

# On Strategies of Promoting Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence from Multimodal Perspective ---Taking 21<sup>st</sup> century Practical College English Viewing, Listening & Speaking As an Example

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## Abstract

Traditional College-English teaching focuses on skills, rather than humanity. Thus, College-English teaching seeks quick success and instant benefits, and students cultivated in this way definitely lack communicative competence as well as international outlook, failing to meet the demand of comprehensive English talents in modern society. The combination of language teaching and culture teaching with the help of multimodal pattern to cultivate students' intercultural communicative competence is the key to changing College-English teaching from the instrumental to the humanistic. This paper focuses on how to use multimodal teaching mode in intercultural communication teaching to efficiently promote the students' intercultural communicative competence on the basis of *21st Century Practical College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking*.

**Keywords:** Multimodal perspective; Intercultural communicative competence; Strategies; *21st Century practical college english VLS*.



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## 1. Introduction

In order to meet the new situation of modern education in China and to promote the quality of teaching and talents training, in 2007, Ministry of Education of PRC specified clearly in *College English Curriculum Requirements*: "College English course is more than a basic language course; it is also a quality-oriented course for the students to enrich knowledge and know the global culture, combining both instrumentality and humanity. Thus, the designer of college English course should take students' cultural quality and international culture into account." ([Ministry of Education of PRC, 2007](#))

However, the current college English teaching still stresses on skills, rather than culture. Specific problems are as follows: firstly, the teaching goal is not clear. Presently, there is no clear teaching syllabus and aim in terms of intercultural teaching in college English teaching so that the students' cultural study is not systematic but fragmental. Secondly, the teaching theory and the teaching method are traditional. Most college English teachers still focuses on the basic English skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing, while ignoring cultural teaching in their teaching. The teachers barely touch the comparison of eastern and western culture, not emphasizing on the students' practical communicative competence. Obviously, this kind of teaching method is not good to promote the students' English thinking.

Taking *21<sup>st</sup> Century Practical College English VLS as an Example*, the paper is to discuss how to effectively promote the students' intercultural communicative competence from multimodal perspective on the basis of analyzing the application of multimodal theory in intercultural teaching in college English teaching.

## 2. Multimodal Theory

Multimodal discourse analysis theory stems from the western countries in the 1990s. Specifically speaking, multimode refers to a kind of interactive mode that men interact with outside environment by means of sense organs like eyes and ears, etc. The interactive mode involving only one sense organ is called single mode; the interactive mode involving 2 sense organs is called bi-mode and the interactive mode involving 3 or more than 3 sense organs is called multimode. In terms of study, multimodal teaching pattern can promote the students to study by different kinds of sensory stimulus such as hearing, vision, smell, touch and taste, thus to produce better study effect than single mode teaching pattern.

In modern world, cultural diversity is more and more intense. The development of multimedia and internet technology makes it possible to combine language and the sensory pattern like vision as well as hearing. The multimodal teaching pattern, as a current trend of college English teaching reform, is more and more supported by educators, linguist and people from all walks of life. In college English Viewing, Listening & Speaking teaching, the teachers combine language and video as well as sound effect, so as to stimulate the students' learning interest of culture. Thanks to multimodal teaching pattern, the cultural teaching enables the students to get information through different channels by means of various sense organs so as to promote cultural cognitive competence and comprehensive cultural quality.

Based on system-functional linguistics, in the perspective of social semiotics, multimodal discourse analysis theory holds that besides language belonging to social semiotics, other non-verbal signs such as paintings, sculpture

and music, etc. are also the resources to produce meaning in communication and construct social meaning together with language. The expression of meaning is realized by signs of multimode which are independent and interactive. The multimodal discourse analysis theory evoked a craze in the 1990s. Kress & Leeuwen firstly put forward the concept of multimodal discourse and constructed the grammatical framework of analyzing visual image, which laid a solid foundation for the multimodal discourse analysis theory. (Gunther, 1996) Then, Terry Royce discussed the relationship between pictures and words in the advertisement, analyzing the complementarity of different signs in multimodal discourse as well as the cooperativity of different signs in the second language teaching. (Terry, 2002) Martinec & Salway studied the relationship between pictures and words in the media, putting forward four relations between pictures and words. (Radan and Andrew, 2005) Carey Jewitt analyzed the relationship between multimodal teaching method of reading and writing and modern technology. (Carey, 2006)

Domestically, the first linguist to study multimodal theory is Li Zhanzi who points out that there are images and charts besides texts in comprehensive multimodal discourse and that multimodal discourse analysis is of great importance to teaching. (Li, 2003) Other scholars are as follows. Zhang Delu puts forward comprehensive theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis and discusses the relationship between different modes. (Zhang, 2009) Wei Qinhong studies multimodal discourse in aspect of visual communication like image, color and composition. (Wei, 2009) Specifically in terms of the application of multimodal theory in foreign language teaching, Hu Yongjin and Zhang Delu study the multimodal function in English listening teaching, holding that suitable use of multimodal pattern is capable of promoting the students' listening comprehension. (Hu and Zhang, 2013) Wang Huiping points out that written discourse has multimodal resources and the students should make good use of these resources to carry out related practical activities in her paper *The Development of Multimodal Reading Competence in English Reading Teaching* (Wang H., 2010a). Wang Zhao thinks that multimodal interactive pattern in multimedia English writing teaching can promote the students' writing competence. (Wang Z., 2010b)

### 3. Application of Multimodal Theory in College English Intercultural Communication Teaching

Multimodal teaching pattern enables different sensory stimulus such as vision, hearing and smell, etc. and shows study resources through various channels like sound, image and fragments. In this way the students' different sense organs are involved in the study so that their imagination is provoked, which enables the students to fully understand what they are taught and promote their pragmatic competence.

#### 3.1. Situation Analysis of Intercultural Communication Teaching

For a long time, college English teaching focuses on language teaching. Although the importance of cultural teaching has been realized in education field in recent years, cultural teaching is still facing big problems due to limited teaching faculty and class period, traditional teaching method and impact evaluation system. In order to improve the situation, the teachers should not only improve their own cultural awareness, but also adopt flexible teaching method and pattern.

Culture is abstract and exists in different forms. English teaching should make the abstract into the concrete by use of men's perceptions such as vision and hearing, etc. The traditional single cultural introduction cannot meet the demand of current society and the teachers need multimodal pattern to cultivate the students' cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, it is a big challenge for college English teachers to effectively use multimodal resources to accomplish cultural teaching tasks in English Viewing, Listening & Speaking Course.

#### 3.2. Advantages of Multimodal Teaching Pattern

Multimodal teaching pattern has great advantages over traditional teaching pattern. Firstly, it combines words, images and sounds with multimedia technology, stimulating students' sense organs and memory, which is good for them to understand what they learn. Secondly, teachers can present a great amount of graphic information through different channels, which can promote the teachers' cultural awareness. Thirdly, multimodal resources are easy to store and use. Teachers can complement and perfect the resources at any time and students can also make a copy of the courseware to strengthen their cultural knowledge. In this way, resource sharing is achieved. Fourthly, students can choose what interests them to study on their own by means of computers and internet. Finally, multimodal teaching pattern is characterized by experience, interaction and communication, which enables students to have more opportunities to realize cooperative learning.

#### 3.3. Promoting Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence by Means of Multimodal Teaching Pattern

Intercultural communication teaching is the key to realize the humanity of college English teaching and multimodal theory is the important means to make it happen. In intercultural communication teaching, the teachers should decide the content in the first place in that culture is various. And then, the teachers should find the pictures or videos that can best embody the cultural content. By presenting these resources in the class, the teachers can provoke the students to actively think about the cultural information that the resources transfer. During the process of teaching in Leshan Teachers' College for more than 10 years, the author finds that non-English students' big problem in their English study lies in study interest. Thus, how to arouse the students' interest becomes the key to English study. However, traditional single-mode teaching pattern is teacher-centered and can only make the students' hearing get involved in study, failing to arouse their learning interest. So, in English teaching, the teachers

are supposed to combine different mode so as to arouse the students' learning interest and lead them to further understand the culture from multimodal perspective. But meantime, the teachers should notice that inappropriate choice from complicated cultural resources will not only distract the students' attention but also cannot realize the expected teaching effect. The teachers are supposed to design every step in the teaching and choose appropriate teaching mode such as PPT, video and movie clips according to the specific teaching content and teaching goals as well as the suitability and practicability of cultural teaching.

#### 4. Strategies of Promoting Students' Intercultural Communicative Competence from Multimodal Perspective

The course book *21<sup>st</sup> Century Practical College English Viewing, Listening and Speaking* combines listening, oral practice, pictures, sounds, films and internet together. And the intercultural communication teaching based on this course book is such kind of multimodal teaching in which the teachers can fully take advantage of the strong points of multimodal teaching pattern to promote the students' intercultural communicative competence by means of the following strategies.

##### 4.1. Comparing Eastern Culture and Western Culture

Only in the way of comparing the similarities and differences between different cultures can the students' sensitivity to culture and multicultural awareness be cultivated. For example, when the English teachers teach the topic of job interview in Unit 1, Book 3 of *21<sup>st</sup> Century Practical College English Viewing, Listening & Speaking*, they can share the students with the different job interview scenes in movies or films, success or failure, in order to stimulate the students' sense organs for them to understand further the topic and take initiatives to compare the similarities and differences between eastern job interview and western job interview. In this way, the students can know the differences in behavior and expression. Firstly, in China, it is a way to show respect not to stare at the other's eyes. But in western culture, it is the basic politeness to keep eye contact during a conversation. Chinese people hold that modesty is a kind of virtue, maintaining that too many words will leave a bad impression on others, so that they often use simple "Yes" or "No" to respond passively. While in western countries, the interviewees will use 3 to 5 sentences to briefly respond to the questions. What's more, there are the differences in sense of worth between eastern and western culture. In Chinese people's eyes, such answers will meet the expectation of the interviewers as "I lack working experience. Hopefully, you will give a chance. I don't care about the pay." However, in western culture, the company wants to employ those who can be competent in the certain position, instead of someone who have no requirements to the job. In a word, the English teachers are supposed to instruct the students to understand different kinds of experience under the multimodal environment and to study creatively. In this way, the students can experience the culture by themselves so as to realize the interactive learning between students and teachers as well as between students and students.

##### 4.2. Tracing to Its Source

English idioms are crystallization of the wisdom of language culture. And the learning of idioms enables the students to open their mind and develop their imagination. But due to the cultural difference, the students will have difficulties in understanding the real meaning of the idioms and further problems in communication if they fail to know the origins of them. The production and development of English idioms have a lot to do with the development of history. Therefore, the English teachers are supposed to choose related pictures and videos to open the student's mind and to strengthen their memory when teaching English idioms. For example, when teaching the idiom of "rain cats and dogs" involved in weather discussion in Unit 7, Elementary Book of *21<sup>st</sup> Century Practical College English Viewing, Listening & Speaking*, the English teachers should let the students know that England was invaded by the Scandinavian of Skane in the history and that dogs symbolize "wind" and cats symbolize "rain" respectively in Norse mythology so that "cats and dogs" refers to "a furious storm". The combination of pictures, images and words is a kind of multimode. The English teachers can choose interesting cartoon to simply present the history of England's being invaded. Further, the teachers can compare Norse mythology with the traditional Chinese mythology by means of pictures and videos so as to analyze the reason for the difference. For another example, when teaching the idiom of "know the ropes" in Unit 1, Book 2 of *21<sup>st</sup> Century Practical College English Viewing, Listening & Speaking*, the English teachers should let the students know that England's great navigation industry benefits from its unique geography so that there are many idioms about navigation. To become an eligible sailor, sailors must learn the ropes. So the idiom means knowing the skills. Thanks to multimodal environment, the teachers can find many related study resources through different channels so as to let the students to understand the connotation of the English idioms in a better way.

##### 4.3. Role Play

The English teachers assign the cultural knowledge as different tasks and instruct the students to practice role play. For example, when the English teachers teach the topic of toast culture in Unit 8, Book 2 of *21<sup>st</sup> Century Practical College English Viewing, Listening & Speaking*, they can share some videos about proposing a toast in eastern culture and western culture respectively, then, the teacher and the students can discuss together the different toast rules and the various ways to propose a toast in different social occasions. In this way, the students can learn from other's strong points to make up one's own weakness, enrich their knowledge and arouse their learning interest. In the process of introducing cultural knowledge, the English teachers should judge how well the students

understand about toast culture according to their discussion results and thus to adjust the teaching content by complementing the English expressions of proposing a toast and comparing the differences between eastern culture and western culture in toast etiquette. In the process of cultural reflection, that is, after the introduction of culture, the English teachers are supposed to ask the students to carry out role play or make a summary by groups or retell what they have learned to strengthen the impression and to promote their cultural awareness. In role play, specifically, the performers will not only imitate the actions, expressions, sounds and speed of language of the different roles in toast culture, but also make themselves in an environment of proposing a toast so as to create a real communicative atmosphere.

#### 4.4. Topic Teaching Model

In the English teaching, when faced with non-English majors, the English teachers must think about how to enhance the non-English majors' initiative in English study in the first place so as to promote their learning interest. The English teachers can divide all the culture that is introduced in *21<sup>st</sup> Century Practical College English Viewing, Listening & Speaking* into different topics, for example, big ones like economy or politics, small ones like food, clothing, shelter and means of traveling, as well as communicative etiquette. For instance, in Unit 5, Book 3 and Unit 3, Book 2 of *21<sup>st</sup> Century Practical College English Viewing, Listening & Speaking*, the topic of shopping and the topic of booking a hotel respectively, they can be classified as the four basic necessities of life; the cultural knowledge introduced in Unit 4, 6, 7 of Book 3 can be classified as the topic of business negotiation. Then, the English teachers can divide the students into groups and assign different topics to certain groups, asking them to learn the different western culture by means of surfing the internet, consulting the materials in the school library and communicating with the international students in the school. Under the guidance of the teachers, the students are supposed to prepare multimodal resources such as words, pictures and videos, etc. and to present what they have prepared through PPT in the classroom. During the process of preparation and presentation, the students' creativity is enhanced and they can take initiatives to learn new knowledge and meaning by means of multimodal resources. And the students can really become the initiators in their study in this way.

#### 5. Conclusion

Under the multimodal teaching pattern, the English teachers will no longer solely use language pattern to teach the students, but focus more on how actively the students get involved in the study activities in the classroom. The English teachers are supposed to put the multimode theory into practice in their teaching, by means of diversified approaches, appropriate choice and coordination so as to realize the teaching of diversity, intuitive and three-dimension. The college English intercultural communication teaching from multimodal perspective will not only arouse the students' study interest, but will more importantly promote their intercultural communication awareness and to provoke the students to actively probe into other countries' culture. With the students' knowledge of English culture becoming more and more, they can accumulate more background information, which enable them to have a lot to speak and have substance in speech. Only in this way can the students promote their language competence in ease, fluency and appropriateness.

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