An Empirical Study on the English Verbs Studies of Art ESLs in the Multimodal Approach

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Abstract: This study tested 48 English as Second Language Learners (ESLs), who are art students in Chinese college, on their studies of English verbs using different multimodal approaches. The 48 students were divided into 3 groups. Materials of 16 verbs respectively with annotations in Chinese and English, pictures reflecting the word itself and with short video prescribing pronunciation were given to the students for a test. With deliberately preparation, the first test was carried out and the scores were recorded. After a week, a chronological test was held again to test if the students could still master the 16 verbs. This study indicates that comparing videos or words, pictures could help the art students best in their studies of English verbs.

1. Introduction

The National College Entrance Examination in China would normally labeled high school students into 3 categories: the students who specialized in Science, Liberal arts, Art and PE. In the year 2020, there are totally 10.7 million high school graduates in China, while there are 1.07 million students who specialized in Art. Although there is no official figures to show whose academic studies are better, the former two would normally boast a higher admission scores to college than the last one. Therefore it's believed that the academic performance for most of the students who specialized in Art and PE are comparatively lower than the Science and Liberal arts students, especially in their English levels. For most of the Art students, they spent their whole high school time on learning artistic theories and training so their basic English knowledge and grammar framework is weak.(MA,2018) Most of the Art and PE students show no preference in English Studies; however, due to the English study protocols in China, the English study would not cease after the College Entrance Examination, which means that all college students have to continue their English studies in College and are even expected to study better. Furth more, highly expectations in English performance are given to all the students especially to those who are preparing their studies in English-speaking countries. However, during the teaching processes, most of the teachers would only be disappointed to get that those Art and PE students are hard to cultivate due to poor vocabularies, unfamiliarity with the grammatical system and shyness in expressing themselves.

For ESLs, there is no need to emphasize the importance of vocabulary abilities. The knowledge of vocabulary and grammar would be the bedrock for writing and comprehensive use of language (YE

Yunping, 2002). Vocabulary knowledge is fundamentally necessary for mastering another language. Development of productive vocabulary knowledge is important to the development of L2 writing performance (Johnson, M. D., A. Acevedo & L. Mercado, 2016). Since the Chinese ESLs specialized in Art and PE have shown low performance in English studies, it is estimated that their vocabulary level would be lower than the science and literature students. Nevertheless, they have shown particular specialties in art,so it would be interesting to see if their talents in art would help them in their acquisition of abstract verbs.

2. Multimodal Learning Approach

In 1996, The New London Group proposes the conception of multi-elements reading and writing abilities, which combines the multimodal discourse analysis with language teaching. And since then, the research on multimodal language teaching started to prevail. The research mainly focused on the effect of multimodal teaching modes on language abilities, among which the research on writing would be the trend, for example, the revolution on the contemporary class teaching practice (Edwards-Groves, 2011), the evaluation on the multi-modal writing (Hafner&Ho 2020); regarding the reading abilities, some research discussed the effects of multi-modal tasks on students' critical reading and cognition. Examples of multimodal teaching may include, but not limited to: digital storytelling, virtual gaming, kinetic typography, hyperlinked texts/stories, blending visual and print media, audio recordings, and writing and editing wikis.There have been several studies findings showed that dual modes is more effective than single modes on vocabulary acquisition. Based on the finding of Al-Seghayer (2001), it revealed that words with definitions and pictures and definitions and videos were learned better than those with definitions only. And according to Akbulut's (2007) , the modes with definition and videos was significantly more effective than text-only by measuring words recognition, meaning recognition, and meaning recall. However, there are also some studies show that single modes has the same effects in helping learners to learn and retain nouns as the dual modes(Boers et al., 2017).

3. Research

3.1 Research Questions:

1. Given the context of the picture word and video, which modularity would help them to enrich their acquisition of abstract verbs better？
2. If the students who specialized in art has great gift from art, could the art pictures help them to memorize verbs easily?
3. Assuming that the pictures would have the students to memorize verbs better, how much it would help？

3.2 Participants

48 students from a Sino-US cooperation program of Shanghai publishing and printing college volunteered to participate in this research. All participates are students who specialized in arts. During their high school they have devoted themselves in drawing and designing courses. Most of them would spend 8-12 hours on drawing each day. Apart from drawing and graphic design, they would also have to learn English for about 10 hours each week. The reason for picking students in Sino-US cooperation program is that they have a great need in mastering English since most of them are getting prepared to study in USA for a bachelor degree and all of them are desired to pass the CET 6 test in college.

6 students out of 48 have passed the band 4 English test (CET 4), of which the vocabulary requirement should reach 4200 words. None of the students have passed the band six English test in China, which is also called College English Test (CET 6). CET 6 asks for a vocabulary level of 5500 English words (National College English Test Syllabus).

48 students were divided into 3 groups according to their scores on a comprehensive English test they took, and the 6 students who had passed CET4 were dispatched to this 3 groups. Each group have some students who are capable of oral speaking and also writing, and each group also contains some of the students whose English are rather poor. This kind of group classification is to ensure that the English level of each group is equivalent with others so the subsequent experiments could be implemented.

3.3 Materials

The researchers have prepared 13 abstract verbs from CET 6 level. These verbs are: scoop, swing, clamp, tumble, wail, meditate, vomit, brawl, tweak, wiggle, dash, obstruct, and bounce. These verbs have been demonstrated in three forms to the three groups, respectively the words with the English and Chinese annotations(definitions); pictures prescribing what the words mean(definition+pictures); also with short videos from the app Tik-tok published by a Chinese blogger (definition+pictures+sound+videos). The first two kinds of materials were provided in printed papers while the last one was sent to participants' mobile devices. Short videos combined with an animation associated with the word, pronunciation of the words and also with the sound marks, for example, with the word "tweak", the animation shows an alpaca tweaking in a funny way while for the word "scoop" there would be an animated character Shin-chan scooping a watermelon. Those three forms of the abstract verbs demonstrated separately in the form single mode, dual modes and triple modes.

3.4. Procedures

The test was divided into three steps.

Step 1, Questionnaire. All the participants were asked to fulfill a questionnaire towards their opinions and experiences about vocabulary study. For example: what's their favorite way for leaning vocabulary? And do they believe if the pictures could help them to study better?

Step 2, Test on your vocabulary abilities. These 48 students were divided into three groups and the materials in three modalities were handed to them. All of them were told that they've got 20 minutes to study all these words and then a test would be carried on so that they have to try their best to memorize as many words as possible. During the preparation they could read or write or even look up at these words in dictionaries. Most of them finish their work in 15 minutes. When indicating to the researchers that they were ready, the test was taken. They have to choose the right meaning of the word in a multiple choice words set.

Step 3, One week after the first test, all of the 48 students were asked to take a delayed test again. Before that, all of them haven't reviewed these words again during the whole week. They have to recall the meaning of the 16 words and then the scores were recorded again.

4. Results

4.1 Analysis on the questionnaires.

The questionnaire mainly discusses the experiences and also opinions on these participants when learning and mastering new verbs. According to the questionnaire, about 57.5% of the participants would prefer using pictures to memorize the words, while 60% of them would use pictures to

memorize words in actual studying. Only 22.5% of the students are satisfied with the effects and efficiencies on memorizing words using pure text.80% students are satisfied with the way of memorizing words with short video as well as using pictures. 37.5% of the students deeply believe that as the students who major in art would have a better and more efficient way to memorize words using pictures as they chose that it would be extremely possible for art students to master English words using pictures. 35% of the students believe that short videos would help them more to study vocabularies. According to the questionnaire, it could be presumed that the students would prefer the way of using pictures and videos much more than using pure texts.

4.2 Analysis on the tests.

It is reported the best duration of online videos is six minutes in order to attract and sustain students' attention and ensure their engagement to the videos (Guo et al. 2014). According to the questionnaire, students themselves would also believe that short videos may help them to memorize words better, but it also causes some side effects. The Stanford University Learning Development Laboratory builds a mobile learning model to cultivate learners' language skills. Research results show that the mobile learning environment is changeable and learners' attention is distracted in this environment (Ying JIANG, 2018). Due to the observation of the researchers, it is found that most of the students would usually be distracted from studying when using cell phones or mobile devices, as they would easily switch to other apps to either review the news or chat online with their friends. The entertaining property of the mobile phones itself would not only cause distractions but also affect students' engagements. Researchers such as Eagleton believe that learners lack attention, participation and assessment skills during online learning, and tend to browse the web quickly without stopping to read and think (Eagleton, M.B, 2002). However, as discussed earlier, we should also admit that due to a lot of advantages of using mobile phones to study, it could also be used as a complementary to the campus studies. By using short videos, students can memorize words, imitate pronunciations, repeat meanings and also know the applications of the verbs. Last but not least, they could also use some fracture times to manage their studies.

4.3 Findings

The Paired-Sample T test was carried out to test which group has a better performance for mastering words.

By observing the figures showed by the paired sample T, group 2(P=0.007<0.01) has a significant differences between 2 tests, which means that the results for students using videos to learn words have a significant difference in a short term. While there are no significant difference between group 1 (P=0.809>0.05) and group 3 (P=0.907>0.05) in terms of review or time. The results from the paired-sample T test showed that group 2(M=92±12.07) has a better performance for the first time while group 3 has a better performance for the second test (M=90.91±18.14).So it could be assumed that although the students using videos could help them memorize best at first, in a certain time frame, using multimodal learning approach would make students forget most. Nevertheless, the group using pictures has a good performance before and after and the mean difference (d=0.91) is the lowest in the three groups. Group 2 has the largest mean difference (d=14.67). The most traditional way for memorizing words as group 1 has the worst mean (M=80.83) in the first test and the mediate score (M=79.17, d=1.67), therefore the traditional words studying methods have proved to be the worst way. When preparing for the urgent examination, students could use videos to simulate their brains to study. So during this study, it could be assumed that students who specialized in art could use pictures to establish their studies of English verbs.

Table 1 Results of PAIRED-SAMPLE T TEST

Paired-Sample T test					
Group	Pair (M±SD)		d (pair1-pair 2)	t	p
	pair 1	pair 2			
Group 1	80.83±13.11	79.17±18.32	1.67	0.248	0.809
Group 2	92.00±12.07	77.33±20.86	14.67	3.143	0.007**
Group 3	91.82±14.01	90.91±18.14	0.91	0.12	0.907

5. Conclusion

Based on the research, we can see that dual modes could help EFLs learn vocabulary better. While as EFLs who specialized in art, pictures have a good impact on students' study. The differences are now only shown on their mean scores, but also shown on a chronological study.

This study has indicated that using pictures related to the word could help the art students perform better, but it only discussed the students who specialized in art and it failed to compare the students in science or literature. So in the further studies, the compare studies between students who majored in art and in science or literature could be held. Moreover, the studies only focused on vocabulary studies. Further studies could be focused on the delivery of courses, for example, should the instructor use more multimodal approaches in their PPT materials or not? Would picture be enough for the art students?

Acknowledgments

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