EFL Translation Teaching from the Multimodal Perspective

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Abstract. The way of information transmission has changed dramatically, in which a variety of modalities play an increasingly significant role. As for the translation teaching, there is an urgent need to transform the traditional single-modal teaching method to adapt to the information age. In the framework of multimodal discourse analysis theory, it explores the significance of multimodal pedagogy, puts forward a multimodal approach to translation teaching based on computer network platform, and tries to apply it in the teaching practice of Tang poetry translation, aiming to cultivate students' multi-literacy.

Introduction

With the development of information technology, human communication is no longer dominated by language. Images, sounds, symbols play an increasingly important role in human communication. These symbols are called modalities, which constitute the channels of communication and media. Multimodal discourse is to use a variety of symbols or symbol encoding to express meaning, during which a variety of multimodalities collectively achieve the construction of the discourse meaning.

However, in the translation teaching practice instructors tend to resort to single modality (i.e. verbal modality), which contributes to learners' barriers to fully understanding of original works and precisely transferring into the target language. This paper attempts to employ a multimodal pedagogy in translation teaching, that is by using multimodality (including sound, picture, video and other symbolic resources) to mobilize learners' multi-senses to carry out multimodal teaching activities, which will help learners reinterpret the meaning of Tang Poems and thereby enhance the teaching efficiency.

The Theory of Multimodal Pedagogy

Multimodal discourse analysis emerged in the 1990s. It mainly focuses on the study of how a variety of symbol resources fit together to achieve making meaning in discourses. Multimodal discourse analysis is developed on the basis of systemic functional linguistics and social semiotics. It inherits the viewpoints of systemic functional linguistics, claiming that language is a system of social symbols and thus has meaning potential and other symbolic systems are also the source of meaning. It proposes that multimodal discourse itself is systematic and multifunctional, thus has three meta-functions. The three meta-functions are possessed by language as social semiotic stretch into other semiotics which are meaningful except language.

According to Kress & van Leeuwen, image, as a social symbol, not only plays a supporting role but it is an independent system, working together with verbal symbols to build meaning. In 2006, Kress & van Leeuwen further developed the systemic functional linguistics theory, by introducing the concept of meta-function to the analysis of other symbols and set up the visual grammar theory. It is the first synthetical statement of the grammar of visual design. This theory is applied in multimodal discourse analysis including the visual and verbal modalities. It elaborates the meaning of visual modality from the following three perspectives: representational meaning, interactive meaning, and compositional meaning. They are respectively in accordance with ideational function, interpersonal function and textual function.
In the information age, the Internet provides people with various information in a fast and convenient way, such as illustrated texts, audio and video. People no longer rely on pure text to obtain information. The net-generation, whose reading habits and learning styles are changing, are more sensitive to images than their parents. "Reading images", as well as reading texts, has become an important means of access to knowledge.

In pedagogical setting, the multimodality era also has an impact on the teaching/learning languages. Kress et al. (2001) argue that "learning can no longer be treated as a process which depends on language centrally, learning happens through... all modes as a complex activity in which speech or writing are involved among a number of modes".

Multimodal teaching advocates the use of multi channels (such as network, picture, role play etc.) and a variety of teaching methods to mobilize students' multi sensory, collaborating to participate in language learning. In the process of teaching, instructors should motivate students' senses as much as possible to experience teaching activities and participate in the interaction between teaching and learning. Under the conditions of teaching, instructors should make full use of the network, multimedia and other resources, as well as visual, auditory, tactile and other means to mobilize students' enthusiasm and arouse students' interest. Multimodal teaching combines with the multimodality features of teaching materials, literary works, the Internet, film, music, involving image, color, sound, text, and other modalities or modality combination.

The traditional single-modal pedagogy cannot meet learners' needs. Educators should be aware of the current situation and make appropriate changes in teaching methods, content and teaching organization to develop learners' multi-literacy. Engaging in the practice of using multiple semiotic resources to make meaning is, however, of fundamental importance for the development of new literacy which are made possible by new technologies.

A Multimodal Approach of Translation Teaching

For foreign language teaching, Foreign educators have been focusing on multimodal pedagogy and learners' multi-literacy over the past decade. The U.S. New London Group holds that with the rapid development of information technology, people not only accept various forms of knowledge (such as prints, images, video tapes), but also transfer knowledge to a wide variety of people through the same complex way. Therefore, educators should give first priority to the cultivation of students' multi-literacy, while teaching the formal, standard, written language. According to Williamson (2005), multi-literacy refers to the ability to read information provided by a variety of media and modalities.

In China, the problems existing in translation teaching are as follows: lack of a unified guiding ideology; teacher-centered; little interaction between teachers and students; emphasis on knowledge transfer while ignoring the training of translation skills; and without a systematic translation teaching theory.

In traditional teaching, instructors intend to increase the interaction with students by adding some class discussion and extra homework correction. Due to less hours in the curriculum, there is little substantial improvement on teaching. To improve the quality of translation teaching, Internet should be fully taken advantage in the pre-class, in class, after-class interactive activities, so that students can truly participate and improve their translation proficiency in practice and discussion.

A multimodal approach of translation teaching proposed is to cultivate students' multi-literacy. It makes full use of multimedia, computer, Internet to construct an interactive way of teaching. It does not totally repudiate the traditional translation teaching. On the contrary, it is a further development on the traditional teaching content.

Multimodal pedagogy can be entirely combined with Internet, corpus and other modern teaching methods, to make up for the shortcomings of traditional teaching. Bilingual parallel text corpus can provide a huge amount of examples on the translation of a linguistic structure in different contexts. On the one hand, it facilitates teacher's preparation and learner's access to information and saving their
time. On the other hand, it eliminates the drawbacks of the traditional translation teaching by summarizing the examples under real contexts. At the same time, learners can understand the different techniques adopted in translating the same vocabulary, sentence pattern and the same discourse pattern.

According to Micheline, in single-modal learning, i.e. by reading and listening, the memory rate ranges from 10% to 30%, while in multimodal learning, especially when learners are personally involved, it can sometimes reach to 90%. And the more real the scene is, the more effective learning efficiency and effectiveness are.

An ideal translation teaching model can be constructed, by making use of traditional resources and abundant Internet resources to choose live teaching material; by the interaction between instructors and learners in class teaching and network platform.

The traditional classroom explanation is also essential, especially concerning translation theory. It can be conducted by teacher's general explanation, supplemented by group report, making slide ... In this process, students can choose a translation theory or a translator they are interested and give a brief introduction, which will be collected into self-built database.

Referring to specific translation practice, network communication platform can be fully used for exchange and interaction. Besides, various forms of teaching and practice should be used, so that students can truly participate and teaching efficiency can be improved greatly.

**Translation Teaching Practice**

Tang poetry is the essence of Chinese culture. It is terse in language, constituted by several lines of Chinese characters. Meanwhile, it is abstruse in meaning and rich in images. The difficulties of its translation mainly arise from the complexity of the connotations of artistic ideorealm. Translator should give a full play of his subjective creativity and do his utmost to reduce the loss of the beauty of artistic ideorealm to the minimal degree.

Zhang Delu has proposed a theoretical framework of multimodal discourse analysis, in which he points out that multimodal discourse should be analyzed from cultural aspects, context level, content level and expression level. This theoretical framework guides the practice of literary translation teaching. In the translation teaching of Tang poetry, instructors should fully explore the meaning potential of verbal modality, and use a variety of auxiliary modalities to compensate comprehension deficiency, ensuring that students can fully understand and precisely reconstruct the artistic ideorealm in the target language.

**Interpreting Verbal Modality.** In translating literary works, translators should first interpret the works as an organic whole (including ideological content and artistic form), and then orderly reconstruct it. As to Tang poetry, students should comprehend the meaning of the verses, including the original meaning of all the words, context meaning, collocation and so on. Therefore, for the verbal modality of Tang poetry, instructors should combine linguistic approach and poetic analytical method, to help students understand poetry and feel the poetic environment.

Take Ma Zhiyuan's *Sunny Sand Autumn Thoughts* as an example. It sketches a man wandering in the late autumn and missing his hometown. The poet lists several images peculiar to autumn without considering the syntax. There is only one verb "decline", and others are nouns. In some way, the poem is like a form of ink painting, composed by fresh images, expressing a thick homesickness sentiment. In interpreting the verbal modality, students should be instructed to recognize how words are organized into a coherent text. By analyzing grammatical cohesion and lexical cohesion, students can overcome the language barrier and have a better understanding of the theme.

**Applying Auxiliary Modalities.** Tang poetry only contains one single verbal modality, which might cause comprehension barrier to college students, whose social experience is little. In the teaching process, other modalities, like picture, music, can be used to arouse students' interest and help them grasp the theme. These modalities make meaning together on their respective forms of
symbols. Verbal symbols and other symbols form a multidimensional sense of the expression space in manifesting the potential meaning of Tang poem to the maximum.

As for the relationship among modalities, Zhang Delu (2010) classifies the relations among modalities into two categories, i.e. complementary and non-complementary. Complementary relationship refers to the type in which one modality cannot express the full meaning and it needs another modality to supplement. In the non-complementary relationship, the two modalities are independent i.e. one modality has little impact on the other.

To illustrate how to use various modalities in teaching practice, a piece of poetry Shan Jing Chun Xing Tu will be taken as an example. Shan Jing Chun Xing Tu is a Chinese poetry and painting which integrates verbal symbols and visual symbols in its unique way. The words and images are the means of expressing ideas and thus possess the features of multimodal discourse. A combination of painting and poetry realizes the goal of strengthening the beauty of painting and emphasizing the theme of verse.

Shan Jing Chun Xing Tu presents the beauty of spring scenery in a dynamic manner and fully portrays the literati’s leisure and quiet manner. On the top right corner of the painting is Song Ningzong’s poem “Chu xiu ye hua duo zi wu, bi ren you niao bu cheng ti” (Wild flowers are dancing because of the touch of the literati’s sleeve and birds stop singing after hearing his footsteps). Song Ningzong’s poem vividly reproduces the scene—a literati going for an outing. The poem accurately shows the dynamic of the painting, and the whole picture echoes the concept of painting in poetry, poetry in painting. The poem is arranges at the top right of the scroll, that is, the interchange of the real given information and the ideal new information, so that poetry echoes painting in terms of compositional meaning. According to Zhang Delu’s classification, verbal symbol and visual symbol are independent in poetry and painting discourse. One modality provides a background to another modality, plays a contrasting and highlighting role. In the meaning construction, verbal symbols and visual symbols contribute to make the discourse coherent.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to employ a multimodal pedagogy in translation teaching, which turns out to be a feasible approach, which can guide students to explore the deep meaning of literary works. In multimodal teaching, verbal modality runs through every aspect, playing an important role that cannot be replaced by other modalities. Meanwhile, it interacts and complements with sound and image modalities, so that it has vitality. The visual and auditory impacts, made by the interdependence of these modalities, can strengthen the significance of the original works, fully mobilize students' different kinds of senses like hearing, sight, create mental pictures, and to a large extent, help overcome their barriers in comprehending pure texts. Due to space limitation, the case study only focuses on the translation teaching of Tang poetry, and the future study will probe other types of literary discourse to give more insights into the college English teaching.

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References


