Original Paper

A Study on Multiliteracy Paths of English Reading Empowered by Short Videos—A Case Study of Ceramic Culture-related Short Videos

Hui Wang[1] & Jing Zhu[1]

[1] Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, China

[1] Jingdezhen Ceramic University, Jingdezhen, Jiangxi, China

Abstract

In the information age, English reading teaching is confronted with three dilemmas: cognitive overload, obstacles in decoding cultural symbols, and technological alienation. Based on the theoretical framework of multiliteracies, this study takes short videos as the media tool to explore its empowering paths in English reading classes themed on ceramic culture. Short videos reduce the cognitive load of professional terms by visualizing the craft processes;It deepens cultural decoding through the analysis of multimodal symbols; and promotes the educational transformation of technical tools via critical media analysis tasks and short video creation projects. The deep integration of short videos into ceramic culture teaching can systematically cultivate students' cultural decoding ability, critical thinking ability and technical mastery, providing a transferable design paradigm for language teaching with deep cultural integration.

Keywords

Multiliteracies, short videos, English reading classes

1. Introduction

Against the backdrop of globalization, English education undertakes a new mission of spreading China's fine culture. As an outstanding representative of China's intangible cultural heritage, ceramic culture is in urgent need of innovative carriers for its international communication. With its strong communication power, high participation, and multimodal characteristics, short videos have become a potential powerful tool to empower cultural teaching, especially for in-depth cultural understanding in English reading classes.As a core link of cultural input, reading classes are in urgent need of exploring innovative paths for the effective integration of short videos. However, current research is insufficient in exploring the paths of integrating ceramic culture into English reading; studies on short videos empowering cultural teaching remain superficial, and the application of short videos in education mostly focuses on language skills or general culture. Based on the theory of multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996), this study will deeply integrate short videos into English reading classes themed on ceramic culture and design an empirical study on systematic empowering paths.

2. Corpus Sources and Theoretical Foundation

2.1 Corpus Sources

The corpus of this study is derived from the series of works on the Xiaohongshu video creator "Shanbai"'s account, with representative works selected for analysis. The videos on "Shanbai"'s account are 5 to 10 minutes long on average, focusing mainly on the making of traditional handicrafts. They boast exquisite visuals, with framing, camera movement and color comparable to those of documentaries. Most of his videos tell stories through visuals, ambient sounds and background music, creating a quiet, focused and healing atmosphere, thus serving as an important platform for the dissemination of ceramic culture.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

In 1996, the New London Group published the article "A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures", proposing a meta-language centered on "design" that covers six dimensions: linguistic, visual, auditory, gestural, spatial, and multimodal, which laid the foundation for this study. Foreign research directions include studies on classroom teaching design (Freebody, 2004), studies on the theoretical framework for cultivating multiliteracies (Kress, 2003), and empirical studies on cultivating multiliteracies in multimodal environments (Jewitt & Kress, 2003), etc.

Research on the cultivation of multiliteracies in China's foreign language circle started a little late but has made rapid progress.

First is the stage of introduction and presentation, during which basic concepts are introduced and explained. For example, Hu Zhuanglin explored the evolution of the relationship between language and perception modes (2004), as well as the meaning and levels of multiliteracies (2007); Gu Yueguo (2007) analyzed multimedia and multimodal learning methods; Zhu Yongsheng (2008) discussed multiliteracies and their implications for China's teaching reform; Wei Qinhong (2009) explored

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multimodality and the cultivation of college students' multiliteracies.

Second is the stage of theoretical research and practical application, in which localized explorations are carried out. For instance, Zhang Delu explored the design of multimodal foreign language teaching and the use of modalities (2010), the teaching and cultivation model of multiliteracies (2012), and the teaching choices for cultivating the multiple abilities of foreign language undergraduates (2018); Zhang Yijun et al. (2011) explored the practical framework of multiliteracies; Wei Qinhong (2013) attempted to interpret the theory of multiliteracies; Huang Lihe explored the extended learning system of college English from the perspective of multimodal theory (2014), and explored the construction and application of a multimodal corpus for interpreting teaching from the dimensions of authentic experience and modeling (2021); Zhu Jing (2016) explored the cultivation model of college students' English multiliteracies from the perspective of PPT classroom presentations; Feng Dezheng (2017) discussed the teaching design of English language courses based on the theory of multiliteracies; Lei Qian (2018) explored the cultivation model of foreign language undergraduates' multiliteracies by taking improving writing through design-based learning as an example, and so on.

3. A Study on the Content of "Shanbai"'s Video Account from the Perspective of Multiliteracies Theory

Against the backdrop of the digital wave, compared with traditional full-length films and TV works, short videos are notably characterized by being concise and compact. They conform to technological development and user needs, and have gradually become a popular video form among audiences. As an emerging communication medium, short videos have shown significant advantages in various fields such as social entertainment, brand promotion, social public welfare, and knowledge dissemination.Against this backdrop, the "Shanbai" video account makes full use of the formal characteristics of short videos to effectively capture the audience's attention in a short time. Through concise yet compelling content, it deepens the audience's understanding of traditional ceramic culture, thereby promoting the dissemination of such culture. This study selected approximately 50 junior students majoring in traditional sculpture from two classes as the experimental subjects, and mainly chose two videos to play respectively during the courses.

3.1 Content Level

In the framework of multimodal discourse analysis, the core theory of multiliteracies, the content level consists of two dimensions: meaning construction and formal expression. It mainly explores how different modes collaborate to construct complete discourse meaning. The "Shanbai" video account makes full use of the collaboration of multiple modes such as language and visual images to vividly convey the discourse meaning of ceramic culture.

3.1.1 Linguistic Mode

The first video: After the course introduction session, the author played a cultural decoding video about the concept of "ceramics" to all the students. The video is approximately 8 minutes long, and its content

focuses on explaining the core definition, historical origin, and cultural connotations carried by the term "ceramics".The video starts by posing a question: "What is ceramics?" Is it pottery plus porcelain, just porcelain, or common specific items like ceramic bowls? Along with the voiceover come the corresponding images of what people would typically think of as "ceramics".

The video captures attention right from the start, triggering students' thinking and curiosity. The presentation of various familiar scenes is eye-catching, and the combination of audio and visual sensory modalities not only arouses students' interest but also points out the misunderstandings in their perceptions, making them eager to watch further to find the answer.Next, the narrator, with clear and standard pronunciation and a moderate speaking speed, explains respectively in simple and straightforward words, and categorizes the misunderstandings mentioned just now, guiding the audience to get into the swing of things smoothly.

It turns out that the term "ceramics" has multiple meanings from different perspectives. To be specific, the subtitle text summarizes these perspectives.

First, from the perspective of materials, the words "high hardness, corrosion resistance, good insulation, but high brittleness" appear one by one in the video, with each being bolded.Suddenly, the scene shifts. What comes into view is a hand firmly pinching "ceramic" (the material), which is then thrown to the ground. The ceramic shatters immediately, and the animated image of its fragments scattering is played in a loop. The three characters "high brittleness" are inserted diagonally right below the animation, making the previously mentioned property concrete.

Then, the screen suddenly goes black. After a few seconds, the red words appear one by one: "What is china?"It seems to be waiting for the viewers to ponder: is "china" China, porcelain, or a symbol of civilization? With a ten-second countdown, tension and curiosity interweave—both those who know the answer and those who don't are looking forward to the revelation of the puzzle.The voiceover sounds again. The historical and cultural context of ceramics, paired with images, creates a sensory collision between sight and sound. The background music suddenly shifts from soothing to intense. "It is the combination of earth and fire; it is a ritual vessel for sacrifices; it is endowed with the philosophical meaning of the unity of man and nature" — the speaking speed gradually quickens, building up tension, and the listener's heart can't help but rise and fall with the voice.Visual, auditory and linguistic symbols complement each other, jointly conveying the cultural heritage behind ceramics. This not only creates a good popular science atmosphere but also enhances attractiveness.

At the end of the video, there is a mind map summarizing all the previous content. The concept and cultural connotations of ceramics reappear in front of the eyes. This map integrates various symbols such as previous images, texts and sounds, helping the audience review to strengthen their understanding and memory.

3.1.2 Visual Image Mode

The second video: In the middle of the course, the author played a video about the production process of blue-and-white porcelain for the students, which is approximately ten minutes long.

The video starts by focusing on a pair of rough hands, and various materials are put into a basket, making people can't help but wonder what these materials are. Subtitles such as "kaolin, porcelain stone" then appear at the right time.The porcelain-making master slings the bamboo basket over his back, and the camera pans to follow his steps, with the pictures clearly showing the environment where the master is: there is no noisy sound, only the occasional chirping of birds and barking of dogs. This makes viewers unconsciously calm down to watch, while using both vision and hearing to obtain and extract information.The sound of splashing water is ordinary enough, and then subtitles appear: "Washing to remove impurities". After the sound of water comes the sound of feet treading on mud, and the subtitle "Kneading clay: squeezing out air bubbles" shows up. This not only clearly points out the process steps but also explains their significance. The text and natural sounds complement each other, visualizing the craft and breaking down abstract concepts.Still a close-up of hands, the camera focuses on the action of "shaping the blank". The kneaded clay is placed on a rotating wheel, and under the master's hands, raw blanks gradually take shape one by one.

After being air-dried overnight, the next day, morning natural light falls on the raw blanks. The master picks up a trimming knife, bows his head, with his fingers hidden in the shadow, and his ten fingers work together to trim the blanks until they are smooth and even—this is called "trimming the blank".Bullet comments read: "This step really requires patience. The craftsman must be so hardworking." The contrast between light and shadow enhances the three-dimensional effect of the raw blanks and the spatial depth of the frame, making the visual presentation more striking. After the words "trimming the blank" fade away, the scene shifts to night again—just a few seconds suffice to show that these steps are both laborious and time-consuming. Amidst the "crackling" sound of firewood, more comments pop up on the bullet screen: "After firing, they can probably paint patterns on it, right?"Yet a line of text appears on the screen: "After being shaped and trimmed, the clay blanks are air-dried and then biscuit-fired at around 800°C to increase the strength and water absorption of the blanks, making them easy to glaze." It turns out that blue-and-white patterns are painted only after glazing. Each frame is accompanied by a voiceover, highlighting visual symbols; these three elements interweave to offer the audience an engaging, immersive experience.

Finally, text appears in sync with the sound of keyboard typing. Against the backdrop of beautiful blue-and-white porcelain vases, the video briefly reviews the production process of blue-and-white porcelain and summarizes its characteristics, status, and symbolic significance. In this way, viewers, alongside the craftsman in a realistic setting, complete the making of blue-and-white porcelain, resulting in a fully immersive experience.Moreover, with the montage narrative technique, multiple combined shots of day and night quickly convey the passage of time. This video mainly uses a combination of multimodal symbols such as visual demonstrations, natural sound effects, and text annotations to present the production technology and process of blue-and-white porcelain in a comprehensive and three-dimensional way. It makes the abstract technical knowledge, which is difficult to understand with only texts and pictures, visible, audible, and comparable. Compared with a

single text tutorial, it can better arouse students' interest and attract them to take the initiative to explore the details.Bullet comments (text) introduce diverse viewpoints, allowing viewers to encounter both the creator's stance and other viewers' feedback while watching. The collision of such multiple perspectives can guide viewers to recognize that "the same content can have different interpretations," thereby helping them break away from a single perspective, learn to examine issues from multiple angles, and cultivate inclusiveness and objectivity in critical thinking.

3.1.3 The Collaborative Relationship Between Linguistic Mode and Image Mode in the Video

The collaborative mechanism of a certain mode in a short video in function construction is reflected in transforming it into mutual dialogue between multiple modes. Such functional dialogue in popular science short videos needs to realize the following three collaborative modes: interpretive collaboration, reinforcing collaboration, and complementary collaboration (Sun, 2025). The two videos mentioned above embody two of these collaborative modes. For instance, when explaining the concept of "ceramics," the first video mainly adopts the combination of language and visuals. Language can provide straightforward explanations, and visual reception collaborates with it in a two-dimensional and synchronous manner, enabling viewers to receive dual interpretations.

The second video, on the other hand, uses a combination of visual demonstration, subtitle annotations, and bullet comment interactions to enhance emotional resonance. Clear visuals intuitively present the porcelain-making process; subtitle annotations provide textual supplements of key information; and the dynamic interaction between bullet comments and explanations enlivens the video's atmosphere and boosts the level of discussion. This three-dimensional cross combination strengthens the collaboration.

3.2 Cultural Level

In the framework of multimodal discourse analysis, which is the core theory of multiliteracies, the cultural level includes the ideology composed of people's thinking patterns, philosophy of life, living habits, and all social hidden rules, as well as the communication procedures or structural potential that can specifically realize this ideology. The multimodal symbol analysis function of short videos completes the process of cultural decoding.Through the superposition of multiple methods such as static pictures → dynamic images → audio explanations → text supplements, concepts are deepened step by step, forming multi-dimensional memory points. Information is reinforced, and students thus develop a systematic understanding of the word "ceramics". It can be seen that the combination of multiple modes is more effective than a single mode. Such a combination can effectively reduce cognitive load and enhance students' cultural decoding ability and critical thinking.

4. Conclusion

This study integrates the theory of multiliteracies with the media characteristics of short videos, and constructs a set of practical paths suitable for English reading teaching of ceramic culture. Teaching practice shows that short videos, by visualizing the craft process and concretizing abstract terms, have significantly reduced students' cognitive load and improved the efficiency of understanding and

memorizing professional terms;Meanwhile, its multimodal collaborative mechanism has effectively assisted in the analysis and interpretation of cultural symbols, and practically improved students' cultural interpretation ability, critical thinking, and technical application literacy. However, this study still has limitations such as a limited sample size and a narrow coverage of cultural themes. In the future, the effectiveness and applicability of this path can be further verified in more diverse cultural teaching themes.

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