

Analysis of the Use of Speech Act Theory in English Teachers' Language

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Abstract: The English curriculum standard emphasizes the cultivation of students' core literacy, which cannot be developed without the construction of language environment. Among the many elements affecting the efficiency of English teaching, teacher's discourse occupies an important position. Teachers' discourse has an important influence on the issuing of instructions, the construction of questions, the promotion of activities and the interaction with students in the English classroom. Therefore, based on verbal behavior theory, it is of great significance to explore teacher discourse in the English classroom to improve the teaching ability of English teachers, enhance students' learning efficiency, and realize the teaching goals with high quality.

Keywords: Speech Act Theory; Teacher Language; English Teaching.

1. Background of the Study

In the context of the new curriculum standard, the curriculum standard of the senior secondary English subject puts more emphasis on the cultivation of students' core literacy in the subject, i.e., language proficiency, cultural awareness, quality of thinking, and ability to learn.¹ The realization of this important curricular goal cannot be achieved without students' independent and efficient learning, and also by teachers' lectures and teaching in the classroom. A high-quality and efficient high school English classroom should play the main role of students as well as the leading role of teachers. Therefore, in addition to exploring how to improve students' learning efficiency and how to cultivate students' good learning habits, exploring how to improve teachers' classroom efficiency is also one of the important ways.

In the process of playing the leading role of teachers, teacher's language is a key link. Teachers' language is the general term for the language used in the educational process, including the oral language used by teachers, written language, classroom language and so on. Teachers' language is crucial to both the organization of classroom teaching and students' language acquisition. Tang, Yanyu, and Liu, Shaozhong (2003) pointed out that there has been a long history of research on teachers' language, and that this kind of research plays an important role in improving the high school English classroom.

Therefore, it is important to explore the use of speech act theory in linguistics in high school English teaching.

2. Basic Concepts of the Theory

Speech act theory is one of the important theories in linguistics in terms of pragmatics. It is an important linguistic theory proposed by the British linguist Austin and developed by Searle and others in the United States. According to Fu Xitao (2004), verbal behavior theorists believe that language is a unique form of human behavior, which plays a vital role in actual human interaction and communication, such as the spoken language used in face-to-face communication and the text typed in online chatting and so on.²

Speech act theory focuses on the nature and internal logic

of speech as a behavior. It believes that speech is the smallest unit of human communication and expression of meaning. Speech acts are mainly divided into three categories: Locutionary Act, Illocutionary Act and Perlocutionary Act. Locutionary Act mainly refers to the act of uttering language by the speaker, which is the act of expressing literal meaning through syntax, vocabulary and phonemes, i.e., the act of speaking itself. The act of acting, on the other hand, refers to the act of expressing the speaker's intention, i.e., the act performed while saying certain words, e.g., when one is saying good morning, the act has the function of a greeting; and the act of taking effect refers to the act that results from speaking certain words. According to Austin, people need to complete three sub-speech acts at the same time when they speak live, or while performing a speech act.

And when this theory is applied to teacher's language, it is equally consistent with the theory. For example, when a teacher greets "Good morning" in the classroom, he/she firstly accomplishes the speech act, and at the same time, the purpose of this sentence is to greet all the students, so he/she also accomplishes his/her action act, and at last, after the teacher's pleasantries, the originally noisy classroom may become orderly, which also achieves the effect act - the effect act. The teacher's greeting may make the classroom more orderly, which is also the achievement of its action - the establishment of good order in the classroom. It can be seen that the use of teacher's language in the classroom in line with the theory of verbal behavior can sometimes achieve twice the result with half the effort.

3. Principles of Teachers' Language Use under Verbal Behavior Theory

How should English teachers appropriately use teacher's language in the classroom in line with the verbal behavior theory in order to achieve the desired effect? Through reading relevant literature, observing English teaching videos and combining with my own teaching experience, the author initially summarizes the following principles on the use of teacher's language under the verbal behavior theory.

(1) Teachers should consciously use the verbal behavior theory.

In the classroom, whether it is the introduction and

guidance part in the beginning, the questioning part in the middle of the class, or the summing up and sublimation part at the end of the class, teachers should be good at using teacher's language in line with the verbal behavior theory to enliven the classroom atmosphere, establish a good order in the classroom, and improve the efficiency of the classroom, and the teachers should have the awareness of using the verbal behavior theory to express themselves.

At the beginning of the class, teachers can use language that is close to the students' daily life and the topic of the class to make pleasantries and open the class, so as to start the teaching skillfully, make the beginning of the class not so hard and blunt, and make the students accept it more easily. For example, in an English reading class about the Chinese New Year, the teacher can start with "Are you happy on Spring Festival?" "What do you usually do on Spring Festival?" "What do you usually do on Spring Festival?" to bring students and teachers closer together and to introduce the topic at the same time.

In the teaching part, teachers can use simple and clear instruction phrases to promote the classroom process. For example, teachers can use student behavioral triggers to get students to perform certain behaviors in the classroom. When students are asked to answer a question, the directive "Anyone volunteers?" can be used to invite students to take an active role in answering the question. Teachers can also use the teacher phrase "Please sit down" to ask students to sit down when they have finished answering questions and to maintain order in the classroom.

Similarly, at the end of the class, when it comes to sublimating the theme or stimulating students to think creatively, the teacher can use the question "Who wants to share his or her idea about this question?" to invite students to share their feelings, so as to complete the classroom steps.

(2) Teachers' language should be clear and concise

An English class contains a lot of contents, take reading class for example, there are three main parts, pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading, and each part contains many activities, so in order to make the class complete successfully, the teacher's language needs to be clear and concise, which can successfully express the meaning that the teacher wants to convey, but also can not be too cumbersome to delay the class. The teacher's language needs to be clear and concise in order to successfully convey the meaning of what he/she is trying to convey, but not be so cumbersome as to delay the flow of the lesson.

For example, if the teacher wants to conduct a group discussion activity, he or she can give instructions in clear and concise language: "Please discuss with your group members. Everyone could form a discussion group with your partners and then you can discuss with them on this question." Such an expression is not only cumbersome, but also not conducive to the students' rapid and correct understanding of what the teacher wants to express.

Similarly, if the teacher wants students to perform on the stage, the teacher can say: "Please show your performance in whole class." instead of "You can prepare for your performance with your partner now and then I can discuss with them on this question. You can prepare for your performance with your partner now and then I will invite some of you to show your performance on the stage. So just do it now." Such language is not conducive to the students' understanding of the teacher's instructions and may even interfere with subsequent activities. This kind of language is

not conducive to students' understanding of the teacher's instructions and may even affect the subsequent activities.

Therefore, English teachers should try to use simple and clear language in the classroom to act and take effect, so as to better grasp the rhythm of the classroom and promote the orderly progress of the classroom.

(3) Teachers' language should be relevant

Not all teacher language in the English classroom has to be direct and brief, and different teacher language needs to be chosen according to specific activities, situations and the characteristics of different students.

When teachers give instructions for individual activities, they can use the question sentence "Would you...?" which has a more euphemistic tone and is used to express requests. "Can you...?" "Could you..." Such soothing language is more likely to reduce tension when students are working individually on a task, which in turn is more conducive to improving student performance in the classroom.

When the teacher gives instructions to the whole class, he or she can use more approachable language to invite the whole class to respond together, such as "Let's do it!" or "Shall we..."., students are more likely to be mobilized to answer questions posed by the teacher under such educational language.

When there are some disciplinary problems in the classroom that require the teacher to maintain discipline, the teacher can use simple and clear instructions to manage the class, such as: "Be quiet!", "Calm down" and so on, this kind of teacher's language can achieve a very good extra-verbal effect, which usually makes students keep quiet immediately and maintain a quiet and orderly classroom.

Of course, teachers face a variety of situations in the classroom, in addition to the above common situations, there may be some sudden and unexpected situations, such as students wanting to go to the toilet in class, making trouble in class and so on, in this case, English teachers have to make use of their own teaching wit, according to the specific situation, and appropriately use teacher's language in line with the theory of verbal behavior to manage and organize the classroom. In such cases, English teachers have to use their own teaching wit to manage and organize the classroom according to the specific situation by appropriately using teacher language that is consistent with the theory of verbal behavior.

(4) Avoiding Common Teacher Language Misconceptions

Based on the English teaching videos observed by the author and the reading of related literature, the author summarizes the problems that teachers often commit when using teacher language.

Problem one, the language is too exaggerated. Tang Yanyu and Liu Shaozhong (2003) point out that some teachers overemphasize the effects of the speech act theory, adjusting their voice tone and volume to a more exaggerated degree to attract students' attention to a greater extent.³ However, such inauthentic language not only fails to achieve the teacher's initial purpose, but also causes some counterproductive effects. Students are not exposed to authentic language from the very beginning, so it is not conducive to practicing their communicative skills in real contexts.

Problem two, oversimplification. Although it is emphasized that the teacher's language needs to be concise and clear, it does not mean that the whole lesson must be connected by simple declarative and imperative sentences. If teachers use oversimplified language, they will not be able to

attract students' interest in learning, and students will not be able to actively participate in the classroom activities, and the efficiency of the English classroom will be greatly reduced, and they will not be able to achieve the effect of making things happen with words. Over-simplified language is dull and lacks the teaching stimulus that should be in the classroom, which cannot arouse students' active thinking, discernment and reasoning, and ultimately weakens the teaching effect.

The third problem is that the language form is detached from life. In Chinese English classrooms, especially in junior and senior high schools, some teachers, in order to pursue grammatical forms, will rigidly change sentences that can be expressed in simple language into sentences that can hardly be used in daily life. For example: (1) Helen runs as fast as a deer runs. (2) James leaps like a gazelle does. In the first sentence, the teacher, in order to emphasize the grammatical point of "as+adj+as+possible", changes the sentence which can be expressed simply into a sentence which can be expressed simply. In the first sentence, in order to emphasize the grammatical point "as+adj+as+possible", the teacher makes the sentence which can be expressed in a simple way more complicated, although it deepens the influence of the students on the grammatical point, but the students can't use it in their daily life, so the teaching of this grammar can't achieve the teaching goal.

4. Case Study of Teachers' Classroom Phrases

The author selected the lead-in part of a teacher's verbatim script in a high school English writing classroom and analyzed the possible problems and deficiencies of the current teacher's phrasing by combining the basic concepts of the speech act theory and the principles of teacher's phrasing under the speech act theory mentioned above.

Table 1. The possible problems and shortcomings of current teachers' wording

Writing class	
Lead-in	1st sentence: hello! Boys and girls, how are you?
	2nd sentence: You all look pretty good! I feel good, too.
	3rd sentence: Today we are going to learn how to write a passage about environmental protection.
	4th sentence: I will divide all of you into several groups and there will be 4 students in each group.
	5th sentence: Now I want to show you something related.
	6th sentence: Please look at the screens, there are some pictures.
	7th sentence: Do you know what are these pictures about? Hands up please!
	8th sentence: Great! Linda! Thank you for your answer.
	9th sentence: Linda said these pictures are about some astonishing pollution in the world. She said the video is trying to remind us of the importance of the environmental protection. That's exactly what we are going to talk about today.

The above is a teacher's verbatim script for the lead-in part of a high school English writing class. Through this lead-in introduction, the teacher wants to achieve the goal of letting students understand the writing topic of the class as well as activating students' related graphic knowledge. According to the author's principles of teacher language and the basic requirements of speech act theory mentioned above, this

verbatim script basically achieves the function of making things happen with words and advancing the teaching process. However, this verbatim script also has some problems.

Although the teacher's language in the first sentence achieves the purpose of exchanging pleasantries and at the same time serves to open up the classroom, the language used is too bland and students may take it for granted, thus failing to achieve a better teaching effect. Moreover, this sentence has little to do with the theme of today's writing class--environmental protection, and does not serve to introduce the topic. Therefore, it is suggested that the teacher replace this sentence with "How do you think of our common home--the earth?" "This kind of language not only connects with the topic, but also attracts students' attention and triggers them to think positively, thus successfully starting the class.

The fourth sentence is a bit complicated, and students tend to get lost in the process of listening, which ultimately leads to a lack of comprehension of the classroom activity, which results in a less effective classroom activity. The teacher can replace the phrase in the fourth sentence with "Now let's have a group work." This explains the need for the activity and allows students to understand the requirements in a shorter period of time without delaying the progress of the class.

The summary of the ninth sentence is too long and complex, which is difficult for students to understand. The author believes that in this part of the teacher can give up the teacher's language appropriately, let other students who listen to Linda's speech to summarize the summary, really play the role of the student theme, rather than overemphasize the leading role of the teacher. Let other students speak, not only is conducive to the formation of a moderately tense classroom atmosphere, change the students more lazy state, but also conducive to the exercise of students' ability to listen and speak, multi-directional realization of the teaching objectives.

Other educational language is concise and clear, simple and easy to understand for students, and at the same time promotes the process of the classroom and achieves the function of doing things with words, which is basically in line with the requirements of speech act theory.

5. Conclusion

Through the above analysis and discussion, including theoretical analysis, principles of teachers' language use and case study of teachers' verbatim scripts, the author concludes that the speech act theory has a role to play in the enhancement and improvement of teachers' language. When teachers organize and consider teacher's language, they can take whether it meets the requirements of speech act theory as one of the conditions to consider. Under the verbal behavior theory, teachers' language will be more concise and effective, able to act with words, better serve the classroom and improve classroom efficiency.

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