

Feasibility of Using WeChat to Promote College English Listening and Speaking Course Teaching

Yonggang Zhao

School of Foreign Languages, China West Normal University
China West Normal University (CWNU)
Nanchong, China

Abstract—This paper aims to analyze the feasibility of using WeChat for college English listening and speaking courses. Based on the changing background of the times, the article analyzes the dilemma of the traditional listening and speaking course teaching, the advantages of the combination of WeChat with listening and speaking courses, the soft and hard conditions of using WeChat for English teaching and provides advice for teachers to carry on English listening and speaking course teaching by WeChat. The paper thinks that although the use of WeChat for English education is still in the exploratory stage, its objective conditions for promoting college students' English listening and speaking are mature, and it is also the common needs and expectations of many teachers and students. Therefore, related exploration has great potential and prospects for development. With the rapid development of mobile learning, it is also expected that WeChat will release more energy in the field of education and promote the development of educational informationization.

Keywords—WeChat; Feasibility; Listening and Speaking Course; Multimodal discourse analysis

I. INTRODUCTION

The Outline of the National Medium & Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan (2010-2020) [1] emphasizes that "information technology must be given high priority because of its revolutionary impact on the development of education". The outline offers to "integrate education information into the overall development of national informationization strategy and advance the deployment of the educational information network". It also requires that the education information system covering all types of schools in urban and rural areas will be basically established before 2020 to promote the modernization of educational content, teaching methods and methods. The promotion of policies has greatly accelerated the process of informatization of higher education. As a result, many modern means of communication such as QQ, Weibo and WeChat have been favored by teachers and students, among which, WeChat, as an instant messaging tool, is accumulating a large user in the field of educational practice of colleges and universities since its launch. In addition to being used as a general means of communication, it has attracted many teachers and students both in course learning and teaching. Especially, its distinctive features different from the general communication platform have attracted the

attention of teachers and learners in the teaching of college English listening and speaking. Based on this, what is the theoretical basis for using WeChat for college English listening and speaking? What characteristics of it are conducive to the teaching of college English listening and speaking courses? How do teachers use WeChat to teach college English listening and speaking? All these questions will be discussed in this article.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS

The English Listening and Speaking Course is a course on the exchange of meaning which requires both the ability to accurately obtain information on English speakers, and the ability to clearly express their intentions in English so that the interpersonal skills are accessible in everyday communication. Traditional listening and speaking courses focus on cultivating language input and output. However, with the rapid development of information technology, people are increasingly aware that communication is a complex process that requires both language and non-language means. Thus, multimodal discourse analysis provides a theoretical basis for the combination of modern technologies such as multimedia and listening and speaking course.

Multimodal discourse analysis was first proposed by Kress and Van Leeuwen (1996) [2], which was developed on the basis of the systemic functional linguistics founded by Halliday. Halliday (1985) [3] pointed out that in the specific social life scenarios of interpersonal communication; different people use various symbols and various resources to realize the construction and communication of meaning. Therefore, the expression of meaning is realized by multiple modal symbols and all these varieties of different symbol resources are multimodal. Based on this, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) [4] define multimodality as all channels and media involved in communication. It can be considered to use multiple channels and multiple teaching modes to mobilize multiple sensory interactions of learners so that multiple sensory interactions can enhance learning input effects. According to this, multimodal discourse analysis can be regarded as the use of a variety of sensations such as hearing, vision, and tactile, through the various means of language, image, sound, and motion and symbolic systems to communicate. The most striking feature of

The research is financed by Education Development Research Center of Sichuan Province (Project No. CJF14004)

this theory is that it not only pays attention to the relationship between the language system and the semantic structure itself and its relationship with social culture and psychological cognition, but also advocates other forms of expression such as images, sounds, colors, animations and so on. Moreover, multimodality exists in many aspects of our daily lives, such as our TV series with sound and color, textbooks, magazine or advertisements with words and pictures, etc. (Holsanova (1999) [5]. As Professor Gu Yuguo (2007) [6] pointed out, multimodality is based on more than 20 sensory systems owned by the human body. In communication, all the music, dance, color and other resources involved in the construction of meaning, as well as human facial expressions, eyes, gestures, postures, emotions, costumes, etc. all have the potential to reveal information and complete the expression or construction of meaning. According to this, in the teaching of English listening and speaking classes, teachers should incorporate symbols (language systems and semantic structures, etc.) and non-verbal symbols (images, sounds, colors, actions, expressions, tastes, etc.) into the theoretical framework of discourse analysis and mobilize multiple modalities for teaching activities to improve students' participation in initiative, and avoid the feeling of boredom and resistance caused by single-modal teaching.

III. THE PRACTICAL BASIS OF THE COMBINATION OF WECHAT AND LISTENING AND SPEAKING COURSES

With the advent of the mobile Internet era being supported by the high-tech informatization, the traditional listening and speaking teaching mode faces enormous challenges. In line with the trend of "Internet + education", the use of online platforms for the teaching of listening and speaking courses has become a trend. Combination of WeChat and listening and speaking courses in this article is an attempt under such circumstances.

A. *The dilemma of college English listening and speaking course teaching*

The traditional teaching of listening and speaking courses has not adapted to the needs of the times in many aspects and has fallen into difficulties in many aspects.

First, large class teaching is not conducive to the effective development of listening and speaking activities. At present, most college English teaching in China must face a reality: compared with professional courses, its status is relatively weak. Therefore, it's common for a large class or even several classes combined to start classes. This is evident for the disadvantages of English teaching which is shown obviously that teachers can't take care of all the students, and students are difficult to get the opportunity to show them in the classroom.

Second, classroom interactions are not easy to develop. English listening and speaking courses have high requirements for classroom interaction. However, in actual classroom teaching, this kind of interaction is difficult to develop. The reason is not only because there are too many students in the class, but also because individual factors of the students are ignored. For example, teachers arrange learning tasks according to uniform standards, making it difficult for students

with learning difficulties or introverts to integrate into the classroom. At the same time, the interactive classrooms of the traditional listening and speaking classrooms are all face-to-face communication. The content of the students' answers to the questions and the level of the language displayed are unreservedly presented to all students. This very "formal" communication binds the students' free expression and even make some students with a higher score in English reluctant to use English to express their opinions and opinions because of fear of mistakes.

Third, the use of listening and speaking materials is difficult to meet the needs of students. On one hand, it is difficult to provide the materials with a large amount and comprehensive information required by students in the limited classroom teaching time; On the other hand, the materials prepared in advance according to the teaching requirements is often not about the most concerned topic of students at present, so the boring materials, which are out of the current reality and have little practicality, cannot attract students' interest.

In addition, the natural listening and speaking environment cannot be created, and the communication mode of the classroom is single, which makes it difficult to truly improve the students' listening and speaking ability. In the actual classroom, language is basically the only communication medium yet other symbolic means for communication are neglected and the functions of students' eyes, hands, ears, mouth and brain cannot be fully mobilized, so the both teaching and learning can get poor outcomes.

Finally, it is not conducive to the student's learning monitoring and effective evaluation. The teachers who are engaged in college English teaching come from foreign language colleges, but the students come from other colleges. Except in the classroom, teachers and students have fewer opportunities to meet, so it is difficult to monitor the students' after-school learning, and even it is not convenient to answer the students' questions. The teacher's evaluation of the students also depends on the results of the final exam, and it is difficult to learn the true learning level of the students in a dynamic and comprehensive way.

B. *The advantages of using WeChat in listening and speaking course*

The advantages are obvious using WeChat in listening and speaking courses because it can make up for the drawbacks of traditional teaching.

First, the establishment of different levels of discussion groups can overcome the drawbacks shown in large class teaching. Teachers can set up different discussion groups according to the actual situation, arrange learning tasks according to the diverse learning needs of students at different levels, and let all students communicate in a group that meets their own level, in order that everyone can attain the goal of communicating without obstacles. Students can use WeChat to communicate and learn at any time. WeChat group and its circle of friends can provide effective support for class and team communication. Students can exchange learning experiences and discuss a certain topic in their own group.

Second, we can use WeChat to obtain a wealth of practical and different types of materials. The WeChat platform can be used between teachers and students, students and students to collect and share English teaching materials that meet the characteristics of the times. These materials different from the single, boring and pure language knowledge in the textbook can meet the requirements of students in many aspects, and a wide variety of text, video and audio materials can also greatly enhance students' interest in learning English.

Third, the use of WeChat can help to establish a natural communication environment and diversify the means of communication. WeChat can send multiple forms of messages, either text messages with emoticons or voice messages, even send a small video to the receiver. Also, video calls and real-time voice intercoms can be directly made, which converts cold text into expressions, converts them into voices, and turns them into videos, making communication more vivid and three-dimensional.

Fourth, WeChat communication facilitates the development of interaction. Through WeChat voice messaging and video calling functions, students can break the embarrassment and fear of face-to-face dialogue in English while exercise students' listening and oral English. Even students who are poor in learning and introverted in characteristics are willing to communicate on the public platform because this asynchronous communication is more concentrated between a single student and the teacher, the information sent by a student to the public platform is not visible to other students. Students can also ask questions from the teacher through WeChat private chat and send their own oral exercise audio to teachers to comment and correct. Moreover, depending on the situation, students can randomly create a discussion group to discuss and communicate the teaching content.

In addition, WeChat can promote students' independent learning. Listening and speaking training requires a specific context. In general, in non-English speaking countries, leaving the classroom context, it is difficult to carry out the activities, but WeChat has overcome this shortcoming. Through WeChat, students can chat with their friends in English with voice or video anytime and anywhere. In this way, the characteristics of WeChat communication without time and space restrictions have changed the classroom teaching mode of college English. The college English teaching is no longer concentrated in the classroom and more learning exchanges are transferred to the classroom. Students can formulate learning plans according to their actual situation, arrange learning content and improve listening and speaking skills through independent learning.

Finally, the use of WeChat helps to monitor the student's learning process and based on more realistic understanding the student's level of listening and speaking to make a more realistic evaluation. For the learning materials and the learning tasks sent by the WeChat platform, the teacher can monitor by use the method of querying whether the student signs in or not. The teacher can also use the WeChat to save the voice of the students' usual practice, which is convenient for tracking the progress of the students improving their learning progress. It can objectively and fairly evaluate students' learning level.

C. The favorable environmental factors of using WeChat in college English listening and speaking training

There is a mature software and hardware environment for using WeChat in the teaching of college English listening and speaking.

On the one hand, WeChat has a high usage rate and high recognition, and is widely welcomed by the college students, and its popularity is also high. WeChat is mainly based on mobile client and supplemented by PC client which makes most WeChat users better able to communicate with smart phones and WeChat apps in iPad to better support mobile learning. Learners can use free time to take out the mobile device to view the information pushed by the teacher, chat with the teacher to communicate with the problems encountered in the learning, participate in the discussion in the WeChat group, and even watch the videos pushed by the teacher in the environment with Wi-Fi hotspots. It can be carried out during bus rides, queues, and breaks which breaks the time and space constraints. These functions are in line with the daily study habits of today's college students and are therefore favored.

On the other hand, it does not require high hardware conditions and is easy to operate. First, most colleges and universities have achieved wireless network coverage and users only need to master the basic operations of the WeChat program to complete communication and sharing resources. Second, WeChat is well compatible with mobile platform systems currently supporting IOS, Android, Symbian, Windows and other systems. It has good features such as "open, interactive, immediacy, easy to operate and other". This is very beneficial for teachers to explore new models of effective English listening and speaking learning in line with the use of WeChat to attract students and enhance their English learning.

IV. THE WAYS OF TEACHERS USING WECHAT TO PROMOTE THE TEACHING OF LISTENING AND SPEAKING COURSES

In the process of using WeChat to carry out English listening and speaking, teachers' guidance and supervision are very important. They play an important role in scrutinizing and pushing information, organizing and monitoring student communication activities, and accurately evaluating students' learning behaviors.

A. To Establish WeChat group, WeChat platform and various discussion groups and arrange listening and speaking tasks according to the actual situation

Teachers should establish a WeChat group to put all students into a circle of friends first, and then divide them into groups of different levels according to their ability level in English listening and speaking in order to assign different levels of listening and speaking exercises to different levels of the team, and finally provide feedback and comments based on the performance and completion of each team member. In due course, it is necessary to dynamically adjust the grouping members or changing the levels of learning tasks according to the progress of students' learning so as to promote the smooth progress of students' listening and speaking activities and help each student's listening and speaking ability can be improved. Teachers also need to establish a public platform to share

learning resources and have the shareholder discuss the resources with other participants. Teachers can also filter the information sent by students to the public platform and select the best to share.

B. To organize, participate in and supervise the students' listening and speaking activities

After the exchange activities of different discussion groups are carried out, the teachers themselves can participate in the student activities through the text or voice communication functions of WeChat at an appropriate time, as an equal member, and discuss with the students on a certain learning theme or problem to direct the activities and improve the quality of the activities. Moreover, the teacher can also use the mobile phone control terminal to check the student's class situation; especially the situation of the listening and speaking activities carried out in different groups and control the rhythm of the whole interaction.

C. To push and share the learning resources

Data push is one of the main tasks of teachers. The variety of listening and speaking materials provided by internet is numerous and mixed, which requires teachers to select both the best quality and the most suitable resources for students. Teaching materials should meet the individualized and differentiated learning needs of students including poor, middle-level and high-level English listening and speaking skills. Of course, teachers can also expand classroom teaching by using pushing materials. For example, some materials should be placed in the classroom for teaching, yet the limited class time cannot accommodate too much information, they can be placed in the WeChat circle for students to practice after class. In this way, the teaching space can be expanded.

D. To communicate with students after class

In the process of college English teaching, students have little chance to communicate face-to-face with teachers except in the class time and fixed counseling time. Therefore, timely and effectively feedbacks are not easy to get when they meet difficulties in learning. Based on this, teachers can compensate for the lack of extracurricular communication effectively by sending text and voice messages through WeChat. In the private chat process of question-and-answer, the teacher can not only answer the students' questions, but also enhance the emotion between the teachers and students in the process of communication.

E. To monitor students learning effectively

Teachers can use WeChat to monitor student execution of the materials and tasks assigned to the WeChat platform. For example, through queries, teachers can see how many students and who subscribe to their WeChat platform. Teachers can also

ask students to provide IDs so as to record students' learning status. Summarizing the problems existing in the teaching according to read the students' homework on the public platform can also help teachers to better adjust the teaching plan and provide targeted counseling on the basis of understanding the learning effect of the students.

F. To help students to manage knowledge and give timely evaluation to their learning

WeChat learning is a piecemeal and fragmented learning, so knowledge only stays in short-term memory and easily forgotten which is not conducive to the formation of systematic and structured knowledge. Therefore, teachers can create knowledge catalogues and set keywords for the once published materials in order to help students to access easily at any time, thus promoting the formation of structured and systematic knowledge from scattered and fragmented contents. Teachers also need to play the role of evaluator, give timely feedback to students, conduct staged evaluations and let students know their own shortcomings and progress in order to adjust their own learning status and give them appropriate positioning to more effectively improve the learning effect.

V. CONCLUSION

With the popularity of mobile devices in China and the wireless network coverage of most university campuses, the function of WeChat has attracted the attention of more and more teachers and learners. Although the use of WeChat for English education is still in the exploratory stage, it has shown great potential and prospects for development. From this, we can predict that the use of WeChat to carry out English mobile learning and promote the English listening and speaking of college students is a matter of course, and this is also the common needs and expectations of both teachers and students. With the rapid development of mobile learning, it can foresee that WeChat will release more energy in the field of education and promote the development of educational information.

REFERENCES

- [1] Outline of National Medium- and Long-Term Education Reform and Development Plan(2010-2020). 2010.7
- [2] Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen, T. Reading Images. The Grammar of Visual Design. London: Routledge, 1996.
- [3] Halliday, M.A.K. & Hasan, R. Language, Context and Text: A Social Semiotic Perspective. Geelong Vic: Deakin University Press, 1985.
- [4] Kress, G. & Van Leeuwen, T. Multimodal Discourse. The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication. London: London Arnold, 2001.
- [5] Holsanova, J. 1999. Reception of multimodality: applying eye tracking methodology in Multimodal research. Routledge Handbook of Multimodal Analysis. New York: Routledge.
- [6] Gu Yuguo. Analysis of Multimedia • Multimodal Learning. Foreign Language Electrotechnical Teaching, 2007(2).