

A Review of the Theoretical Development and Practical Application of Listening Teaching Models

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Abstract:

Enhancing the listening comprehension skills of second language learners represents one of the most pressing and persistent educational challenges within the field of second language acquisition today. As a fundamental core component of successful linguistic communication, the effectiveness with which listening skills are acquired directly impacts learners' overall language proficiency and communicative competence. To systematically address this significant challenge, researchers have actively developed and implemented diverse listening instructional models over time. This comprehensive paper critically reviews three particularly representative mainstream pedagogical approaches: traditional listening instruction, task-based listening instruction, and contemporary multimodal listening instruction. Through an in-depth analysis and comparison of each model's theoretical underpinnings, distinct operational characteristics, inherent strengths, and notable limitations, this study specifically seeks to identify their relative applicability across varied learner profiles (e.g., age, proficiency levels), diverse instructional objectives (e.g., phoneme discrimination, detail extraction, gist comprehension), and contrasting teaching environments (e.g., classroom time constraints, technological resource availability). The ultimate research goal is to provide educators with clearer theoretical frameworks and actionable, practical guidance for pedagogical implementation, thereby enabling more effective improvement of students' L2 listening comprehension performance and overall proficiency development.

Keywords: multimodal theory, listening teaching model, English listening teaching

1. Introduction

In today's era of globalization, there is a growing emphasis on English language learning. Listening, as a core input skill in English language acquisition, serves as the foundation for language communication. However, traditional listening instruction has long relied on one-way audio input and mechanical exercises, following a pattern of "teachers play audio, students complete exercises, check answers, and listen to the audio again". This learning model overlooks learners' subjective initiative and fails to engage learners actively in the application of real life contexts. With the development of educational technology and the deepening of second language acquisition theories, an increasing number of listening teaching models have emerged, and the focus of listening instruction has gradually shifted from "passive reception" to "interactive construction".

Through an in depth analysis of the theoretical foundations, operational characteristics, advantages, and limitations of three mainstream teaching models (traditional teaching model, task based teaching model, and multimodal teaching model), this paper aims to clearly define the teaching scenarios suitable for each model. These scenarios include different learner characteristics (age, proficiency level), teaching objectives (basic sound discrimination, detail extraction, and main idea comprehension), and environmental constraints (classroom time, technological conditions). The purpose of this study is to provide solid theoretical support and practical operational guidelines for teaching practice, so as to effectively enhance the listening comprehension abilities and academic performance of second language learners. Additionally, this paper offers prospects for teaching practice and future research.

2. Theoretical Basis

2.1 Language Input Theory

The core of Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory, the "Language Input Hypothesis", posits that "comprehensible input" is the key. It indicates that the language input received by learners should fall within their comprehensible range (i.e., the $i + 1$ level, where " i " represents the learners' current language proficiency and " $i + 1$ " represents a level slightly higher than their current language knowledge). In other words, language materials that are slightly more advanced than the learners' current level are crucial for language acquisition. Second language acquisition achieves the best results when the input is understood. Sufficient comprehensible input is not only a prerequisite for effective acquisition but also the cornerstone for the development of later language output ability [1].

2.2 Cognitive Processing Theory

This theory posits that listening comprehension is a complex information processing process. It is an interactive process of top-down and bottom-up processing. Bottom-up processing relies on the decoding and recognition of speech signals. Auditorily, the brain starts from the most basic sound features and gradually identifies phonemes and words, ultimately comprehending the meaning of the entire sentence. In contrast, top-down processing depends on the listener's background knowledge, expectations, and context to predict and interpret the heard content. Auditorily, the brain interprets incomplete audio based on past experiences. Expectation plays a crucial role in the cognitive process [2].

2.3 Dynamic Systems Theory

Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) describes and interprets complex systems that change over time according to specific rules. It originates from a pure mathematical paradigm used to describe the main internal properties of a system as time elapses [3]. DST posits that the language system is complex and dynamically evolving. The complexity of language is manifested in its composition of numerous nested subsystems, meaning that each system is always a part of another system. Secondly, the dynamic theory holds that the language system is self-organizing. By responding to external inputs and self-organizing internal variables, it remains in a relatively stable state for a certain period. Finally, the development of language proficiency exhibits a sensitive dependence on initial conditions and feedback [4].

2.4 Multimodal Theory

Modality refers to the ways in which humans interact with the environment through their senses, such as vision and hearing. Based on the number of sensory organs involved in the interaction, these interaction modes can be classified into three categories: "unimodal," which involves only one sensory organ; "bimodal," which involves two sensory organs; and "multimodal," which involves three or more sensory organs [5]. Therefore, multimodality is a phenomenon of communication that utilizes multiple senses, including auditory, visual, and tactile senses, and employs various means and semiotic resources, such as language, images, sounds, and gestures [6].

3. The Mainstream Listening Teaching Models

3.1 The Traditional Listening Teaching Models

The traditional listening teaching model is centered

around the teacher, featuring a highly structured teaching process. The core training methods typically encompass dictation, repetition, and multiple choice questions. The selection of teaching content and the pacing of the class are primarily controlled by the teacher, leaving students in a state of passive reception and reaction. The listening materials used are often simplified or specially compiled, with a high degree of standardization, yet they may deviate from real and complex language use contexts.

The advantages of this model lie in enhancing speech recognition abilities. Dictation and repetition exercises can effectively train second language learners' familiarity with phonemes, word pronunciations, and simple sentence structures, laying a foundation for listening comprehension. Secondly, this model is well-suited for examinations. The process of this model is fixed, and multiple choice questions in particular are highly compatible with "large-scale standardized tests", meeting the requirements of exam taking. Thirdly, the model has a clear structure and is easy to get started with. For language beginners or learners with a weak language foundation, this clear and controllable structure can enhance their sense of security in learning, provide a clear learning path, and reduce learning anxiety.

However, the traditional listening teaching model also has significant drawbacks. Firstly, the learning materials are divorced from real-life contexts, making it difficult for students to transfer their learned skills to actual language situations. Secondly, second language learners passively receive information, which can easily dampen their learning motivation. Thirdly, this model overlooks individual differences. It pays insufficient attention to "the differences in students' individual English proficiency, learning styles, and cognitive strategies". Teaching that fails to take into account students' individual differences can hardly meet the needs of students at different levels, and is particularly unfavorable for high-level students to develop other listening skills such as "critical understanding, summarizing the main idea, and inferring implied meanings" [7].

This model is suitable for learners with relatively weak language foundations. These learners need to build confidence by starting from the most basic identification of sounds, words, and sentences. Moreover, this approach is applicable to large class teaching environments with relatively limited resources or environments that highly emphasize standardized tests and grades. In summary, the traditional listening teaching model holds certain value in "building basic identification abilities and serving standardized tests", and is particularly suitable for beginners and specific test-taking scenarios. However, its limitations, such as being divorced from real contexts, making learners passive, and ignoring individual differences, make it difficult to meet the learning needs of language

learners at the advanced stage of practical communication ability development. Traditional listening teaching needs to integrate more new educational concepts and utilize real language materials and technological means to make up for the deficiencies of the traditional model.

3.2 Task-Based Listening Teaching Model

The task-based listening teaching model is "learner-centered" and emphasizes "learning by doing." Its core lies in the fact that teachers, based on the key and difficult points of teaching and a precise analysis of students' pre-class preview feedback, design and assign targeted and contextualized in-class learning tasks. These tasks simulate real-life, learning, or work scenarios (such as booking airline tickets, understanding the key points of a lecture, and participating in group discussion and decision-making), requiring learners to use the target language (English) for purposeful information acquisition, processing, communication, or problem-solving. The entire teaching process focuses on the task completion process and meaning conveyance, rather than mere language form drills.

Its primary advantage lies in the ability to enhance learners' motivation and engagement. Authentic and interesting tasks can greatly stimulate learners' intrinsic interest and enthusiasm for participation, enabling them to shift from passive reception to active involvement. Secondly, tasks compel learners to employ methods such as prediction, inference, selective attention, meaning negotiation, and main idea summarization in complex contexts, effectively cultivating high order listening comprehension and communication skills that meet the requirements of the real world. Thirdly, this model can strengthen language application ability and fluency. Under the pressure of task completion, learners more naturally integrate skills such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing, accelerating the transformation of language knowledge into application ability and enhancing the fluency and confidence in language use.

Although the task-based approach has certain advantages, it also reveals obvious limitations in actual teaching applications. Firstly, the design and implementation of tasks are highly challenging. Designing tasks that are both authentic and suitable for learners' proficiency levels demands a high level of professional competence from teachers. Moreover, classroom organization and management, especially in large classes, are more complex, requiring teachers to meticulously plan time and resources. Secondly, this approach imposes a cognitive load and stress on learners. When the task volume is excessive or the complexity exceeds students' current proficiency levels, it can easily lead to learners' anxiety and frustration, and may even reduce their learning motivation, which is counterproductive to learners' second language acquisition. Thirdly, this approach is highly dependent on the learning environment

and resources. Effective implementation of this teaching approach requires relatively sufficient classroom time, small class sizes or effective group work strategies, abundant authentic language materials, and technical support.

This model is suitable for learners who already have a foundation in the language, are capable of processing information of a certain level of complexity, possess strong learning motivation, are eager to improve their practical language application abilities, and enjoy interactive learning. This model is applicable to the teaching objectives of cultivating listening comprehension and communication skills in real-life contexts, as well as fostering collaborative learning and problem-solving abilities. Moreover, this model is appropriate for educational environments featuring small class teaching and relatively ample class time.

Jia Zhang conducted an experimental study among students in Grade 9 at a middle school in Xianyang City. Two parallel classes with similar English proficiency levels were selected and randomly assigned to an experimental class (where the task-based listening teaching model was adopted) and a control class (where the traditional listening teaching model was employed). The study utilized listening test questions, questionnaires on learning attitudes and strategies, and student interviews as tools to collect data, and the SPSS software was used for statistical analysis. The research results indicate that the improvement in English listening scores of students in the experimental class using the task-based listening teaching model was significantly greater than that of students in the control class using the traditional model [8]. This provides empirical evidence for the effectiveness of the task-based listening teaching model in improving listening scores at the middle school level, especially for learners with a certain foundation.

In conclusion, the task-based listening teaching model offers significant advantages for intermediate and advanced learners in enhancing listening comprehension and practical communication skills. Despite the challenges in implementation, these advantages can be fully realized under appropriate teaching conditions. This model addresses the limitations of traditional teaching approaches and represents a crucial step towards cultivating communicative competence.

3.3 Multimodal

Multimodal teaching is a scientific and reasonable teaching model that conforms to the laws of students' cognitive development. It integrates multimodal resources such as images, texts, games, tables, languages, gestures, and sounds for information transmission and communication. In English teaching, multimodal teaching emphasizes fully engaging learners' visual, auditory, and tactile senses through various means such as gestures, sounds, and images in classroom instruction. This approach can

transform abstract and complex knowledge into concrete and vivid forms, presenting abstract knowledge in a more tangible way, effectively enhancing students' abilities to process, acquire, and analyze English knowledge, and thereby cultivating their English proficiency. Therefore, in senior high school English listening teaching, teachers should scientifically apply the multimodal teaching model, create a multi-sensory experience environment, optimize the listening learning effect, and effectively promote the development of students' English listening skills [9].

Firstly, this model can stimulate learners' interest and motivation in learning. The rich and diverse sensory stimuli can significantly enhance the attractiveness and interests of the classroom, effectively arouse students' learning interest, and reduce their listening anxiety. Secondly, this model can promote the visualization of abstract knowledge. Teachers can use means such as images, videos, and demonstrations to vividly present abstract and obscure English language knowledge (such as idioms, cultural backgrounds, and complex concepts), greatly enhancing students' depth of understanding. Thirdly, it can enhance students' potential for autonomous learning. Exposure to and getting used to multimodal learning resources (such as subtitled videos, illustrated podcasts, and interactive software) can strengthen students' awareness and ability to conduct extracurricular listening exercises through various channels, thereby improving their learning ability.

Despite certain advantages of the multimodal approach, it has also revealed significant limitations in practical teaching applications. Firstly, this approach has a high degree of dependence on teachers' competencies and technology. Effectively designing, selecting, and integrating various modal resources requires teachers to possess high-level information literacy and instructional design capabilities. Meanwhile, it is highly reliant on multimedia equipment and technical support (such as projectors, audio systems, and the Internet), and technical glitches may severely impact teaching. Secondly, this approach may cause distraction. Excessive irrelevant animations and relatively complex visuals can divert learners' attention from the core listening content, thereby interfering with the learning outcomes.

This model is applicable to learners whose learning interest needs to be developed. It also serves the teaching purposes of reducing listening anxiety, enhancing learning motivation, and enabling learners to acquire vocabulary and expressions related to cultural backgrounds and specific real-world objects. Moreover, it is suitable for teaching environments equipped with well-established multimedia classrooms or language laboratories and featuring small-sized classes. Zhang Yu conducted a study on ninth-grade students in a junior high school in Liaoning Province. Using a mixed methods approach (including questionnaires, proficiency tests, and in-depth interviews),

Yu Zhang explored the practical effectiveness of the multimodal teaching method in English listening instruction. The study selected a total of 80 students from two classes with comparable academic levels as the sample group. Class A served as the experimental group, where the multimodal listening teaching strategy was implemented, while Class B served as the control group, maintaining the conventional listening teaching mode. To ensure effective control of experimental variables, the same teacher was responsible for teaching both groups, using the same teaching materials and the same number of class hours, with differences only in the teaching methods. The final results indicated that the listening interest of students in Class A significantly improved in the emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions. The application of the multimodal teaching model in junior high school English listening instruction had an impact on students' listening performance, with the listening scores of students in the experimental class showing a significant increase [10].

The multimodal listening teaching model constructs a rich and realistic language input environment for learners by integrating multiple sensory channels such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic modalities. Its core advantages lie in significantly enhancing learning interest and motivation, reducing the difficulty of comprehension, and facilitating the concretization of abstract knowledge. Zhang Yu's research at the junior high school level provides empirical support for the model's effectiveness in improving students' listening interest and performance. However, the model faces challenges in terms of teacher competence, technological dependence, potential cognitive interference, and resource investment. The key to the successful implementation of this model is that teachers precisely select modality combinations that are highly consistent with teaching objectives, ensure that the modalities synergistically enhance rather than interfere with each other, balance the relationship between auxiliary modalities and core listening training, and make full use of existing technological conditions. It represents a highly valuable supplement and development direction in modern listening teaching, especially in stimulating interest, addressing difficulties, and creating contexts.

4. Conclusion

Listening instruction necessitates the breaking down of educational barriers. The traditional teaching model focuses on basic identification skills and exam-oriented training, which is suitable for beginners and large-class teaching with limited resources. However, it is divorced from real-life contexts and overlooks individual differences, making it difficult to meet the development needs

of advanced communicative abilities. The task-based model drives language use through real tasks, effectively enhancing the engagement and comprehensive abilities of intermediate and advanced learners. Nevertheless, it faces challenges such as complex task design and high cognitive load. The multimodal model integrates multiple sensory inputs, reducing the difficulty of understanding and stimulating interest, but it is highly dependent on teachers' capabilities and technological resources. Each of these three models has its own advantages: the traditional model lays a solid foundation, the task-based model strengthens application, and the multimodal model optimizes the input experience. While these models can strengthen language foundations, due to the differences among learners, the selection of educational models is characterized by diversity and complexity. Future research could focus on achieving a dynamic balance in the selection of teaching models and explore the integration and stratification of these teaching models.

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