

## A Study of College English Listening and Speaking Teaching on the Basis of Multimodal Theory

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### Abstract

The goal of listening and speaking teaching is to cultivate students' skills of using English to communicate in their daily life. With the wide spreading of multimedia technology in educational sectors, more and more teachers have come to realize the importance of applying multimodal theory to the teaching of English. Multimodal teaching method, through the use of pictures, videos, audio files and some other means, has the strengths of improving students listening and speaking skills efficiently and will definitely replace the traditional and monotonous mode of English teaching. The thesis, on the basis of multimodal theory and multimodal teaching method, will conduct a further research on multimodal English teaching, hoping it can optimize the college English teaching mode.

**Key words:** Multimodal theory; College English; Listening and speaking teaching

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### INTRODUCTION

Under the tendency of global economic integration, the relationship between countries all over the world is becoming more and more tied. English, as a tool for international communication, its importance has been

widely recognized in our country. The goal of college English teaching is to develop students' comprehensive English abilities, which mainly refers to the cultivation of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). According to the survey of Reviere and Temperly (2010), in human communication activities, listening accounts for 45%, speaking 30%, reading 16% and writing 9%. Therefore, it is obvious that the cultivation of listening and speaking skills should be given priority in English teaching and it is also the key to guarantee that contemporary college students could make use of the tool of English to contribute to their future work and life. Nowadays, the development of the Internet and multimedia technology provides a broad platform for college English teaching, pushes forward the college English teaching to multimodality gradually, and promotes the development of college English listening and speaking teaching efficiently.

### 1. CURRENT CONDITION OF LISTENING & SPEAKING COURSE IN COLLEGE ENGLISH

Listening and Speaking Course has long been a part of college English, but due to the influence of traditional examination-oriented education, more than often than not, students pay little attention to listening and speaking course. They learn English in a way that only facilitates them to finish exercises or pass examinations, making themselves excellent in passing exams but weak in listening and speaking. They are not even good users of daily spoken English, and what they learn instead is a form of "Dumb English". They are strong in academics but weak in practical skills. What is worse, not even in college English curriculum has listening and speaking course not gained due attention, most schools generally arrange only one class hour of this course in one or even

two weeks. The requirements for the development of students' listening and speaking skills are not sufficiently met. In the actual teaching process, teachers tend to focus only on vocabulary, phrases and several grammar points. In other words, they adopt a form of old-style, one-sided teaching mode in the listening and speaking course, ignoring the innate multimodality of the course itself. The listening course is restricted to simply playing the recordings and checking the answers in the exercises; while oral English course is quite restricted to read out loud the given materials or at most altering a few details based on a fixed model. Throughout the course there is a lack of real context for spoken English output, so the students' English listening and speaking skills can not be effectively improved. The lack of real context for practicing the target language and limited suitable teaching methods led to the weak performance of English listening and speaking skills among college students in China. How to improve the teaching methods, create a good context and effectively improve the students' listening and speaking skills? This question is in urgent need of answers in college English education.

## 2. MULTIMODALITY AND MULTIMODAL TEACHING

“Modality” is derived from the word “mode/model”, which refers to the interaction between human beings and the external environment through different senses (including auditory, visual, tactile, olfactory and gustatory sense) (Gu, 2007). According to Kress & Van Leeuwen (2001), “multimodality” means “the use of several semiotic modes in the design of a semiotic product or event, together with the particular way in which these modes are combined... fulfill complementary roles... or be hierarchically ordered”. “Multimodal discourse”, which gained its popularity in the 1990's, is an independent and cutting-edge research field based on the discipline of discourse analysis. Zhang (2009) defined it as “a communicative phenomenon which takes full advantage of the means of language, pictures, voice and body movements, to integrate the students' auditory, visual, tactile and many other senses into language acquisition.” In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there is a boom in the research of multimodal teaching in the educational field. A host of studies have been done by scholars at home and abroad. Stein (2000) put forward the notion of multimodal teaching, aiming at applying multimodal theory into the teaching field. Guichon & McLornan (2008) studied the impact of multimodal teaching to the second language learners, explored the curriculum design principles and methods of computer-assisted instruction. And in China, Zhang (2010) further studied the design and selection of modalities in foreign language teaching and proposed the general principle—to make full use of modern media

technology to convey a speaker's speech to the maximum extent so that it can achieve the best efforts.

Multimodal teaching is a process in which teachers employ Internet, videos, pictures, voice imitation, role play and various other forms of teaching materials to integrate the students' auditory, visual, tactile and many other senses into language acquisition in order for the students to get more involved and better active in language learning and interactive teaching activities. Multimodal teaching has its unique advantages: Firstly, for teachers, multimodal teaching can diversify teaching methods, enrich teaching content, improve teaching effectiveness and provide a more vivid and real context for teaching; Secondly, for students, multimodal teaching can better stimulate students' motivation for learning, enhance participation and facilitate better understanding and memorization. College students already have good knowledge of English basics, what they need the most is to nurture a better command of practical skills in using English. Unlike grammar and vocabulary which depend more on memory, English listening and speaking abilities can only be acquired after teachers' improvement in teaching methods and application of multimodal teaching approach. Therefore, this thesis aims at analyzing multimodal teaching strategy which includes pictures, videos, props and some internet platforms or other resources in mobilizing students' various senses including auditory, visual, tactile and other senses when it comes to facilitating a better design and study of English listening and speaking courses.

## 3. A TEACHING DESIGN OF COLLEGE LISTENING & SPEAKING TEACHING ON THE BASIS OF MULTIMODAL TEACHING

Based on the multimodal theory and the author's own teaching experience, the thesis will take Music, *College English Listening and Speaking Course 2* should be written in italic as an example to explore the design and implementation of college English listening and speaking teaching in the context of multimodal teaching.

### 3.1 Leading in

As a warm-up stage for this unit, firstly, teacher shows the songs played by different instruments on the audio file, to enable students to guess the names of those musical instruments, and displays their pictures on PPT later. Next, teacher plays the short video clips like classical, country, rock, jazz, rap and other different types of music, to enable students to express their views on the appropriate type of music. So through these activities which guides students to finish the study of the background knowledge, students can have a better understanding of the topic of this unit, thus stimulating their desire to learn.

### 3.2 Presentation

Teacher plays the tapes of this unit by using the multimedia tools, and asks students to finish the exercise of listening part independently. Then teacher presents the key words, phrases and sentences related to the topic of this unit through the use of verbal interpretation, PPT and body movements, and students complete the practice of speaking part in the textbook. Through these exercises, students should master some basic music-related knowledge (words, phrases and sentences, etc.), be able to understand the general information of the listening materials and have the skills to communicate effectively about this topic. Students, through the study of this part, accomplished the acquisition of the key and important knowledge of the unit.

### 3.3 Extension

The main modalities used in this part are songs, task cards, and teachers' oral guidance. In this part, first, teacher plays a very popular English song "let it go". According to the song lyrics that they have heard, students fill in the blank hollowed out by the teacher to further enhance students' listening skills. Next, several kinds of different music-related topic cards set in advance by the teacher will be shown to students. Students select cards randomly in groups and are asked to make dialogue to simulate the scene to further improve their speaking skills in real-life situation. This part will help enhance students' participation in class, strengthen students' listening and speaking skills and achieve a better interaction between teacher and students.

### 3.4 Assignments

In this part, teacher will assign the task of learning to sing the song "let it go" and opera performance as their homework. The task of learning to sing will mainly focus on students' listening and imitation skills, and the task of opera performance will take students' team spirit and multimodal spoken English competence, such as voice, gesture and intonation, as the evaluation criterion. All the tasks will be prepared and finished after class. Through this procedure, students are hoped to consolidate what they have learned and improve their listening and speaking skills.

From the teaching case above, it can be concluded that in the process of multimodal teaching, teacher makes full use of the means of videos, pictures, audio files, gesture and language to mobilize students' visual, auditory, tactile and many other senses to engage in the teaching activities actively, which is not only can

improve students' learning enthusiasm, active the classroom atmosphere, but also convert the boring and one-sided traditional teaching mode into a more interesting and efficient one.

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## CONCLUSION

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Nowadays, even human communication at large is showing more characteristics of multimodality. Meanings are constructed through a variety of different means. Thus, the multimodality in teaching activities is an unstoppable trend, and teachers should pay great importance to the application of multimodal teaching strategy in order for the students to fully understand the course and the presentation by the teachers. If fully applied in English listening and speaking courses, multimodal teaching is going to change the traditional teaching which primarily focuses on language input. By scientifically mobilizing visual, auditory, tactile senses and other multimodal means, students' multimodal cognitive mechanisms can be effectively stimulated to improve their abilities in processing and internalizing language information input. Fact proves that in the process of multimodal teaching, listening and speaking process are harmoniously combined and mutually enhancing each other. Students' enthusiasm for learning can be hugely reinforced and they can achieve significantly better results in the learning process.

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