Research on the Multimodal Teaching Characteristics and Foregrounding Methods of High-Quality English Courses

Wuqi[1,2], Samah Hatem Almaki[3]

[1]City University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, [2]Jiangxi University of Science and Technology, Gan Zhou, China, [3]City University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: 1468964885@qq.com

Abstract
High-quality courses gather a variety of teaching tools such as verbal modality, behavioral modality and PPT combination modality, which can better highlight the teaching content and attract students' attention. By analyzing the foregrounding means of teaching in high-quality English courses, we found that teachers use a variety of modalities in their courses to achieve foregrounding teaching effects. In the verbal modality, they often use phonetic deviation, lexical deviation, syntactic deviation, quantitative deviation and content deviation to highlight the teaching content; in the behavioral modality, they make good use of body language and facial expression to enhance the teaching effect; and in the PPT modality, they use underlining, bolding, inserting vivid pictures/concise charts and combining with video and audio to analyze the key points of teaching. The use of these multimodal tools attracts students' attention, responds to their psychology, and assists them in receiving information more effectively.
Keywords: High-Quality Courses, Multimodal Teaching, Foregrounding

Introduction
High-Quality English Courses are integral to effective language education, focusing on delivering instruction that meets rigorous academic standards while addressing the diverse needs of learners. The concept of HQECs encompasses various dimensions, including well-structured curricula, effective pedagogical approaches, and continuous improvement through professional development.

Through literature collation, it is found that the domestic and foreign research on high-quality courses can be divided into three categories. （1）Research on the definition of high-quality courses， for example, Brown (2018) defines HQECs as courses that not only meet the

rigorous academic standards but also cater to the diverse needs of learners, incorporating effective pedagogical strategies and resources (Brown, 2018). Hattie (2015) highlights that HQECs are characterized by clear learning objectives, rigorous assessment practices, and a supportive learning environment (Hattie, 2015). Richards and Rodgers (2014) emphasize that HQECs involve well-structured curricula that integrate language skills development with real-world applications (Richards &Rodgers, 2014). Tomlinson (2017) adds that differentiation and adaptability are key components, ensuring that courses are responsive to individual learner needs (Tomlinson 2017). (2) Research on the construction of high-quality courses.

Modular course design has gained prominence as a strategy for enhancing the effectiveness of HQECs. Zhang, Wang, and Li (2022) demonstrate that modular courses can improve learner engagement and academic achievement by providing clear, focused segments of instruction (Zhang, Wang, & Li, 2022). Bond and Bedenlier (2021) argue that modular design supports personalized learning paths and facilitates the integration of technology-enhanced learning resources, which are essential for maintaining high course quality (Bond & Bedenlier, 2021). （3） Research on professional development of teacher in the background of high-quality curriculum. For example, Tian proposed that in the background of high-quality courses, it requires joint efforts from two aspects to promote teachers' professional development: the teachers themselves and the external environment, such as schools (Tian, 2018).

To summarize, the research on high-quality course has been fruitful so far, from conceptual definition, curriculum construction to teacher development, however, it has not yet touched the core issue of the multimodal discourse and its educational function. Moreover, multimodal studies have mainly focused on academic texts, movie, posters, paintings, and studies on the multimodal features and functions of high-quality English courses are extremely rare. High-quality English courses often integrate a variety of teaching tools such as verbal modality, behavioral modality and PPT combined modality, and what kind of teaching functions are played by the use of various modalities is the question we want to focus on. Therefore, we have conducted a preliminary exploration of multimodal teaching tools and their functions in university English high-quality courses by applying the theories of multimodality and foregrounding.

Literature Review
Multimodal Discourse Analysis
Since the 1990s, Western scholars have found that the study of linguistic discourse alone cannot really analyze and explore discourse in depth and comprehensively, so the theory of multimodal discourse analysis began to gradually take shape. Multimodality refers to the communicative product or communicative process that combines multiple symbol systems, such as modalities. Multimodal discourse analysis, on the other hand, is a discourse analysis perspective that looks at all communicative modalities (language, images, sounds, body language, facial expressions, etc.) as meaning-generating resources to be studied. In the process of communication, each modality cooperates with each other to complete a complete communicative activity.

Foregrounding Theory
The concept of "foregrounding" originated in the field of Western painting, which means that the painter highlights the artistic image he wants to show from the background of other

paintings in order to attract the attention of the viewers, so as to achieve a certain kind of artistic effect that the painter wants to achieve. Later, this concept was introduced into stylistics and became an important concept in the study of stylistics, and its content was constantly enriched and improved in the process of its gradual formation. Mukarovsky of the Prague school considers foregrounding as the opposite of automatization (the use of expressions that do not attract attention, communicating in the usual, natural language, which the receiver of the message understands without effort), the use of language that deviates from the norm and draws attention to itself. In terms of expression, automatization conforms to the characteristics of popular perception and is aimed solely at achieving interpersonal interaction, whereas foregrounding implies going beyond or deviating from the linguistic conventions of expression, not only for the purpose of achieving interpersonal interaction, but also focusing on the singularity of the effect of the expression. Subsequently, Halliday (1971) made a clear distinction between the concepts of prominence and foregrounding on this basis, arguing that prominence refers to the fact that some particular linguistic expressions used by the author are not intentionally arranged and are not highly motivated, while foregrounding refers to the fact that the deviations from the conventional expressions used by the author are intentional (Halliday, 1971). Leech (1969) further categorizes deviations into eight categories; they are lexical deviations, phonological deviations, grammatical deviations, writing deviations, semantic deviations, register deviations, dialectal deviations, and historical period deviations (deviation theory) (Leech, 1969).

Applying the theory of foregrounding to analyze the multimodal discourse used by teachers in high-quality English courses, we can found that the teachers use a variety of foregrounding means to attract the learners' attention, make their classes lively, highlight the content, and ultimately achieve the teaching purpose.

Methodology
Research Settings
The research subjects of this paper are 10 winners from The SFLEP (Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press） National Foreign Language Teaching Contest. National Foreign Language Teaching Contest is the earliest national foreign language teaching competition held in China. Since its inception in 2010, it has been successfully held for 15 sessions. It has been selected into the national general college teacher teaching competition catalog for five consecutive years and has won the first place in foreign language competitions. This competition is not only the largest, highest-level and most influential foreign language teaching competition in China, but also covers four levels of higher education: college English, English majors, postgraduate English and vocational college English, becoming an important platform for foreign language teachers in colleges and universities. The competition aims to continuously promote the construction of foreign language teaching staff in colleges and universities, promote teacher development, deepen teaching reforms, and actively explore the construction of a foreign language education system with Chinese characteristics by building a national competition platform.

Research Questions
Starting with the foregrounding theory and the multimodal discourse analysis theory, this paper takes ten high-quality English courses as research materials to discuss the following two

questions: ① What foregrounding methods do the teachers of high-quality English courses use in their multimodal teaching? ② What are the most commonly used foregrounding methods for teachers?

Results and Analysis
In the multimodal discourse context of high-quality courses, verbal modality, behavioral modality, and PPT modality work together to achieve foregrounding. verbal modality refers to the voice intonation, tone of voice, etc; behavioral modality refers to the teacher's gestures, facial expressions; PPT modality refers to the text, pictures, chart, videos used by the teacher.

Foregrounding Analysis of Verbal Modality
Phonetic Deviation
Any language has its own set of phonological system, which contains a variety of pronunciation rules, and when the pronunciation does not conform to these rules, it causes phonological deviation.Leech in 2001 categorized phonological deviation into seven types, which are: omission, mispronunciation, substandardization, special pronunciation, alliteration, grammatical pattern deviation, and phonological pattern deviation. Because teacher's discourse is the standard language for students to learn, phonetic deviation in the form of omission and mispronunciation is less likely to occur in teacher's discourse, while special pronunciation, stress and other forms of phonetic deviation occur in teacher's discourse in order to attract students' attention, and instructors often use phonetic deviation to foreground and ultimately to achieve teaching effect in order to highlight the key points of teaching.

In the selected high-quality English courses, we found that the teachers most often used the following two types of phonetic deviations: stress deviation and special pronunciation. In almost every high-quality course, teachers usually emphasize some words or phrases in order to attract students' attention and highlight the teaching point. The sudden rise in pitch usually draws students' attention and makes them aware of the emergence of the focus of instruction. The use of special pronunciation also often achieves the effect of foregrounding. For example, when teaching Mark Twain's advice to youth, the teacher imitated Mark Twain's hoarse voice and said "obey your parents when they are present", which deviated from the teacher's normal tone of voice and made the students immediately enter the teacher's normal voice. This voice deviates from the teacher's normal tone of voice, so that students immediately enter into the teaching situation, as if Mark Twain is in front of us to tell us that we should listen to their parents, this teaching design to realize the prospect of not only attracting the attention of the students, but also to achieve the teaching effect. We also noticed that when the teacher is teaching the important and difficult points, the speed of voice is usually slower than the normal speed of voice, and there are pauses from time to time, and if the students need to think about, the pause time is longer, and the teacher often stretches the pronunciation of certain words, all of which can be regarded as the teacher's means of realizing the foregrounding in the classroom.

Lexical Deviation
Lexical deviation in literature refers to the temporary creation of new words or giving new meanings to ordinary words. In teachers' discourse, lexical deviation is manifested in the

creation of new words by means of root words, affixes, synthesis, etc. For example, teachers use "right-hand man" to express that the monitor is the teacher's good helper, and use "Polish the apple" to express that the characters in the text like to please the protagonist, which is new to students when they hear these uncommon expressions. It is refreshing for students to hear these, and in order to understand the teacher's meaning, students will pay more attention and listen carefully in order to understand the teacher's meaning.; another example is that when there are synthesized words in the example sentence, more synthesized words will be used to assist students' understanding, for example, when there is midwife in the example sentence, the teacher explains to students that mid- is used as a word prefix in English, it means "in the middle, together with ....", and emphasizes that 'mid' can form more new compound words, such as midterm, midway and so on. All in all, teachers of high-quality courses often use some lexical deviations in their lectures, which not only stimulate students' curiosity, but also help them understand and enhance their memory.

Syntactic Deviation
Syntactic deviations in literature are manifested in the inversion and omission of constituents of sentences, and the excessive length or shortness of sentences. These deviations also exist in the teacher's discourse in the high-quality English classroom. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher uses "good morning my dear friends,here comes my class......" to open the lesson. and "Here comes the time to ......" for the transition of the content, the use of these inverted sentences deviates from the normal syntactic rules and achieves the function of foregrounding.

Quantitative Deviation
In the field of literature, quantitative deviation refers to the fact that some language exceeds the readers' expectations because it occurs too frequently or too infrequently. Similarly, quantitative deviation exists in the teacher's discourse in the high-quality English classroom, such as some words and sentence patterns occurring more frequently in the course. such as "good job, well done......" and the sentence pattern "let's look at, let's come to......". let's look at,let's come......" and so on, and teachers usually repeat the related statements when teaching the key contents in order to deepen students' memory or for other purposes. These quantitative deviations of words, sentence patterns can be seen as a means for teachers to achieve foregrounding.

Content Deviation
Each discourse has a specific topic, content deviation is formed when the teacher deviates from this topic. In high-quality English courses, teachers are able to focus on a specific topic, but most of them will sublimate the topic in the concluding stage, appropriately incorporate the elements of ideology and politics, and stimulate students' thinking, so as to achieve the purpose of foregrounding. For example, the topic "community" leads to "global community of shared future", which helps students to think deeply about the idea that China is actively developing itself, spreading its excellent culture and embracing the world at the same time, so as to cultivate students' global vision.

Foregrounding Analysis of Behavioral Modality
Teachers do not only communicate with students through language only in the classroom, but teachers' non-verbal behaviors such as proxemics, gestures, posture, and expressions are also

driving the teaching and learning. In other words, the construction of the meaning of classroom discourse does not only rely on one verbal modality, but also the teacher's expression, gesture and other behavioral modalities play a crucial role.

Proxemics
Proxemics refers to the physical distance between communicators during the interaction process. In order to more systematically analyze the use of proxemics by teachers in the classroom, we divides proxemics in high-quality English courses into three types for discussion: formal distance, social distance and personal distance. Formal distance refers to the position where the teacher stands around the laptop table or near the whiteboard. The social distance is where the teacher stands in or near the passageways between students' desks, and the personal distance refers to the position where the teacher intentionally stands beside one student.

In the observed high-quality English courses, the teachers often use "social distance" and "personal distance" to attract students' attention and realize the foregrounding . As for social distance，take T4 as an example, the teacher is in the pre-task stage, teaching students the main points of the class, switching positions at the right time, shuttling between the two sides of the podium, attracting the attention of students on both sides, and interacting with them respectively, helping them interpret the details of the text and answering their questions. In this process, the teacher creates a relaxed and interactive classroom atmosphere through a moderate distance, making students feel comfortable and able to express their opinions freely. This proportion reflects that teachers in high-quality classrooms attach importance to creating a positive learning atmosphere through social distance, which is neither too serious nor too intimate. As for personal distance, Personal distance is often seen in group discussions, individual tutoring, and scenes that encourage students to express themselves. This distance helps teachers and students establish a closer connection, especially when students need personalized feedback or guidance. By getting close to students, teachers can make them feel more trustworthy and friendly. The use of personal distance has a positive effect on encouraging students to speak boldly and participate in classroom discussions. Take T3 as an example, the teacher asked the students "What do you usually use your computer for?" and walked into the students to communicate, reducing the teacher's sense of majesty and allowing students to dare to express their ideas. Another example as T8, the teacher organized students to discuss the topic "How can we find amazing things?" and then personally participated in the students' discussion, maintaining a personal distance with the students. At the same time, he also provided relevant suggestions to the students, improved the students' discussion efficiency, and shortened the psychological distance with the students. By shortening the distance, teachers convey their concern for students' individual needs and encourage them to be more proactive in learning. Although this proxemics is not dominant, it plays an important role when it is necessary to stimulate students' participation and provide individual guidance.

Gestures
Gestures are a kind of teaching body language of teachers. Using them in conjunction with verbal modalities can well guide or reinforce students' understanding of the text and enhance students' learning enthusiasm. According to its composition and its function in the

teaching and learning process, gesture can be divided into Icon gestures, metaphor gestures, deictic gestures, symbolic gestures and evaluative gestures (Yang, 2004). Icon gestures are used to depict the shape of objects, in teaching teachers use this gesture to assist language expression, such as letting students understand the size and length of an object; metaphor gestures refer to some of the gestures used by the teacher in the classroom with the meaning of the conventions, such as putting the index finger on the side of the mouth to indicate that the students should be quiet; deictic gestures refer to the directions that teachers point to when they are used to support verbal expression in the classroom, such as front, back, you, me, and him. The symbolic gestures are used to represent abstract concepts and make abstract things more concrete; the evaluative gestures are used to evaluate students' performance, such as thumbs up for praise, and so on. Through observation, it can be found that teachers of high-quality English courses often use some kinds of gestures in the classroom to express their meaning and enhance the infectious force of teaching.

Teachers of high-quality English courses often use various types of gestures to bring them closer to their students and make their students less anxious. The most commonly used gestures are indicative gestures, such as teachers spreading their palms out to the learners when they talk about "you", and pointing to themselves with their hands on their chests when they talk about "me"...., this series of actions can bring the distance between the lecturer and the students closer, so that the students feel the kindness of the teacher, but this kind of gestures can not be very good to achieve the effect of foregrounding, so at this time, the teacher will assist in the use of another type of gestures - icon gestures. for example, For example, when explaining the word "gigantic", the teacher drew a big circle in the air with both hands to make the students understand that the word means "huge", and this gesture foregrounded the content expressed by the word "gigantic" to assist the students' understanding of the word. This visualizes the content of the word and enhances students' understanding and memorization of the word.

Facial Expression
Teachers can also achieve the effect of foregrounding by using appropriate facial expressions when teaching. Teachers can teach a good lesson just as actors can perform a good play, which requires not only singing but also rich gestures and appropriate facial expressions to attract the audience, so teachers should not only combine speaking with doing, but also supplemented with appropriate facial expressions to make their voices and feelings vivid, so as to attract the students and achieve a good effect. In high-quality English courses, teachers are good at using appropriate facial expressions to assist teaching, for example, when teaching traditional Chinese festivals, teachers' facial expressions are different for different themes of festivals. When teaching festivals such as the Spring Festival and the National Day, teachers look happy and smile; while when teaching sad festivals such as the Qingming Festival and the Dragon Boat Festival, teachers look gloomy and sad. These two different facial expressions on the one hand successfully attract students' attention, and on the other hand make learners feel the cultural connotation of these traditional festivals more intuitively. All in all, the appropriate use of facial expressions makes the teaching achieve the effect of prospecting.

Foregrounding Analysis of PPT Combinatorial Modes
PPT, as an important component of multimodal teacher discourse in quality courses, co-constructs the meaning of classroom discourse through visualization. Observation of PPTs used in quality English courses reveals that most PPTs use different means to achieve the effect of foregrounding.

Highlighting Key Texts
The text in PPT is mainly used for teachers to summarize the knowledge points and highlight the teaching key points. In this regard, teachers usually use capitals and lower case letters, font bold, underline, italic, different colors and other ways to achieve foregrounding. As shown in the figure below, the PPT text using capitals and lower case letters, bold font, different colors and other means to highlight the key points of teaching, these features are easy to attract the attention of students, to help students grasp the key points.
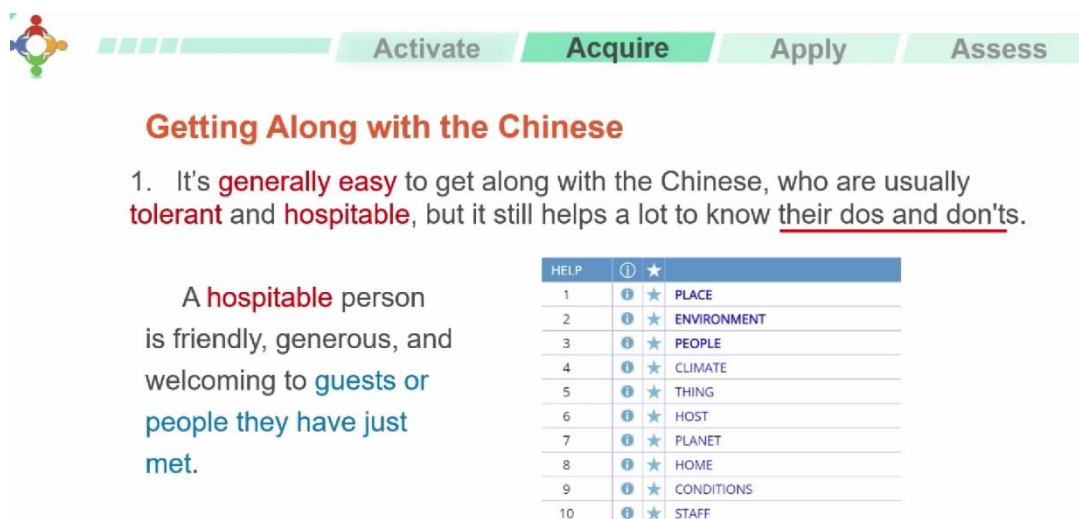

Figure1 Insert vivid pictures/concise charts

The prominence of picture is also one of the important means of foregrounding. Through observation, most of the PPTs used in high-quality English courses come with illustrations, which are vivid and visual to attract students' eyes and add interest to teaching. As shown in Figure 2, the teacher lists traditional Chinese festivals with multiple sets of graphic illustrations. These pictures have a great visual impact on students and closely link English expressions with specific content, which is conducive to students' memorization. The addition of picture/chart modals not only succeeded in drawing students' attention, but also made the teaching content vivid and easy for students to understand.
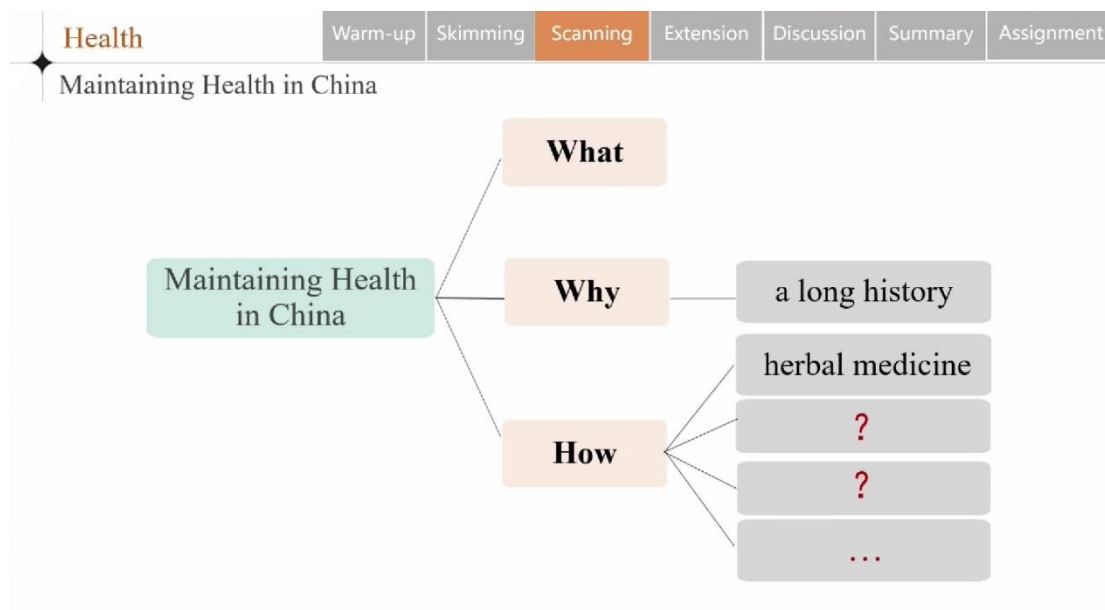
Figure 2

The insertion of audio and video helps to improve students' listening skills and comprehension, and when the teacher plays video and audio, the audiovisual modality stands out above the rest of the background, successfully attracting students' attention. Moreover, students are more inclined to learn through the combination of sound and animation than through the teacher's monotonous verbal narration. For example, when the teacher talks about the taboos of communicating with foreign friends, he does not directly tell the students what topics are not suitable for communicating with foreign friends, but inserts a video to help the students understand, in which the two

Figure 3 Combining video and audio

characters discuss this topic, and the students can clearly understand what topics are more suitable for communicating with foreign friends, and what topics are taboo after watching the video. The integration of audiovisual modality successfully foregrounds the knowledge needed to be mastered, making it enjoyable and easy for students to learn.

Conclusion

Teachers' discourse in high-quality English courses combines verbal modality, behavioral modality and PPT combination modality, and multiple modalities work together to complete the construction of teachers' classroom discourse. In order to make the teaching content stand out from other background in a short lesson, the teacher uses a variety of foregrounding means, including phonetic deviation, lexical deviation, syntactic deviation, quantitative deviation and content deviation in the verbal modality, body language and facial expression in the behavioral modality, and highlighting the important text, inserting vivid pictures, and combining video and audio in the PPT combination modality. This paper analyzes the means of foregrounding multimodal teacher discourse in high-quality English courses in order to provide relevant insights to frontline teachers' lectures and PPT production, but due to the author's limited, I only focus on foregrounding on verbal, behavioral, and PPT combination modes of multimodal teacher discourse, while neglecting the other modes, and the following researcher can start from other modes to analyze the teacher discourse and enrich multimodal teacher discourse research together.

References

Bond, M., & Bedenlier, S. (2021). Modular course design: Benefits and challenges. Journal of Educational Technology & Society, 24(1), 67-85.

Brown, H. D. (2018). Principles of language learning and teaching. Pearson Education.

Halliday, M. A. K. (1971). Linguistic function and literary style:An inquiry into the language of WilliamGolding's . The Inheritors InS Chatman(ed.)Literary Style：A Symposium.

Hattie, J. (2015). What works best in education: The politics of collaborative expertise. Pearson.

Leech, G.N. (1969). A Linguistic Guide to English Poetry. Longdon:Longman.

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). Approaches and methods in language teaching. Cambridge University Press.

Tian, J. (2018). Research on the Teacher professional development based on online courses. Science and Technology of Chinese Universities, (08): 92-94.

Tomlinson, C. A. (2017). Differentiated classroom: Responding to the needs of all learners. ASCD.

Yang, J. (2004). Research On the non-verbal expression in Chinese teaching [D]. Hunan Normal University.

Zhang, L., Wang, Y., & Li, Z. (2022). Modular course design and its effects on student learning outcomes. Education and Information Technologies, 27(2), 212-228.