

Enlightenment of Indirect Speech Acts Theory on College English Listening Teaching

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Abstract: According to the adjustment of English curriculum, there are more requirements for English learners in listening. On the basis of Indirect Speech Acts Theory, this thesis aims at analyzing the relationship between ISAT and listening comprehension from the point of the definition, characteristics and classification of ISAT. Concerning students' average ability of listening, the author carries an experiment, including questionnaire and tests, on application ISAT to listening course. After the experiment, the author finds that ISAT can provide positive guidance for listening class.

1. Introduction

By analyzing the surveys of English learners from different majors, the learner's have more difficulties in correctly finishing the tasks rather than the materials' literal meaning. Then in the 1960s, J. L. Austin, an excellent linguistic representative, put forward Speech Act Theory (short for SAT) and this theory researched the relationship between speech acts and speech meaning.

Several years later, Searle, an American philosopher, systematically and strictly developed SAT, and put forward Indirect Speech Acts Theory, compactly called ISAT, on the bases of the principles and classification of SAT. ISAT deeply researched how speakers' conscious and mental activities influenced their implied meaning. On this condition, the purpose of this paper is to analyze Indirect Speech Acts Theory and trying to adopt this theory to college English listening classes reasonably in order to improve learners' aural comprehension.

2. Literature Review

2.1 An introduction to Indirect Speech Acts Theory

In the early 1960s, an outstanding English philosopher, who was widely associated with the idea that speech acts and the idea that speech was itself a form of action, first put forward Speech Act Theory (short for SAT), which provided both a theoretical outline and the terminology for the modern study of speech acts developed subsequently. Later, J. R. Searle, an American philosopher, systematically and strictly developed SAT, and put forward Indirect Speech Acts Theory (short for ISAT) on the bases of the principles and classification of SAT. In Searle's eyes, the existence of each speech act depends on a set of conditions for its successful and non-defective performance

with a given utterance^[1].

2.2 Essential conditions of ISAT

According to Searle, when someone is using indirect language, he is performing two speech acts simultaneously: primary speech acts and secondary speech acts^[2]. Primary speech acts mean speaker's goal of communication while secondary speech acts are the means by which he achieves his goal. The example provided by Searle to illustrate his idea is the following brief exchange between two students:

Student A: Shall we go camping this weekend?

Student B: I have to attend my piano class.

Obviously, by saying "I have to attend my piano class" Student B is saying "No" to Student A's invitation to go camping. According to Searle's indirect speech acts theory, the primary speech act Student B performs with his utterance is the act of rejecting Student A's suggestion and the secondary speech act he performs is the act of making a statement about the fact that he has to attend his piano class. Then naturally arises the question as to how the hearer comes to recognize the real purpose of the speaker through what he says. According to Searle, inferences can help listeners form this kind of recognition on the basis of their general knowledge and his common knowledge with the speaker.

2.3 Study on college English listening course

2.3.1 Requirements of listening for students

Basic requirements: students should be able to follow the classroom instructions, conversations, and lectures on general topics conducted in English. They also should understand the main ideas and key points from that they hear.

Intermediate requirements: students should follow the talks and lectures spoken in English and understand longer English radios and TV programs on familiar topics spoken at a speed of around 150 to 180 wpm, grasping main ideas and relevant details.

Advanced requirements: learners should understand radios and TV programs produced in English-speaking countries and grasp the gist and key points. They should follow conversations at normal speed spoken by English-native speakers.

2.3.2 Students' average ability

During the internship as an English teacher in Zunyi Medical College (short for ZMC), the author was responsible for 8 classes' sophomores' listening class, of whom 4/5 come from clinical speciality and the rest major in oral cavity. At that time, the sophomores have already taken CET4. However, their grades were not perfect: the author calculated that their passing rate of CET4 is less than 17%, and those who failed CET4 have much troubles in listening comprehension and even speakers' pronunciation.

It's representative and common for non-English major students in listening. This is Dumb English, because not only do learners have trouble in listening, but they feel very difficult when communicating with others.

2.3.3 Influential factors in learning

The influential factors in learning may be potentially numerous and defy any attempts at a classification. There are six general factors that we believe are of great importance in language

learning: age, intelligence and aptitude, attitude and motivation, cognitive styles, personality, learning strategies. Age and aptitude are viewed as uncontrollable--they are innate. Motivation and attitude, cognitive styles, personality and learning strategies are controllable--they can be changed by appropriate training. Admittedly, there are other factors that were not included in this thesis, but it seems impossible to make a full list. An awareness of these factors will help learners get rid of their shortcomings in learning and help teachers know that no two learners are ever the same. In order to successfully teach a second or foreign language to students, teachers should recognize that, at a very practical level, they must adjust their methods and materials on the basis of their identifications of the learners differences.

3. A Research into the Application of ISAT to College Listening Class

3.1 Subjects

The hypothesis of this experiment, includes questionnaire and two tests. In this experiment, the author chose two groups of sophomores from 19-years old to 23-years old in ZMC to examine my hypothesis: including those who have ideal grades in CET4, Group One contains 100 persons from combination of Class 5 and Class 6 from Clinical Medicine major and Group Two has 96 people from oral cavity department. The reason why the author choose such group of sophomores is that they both have experienced CET 4 and those who still take English classes mostly have failed in the examination (Students who have passed the examination can volunteer to take English class.). Among the two groups, respectively there were only 26 in Group One and 25 students in Group Two passing CET4. In fact, those classes have the highest grades than others like Class 3, whose CET4 rate is only 6% and Class 4, whose rate is 8%, which means that nearly 83.7% students of the 5 classes that have been mentioned above will not have qualification for diplomas because nowadays diplomas are tightly related to grades of CET4. However, they have already received English training for one year on campus and they are familiar with College English Curriculum Requirements and English classes, unfortunately, they still failed. So it's very necessary for us to research new teaching methods in classes.

3.2 Experimental process

First of all, the author prepared a questionnaire which contains 10 questions for my students. In the questionnaire, the author got some reference about the question items from Zhao Jia's thesis^[3].

In this part, the author wanted to know their general situation and difficulties in listening from three aspects: understanding of listening; problems in listening comprehension; knowledge about related pragmatics theory--ISAT.

Then the author chose two papers from CET4, which contain 10 questions closely related to indirect speech acts. One was for the beginning of this experiment to test student's current level and another was prepared at the end of this experiment to test the experimental effects of special training with the guidance of ISAT. And in order to ensure its reliability, the author divided the subjects into two kinds of different classes: students from Clinical Medicine major were trained with the guidance of ISAT and combination of practice and ISAT; another group was taught as usual without any changes.

Then, the author gave out 150(total number of students who still take English class) questionnaires to students. And by carefully analyzing the questionnaires, the author got whole information about students' difficulties in listening.

After the process of questionnaire, the two groups are required to take pretest, which contains 10 short conversations that were closely related to indirect speech acts and the author also noted their

grades.

As far, the author could know students' shortcomings in listening comprehension. Next, the author began to teach ISAT to the Group 1 as experimental class for a month. After the event, post-test with a similar degree of difficulty, compared with pretest, was prepared to test their mastery of indirect speech acts in listening comprehension. As for students in Group Two, the author made no changes in teaching and the author did not teach them Indirect Speech Acts Theory. Also they were required to take the same examination as Group One. All their grades were carefully written down.

3.3 Experimental analysis

3.3.1 Questionnaires analysis

3.3.1.1 About students' listening ability

In the questionnaire, the first four questions aimed at knowing students' current listening levels and their background about listening. And the following Tables will show their answers. (As Shown in Table 1 to Table 4)

Table 1: Question 1: About student's listening level. (No. = 150)

Self-evaluation	Poor	Ordinary	Good	Great
Numbers	63	78	9	0
Rate (%)	42	52	6	0

Table 2: Question 2: About student's attitude towards help from listening class. (No.=150)

Attitude	Great	A little	Little	Don't care
Numbers	63	63	15	9
Rate (%)	42	42	10	6

Table 3: Question 3: About which skill is the most important. (No.=150)

Opinion	Listening	Speaking	Writing	Reading
Numbers	60	54	15	21
Rate (%)	40	36	10	14

Table 4: Question 4: About student's interests in listening class. (No.=150)

Degree	Do not hate	Like	Dislike	Don't care
Numbers	54	81	9	6
Rate (%)	36	54	6	4

It's clear that only 6% were confident with their listening level that they evaluated themselves as good and nobody thought themselves great. On the contrary, the majority thought their level was very ordinary even poor, which took 94%.

From Table 2-4, students were eager to improve their listening skill because 76% students thought that on matter in our English tests but in real working requirements, speaking and listening are the most important skills and requirements, what's more, listening is closely related to speaking. The first four questions show that on the one hand most students' listening level was at disadvantage, on the other hand, they have realized the importance of listening in all fields and they really hope to get help from educators.

3.3.1.2 About students' problems in listening

Question Table 5 to 11 are about learner's problems in listening comprehension and their answers and students' inner thoughts will be presented as following Tables.

Table 5: Question 5: About whether students worry about their listening. (No.=150)

Attitude	Quite worried	A little worried	Let it be
Numbers	72	54	24
Rate (%)	48	36	16

Table 6: Question 6: About whether listening is difficult in examination. (No.=150)

Response	Very difficult	Difficult	A little easy	Very easy
Numbers	42	78	24	6
Rate (%)	28	52	16	4

Table 7: Question 7: Endeavor is more important than congenital ability. (No.=150)

View	Not agree	Not deny	Agree	Quite agree
Numbers	21	36	54	39
Rate (%)	14	24	36	26

From the three Tables above(As Shown in Table 5 to Table 7), 84% of them were worried about their listening skills more or less, and 4/5 of them thought listening difficult. Fortunately, they had confidence to improve this skill because 86% didn't deny the importance of endeavor during study.

Table 8: Question 8: About students' listening hours of everyday. (No.=150)

Time	< 30mins	30mins--60mins	About an hour	> 60mins
Numbers	105	21	15	9
Rate (%)	70	14	10	6

Table 9: Question 9: About students' listening emphasis during exercises. (No.=150)

Key points	Every word	All the details	General idea	Implication
Numbers	21	33	69	27
Rate (%)	14	22	46	18

Table 10: Question 10: About what should be paid attention to during exercises. (No.=150)

Key points	Every word	All the details	General idea	Implication
Numbers	18	27	60	45
Rate (%)	12	18	40	30

From the Tables above(As Shown in Table 8 to Table 10), when asked about their listening emphasis during exercises, 36% paid much attention to the details, 46% focused on general idea and only 18% thought implication the most important. Nevertheless, after examinations or training, 30% of them recognized the importance of implication

3.3.1.3 About students' knowledge about ISAT

In this part, the author surveyed the students about how much they know about ISAT and how they think of the relationship between ISAT and listening. (As shown in Table 11)

Table 11: Question 11: About the relationship between ISAT and listening. (No.=150)

How much	Know much	Know a little	Only have heard	Never heard
Numbers	3	30	51	66
Rate (%)	2	20	34	44

Table 12: Question 12: About the help from ISAT. (No.=150)

How much	Very much	A little	Little	Do not know
Numbers	75	39	27	9
Rate (%)	50	26	18	6

Above all, 78% students didn't know much about the relationship between ISAT and listening, however, 76% of them had great expectation and confidence towards the theory. (As shown in Table 12)

3.3.2 Test analysis

3.3.2.1 Pre-test

After questionnaire, two groups are required to take pre-test containing eight short conversations and a long conversation that are closely related to indirect speech acts, totally ten questions and everyone scoring ten. Their grades are represented as follows.

Table 13: Group One: (No.= 75)

Score section	< 30	30--60	60--80	> 80
Numbers	12	34	24	5
Rate (%)	16	45.3	32	6.7

Table 14: Group two: (No.= 75)

Score section	< 30	30--60	60--80	> 80
Numbers	10	37	20	8
Rate (%)	13.3	49.3	26.7	10.7

From those Tables (Table 13 to Table 14), it's obviously that more than half of them got less than cut-off scores (60 points). In addition, less than a quarter had reasonable grades (more than 80 points) and their listening comprehension ability of the students in the two groups is quite similar to

each other.

3.3.2.2 Post-test

In **Table 15**, the teacher taught students some basic knowledge about ISAT, including the definition, classification, essential contents and characteristics of ISAT by analyzing some typical examples. In that way, students could know ISAT and know how ISAT works. Then, they took post-test. And after each question, the teacher prepared some questions for the listeners and asked them to answer in details, for instance, “What’s the denotation can you get from what you hear?” or “What’s the intended meaning of the man or woman?” After some training, they were able to infer the speakers’ intended meaning slowly.

All the exercises in post-test are also chosen from CET4, and here are their grades:

Table 15: Group One (No.= 75)

Score section	< 30	30--60	60--80	> 80
Numbers	11	12	25	27
Rate (%)	14.7	16	33.3	36

Table 16: Group Two (No.= 75)

Score section	< 30	30--60	60--80	> 80
Numbers	9	37	21	8
Rate (%)	12	49.3	28	10.7

In the Tables, it clear that the grades in Group 2 had nearly no changes. However, grades from Group 1 has changed a lot: nearly 70% students got more than cut-off scores and 36% got higher progress--more than 80 points--in this part.(As Shown in **Table 15 to Table 16**)

This showed us the significance of theory in practice and there must be something that we can do about applying ISAT to listening class.

3.4 Research summary

By survey, the author found that students didn’t know the relationship between ISAT and listening, and some students didn’t have proper methods for learning listening, which added problems in listening. By analyzing the difference of two tests, ISAT could make contribution to improving listening grades. It is not enough to pay too much attention to grammar as traditional methods and just make sense of the surface meaning. In current age, oral communication in English has become a skill. It’s important to apply ISAT and other relevant theories in English learning.

4. Pedagogical Suggestions for Listening Class

4.1 Requirements for teachers

To help learners get rid of various and changing requirements and challenges in our life, teachers must update their knowledge, teaching concepts and improve their self-ability, and they need to master modern educational technology and apply modern educational technology to teach proficiently.

Self-examination would make great influence on ones' improvement and progress. The purposes of teaching reflection are to settle educational problems and sum up experience during the course of teaching based on their professional knowledge and experience of success or failure^[4]. Usually, teaching reflection contains reflecting educational concepts, selecting teaching materials, teaching methods and educational achievements. Teachers should make good use of teaching records, teaching diaries and educational cases to reflect their educational behaviors.

Teachers should become the researchers of education and they have the ability to become good researchers. They should try to find the shortcomings and problems during teaching positively and deeply research the solutions to the problems.

4.2 Learning objectives of students

Inference is one of the the most important strategies that could be taught in the listening classroom. Linguistic contexts are also important in communication because it provides cultural environment for the conversations and which might make influence on understanding the materials' ideas directly. Sometimes, the same sentence mean differently in different linguistic contexts. As for indirect speech acts, teachers could set up some interesting situational dialogues for practice and require students to drill the roles accordingly. The activities will help students become familiar with the connecting phenomenon of the indirectness of language in different language communications and improve their ability of listening comprehension.

4.3 Effective measures and practical instruments for class

Teachers could choose relatively difficult materials that students couldn't answer directly from surface expression.

Proper activities are essential to training students' ability of using conventional ISAT at the same time. Before listening, teachers can offer students some key words and ask them to make up a story on the basis of the words and exchange their ideas. Then play the tape for students and require them to check their ideas.

In listening comprehension, students' listening strategies are of great help. Owing to the complexity of listening, listening strategies should be trained. Maybe everyone has his own special strategy in listening. Teachers should teach and guide them how to think, how to listening, and help students develop useful listening strategies.

5. Conclusion

Indirect Speech Acts Theory explains what materials listeners hear and what information listeners should grasp, which is very important for listening comprehension.

To find proper methods for listening class, the author carried out an experiment, including questionnaire and two tests, on application ISAT to listening course, which has proved that with the guidance of ISAT, students could make progress in listening grades.

After the experiment, the author concluded several pedagogical suggestions for both teachers and learners for listening class. Teachers directly provide guidance for students and directly effect learning efficiency so it's significant for educators to lay their foundation for teaching: enriching background information, keeping learning, updating teaching concepts and strengthening communication and cooperation with teachers and students. Students receive benefits mostly from the guidance of ISAT. During learning, their endeavor matters a lot: accumulating cultural information and improving inference ability. To apply ISAT successfully, there are effective and practical instruments for class: scientific materials, appropriate activities, multimedia, like VCD and

internet.

Though the author has tried her best, there are still several limitations in this thesis. Firstly, the author didn't choose large enough students for this experiment because of limited time and space, thus the results may be not representative or universal. Then the questionnaire was designed from the point of the author so the questionnaire may lack relative questions for the research. All in all, ISAT could offer great helps in college listening class. During the process of applying this theory, users may face some challenges to overcome. And in further research, the author will try best to get rid of the shortcomings.

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