

# A Bibliometric Review of Multimodal Foreign Language Teaching Research (2000-2020)

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**Abstract:** With the development of social semiotics and multimodal discourse analysis, multimodal foreign language teaching has gradually become the focus in the field of foreign language teaching research. This study makes a visual analysis of 392 articles on multimodal foreign language teaching from the Web of Science Core Collection. The methods of descriptive statistics and bibliometrics are used to systematically comb the development status and trend of multimodal foreign language teaching research in recent 20 years. It's hoped that this study can provide a reference for future research.

**Keywords:** Multimodal Foreign Language Teaching; Visualized Analysis; Development Trend

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## Introduction

The term 'modality' has a long history, which began in the 1990s and has attracted more and more attention in the field of foreign language education. With the development of society and the progress of science and technology, especially with the wide application of network, multimedia and digital technique, symbols such as image, color, sound and action are no longer in a secondary position in modern communication, but instead language is combined with other modes to form a wider range of resources when constructs meaning. Thus, 'multimodality' is a phenomenon that uses various senses such as hearing, vision and touch to communicate through language, image, sound, action and so on. And multimodal teaching can be understood as that teachers and students fully engage in the multimedia environment, such as video, film editing, recording, pictures, graphics, objects, props, etc., to obtain, transmit and receive information (Dou, 2021).

## 1. Methods

### 1.1 Data collection

The data source of this study is from the Web of Science Core Collection database. In order to ensure the exhaustiveness of data, words 'multimodal \*', 'foreign language', 'English' and 'teaching' are searched as topics. Document types include article, review and proceedings paper and the retrieval time period is 2000-2020. In the preliminary search, 451 documents are filtered. Processed by Cite Space's duplication function, the number of final valid data is 392.

### 1.2 Analytical tool

The analytical tool used in this study is Cite Space 5.7.R5, a Java application in a visualization software which can present mapping knowledge domains to analyze the development and trend of a research field.

## 2. Results and Discussions

### 2.1 General characteristics

The research on multimodal foreign language teaching is on the rise as a whole, which has mainly experienced four development stages. Stage 1: the slow development period (2003-2012). At this stage, the research on multimodal foreign

language teaching was in its infancy, where the methods and tools were immature, and the development was relatively slow. Stage 2: the period of rapid development (2012-2015). After 2012, the number of articles published increased significantly, from 20 in 2013 to 45 in 2015. Stage 3: the period of rational development (2015-2018). At this stage, the development was relatively stable, which basically maintained at around 45 papers per year. Stage 4: the period of prosperity (2018-2020). The strengthening of international cooperation and the development of interdisciplinary research had greatly advanced the study.

## 2.2 Discipline distribution



Figure 1. Discipline distribution

In terms of discipline distribution, multimodal foreign language teaching research mainly involves the fields of education, linguistics, social sciences, computer science, humanities and arts, psychology and so on, which shows significant interdisciplinary characteristics. Among many disciplines, scholars in the fields of education and educational research (33.9%), linguistics (32.2%) and computer science (8.9%) have the highest number of research findings.

## 2.3 Keywords and emerging hotspots

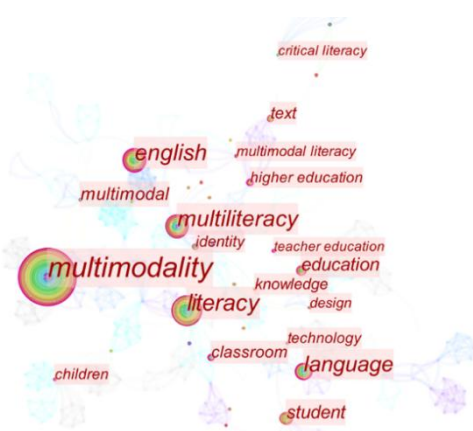


Figure 2. Keywords distribution

Top 20 Keywords with the Strongest Citation Bursts

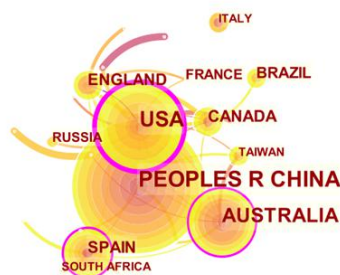
Keywords	Year	Strength	Begin	End	2003 - 2020
student	2003	4.66	2017	2020	-----
multiliteracy	2003	4.65	2018	2020	-----
english	2003	4.05	2015	2020	-----
multimodal	2003	3.54	2015	2018	-----
literacy	2003	3.47	2018	2020	-----
text	2003	3.17	2017	2020	-----
knowledge	2003	2.98	2017	2020	-----
english language learner	2003	2.4	2018	2020	-----
teacher education	2003	2.33	2017	2020	-----
higher education	2003	2.32	2018	2020	-----
technology	2003	2.21	2015	2017	-----
multimodality	2003	2.15	2015	2016	-----
writing	2003	1.98	2017	2018	-----
framework	2003	1.9	2016	2020	-----
foreign language	2003	1.8	2008	2011	-----
cid	2003	1.78	2013	2014	-----
performance	2003	1.77	2018	2020	-----
new literacy	2003	1.66	2015	2018	-----
college english	2003	1.63	2013	2015	-----
language learning	2003	1.58	2016	2020	-----

Figure 3. Emerging hotspots

As can be seen in Figure 2, in addition to the heated discussion about “multimodality”, “English” and “language”, the keywords “literacy” and “multiliteracy” also occupy a high degree of centrality. According to New London Group, “multiliteracy” includes not only the traditional reading and writing ability, but also the literacy of vision, hearing, smell, taste, space, gesture, culture, and information and technical literacy in the network era (Hu, 2015). As an important cognitive ability in the information age, the cultivation of students’ multiliteracy has become one of the most important objectives of modern education. In addition, high-frequency keywords like “children” and “students” show that currently the research object main focuses on children, and scholars pay more attention to the impact of the application of multimodal teaching resources on students’ actual learning process and learning effect. Furthermore, “knowledge” and “technology” are also highly central keywords. As Hafner (2014) points out, digital technology is the dominant communication media in the postmodern world, which boosts the popularity of multimodal texts that combine writing, image, sound and other modes and can be easily shared in an online affinity space where readers and authors interact with each other.

The citation bursts in Figure 3 reveal the emerging hotspots of multimodal foreign language teaching by investigating word frequency and its changing tendency. As shown in Figure 3, “literacy”, “text” and “knowledge” have attracted much attention in recent years. For English learners, digital media communication has been very common, and there are higher requirements for multimedia literacy. In view of these changes, various text forms related to information and multimedia technology have developed rapidly. Moreover, foreign language teacher education has also received extensive attention from scholars in recent 3 years and the development of the information age also sets higher demands for the ability and literacy of foreign language teachers.

## 2.4 Regional cooperation



**Figure 4.** Regional cooperation network

As can be seen in Figure 4, in the past 20 years, the top 3 countries in terms of the number of articles published on multimodal foreign language teaching are China, America and Australia, followed by Spain, Canada, England and Brazil. Compared with developed countries, the cooperative relation among developing countries and other countries is relatively weak. Although China is the country with the largest number of papers, the 3 main clusters of national cooperation networks are centered on America, Spain and Australia.

## 3. Conclusion

Nowadays, researches on multimodal foreign language teaching are in the stage of prosperity, in which the fields of the cultivation of multimodal literacy, the application of digital technology and the reform of foreign language teaching modes in colleges and universities are developing rapidly. However, academic circles still lack well-known experts and scholars to promote the in-depth development of multimodal foreign language teaching. While continuously producing achievements in scientific research, scholars should meanwhile strengthen academic exchanges among institutions and countries so as to promote further cooperation and development in this field.

## References

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