

# A Review of Middle School English Writing Instruction from the Perspective of Multi-modal Theory

Xiaoju Lee

School of Foreign Language, Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing 401331, China

## Abstract

Writing, as one of the forms of communicative activities, plays an important role in second language teaching. China has a long history of writing teaching, but writing has always been a weak link for students. Improving the situation of junior middle school English writing teaching has become an important topic in English teaching. In the 20th century, western scholars put forward the theory of multi-modal analysis, and then the multi-modal teaching model. Multi-modal teaching combined with advanced teaching equipment, the use of sound, pictures and other media, can mobilize students' visual and auditory senses, stimulate students' interest in learning, has a guiding significance for writing teaching. This paper first introduces multi-modal and junior high school English writing, and then reviews the new progress made in the exploration of junior high school English writing from the perspective of multi-modal.

## Keywords

Multi-modal teaching; Junior high school English; English writing.

## 1. Multi-modal and Junior High School English Writing

### 1.1. Multi-modal and multi-modal teaching

Modal is the meaning potential formed by the material media after a long time shaping in the society, and is used to represent and communicate the meaning of social cultural resources. [1] The term "multi-modality" has a long history and has attracted the attention of linguistic circles since the 1990s. It refers to the diversity of signs in oral or written communication. [2] With the development and extensive application of modern science and technology, especially computer, multimedia and media technology, more and more discourse voices appear simultaneously in image, sound, text, color, space, action and other modes. At the same time, the same is true in teaching. The multi-modal nature of teaching discourse has become a key research field. [3] Multi-modal discourse refers to the phenomenon of using auditory, visual, tactile and other senses to communicate through language, picture, image, sound, action and other means and symbolic resources. [4] The theoretical basis of multi-modal foreign language teaching research is social semiotics of systemic functional linguistics. Multi-modal foreign language teaching is a teaching mode that uses two or more symbolic resources and means to present teaching contents in the process of teaching design. [5]

### 1.2. Definition of junior high school English writing

In the academic world, people have different understandings of writing. Shevina (1994) believes that writing and reading are mutually integrated. Writing is the act of simulating reading, while reading is the act of simulating writing. [6] Liu Kuanping et al. (2003) believe that from the perspective of literature, writing is a creative spiritual activity. Writing is a continuous process of finding the most effective language to communicate ideas and feelings. [7] Rong Weidong (2010) believes that, from the perspective of linguistics, writing is the language combination training of "integrating words into words, words into sentences, sentences into paragraphs, and paragraphs into articles". From the point of view of writing,

writing is a mental activity in which the writer uses written symbols to express his meaning and convey information. It can be seen that writing is an important communication activity to express ideas. [8] *English Curriculum Standards for Compulsory Education* points out that English curriculum should cultivate the core quality of English, including four dimensions, namely language ability, cultural awareness, quality of thinking and learning ability [9]. Language ability refers to the ability to understand and express meaning by means of listening, speaking, reading, watching and writing, and writing skill is one of the language abilities. *Nine-year Compulsory Education Full-time Junior High School English Teaching Syllabus* stipulates that junior high school students can write English skillfully and clearly, can write simple letters, notes, notices, can mark simple text captions for pictures, etc. Moreover, I have added practical application content, such as being able to express my own views under the prompt of context, and paraphrasing the simple content I have listened to and read as required. [10]

Therefore, the English writing ability of junior high school meets the cultivation requirements of the core quality of English subjects, and the requirements of compulsory education on students' writing ability are gradually improving.

## **2. New Progress in Exploring Junior High School English Writing From A Multi-modal Perspective**

### **2.1. Research on English teaching from the perspective of multi-modal abroad**

#### **2.1.1. Research on multi-modes**

Western multi-modal research originated in the 1990s and developed rapidly in the early 21st century. In 1994, the "New London Group" put forward the concept of "diverse literacy", which set a precedent for the research on the cultivation of diverse literacy. [5] O'Toole (1994) mainly analyzed images from the perspective of hierarchy. Kress and van Leeuwen published *Reading Images* in 1996, which gave a comprehensive and systematic exposition of vision and discussed the educational significance of visual literacy. In 2001, in his book *Multi-modal Teaching and Learning*, Kress discussed how teachers can scientifically present teaching topics through different modes and make students understand the learning content through the interaction of classroom teaching. [11]

#### **2.1.2. Research on second language writing**

In the late 20th century, foreign studies on second language writing tend to mature and form their own theoretical system, such as contrastive rhetoric theory. The research object, research method and research team have gradually developed into an independent discipline with clear research scope. In the 1980s, the "process teaching Revolution of second language writing" appeared in the field of teaching and research of second language writing. Since then, people began to re-examine the nature of writing. Writing is regarded as a cognitive activity and a "process of finding meaning". In recent years, the international study of second language writing has developed rapidly and prospers unprecedentedly, showing the following characteristics. First, the research team is constantly expanding, and a group of experts specializing in the study of second language writing has appeared. Second, various academic research activities are unprecedentedly active. Third, research results and papers have been published continuously, and many monographs or anthologies on the research of writing teaching in second language have been published, with a wide range of design topics. [12]

#### **2.1.3. Research on English teaching from a multi-modal perspective**

R.Barthes (1977) wrote *The Rhetoric of Images*, the first to analyze multi-modal languages. [13] Royce (2002) studied the relationship between different symbols in multi-modal discourse, and believed that different symbols are complementary and various symbols can promote English teaching to some extent. [14] Williamson believes that multiple literacy is the ability to convert

information about models into written information. Jewitt (2006) mainly studied how to analyze the relationship between interactive whiteboard teaching and multi-modal reading and writing design, and applied this teaching mode to modern technology and classroom teaching. [15] Baldry et al. (2006) studied how to conduct in-depth research on multi-modal languages and the application of language teaching with the assistance of different coincidence modes and multimedia. Guichon and Mcloran (2008) showed through experimental research that multi-modal discourse is conducive to helping students understand the material content and improve their English listening ability. [16]

Through the above research, it can be found that the research and application of multi-modal theory in foreign countries has been very wide, and is gradually building its own research methods and theoretical structure.

## **2.2. Research on junior high School English teaching from the perspective of multi-modal at home**

### **2.2.1. Research on multi-modes**

On the whole, our country is behind developed countries in the study of multi-mode. The first paper that introduced the theory of multi-modal signs to China was "Social Semiotic Analysis of Multi-modal Discourse", which introduced visual grammar and image analysis and their significance to English teaching in detail [1]. In terms of multi-modal application, Hu Zhuanglin and Gu Yueguo are pioneers in the study of multi-modal application in foreign language teaching. Gu Yueguo (2007) defined the concept of multi-modal to distinguish multimedia learning in detail, and also proposed and explained a teaching model based on multi-modal and multimedia. Hu Zhuanglin (2009) studied the role of PPT in teaching and found that PPT was very popular among students, and in all modes, sound and images made great contributions to PPT presentation. [13] Li Zhanzi and Lu Danyuan (2012) pointed out that current research on modes mainly focuses on the application and relationship between images and words, but there are few studies on how to generate meaning between other modes. [1]

### **2.2.2. Research on junior high school English writing**

In recent years, the domestic research on writing teaching can be roughly divided into two categories: the research on effective writing teaching methods and the research on the influencing factors of writing ability. [17] At the same time, some foreign writing teaching methods are also introduced, such as process method, genre method, new paradigm grammar, process genre method and so on. [7] However, there are still many problems in junior middle school English writing ability at present, which are mainly manifested as common vocabulary and grammar errors, serious interference from mother tongue, weak discourse awareness and improper rhetoric, monotonous writing training mode, and insufficient attention to writing teaching. [19] [20] [21] [22] [23]

### **2.2.3. Research on junior high School English teaching from the perspective of multi-modal**

Zhang Delu has published a series of articles on the application of multi-modal methods in English teaching. For example, Zhang Delu (2010) explores the cooperation and coordination among different discourse modes in order to achieve the goals of English classroom teaching, and points out that although oral language is the main mode in English teaching, other modes play a role of improvement and emphasis. [24] Yang Jiaqin and Liu Jinju (2009) proposed that multi-modal teaching should be applied to junior middle school teaching to improve the memory effect by mobilizing learners' various senses. [25] Hu Zhuanglin (2011) studied the application and design methods of multi-modal audio-visual materials. [26] Song Qingwei (2013) proved that compared with traditional teaching, multi-modal teaching has more advantages in improving students' listening and reading ability. [27] Li Beibei (2014) studied

multi-modal teaching of high school English vocabulary and verified that multi-modal teaching is more conducive to students' learning and mastery of English vocabulary. [28]

To sum up, research on multi-modal teaching is generally applied to listening, speaking and reading, while research on English writing teaching is rare.

### 3. A Review and Analysis of Junior High School English Writing from The Perspective of Multi-modal

On the whole, since the introduction of multi-mode in China, the research value of multi-mode has gradually attracted the attention of researchers, and the research results are numerous, involving a wide range of fields. However, due to the short history of multi-mode research, the present research has its limitations.

(1) From the perspective of research methods, most of our multi-modal foreign language teaching research is based on Western research, or the introduction and comment of Western theories. The multi-mode research in our country is still in the initial stage. The main research is non-empirical research, the quantitative empirical research is few, and the independent innovation of the research is not high.

(2) From the perspective of research content and perspective, multi-modal foreign language teaching covers a wide range of areas, with research focusing on macro teaching mode, multiple literacy, listening teaching, classroom discourse research, etc., but there are few teaching areas such as writing, and the teaching effect of writing has not been significantly improved. Although the country has carried out many reforms in middle school English teaching, which has also had a certain impact on English writing, in fact, these reforms and attempts still have not fundamentally solved the problem. On the one hand, the traditional teaching model has a deep-rooted influence on the classroom. Students have formed a heavy reliance on this teaching model, which inhibits their imagination and creativity. On the other hand, teachers' teaching methods need to be improved. They should pay attention to the fun of teaching and cultivate students' creative thinking. Multi-modal teaching can help teachers carefully organize and present teaching materials, mobilize students' various senses, stimulate students' various associations, and help improve the current writing learning situation of junior high school students.

We live in a multi-modal society, language, image, sound and other non-linguistic symbol resources permeate every aspect of our life. At present, the research on multi-modal is gradually deepening at home and abroad, which can promote the further progress of language teaching and improve the current predicament of junior middle school English writing.

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