traditional vocabulary teaching methods, Xu Yaling (2016) proposed an integrated narrative teaching method that not only emphasizes the development of students’ emotions, imagination, and creativity, but also highlights the importance of selecting meaningful language input materials and adopting semantic fields and other flexible strategies to stimulate students’ imagination.

Yang Hong (2012) researched the feasibility of using narrative methods in grammar teaching and found that it can enhance learners’ cognitive acquisition. Jiang Suqin (2013) employed narrative methods in a university English language course. The study concluded that narrative methods can enhance the effectiveness of English language teaching and facilitate university students’ capacity to learn languages continuously and independently. Dong Xun (2017) highlighted that traditional grammar translation methods in foreign language teaching often fail to engage students, impeding the improvement of learning efficiency. The utilization of narrative teaching in the design of language learning activities has the effect of creating a vibrant classroom atmosphere, which effectively stimulates students’ interest and attention.

4 Multimodal narrative teaching

Multimodal teaching and narrative teaching methods share many similarities, such as emphasizing student initiative and the teacher’s role as a guide and facilitator, and enhancing students’ enthusiasm for learning. Wu Chunming (2014) proposed a multimodal narrative method based on multimodal theory and narrative techniques, combining the strengths of both and applying it to vocabulary instruction. He defined multimodal narrative teaching as “a teaching method based on narrative techniques and characterized by the use of multiple communication models”. Multimodal narrative teaching is a new and innovative approach that overcomes the limitations of both multimodal teaching and narrative teaching methods. The combination of the two is not just an additive process, but rather produces a more effective integration, with effects greater than the sum of its individual parts. The two methods complement and reinforce each other; Multimodality is a technology that can engage students’ multiple senses in learning, while narrative teaching advocates for the use of real-life scenarios and ideal worlds to create vivid and visually rich learning experiences.

Multimodal narrative teaching has a wide range of applications in vocabulary, grammar, speaking, reading, writing, and other foreign language teaching areas. Currently, some scholars have applied this model to various

fields of foreign language teaching and conducted research.

In recent years, Chinese scholars have conducted extensive research on multimodal narrative methods in English teaching, yielding fruitful results.

For example, Lu Qiao (2016) explored and attempted to use multimodal narrative teaching in higher vocational school English oral instruction. This approach combines various modes organically, based on teaching objectives and student needs, using narrative as a foundation to cultivate students' comprehensive English abilities. Zhou Yu (2016) proposed the use of multimodal narrative methods in university English reading and writing classes and explored the concept of university English teaching within a multimodal framework. Zheng Honghui (2017) found that implementing multimodal narrative methods in junior high school English vocabulary teaching can effectively improve students' understanding of vocabulary meanings and enhance their overall English proficiency. Feng Fangfang (2019) discovered that applying multimodal narrative teaching methods to middle school English vocabulary instruction can significantly enhance students' memory of English vocabulary and improve their academic performance. Tian Yi (2019) believed that adopting multimodal narrative vocabulary teaching models can effectively improve students' cognitive levels and enhance their vocabulary usage. Chen Yulin (2020) emphasized that employing multimodal narrative teaching methods can enhance students' long-term retention of vocabulary, improve their learning strategies, and boost their overall learning abilities.

In conclusion, Chinese scholars have conducted extensive research investigating the impact of multimodal and narrative teaching on second language acquisition and instruction. The combination of multimodal theory and narrative method, known as multimodal narrative teaching, has received increasing attention from scholars in China.

5 Conclusion

We have focused on the use of multimodal narrative teaching in English instruction in China. However, there are some important issues to be explored in the current study. In the realm of second language vocabulary, studies on multimodal narrative vocabulary instruction typically explore input – based vocabulary acquisition. They concentrate on vocabulary instruction associated with precise, deliberate, and simultaneous vocabulary learning. Most of the current research has focused on the impact of vocabulary instruction and word recall methods, while neglecting the impact of multimodal narrative vocabulary instruction on learners' vocabulary proficiency. It is essential to investigate whether students can enhance their vocabulary proficiency and master vocabulary learning strategies through multimodal narrative instruction methods. Considering that the current research on Chinese high school students is not specific and in – depth enough, this study aims to investigate the effects of multimodal narrative vocabulary instruction on vocabulary competence. The aim is to enhance high school students' vocabulary proficiency, learning strategies, and interest in learning the English language.

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