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Conversation Analysis: ESC Method of Chinese and Foreign English Teachers in SEL Class

Rujing Zhang[1,*], Weidong Li[1,*]

1.Northeastern University at Qinhuangdao

Abstract

This study aims to compare the differences in classroom conversation patterns between Chinese and foreign English teachers and analyze their ways of checking students' epistemic status in the classroom, the different performances of students with different epistemic status levels, and the measures teachers take when students are at a lower epistemic status level, to provide new perspectives for the study of conversation analysis in the classroom. In the study, two English classroom video samples with great similarities are selected. This study draws the following conclusions through the analysis of data tables and specific conversation examples: 1. There are big differences between Chinese and foreign English teachers in the method of ESC (epistemic status check) to students, Chinese teachers prefer to use interrogative questions (IQ), while the foreign teachers mainly use declarative questions (DQ); 2. When the students are in a high epistemic status level, both Chinese and foreign teachers preferred the form of "students answer questions directly and initiatively"; 3. When the students are in a low epistemic status level, the students tend to be silent (the reason for the appearance of students' questioning in the foreign teacher's classrooms may be that the atmosphere of the foreign teacher's class is more active and the teacher-student relationship is more equal than that of the Chinese teacher's class); 4. The Chinese teacher's strategy in the face of students' low level of epistemic status is mostly Rule 3 of the turn-taking rules; whereas foreign teachers mostly adopt Rule 2 accompanied by encouragement words. Based on the above conclusions, this study suggests that Chinese and foreign English teachers can learn from each other. Chinese teachers can learn from foreign teachers who emphasize students' participation and interaction, and increase students' opportunities for expression and thinking. Western teachers can learn from Chinese teachers' students-group learning methods and skills of maintaining classroom discipline to ensure teaching efficiency.

Keywords: conversation analysis, epistemic status, English teacher, ESL class

1 | Introduction

Conversation analysis was developed by Harry Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff, and Gail Jefferson, who inherited Erving Goffman's and Harold Garfinkel's sociological analysis methods (Wang Lifei,

2015). According to Heritage (2012), epistemic status is a concept involving an individual's access to certain domains, and the epistemic status of each person varies across domains, as well as over time, and changes from time to time as a result of specific interactional contributions. Research on the integration of epistemic status and conversation analysis in the language classroom has received abundant attention. The conversation analysis in the classroom provides a more transparent depicture of classroom structure, summarizes classroom patterns, and helps teachers understand their students' learning situations in class so that they can design classroom content to maximize teaching efficiency. The examination of epistemic status for students in the classroom can help teachers better understand the difficulties encountered by students in classroom interactions, deal with speech transitions more effectively, increase student participation in class, and improve the effectiveness of classroom interactions.

There have been many studies combining classroom conversation analysis and epistemic status, but there is a gap in the research on Chinese and foreign English teachers' epistemic status check strategy preferences in ESL class and their responses to students' epistemic status deficiencies. When students' epistemic status is insufficient, they fail to keep up with the progress of the class and concentrate on class more frequently. At this time, teachers' coping strategies will greatly affect students' performance in the classroom and the effect of language acquisition. Therefore, it is of great practical significance to study teachers' epistemic status check methods taken when facing students' epistemic deficiency. In addition, the analysis and comparison between teaching models in ESL classes of Chinese English teachers and that of foreign English teachers will also be discussed to explore the best model for guiding teaching practice.

2 | Literature Review

2.1 | Related Studies in the West

Foreign research on classroom conversation analysis began in the 1960s. Its research mainly includes teacher's talk and teacher-student interaction analysis. For example, Flander studied classroom interaction in terms of the number of classroom conversations, speed of speech, vocabulary adjustment, etc. (Xiao Feng, 2000); Sack, Schegolff, Jefferson, and others studied classroom teachers' conversations from the perspective of turn-taking and summarized three rules of turn-taking in conversion (Wang Lifei, 2015). As for the mixed study of conversational analysis and epistemic status, many scholars have focused on teacher-student conversation in class. Such as Melita Morales's research about using epistemic status as an analytical tool to map classroom talk (2021) and Olcay's "'Epistemic status check' as an interactional phenomenon in instructed learning settings." (2012).

2.2 | Related Studies in China

The main research of classroom conversation analysis in China includes the conflicts and compromise of knowledge view in classroom teaching (Cui Dasong, 2021); teachers' teaching mode (Zhao Xiaohong, 2020); teachers' turn-taking rights in class (Lan Liangping, 2013); and the revision phenomenon of teacher-student communication (Liu Shu, 2005). Domestic research on cognitive state mainly focuses on the direction of cognitive diagnosis, instructional design, and personalized learning. For example, Peng Zhuo's (2019) research on teacher-student interaction and epistemic status; and Qu Jing's research on analyzing cognitive status from classroom questioning (2006).

Based on the brief review of foreign and domestic research, it should be noticed that there is little

research comparing Chinese and foreign English teachers, especially in the ESC area, and teachers' coping strategies for students' epistemic deficiency. Knowledge status check is the main source of judgment for teachers to take the next step according to the student's responses. In most cases, teachers design their classrooms according to Krashen's "i+1" model to ensure that students acquire new information without feeling too much pressure, and try to avoid class silence. However, even though the classroom has been carefully designed, there is no guarantee that everything is under control, and there will still be times when the level of students' state of knowledge is insufficient. What teacher should do in that situation? Is there any difference in the correspondence between Chinese and foreign teachers? It is a research gap. The appropriate response to deal with students' epistemic deficiency is an important part of the teacher's teaching, which can figure out which part of teaching should be paid more attention to.

3 | Classroom CA Comparison

3.1 | Sample Introduction

In this paper, two ESL classroom videos were selected as samples for analysis: one is a fourth-grade Chinese teacher's English classroom at Beiyuan Primary School in Jinan City (C1), and another is a fourth-grade foreign teacher's English classroom in an elementary school in Nanjing (C2). Although the concrete content taught in the two classes was not the same, C1 was on the topic of job positions and C2 was on the topic of sports equipment, both classes were the first time to teach their selected topics and both focused on the introduction of relevant vocabulary. Therefore, the two classes have a relatively high degree of similarity, which satisfies the condition of domestic and foreign teachers as the only variable, so that the credibility of the results of the session analysis in this paper is guaranteed.

3.2 | Methodology

In the process of analyzing teachers' epistemic status check methods for students, Olcay Sert's (2013) "Epistemic status check" in a verbal way and Tan Xiaoyun's (12) "A Cognitive Study on Classroom Questioning" are mainly referred to. Considering the samples used in this paper, teachers' ESC methods are classified into declarative questioning (DQ) and interrogative questioning (IQ).

Because the classroom samples analyzed in this paper were single-camera videos, it was difficult to observe students' nonverbal responses (e.g., gaze shifting, head shaking, head bowing, etc.) in the classroom. Therefore, in examining student performance of epistemic deficiency, we only analyze students' verbal responses (silence and uttering question words). Both classes were reasonably designed, and students' epistemic deficiency happened infrequently. Thus, once it happens, it is easy to tell. Students' silence and Student questioning are discussed for that. Therefore, this paper has fewer data errors in this direction of the study. When students are in a high position of epistemic status, their attitudes toward ESC are more positive, which is reflected in their activeness in class participants. This paper focuses on the two approaches of ESC "teacher chooses the student who raises his/her hand to answer (A1)" and "the student answers directly without the teacher's choice(A2)".

In discussing teachers' coping strategies in the face of students' epistemic deficiency, teachers hold the right to cope with that condition which is one special case of turn-taking in conversation analysis. Thus, the three rules of turn-taking summarized by Sacks, Scheggolff, and Jefferson are referred to in the research (1974):

1. If the current speaker chooses the next speaker, the chosen person has the right to continue the conversation, while others do not;
2. If the current speaker has not chosen the next speaker, the conversationalists may, but are not obliged to, self-select. If self-selection has been made, the first self-selected person takes over the turn of the conversation;
3. If neither the current speaker has chosen the next speaker nor the session participants have self-selected, the current speaker may, but is not obliged to, continue.

3.3 | Data Analysis

In the following tables, DQ represents the declarative question; IQ represents the interrogative question; A1 represents the teacher chooses the student who raises his/her hand to answer; A2 represents the student answers directly without the teacher's choice; Rule1, Rule2, and Rule3 correspond to the three rules of turn-taking summarized by Sacks, Scheggolff, and Jefferson respectively.

Table 1. Epistemic status check of the Chinese English teacher.

Students / Teacher	High Epistemic Status		Low Epistemic Status	
	A1	A2	Silence	Student Questioning
DQ	1	8	2	0
IQ	20	16	4	0

Table 2. Coping strategy of Chinese English teacher facing students' epistemic deficiency.

Teacher	Rule1	Rule2	Rule3
Times	0	3	0

Table 3. Epistemic status check of the foreign English teacher.

Students / Teacher	High Epistemic Status		Low Epistemic Status	
	A1	A2	Silence	Student Questioning
DQ	5	16	0	0
IQ	8	6	1	2

Table 4. Coping strategy of foreign English teacher facing students' epistemic deficiency.

Teacher	Rule1	Rule2	Rule3
Times	0	3	0

Based on the above tabular data and video sample analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. There is a big difference between Chinese and foreign teachers in the way of ESC. Chinese teachers are more inclined to use interrogative questions, while foreign teachers mainly use declarative questions;

2. When students are in a high position of epistemic status, both Chinese and foreign teachers are more inclined to the form of "students' independent direct answer" (A2);

3. When students are in a low position of epistemic status, the student's performance is mostly silent (the reason why the foreign teachers' classroom has the form of question words may be because the classroom atmosphere of foreign teachers is more active than that of Chinese teachers, and the teacher-student relationship is more equal);

4. Most of the measures taken by Chinese teachers to deal with students in low epistemic status level are Rule 3; Foreign teachers usually adopt Rule 2, accompanied by encouraging words.

In addition to the above performances, it is observed that the classroom discipline of the Chinese teacher is better than that of the foreign teacher; When no student was assigned to answer questions independently, students in the Chinese English teacher's class usually answered the answer in chorus, while students in foreign teachers' classes give different answers at the same time. In general, both Chinese and foreign teachers have their own merits and some aspects need to be improved. For example, Chinese teachers can learn from foreign teachers' encouraging discourse mode and open-ended question setting to cultivate students' ability to think independently, to avoid a "lack of teacher-student interaction" (Sun Caixia, 2012, p. 3). Foreign teachers can also learn from Chinese teachers' methods of keeping class in discipline to save the time of maintaining discipline in class and improve teaching efficiency.

4 | Conclusion

4.1 | Significance

By analyzing the ESC methods of Chinese and foreign English teachers to students, the different performance of students of different epistemic status, and the different strategies taken by teachers facing students with low epistemic status, the differences and advantages and disadvantages of classroom conversation modes adopted by Chinese and foreign teachers are analyzed and compared in this paper. The study will contribute to the understanding of effective classroom communication methods and strategies that can be employed by English language teachers to increase the learning experience of students with varying levels of epistemic status. The study may also provide a foundation for further research in the area of effective classroom communication, particularly concerning epistemic status checks.

4.2 | Limitations and Future Research Prospects

There are still some limitations in this paper, such as small sample size, failure to analyze non-verbal responses, and non-natural classroom. Due to the limitation of coverage, only data tables are shown without specific conversation analysis. Therefore, future studies can expand the sample size, include non-verbal responses in the analysis, analyze natural classrooms, etc., and enrich the research field of classroom conversation analysis and epistemic status. In conclusion,

through the analysis of the classrooms of English teachers in China and the West, this paper provides new evidence for the field of conversation analysis and epistemic status research and introduces a new perspective on the differences in measures taken by Chinese and foreign English teachers in the face of students' low epistemic status level.

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