A Preliminary Study of Multimodal Discourse to Promote the Teaching of Chinese for Specific Purposes

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Abstract: With the increasing global demand for Chinese language, the teaching of Chinese for Specific Purposes (CSP) has occupied an increasingly important position in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language. However, traditional teaching methods often neglect the role of non-verbal symbols in language comprehension and communication. The multimodal discourse theory provides a new perspective for CSP teaching, which can effectively enhance students' understanding and mastery of specialized terminology and language application skills by integrating multisensory symbol systems such as language, vision, hearing, and touch. This paper starts from the current situation of teaching CSP and analyzes the adaptability between multimodal discourse and CSP teaching, aiming to provide theoretical support and practical suggestions for the innovation of the teaching mode of CSP.

Keywords: Chinese for Specific Purposes; Multimodal; International Chinese language education

1. Introduction

With the rise of the global Chinese language craze, Chinese for Specific Purposes (CSP) teaching has gradually become an important part of Chinese language teaching. The goal of CSP teaching is to cultivate learners' linguistic competence in specific fields or occupational contexts and to satisfy their professional communication needs. However, the traditional mode of language teaching relies too much on single linguistic symbols without considering non-linguistic symbols and multimodal resources. In today's informatized and digitalized teaching environment, classroom communication presents multimodal discourse characteristics, that is, a mode of communication through the simultaneous participation of multiple senses.

The multimodal discourse theory emphasizes that multiple senses such as auditory, visual, and tactile, and their related symbol systems work together synergistically in the communication. For example, teachers use multiple symbols such as PowerPoint, video, gestures, and facial expressions to help learners understand the teaching content through multimodal input. This kind of teaching method based on multi-sensory stimulation

and multi-symbol systems has unique advantages, especially in CSP teaching. Specific Chinese learners usually need to master the terminology and language application skills of a specific domain. Compared with traditional teaching methods, multimodal discourse can better integrate linguistic and non-linguistic symbols to help students apply what they have learned in real-life scenarios.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to explore how multimodal discourse can play a positive role in CSP teaching, promote the improvement of the teaching effect, and provide new ideas for the innovation of specialized teaching modes.

2. Chinese for Specific Purpose

CSP is a concept corresponding to Chinese for General Purpose (CGP), which refers to the Chinese language used in a certain specialized field, a specific scope, and a fixed occasion [1]. Du proposed "specific Chinese language teaching," which is the earliest known conceptual name for CSP [2]. Wang formally introduced the term CSP [3]. The current understanding of CSP has been developed. With the promotion of the "Belt and Road" initiative and the expanding global influence of China's economy, there is an increasing demand for composite talents who know both the Chinese language and professional technology. For example, Confucius Institutes in more than 40 countries around the world offer "Chinese+" programs covering up to 10 fields. It shows that the demand for specific Chinese language learning is growing with the deepening of cooperation between China and the rest of the world in various fields.

3. Multimodal theory

In the continuous development of discourse analysis theory, researchers gradually realize that it is no longer possible to analyze and explore discourse comprehensively and thoroughly from the linguistic point of view alone. A considerable part of the meaning of discourse is manifested through non-verbal factors, such as some accompanying language, body language, and non-physical features. Communication is no longer limited to the use of a single sense, and the synergistic discourse of multiple senses has become a trend. The discourse generated under such communication is multimodal discourse [4]. Multimodality can provide teaching scenarios and facilitating conditions for foreign language teaching and learning, provide auxiliary conditions for foreign language teaching and learning, and thus improve teaching efficiency; it can provide multi-sensory channels for multimodal discourse communication to express discourse meanings [5].

4. Research status

There is a lack of clear specifications of teaching content and assessment standards. Wu proposed that relevant basic theory research and construction should be improved, the application of relevant linguistic theories (e.g., Register theory and Genre theory) and language teaching theories (e.g., demand analysis theory) should be strengthened, and standards and syllabi should be formulated [6]. At present, due to the lack of grading for students with different levels of Chinese language proficiency in different majors and a clear hierarchical design of teaching content, there are difficulties for some international students to learn at different stages. Meanwhile, the assessment format mainly focuses on written tests, which assess the theoretical knowledge and basic skills of the language, but fails to adequately assess students' operational skills, situational application, and group work in a formative manner.

Teaching methods are single, with some common teaching methods in CSP teaching mainly including task-based teaching method, case teaching method, and post-method teaching method [7]. Although these methods can support language learning, they often suffer from monotonous content and dull forms due to a lack of focus on specific professional fields. Many current teaching practices rely too heavily on traditional teaching templates without considering the unique needs of each discipline. This limits the effectiveness of CSP teaching, highlighting the need for more personalized and practical adjustments based on disciplinary characteristics.

Research on Chinese for different specialized fields is unbalanced. CSP covers a number of specific fields, however, current research mainly focuses on the fields of Chinese for Medicine and Chinese for Business, especially in terms of relatively mature teaching methods and theoretical systems in language demand analysis, curriculum design, and teaching evaluation. In contrast, research on Chinese language teaching methodology for other fields is still insufficient. Therefore, diversifying and personalizing the development and application of CSP teaching methods in different fields is an important direction in the current research.

5. Integration points between teaching Chinese for Specific Purposes and multimodal teaching

The specialization of language fits with the diversity of multimodal resources. Teaching CSP focuses on language use in specific fields, requiring learners to understand terminology, syntactic structures, and industry language norms. Multimodal teaching enhances this by integrating text, images, audio, and video, offering a richer, more concrete learning experience. This approach helps learners grasp specialized terminology and contexts, facilitating the integration of linguistic and field-specific knowledge. For example, medical Chinese can use anatomy diagrams and video explanations to teach relevant terms in context.

Multimodal teaching can restore authentic language contexts. One of the core objectives of teaching CSP is to cultivate learners to use Chinese effectively and accurately in specific professional contexts and to help them communicate naturally in professional or academic scenarios. This requires learners to understand industry-related terminology, norms of language use in contexts, and sensitivity to the target culture. In this context, multimodal teaching provides a more flexible and realistic teaching experience for CSP with the advantages of diversified symbolic systems and resource integration, so as to enhance learners' motivation and learning performance.

This integration enables intercultural communication and interaction between symbol systems. Teaching CSP is not only about the transmission of language knowledge but also about the cultivation of learners' cross-cultural communicative competence. This is especially important in the context of globalization, where people in different cultures often have large differences in the use of language and symbol systems. Therefore, a key goal in teaching CSP is to enable learners to adapt to multicultural contexts and communicate with people from different cultural backgrounds in a way that allows them to express meaning accurately while following appropriate behavioral and etiquette norms. Multimodal teaching provides rich support for the development of intercultural communicative competence. It enables students to gain a comprehensive understanding of the ways in which language is used and the habits of communication in different cultures by combining verbal and non-verbal symbols (e.g., gestures, facial expressions, body postures, visual symbols, colors, sounds, etc.).

6. Integration of specific Chinese language teaching into multimodal instruction

Designing teaching activities for different specialties: Specific Chinese language teaching can leverage mul-

timodal resources to design activities within specialized contexts for greater authenticity. For example, in a business Chinese classroom, teachers could create a simulated business negotiation activity using videos, PowerPoints, charts, and text materials, encouraging students to engage in role-playing. In an engineering Chinese classroom, teachers could incorporate 3D modeling, drawings, and flowcharts to guide students in presenting a technical proposal, explaining project details and implementation plans.

Using digital platforms for multimodal learning resources: Multimodal resources can be integrated into specific Chinese language teaching through digital platforms like learning management systems or mobile apps. For example, in a medical Chinese course, teachers can provide anatomical diagrams, surgical videos, and audio lectures on an online platform, allowing students to deepen their understanding through diverse symbol systems when reviewing content after class.

Virtual reality and immersive learning: With virtual reality technology, specific Chinese language teaching can offer more immersive learning experiences. Through virtual environments, learners can actively participate in specialized scenarios, such as virtual business meetings or clinics, which enhances learning outcomes.

Establishing a multimodal discourse evaluation system: An evaluation system tailored to multimodal teaching should assess learners' linguistic competence, intercultural communication skills, and practical application abilities in specialized areas. This system should go beyond traditional written tests or single-language assessments to include the use of language, non-verbal symbols (e.g., gestures, facial expressions), and multimodal systems (e.g., images, videos, audio) in cross-cultural contexts. Assessment methods should be diversified, incorporating oral interviews, situational dialogues, and multimodal projects (e.g., product promotions, medical explanations). Students can create presentations using text, images, audio, and video to demonstrate effective integration of these resources for clear, accurate, and persuasive communication in a professional context.

7. Limitations and reflections on the combination of specific Chinese language teaching and multimodal teaching

Information between symbol systems will be overloaded. Multimodal teaching transmits information through multiple symbol systems at the same time, which may lead to information overload, especially when learning a complex specialized language, learners may have difficulty in processing information from multiple sources such as text, images, audio, etc. simultaneously. In this case, the principles of modality selection should be followed, such as the principles of effectiveness, fitness, and economy, to avoid overlap and redundancy in the use of non-complementary modalities [4].

There is a high dependence on teaching resources. Multimodal teaching often relies on more complex technological resources, such as virtual reality devices, digital platforms, and interactive videos. This makes multimodal teaching a challenge for environments with limited equipment and technology support. In addition, teachers' technological literacy and proficiency may also affect the effectiveness of multimodal teaching, especially teachers without sufficient professional training in traditional teaching and learning may have difficulty in effectively integrating these technological resources.

Teachers may face high demands in designing a complex instructional plan. The design and implementation of multimodal instruction are often much more complex than traditional instruction. Teachers need to spend a lot of time preparing multimodal resources and ensuring that they can be closely integrated with the course content. For example, when designing a legal Chinese course, teachers not only need to provide legal texts but also need to collect and produce appropriate videos, pictures, and other media content, which undoubtedly

increases the workload of teaching preparation. It is doubtful whether the time and resource costs invested can improve the learning effectiveness of learners of specific Chinese.

It may lead to an over-adaptation to the needs of learners. A potential problem with multimodal teaching is over-adaptation to learners' needs, leading to inadequate language proficiency when learners are not supported by multimodal resources. Due to the richness of multimodal resources, learners may become accustomed to comprehending language through a multimodal system and instead find it difficult and stressful to work in real-world scenarios without the support of one or all of the submodalities. Therefore, teachers need to balance the use of multimodal resources with pure language training when designing courses.

8. Conclusion

The combination of Chinese for specific purpose teaching and multimodal teaching has great potential to provide learners with a more authentic, rich, and interactive learning experience, especially in cross-cultural communication and language practice in professional contexts. However, the success of multimodal teaching relies on instructional design, technical support, and the learners' ability. Therefore, it is necessary to balance the use of multimodal resources and traditional teaching methods in practical application to avoid the problems of information overload and over-reliance and to ensure the maximization of teaching effectiveness.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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