



# The Application of Multimodal Teaching Mode to Oral English Teaching in Senior High Schools

Zhu Lin Ji Lingzhu\*

Zhu Lin post-graduate student of English language teaching in Education Institute of Taiyuan Normal University, City of Jinzhong, Shanxi Province, 030619 P.R. China

Ji Lingzhu\* Corresponding author, associate professor in Foreign language Department of Taiyuan Normal University, City of Jinzhong, Shanxi Province, 030619 P.R. China

**Abstract:** With the growing trend of internationalization, good oral English communicative competence have become essential for interpersonal communication. For the recent years, as China's international status has been rising, the requirement of oral English for Chinese is becoming higher than before. In the context of continuous progress in science and technology, the diversification of language communication has also injected new blood and provided new directions for teaching oral English. Multimodal teaching refers to the scientific and rational use of multiple symbols and resources by teachers, including language, movement, images, sound and multimedia teaching tools. With the help of these symbols and resources, teachers can provide students with more authentic and dynamic learning resources and learning environments. So some strategies are put forward to help change the current single teaching mode in senior high schools in order to effectively improve the quality of oral English teaching and students' oral English proficiency.

**Key words:** Multimodal teaching mode; Senior high schools; Oral English teaching; Oral English proficiency; Teaching Quality

Received 09 Feb, 2022; Revised 21 Feb, 2022; Accepted 23 Feb, 2022 © The author(s) 2022.

Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

## I. Introduction

As a world language, English is widely used as a communicative tool. Under this circumstance, it is particularly important to be able to communicate effectively in English, especially for people of this century. In recent years, as China's international status has been rising, the requirement of oral English for Chinese is becoming higher than before. As a result, more attention has been paid to oral English teaching which aims to enable students to use English skillfully for effective communication. Due to China's continuous and deepening reform and opening up, China has stepped into a bigger world stage and interacted more closely with other countries. According to statistics, more than 75 percent of the world's events are negotiated in English, so a good command of oral English is a necessary prerequisite for China's close interaction with other countries.

The General High school English Curriculum Standard(2017) (hereinafter referred to as the Standard) issued by the Ministry of Education emphasize that students should cultivate and develop the five language skills of listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing. It is an important way for students to acquire cultural and linguistic knowledge from discourse, as well as to help them understand and express meaning, emotions and develop thinking qualities. In addition to the traditional four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, the Standard adds the skill of "viewing" to them. According to the Standard, "viewing" refers to the use of animations, graphics, symbols, videos, and tables in multimodal discourse to understand and express meaning. It can be seen that in the age of information, people communicate with each other and transmit information in more diverse ways, which also provides a new way for teachers to teach.

The Standard states that the teaching of English in senior high schools is aimed at developing students' ability to use English comprehensively, and the overall goal of the senior high school English curriculum is to enable students to further develop their comprehensive language skills on the basis of their compulsory education. In addition, special emphasis is placed on improving students' ability to think and express their ideas in English, which also means the development of the skill of "speaking" in language skills. Unlike the previous way of describing listening, speaking, reading, and writing separately, the Standards describe the requirements of language skills in two categories: comprehension skills and expressive skills. Among those skills, reading,

listening and viewing are comprehension skills, while writing, speaking and viewing are expressive skills. What calls for special attention is that the skill of “viewing” is both an important way of acquiring and understanding information as well as an indispensable tool for expressing meaning and emotion. For expressive skills, detailed requirements are listed, including initiating and maintaining conversations as needed; describing clearly the course of events; describing personal experiences and features using both verbal and non-verbal means; establishing logical relations in spoken and written expressions by means of connective words, demonstrative pronouns, lexical cohesion and other linguistic means; conveying information and express meaning in the written expression according to the title, icon, image, table, layout and so on; choosing the appropriate type of discourse according to the purpose of expression; choosing words and grammatical structures according to the needs of the expression; choosing formal and informal language according to the needs of the expression; and using intonation and stress to highlight the meaning when emphasis is needed.

It can be seen from the regulations and requirements of the Standards that in teaching oral English in senior high schools, emphasis should be placed on developing students’ ability to use language rationally in authentic contexts, and teachers should also respond to the changes of the times by teaching speaking in the information age with the help of multimodal symbols and resources, so as to develop students’ oral English proficiency.

Despite the fact that English is one of the most important prerequisites for interpersonal communication, in practical teaching of English, especially in oral English teaching, the result seems not satisfying and the phenomenon of dumb English and Chinese-style English are very common. Oral English has always been regarded as the most difficult part in the process of English teaching. And the time students spend in learning spoken English is not in direct proportion to their achievements, which has attracted more and more attention of English teachers and researches of English education. Therefore, in order to help improve the quality of oral English teaching and the level of students’ oral English, it is worthy to have a further study on the application of multimodal teaching mode to oral English teaching in senior high schools and explore the corresponding instructional strategies.

## **1. Major Concepts**

### **1.1. Multimodal Teaching Mode**

In order to better understand the meaning of multimodal teaching mode, we should first understand the concept of modality. Based on the theory of systemic functional linguistics, Halliday proposes that modality is embodied by means of verbal and nonverbal symbols, among which nonverbal symbols such as audio, video, pictures, and gestures play an irreplaceable role [1]. In 1996, Kress & van Leeuwen pointed out that human communication cannot be achieved by a single verbal modality, but by a combination of verbal, auditory, visual, and physical modalities to achieve the purpose of communication [2]. Based on sociolinguistics, Kress & van Leeuwen pointed out that modality is a symbolic resource that enables social communication, including the medium of language, video, audio, pictures, and body language [3]. It can be seen that modality is a way for people to communicate with the outside world with the help of language and various resources.

With the progress of science and technology, people receive information in more and more diverse ways, and many scholars in China have started to study multimodality. Gu Yueguo proposed the concepts of modality, bimodality and multimodality respectively. He suggested that modality is a way for people to communicate with the external environment through their own sensory organs. What’s more, unimodality means the way you communicate with the help of single sensory organ such as vision, hearing, touch, and bimodality means that you use two sensory organs to interact with the external world, and similarly, communication with the external environment with the help of multiple senses is called multimodality.

As more and more people are aware of the importance of multimodality, some scholars have focused on multimodal teaching, arguing that students’ learning, like external communication, cannot be accomplished through language alone, and that the interplay of multiple senses is what motivates and motivates students to learn. In 1996, 11 linguists from three different countries formed the New London Group, who first proposed the concept of multimodal teaching mode and advocated multimodal literacy as a new educational concept, which undoubtedly made a great contribution to the world of education. They have developed a multimodal teaching mode based on the theoretical framework of “design learning” as an important concept for developing multimodal literacy. The mode consists of four parts, namely, “situated practice”, “overt instruction”, “critical framing”, and “transformed practice”. It is important to note that these four components are not sequential in the teaching process and can be interchanged. In this regard, “situated practice” means that teachers should guide students into the actual interaction during the teaching process and create a realistic language environment for them. Although there are many practical difficulties, teachers can use high-technology tools to simulate authentic communicative contexts and thus expose students to more authentic language input and output. This is the same educational philosophy as many current pedagogies such as task-based language teaching and communicative approach. “Overt instruction” means that the teacher guides students to consciously analyze and

understand the information they receive in a systematic way, and that the teacher helps and guides them when they are confronted with more complex information that is beyond their cognitive abilities. “Critical framing” means that teachers allow students to evaluate and critique what they have learned in order to develop their critical awareness and mindset. For example, teachers can ask students to express their opinions and views on questions they have designed in advance. “Transformed practice” means that students apply what they have learned from the above three steps to other contexts to achieve communicative purposes. As mentioned above, these four steps are not sequential, so when students are exposed to simple knowledge, teachers can ask students to first summarize it by themselves in authentic communicative contexts, and then teachers can supplement it accordingly according to students’ self-learning knowledge. However, when the information goes beyond the students’ knowledge base, teachers should first explain to the students what they will learn next, and then let them experience how to apply that knowledge in a context.

After this, other scholars have presented their views on the concept of multimodal teaching mode. Among them, Zhang Delu created multimodal literacy development mode and a multimodal learning development mode based on systemic functional linguistics. He pointed out that the multimodal teaching mode provides teachers with new directions for teaching and learning, and that teachers should not rely only on language and textbooks, but should draw on multiple symbols and resources to teach, yet he also pointed out that teachers should pay attention to the matching and cooperation between the various modalities, and should not cause students’ attention to be distracted by the use of multimodality.

## 1.2. Oral English Proficiency

As one of the most challenging and meaningful expressive skills, oral proficiency can be used to measure the appropriateness of one’s use of English, and it is also one of the most essential components of communicative competence (Bailey and Savage 1994). Oral English proficiency refers specifically to the ability of people to use appropriate English in a given context for the purpose of oral communication (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) [4]. Compared to written English proficiency, oral English proficiency places more emphasis on the use of language knowledge in concrete and authentic contexts, and it is a broader and more natural way to communicate (Crystal, 2003) [5].

Bleistein (2013) argued that oral English proficiency refers to people’s ability to express their opinions and emotions accurately and appropriately in actual communicative situations. He divided learners’ oral English proficiency into four components: linguistic competence, discourse competence, strategic competence, and sociocultural competence. More specifically, “linguistic competence” refers to one’s ability to have a sound knowledge of language itself. It is concerned with pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, grammatical structure and semantic. “Discourse competence” means that people can understand and express a topic coherently and logically. Strategic competence refers to the ability to use appropriate methods and strategies to remedy problems in communication in a timely manner. Sociocultural competence refers to people’s ability to communicate appropriately and politely with others in a given context based on their social and cultural knowledge.

Fluency, accuracy, and appropriateness are often used as criteria to evaluate how well a person speaks orally. Fluency refers to people’s ability to express what they want to express fluently, and accuracy refers to people’s ability to use vocabulary, grammar, rhetoric, and phonology accurately to communicate with others normally. Appropriateness means that the language used in communicating with others is reasonable and appropriate. It is important to note that there needs to be a balance between the three so that learners can speak English more freely, knowing when to say it, what to say and how to say it.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Input and Output Theory

#### 2.1.1. Input Theory

In the 1980s, American linguist Krashen proposed the input theory, which has had a profound impact on second language acquisition. It emphasizes not only how to acquire a second language, but also how to acquire it efficiently. It has become one of the most influential theories in the field of second language acquisition by combining language acquisition theory with practical teaching. Among the input theories, the “i+1” model of comprehensible input is the most influential, meaning that in practice, teachers provide students with language input that is slightly more difficult than their current language level. Where “i” refers to the student’s current language level and “1” refers to language input materials that are slightly more difficult than the second language learner’s current level but within their comprehension range. In short, the language input materials should not be too difficult, otherwise they could easily have a negative impact on students’ self-confidence and motivation, but at the same time they should not be too easy, otherwise they would not have much practical meaning for the students. In other words, when students’ current language level is at “i”, the difficulty of the corresponding input material should be at level 1. Krashen noted that the gap between “i” and

“1” motivates students to learn. When students are presented with material that is slightly above their current level, they acquire second language knowledge based on their existing knowledge and infer the meaning of the input material based on the learning strategies they have acquired.

Krashen argued that the key to effective second language acquisition is students' continuous exposure to comprehensible material, and he emphasized the accumulation of time and quantity in the process of second language acquisition. Only when students continue to accumulate as much comprehensible material as possible can they make a quantum leap in the quality of second language acquisition. In addition, Krashen pointed out that comprehensible input should not be limited by grammatical rules, in other words, teachers should not pay too much attention to language and language rules during the lesson. And a relatively relaxed classroom environment can help students better understand the input material and thus transform it into their own linguistic knowledge.

According to Krashen, comprehensible input materials have the following four characteristics: (1) Interesting. The materials should be interesting to capture students' interest and should also be relevant to their real lives. (2) Meaningful. The material should focus on the meaning itself rather than the structure of the language. (3) Sufficient. There should be enough material for students to learn. (4) Comprehensibility. The material should be within the students' comprehension range and be acceptable to the students. In conclusion, Krashen believed that in the process of second language acquisition, teachers should provide students with interesting, meaningful, comprehensible, and sufficient materials so that students can internalize the content of the materials into their own language knowledge on the basis of comprehension, and thus effectively achieve second language acquisition.

### 2.1.2. Output Theory

Output theory is another influential theory in the field of second language acquisition. It was proposed by Swain in 1986 as a complement to and development of Krashen's comprehensible input theory. It is well known that language requires both input and output, and that only with enough exposure to language materials can learners translate them into their own knowledge and thus express what they have in mind.

According to output theory, second language acquisition cannot be achieved by input alone, and the process of language acquisition must include both input and output. Swain and others argue that second language learners discover their deficiencies and difficulties when they want to produce language output, at which point motivation for learning arises. Continuous output practice helps learners to focus on their error-prone parts and related guidelines, and to correct and correct errors, thus improving accuracy and fluency. The output theory suggests that if learners are only engaged in the input of language material, they cannot check whether they have acquired what they have learned, and it is only in the output process that the gap between learners' true level and the target language becomes apparent.

## 2.2. System-functional Linguistic Theory

The theory of systemic functional linguistics was proposed by Halliday in the 1970s, and it provided the theoretical basis and support for multimodal discourse analysis. Halliday interpreted various aspects of language from a sociological perspective. First, he distinguished potential of linguistic behavior and actual linguistic behavior, and he considered language as a social symbol, a resource that people use purposefully to express meaning. In short, language is a social symbol system. According to Halliday, language is produced in all directions. Language can be used to express people's ideas, but in addition to linguistic symbols, there still exist other nonverbal symbols, or a combination of linguistic and nonverbal symbols to produce discourse. That is, in addition to linguistic symbols, other symbols are also sources of meaning, such as music, colors, photographs.

Halliday pointed out that language is a system and that within this system language performs many functions, which he divides into three parts: (1) conceptual function. Language can describe objective objects; (2) interpersonal function. Language can be used to maintain social relations between people in social life; (3) discourse function. Language reflects discourse and contextual information. He pointed out that, like linguistic symbols, multimodal discourse has the same function as it does.

## 2.3. Multimodal Discourse Analysis Theory

Multimodal discourse analysis focuses on the nature and functions of various modalities in communicative symbols, the meanings they construct, and the interrelationships between the modalities. It studies both the various symbolic resources including text and how to design and use multimodal resources rationally to achieve communicative purposes. Regarding multimodal discourse analysis, many scholars have made great contributions to it. Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) book *Reading Images*, which provided a systematic and comprehensive visual grammar design, was a milestone in the development of multimodal discourse analysis. Since then the theory has been rapidly developed and applied to other different aspects.

According to Martin (1992), the theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis consists of five main aspects: cultural, situational, meaning, lexical-grammatical, and phonological-word systems, which are finally expressed in the form of physical sounds or writing and printing [6]. Lim (2004) emphasized the importance of pictures and language in communication, and he divided the theoretical framework into four levels: ideology, genre, domain, and discourse [7]. In 2009, Zhang designed a comprehensive theoretical framework for multimodal discourse analysis based on Lim, which includes cultural level, contextual level, content level and expression level. He believed that most of the construction of meaning is done by nonverbal symbols, such as gestures, actions, facial expressions, and networks.

### 3. The Application of Multimodal Teaching Mode to Oral English Teaching

#### 3.1. Preparation before Class

Before class, the teacher is the designer of activities and classes. First, teachers should design the lesson objectives, clarify the content, design the activities, and choose the teaching methods according to the high school English curriculum standards and students' age and gender differences. In this process, teachers should select and prepare a variety of multimodal materials related to the content and provide students with tasks that require their independent learning. In today's society where the Internet and big data are rapidly developing, Wechat groups and QQ groups have also become powerful aids to assist teachers in teaching. Therefore, teachers can post teaching tasks that need to be completed by students to parent groups in advance for students to be well prepared for what they are about to learn. For example, if the topic of the lesson is a famous person, teachers can ask students to collect his character introduction and outstanding achievements online in advance and give a short introduction in class. In addition, teachers can also post the audio or related videos of the words to be learned in this unit to the parents' group in advance, which can help students preview the basics. In this process, the single text modality is combined with the audio and video modalities, while the students' visual and auditory modalities cooperate with each other. All the modalities are used to build a preparation environment of multimodal oral English teaching.

#### 3.2. Communication in Class

During the class, the teacher is the guider of the students and the organizer of the activities. First of all, teachers should provide students with various opportunities for presentation, such as telling a story, making a short presentation in which students can share the information they have collected online in advance and the tasks they have completed. Teachers can not only check the completion of students' homework, but also provide students with various opportunities to express themselves orally. Secondly, teachers should also use various modalities to create authentic cultural contexts for students. Only when students are exposed to authentic language and context can they understand the real information behind knowledge and thus be able to express more accurate and fluent ideas in realistic communicative contexts. For example, students can learn new words and new grammar points based on audio, photos. Meanwhile, movies play an essential role in creating authentic cultural contexts for students. Finally, designing a variety of speaking activities to increase students' input and output of English is also a key point that teachers must take into account. For example, students perform imitation training based on the video with the aim of mastering the correct pronunciation and intonation. At the same time, understanding and mastering body language is also one of the learning tasks for students while watching the video. In real communicative situations, body language can help us perceive and convey information very well. Teachers can also provide a topic for students to brainstorm with the help of PPT. It should be noted that teachers should help students to express their own opinions as much as possible, and do not evaluate the right or wrong points raised by students during their discussion because quantity over quality of sentences is an important principle of brainstorming. Furthermore, in addition to designing a variety of individual activities, group activities are also an essential part of the English speaking class. For example, students can do role plays, debates, dialogues with their group members.

#### 3.3. Consolidation after Class

After class, the teacher is a facilitator of students' learning. Teachers can ask students to make full use of their time outside of class to complete various multimodal assignments and do a good job of combining classroom learning with extracurricular learning. Students can go online to collect relevant information, which will not only broaden their horizons and enrich their knowledge, but also improve their hands-on skills and thinking level. Teachers can also use parent groups to assign related exercises, such as making cards, recording a small video or completing a dubbing of a movie clip they like.

#### 4. Implications for Oral English Teaching

##### 4.1. Making Full Use of Various Resources

In the teaching process, teachers can use multimedia as a medium to combine external modal resources such as pictures, videos and audios with students' visual and auditory senses, thus changing the traditional single text modality and realizing a teaching mode in which visual modality, text modality, auditory modality and other multimodalities cooperate and complement each other. In today's society where information technology is rapidly developing, textbook knowledge is far from satisfying students' needs for learning oral English, and the improvement of students' oral English proficiency must not rely on textbooks alone. Various online resources and extra-curricular reading materials should become one of the important sources for enriching students' knowledge of oral English. It is important to note that teachers should not only achieve the presentation of multimodal resources in the classroom, but also complete the pre-class preparation work and post-class teaching guided by multimodal teaching mode. Specifically, teachers can ask students to collect relevant information online before learning something new, and then present their preparations in class in the form of a PowerPoint presentation or a short speech about their content. Students will have a deeper understanding and longer-term memory of the original oral English material they have acquired by their own hands. For teachers, providing students with various multimodal resources is also one of their competencies. Therefore, in order to better use multimodal teaching mode in oral English classroom, teachers should learn to be proficient in multimedia technology and make full use of the Internet and various software to present students with meaningful and high-quality oral English resources in different modalities.

##### 4.2. Designing a Variety of Student-focused Activities

According to input and output theory, while it is important for students to continuously accumulate as much comprehensible material as possible, students cannot test their mastery of the information they have received if they do not have enough opportunities to output what they have accumulated. It is only in the process of output that students can become aware of their mistakes and deficiencies and can continuously reduce the gap between their current level of oral English and the target level. When designing teaching activities, teachers should choose a variety of modal teaching materials based on the theme of the lesson in a reasonable way to create a relaxed classroom atmosphere for students. In the traditional oral English class, boring and single repetitive training cannot motivate students to learn, so in order to solve this problem, teachers should design classroom activities in various forms, such as role-playing, debates, and dubbing competitions. For example, when learning the topic of online shopping, teachers can organize a debate on the pros and cons of online shopping, students can express their own views according to their chosen position, and other students can add or refute their views. In this learning environment, students are able to experience an authentic communicative context, which not only stimulates their desire to express themselves and improve their language logic, but also develops their sense of teamwork and organizational skills.

##### 4.3. Using multimodality in a Reasonable and Moderate Manner

It is true that multimodal teaching modes are effective in improving students' oral English proficiency, but this does not mean that as many multimodal resources as possible should be used in the teaching process. All things are in moderation, and more modal resources do not mean better teaching and learning. On the contrary, over-presentation of multimodal information may distract students' attention and thus reduce the desired effect. For example, the presentation of instructional materials should be focused and unfocused, and teachers should select those oral materials that are helpful to students while ignoring other irrelevant content. In conclusion, when designing oral English classes, teachers must remember to choose teaching resources reasonably according to students' needs, the content of the lesson and teaching requirements. They must not use teaching modalities indiscriminately and affect teaching effectiveness.

##### 4.4. Strengthening the Control of Class

Good classroom control is reflected in the teacher's ability to control classroom discipline, classroom time, and the articulation of classroom activities. The English speaking classroom under multimodal teaching mode is often a relaxed and cheerful state, and students may be immersed in videos, pictures or classroom activities for a long time. Therefore, classroom discipline may be out of control, which also requires teachers to strengthen control of the classroom and lead and guide students to complete their learning tasks. Teachers need to balance student-oriented classroom activities with good classroom discipline to ensure that the whole class is under control while providing ample opportunities for students to express themselves orally, thus ensuring orderly classroom activities.

## **II. Conclusion**

In traditional oral English teaching, the teacher is still in the dominant position, and although the teacher assigns the so-called tasks to the students, this does not produce satisfactory teaching outcome. Fundamentally, students are not very interested in learning oral English, so it is difficult for them to concentrate on the teacher's teaching. Consequently, they do not want to spend extra time to learn and practice speaking on their own. In addition, it is clear that the teacher's fill-in-the-blank approach is not suitable for teaching speaking as an output skill, and good speaking skills cannot be achieved without input and output from authentic contexts and various aids. Prior to this, it was difficult to construct realistic contexts in oral English classes due to China's test-based education, but with the advancement of technology, resources such as audio, video and pictures have laid a solid foundation for authentic oral English learning.

Combining multimodal teaching mode with oral English teaching is innovative and practical in teaching. It can effectively improve the quality of teachers' teaching and students' oral English proficiency. For teachers, they can change the traditional mode of teaching oral English by focusing more on multimodal resources and symbols, using video and audio to create authentic learning resources and communicative environments for students, while guiding them to receive and understand information from pictures and body language as well as to convey their own opinions and emotions. For students, this mode can effectively mobilize students' various senses, thus cultivating students' enthusiasm and initiative in learning speaking as well as exercising their thinking skills. It can stimulate students' interest and enthusiasm in participating in interactive communication, improve students' ability of speaking English freely and confidently and promote the effective implementation of oral English teaching. Finally, it is essential to point out that there is a long way to go in regard to applying multimodal teaching mode to oral English teaching in senior high schools, therefore what we should do is to do more researches about it.

## **Bibliography**

- [1]. Halliday, M. A. K. 1985. *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* [M]. London: Edward Arnold.
- [2]. Kress, G. R. & T. van Leeuwen. 1996. *Reading Images: The grammar of visual design* [M]. London: Routledge.
- [3]. Kress, G. R. & T. van Leeuwen. 2001. *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication* [M]. London: Arnold.
- [4]. Bachman, L.F. & Palmer, A.S. (1996). *Language Testing in Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [5]. Crystal, D. (2003). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [6]. Martin, J. R. 1992. *English Text: System and Structure* [M]. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- [7]. Lim Fei, V. 2004. Developing an Integrative Multi-Semiotic Model [A]. *Multiliteracies: Literacy learning and design of social futures* [C]. B. Cope, and M. Kalantzis (eds.). London: Routledge. 220-246.