

A Study on the Application of Indirect Speech Act Theory in CET-6 Listening

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In recent years, the CET-6 (College English Test, Band 6) has become an important standard to measure the English language ability of Chinese college students, and listening is a challenging task for many students. The application of indirect speech act theory in CET-6 listening is seldom studied. Therefore, it is crucial to study on it. Based on the two observation points of indirect speech act theory in CET-6 listening, this study analyzes the specific embodiment of conventional indirect speech acts and non-conventional indirect speech acts in listening, and discusses the effective teaching methods of CET-6 listening.

Keywords: indirect speech act theory, CET-6, English listening, English teaching

Introduction

In recent years, the CET-6 (College English Test, Band 6) has become an important criterion for evaluating the English language proficiency of Chinese college students. Listening is one of the four skills tested in the CET-6, and it is also a challenging task for many students. Indirect speech act theory has been widely applied in language teaching and learning. However, its application in CET-6 listening has not been fully explored. Therefore, how to improve the effectiveness of CET-6 listening has become an urgent problem that needs to be solved.

The purpose of this study is to explore the application of indirect speech act theory in CET-6 listening. The significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the development of effective teaching methods for CET-6 listening and to provide insights into the application of indirect speech act theory in language teaching.

Literature Review

There are many researches on CET-6 listening. He (2022) studied the deviation of CET-6 listening test based on the method of project function difference. By referring to the theoretical models and empirical results at home and abroad on the backtracking, Xie, Lu, and Ma (2021) studied the backtracking effect of the reformed CET-6 listening on learners' listening learning by means of questionnaire survey. Shen and Chen (2016) thought that we should pay attention to the cultivation of students' metaphorical cognitive ability in CET-6 listening teaching. Du (2012) studied the validity of CET-6 listening sub-test. Song (2010) found that CET-6 listening is more difficult than TEM-4 due to its speed, vocabulary, and questions.

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So far, there are many researches on the CET-6 listening at home and abroad, but there is little research on the application of indirect speech act theory in CET-6 listening. Therefore, it is crucial to study the application of indirect speech act theory in CET-6 listening.

Theoretical Framework

Introduction to the Theory Itself

The analysis of this paper is based on the principle of indirect speech act theory.

Indirect speech act theory, first proposed by John Searle (1969), holds that speakers often use indirect speech acts to convey intent beyond the literal meaning of their words. It stems from Austin's theory, but with some modifications. Searle's theory focuses on the function of language rather than the form of language. This shift in focus is also happening in English teaching. In communication, people may achieve the communicative purpose of the speaker through the indirect meaning of the utterance.

Embodiment of the Theory in CET-6 Listening

Indirect speech act theory is embodied in CET-6 listening in two aspects, namely, conventional indirect speech acts and non-conventional indirect speech acts.

The conventional indirect speech acts refer to those indirect speech acts that have been agreed and commonly known through general reasoning, and the listener can easily understand the implicit meaning of the sentence from the literal meaning. The connection between the speaker's discourse meaning and the literal meaning of the sentence used in the non-conventional indirect speech acts is relatively complex. The meaning of the speaker's speech should be inferred from the context and shared background knowledge.

Analysis and Discussion

The following is the analysis and discussion based on the theoretical framework about the application of the conventional indirect speech acts and the non-conventional indirect speech acts in CET-6 listening.

Application of the Conventional Indirect Speech Acts

Some examples are chosen here from CET-6 test papers to show how the conventional indirect speech acts are used in short dialogues.

Example 1:

M: Why not check out the new cafeteria at Market Street?

From this example, the man does not say "You need to go to the new cafeteria at Market Street", but uses an inquiry to indirectly show his advice to go to the new cafeteria. Making an indirect statement of intent by asking such questions has become generally accepted as a way of making suggestions

Example 2:

W: Would you stop making some noise?

From this short sentence, we can find that the woman does not directly use the imperative to order the person to be quiet. She uses a polite interrogative way to indirectly express that she thinks the environment is noisy, and expresses her hope for the other party to be quiet. Although she uses the way of questioning, it has been conventionally accepted as a request. This is the kind of request that people have come to an agreement to express, and the other person clearly understands and responds accordingly.

Application of Non-conventional Indirect Speech Acts

Some examples are chosen from CET-6 test papers to show how the non-conventional indirect speech acts are used in short dialogues.

Example 3:

W: Since Simon will graduate this May, the school paper needs a new editor. So, if you are interested, I will be happy to nominate you.

M: Thanks for considering me. But the baseball team is starting up a new season. And I'm afraid I have a lot on my hands.

The intention of the woman was obviously to invite the man to be the new editor, but the man did not directly answer whether he would become the new editor and instead told the other party a fact that "the baseball team is starting up a new season". Through this discourse, the man indirectly expressed his intention of rejection to the woman. The listener can understand the speaker's real intention based on the context and familiarity with the other person.

Example 4:

W: I was amazed when I heard Tony played the piano so expertly. From the way he talked, I thought he was just starting his lessons.

M: Oh, no! That's the way he always talks.

From the dialogue, we can see that the man indirectly expressed the affirmation of the woman's last sentence. But what the man really means is that he thinks Tony is underestimating his achievements. Tony is a modest man. This meaning requires the woman to infer based on the context and understanding of the man and Tony.

Enlightenment From the Application of Conventional Indirect Speech Acts

For conventional indirect speech acts, listening teaching should focus on cultivating students' corresponding language skills. Teachers should emphasize on the importance of polite language and the students are required to understand how to use these words to express their wishes and requests. Teachers can simulate real-life scenarios for students and enable them to learn these language skills in context. In addition, teachers can also use multimedia technology to show language communication in real situations, so that students can better understand and master these conventional indirect speech act.

Enlightenment From the Application of Non-conventional Indirect Speech Acts

For non-conventional indirect speech acts, teachers should emphasize the importance of them, so that students can realize they are very common in CET-6 listening. Teachers should let the students understand the characteristics of non-conventional indirect speech acts and the difference between them and conventional indirect speech acts. Teaching should focus on cultivating students' pragmatic awareness and contextual understanding ability. Teachers can use authentic corpora to train students in listening, so that students can understand the meaning and intention of non-conventional indirect speech act through context.

In a word, both conventional indirect speech acts and non-conventional indirect speech acts have important enlightenment in the listening teaching of CET-6. Teachers should adopt various methods according to the actual situation of students to develop their listening skills, so that students can better understand and use indirect speech act theory in the real context.

Conclusions

This paper explores the application of indirect speech act theory in CET-6 listening. Analysis shows that indirect speech act theory is embodied in CET-6 listening in two aspects: conventional indirect speech acts and non-conventional indirect speech acts. And discussion reveals that indirect speech act theory can be applied in CET-6 listening teaching to improve students listening comprehension and communication skills. The study has the implication that it is helpful to develop effective CET-6 listening teaching methods and provide insights for the application of indirect speech act theory in language teaching, so that students may feel a little bit easier to do CET-6 listening and it has reference value for English teaching.

But to some extent, this study has limitations. The author only gives some advice for teaching and they still have so much to be perfected. Applying indirect speech act theory in CET-6 listening which requires more research needs to be done on this.

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