

# *Brief Discussion on the Shift of Focus Based on the Cultivation of Non-English Majors' English Proficiency under the Background of English Test for International Communication*

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**Abstract**—In recent years, there are many English proficiency tests for non-English majors. They are meant to examine the language competence of the students and these tests have had a great influence on students' learning, communication and job-hunting. This paper firstly illustrates the strengths and weaknesses of these traditional tests, and then studies the Washback effects on the reforms of the testing system; because of these effects, a new kind of test-English Test for International Communication (ETIC) emerged. After being introduced, it has attracted the attention of both teachers and students. Then this paper analyzes the features of this test and highlights the necessity of shifting teachers' teaching focus in order to enhance the effectiveness of teaching and the students' language competence. On the students' side, this test is suitable to examine whether they can meet the requirements of the current personnel standard selection; on the teachers' side, their teaching practice and teaching direction should be adjusted.

**Keywords**—English proficiency test; non-English majors; language competence; Washback Effects; English Test for International Communication; shift the teaching focus; effectiveness of teaching; Current personnel selection; teaching practice

## I. TRADITIONAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TESTS

With China more and more getting involved in the international affairs, college students, especially non-English majors are facing new opportunities and challenges worldwide. As intercultural communication increases, China turns to promote its economic partnership with countries all over the world which has a high demand for students' English competence when they walk into all kinds of careers after graduation. Excellent English communication and writing skills are particularly indispensable and these two abilities also play a significant role in the employment market. How to enhance students' competitiveness in the job market has always been a big concern in college English learning and teaching. During many years of training, students are good at reading and doing multiple-choice questions, but it's hard for them to make a summary of the material they have read and let alone to express their opinions about the issue. Take CET-4

and CET-6 for example, it is well-known to college students that these two exams are important which aim to measure their ability to use English in a well-rounded way. But how much do they contribute to the improvement of students' English learning? Whether students are truly qualified and competent in dealing with English-related problems and work after getting the certificates? We know that there are two critical components accounting for the largest proportion on these two test papers, that is Listening and Reading. So both teachers and students pay a lot of attention to these, especially reading, because we are familiar with this traditional pattern and have been examined over and over again. So in classroom teaching, we spend a lot of time reading and trying to find out the right answers to these multiple-choice questions. As for listening, most students can just make do with it. What they want is just to focus on the main points related to the questions and then choose the right answers to make them pass the exams. So they often neglect the rest and pay less attention to the content of an article: what is a piece of news report mainly about or what common sense does a lecture give us. That's why the results of CET-4 and CET-6 have always been subjected to criticism. That's why so many graduates, even though have obtained their certificates, still can't do well in a job interview, let alone in their daily communication and work.

## II. THE WASHBACK EFFECTS

### A. The Definition of Washback Effect

Test is a method of measuring a person's specific range of knowledge and ability. This definition implies that testing must meet the following four aspects: it is a method; it is meant to examine people as its end; it aims to examine people's ability and knowledge as its object; it is limited to a specific range. The main purpose of language testing is to give an accurate, fair measurement and evaluation to the language that being tested.<sup>[6]</sup> With the development of language testing theory, it is widely believed that language test can comprehensively, profoundly and positively affect language teaching, which is called Washback. It concerns the impact of tests and assessments on materials, teachers, and learners. Washback is a term that commonly used in language testing,

This work was financially supported by "China Language Assessment (No.ZGWYCPJJ2018028B)

yet it is rarely found in dictionaries. However, it is defined as: “the unwelcome repercussions of some social actions” by the *New Webster’s Comprehensive Dictionary of the English Language*, and “unpleasant after-effects of an event or a situation” by *Collin’s Co-build Dictionary of the English language*. It is used to explain the relationship among testing, teaching and learning. As language testing methods change, so do the development of language teaching modes. They are inseparable. Teaching modes have evolved from the former behaviorism translation under the guidance of grammar to the communicative teaching under the influence of cognition<sup>[2]</sup>. Then it developed to Task-Based Language teaching (TBLT). These changes in teaching cause the changes of testing modes. In general, these changes indicate that our focus on the forms of language has been shifted to the concern of communicative function.

#### *B. He Bi-Directional Effect of Washback*

These selective testing modes affect individual employment, together with the rapid development of international exchanges and cooperation business; these tests are being tested by a wider range of relevant employment groups and employers. Series of English proficiency tests can produce Washback effects to the society. However, this effect is bi-directional which means not only tests have an impact on the society; the society can also have an impact on the tests. It is mainly reflected by the reforms of examinations which put more emphasis on people’s communication ability. The newly launched English Test for International Communication (ETIC) is also the reflection of the society on English proficiency test. All the questions are designed to respond to social needs. This test conforms to the mode of task-based teaching and sets its questions, requiring examinee to finish the corresponding speaking, listening, writing and communication tasks.

### III. ENGLISH TEST FOR INTERNATIONAL COMMUNICATION

#### *A. Brief Introduction of ETIC*

English Test for International Communication (ETIC) is established by China Language Assessment center of Beijing Foreign Studies University. It has been introduced under the background of the “Belt and Road Initiative”, aiming to select excellent professionals and provide references for companies<sup>[1]</sup>. At the same time, this test is meant to select some professionals with proficient English communication skills and a global view, knowing about the international rules and very familiar with international negotiations. There are five levels: preliminary, intermediate, advanced, high end and senior translation. It is a standard testing tool not only to evaluate talents’ linguistic knowledge, but also their actual application skills of the language in business setting. It will serve well for any firms in their business recruitment and evaluation processes, it will also be inspirational to teachers who are engaged in English teaching and training.<sup>[4]</sup> It mainly examines talents’ core ability: English communication ability and its name has it all. Communication ability means talents should be able to complete a variety of communication tasks in English, including comprehension and communication, respect the cultural differences of different countries, ethnic groups and handle these cultural misunderstandings and communicate effectively with other people<sup>[3]</sup>.

#### *B. Its Focus and Component Parts*

Speaking ability and writing ability are the most important parts in this test. Take intermediate level for example, its oral communication contents include speech analysis, data interpretation, business introduction and business speeches; its written contents include sorting information, studying materials, writing letters and proposals, etc. To be more specific, the first part, oral communication, usually has three tasks. The first task is a short extract from five people, giving their feedbacks or opinions about a product. After that, five questions will be asked on what each speaker has mainly talked about. So the examinee has to summarize each speaker’s message. All the topics in this test are closely-related to our daily life. So firstly, the examinee have to figure out what the five speakers are talking about which requires them to improve their listening skills and then they also need to try to make a summary which requires them to speak it out. So during this process, the examinee no longer focus on some single sentences, they should get a main idea in general and then apply what they abstract from the recordings to their daily lives since they are closely related. So through this part, the examinee can not only improve their listening skills but also their oral expression. Through so many years of learning, students’ biggest problem is that it’s difficult for them to match what they have learned with their daily lives. So this test is a way for students to improve their learning method as well as a way for teachers to change their teaching direction. The second task is a bar chart about a common topic usually discussed in the companies, for example, the major expenses at Venti Ltd or the numbers of retail stores by geographical location.<sup>[1]</sup> The examinee first read the chart and then they will be asked eight questions. They should give oral answers and each of the answers should be accurate and brief. The chart itself is quite clear and simple, usually including four aspects of a thing in 3 years or seasons or different periods, etc. But it is a little difficult for the examinee to give a quick and right answer in a short period of time. They need to learn how to report something with a clear mind and a logical thinking. It aims to develop examinee’s speaking ability and quick-thinking which are quite useful after they enter into a company. The third task is a passage about a company or a brochure about a business, and the examinee need to introduce the company or the business to the clients by summarizing the main features of the company or the service. It aims to examine the ability of summarizing a piece of reading material. In college, students usually understand the main idea of an article after figuring out every word which is not a correct way of getting information. When they get a piece of material, they should have the ability to get the main information as quickly as possible through skimming and scanning. So through this part, students will realize they can read some topic sentences—often the first sentences of each paragraph or the conclusions or the results of some studies, etc. to obtain the main information. After reading the material in this way, they will get a comprehensive, clear and logical understanding of the information and then introduce it to their clients. Since all of these topics are relevant to students’ future jobs, it is targeted and the students will know what kinds of abilities they should develop during their four years of English learning. The last part of oral expression in this test is to make a presentation.

This requires the examinee to be able to convey information, illustrate a kind of situation or express opinions and so on in a business setting. So the examinee has to know the content and purpose of his or her speech, and then be able to present him or herself in a proper way. These four parts of oral expression provide a lot of insights to both teachers and students. What should we learn? It should be the things that related to our daily life and work. What kinds of skills should we develop? That is we should know how to make an accurate report in a clear and logical way; we should realize that we need to grasp the topic sentences or the specific structure of an article first, for example, for exposition, we need to get the main information as quickly as possible, not word by word, but by skimming and scanning; we should also learn how to present ourselves as a training coordinator or a managing assistant or a department manager. As for the written part, all of the sections are closely related to our life and work which aim to tell us that we should know how to make an outline or how to deal with a piece of information: distinguish the opinions and facts, find out the results and predictions, get the main idea of a paragraph, etc. After this test was introduced in 2016, it has received favors and recognition from well-known enterprises.

#### IV. THE SHIFT OF FOCUS ON ENGLISH TEACHING AND LEARNING

##### A. *The Necessity of Shifting Focus*

College English teaching for non-English majors is affected by the Washback effects of selective testing in various universities. College English teaching aims to enhance students' comprehensive ability which includes thinking skills, English communication ability, practical ability, entrepreneurship ability and overall quality, so as to better meet the social demand for talents and complete the important historical mission entrusted by the times. Many universities have made massive adjustments and innovation to their class arrangement, teaching methods and contents to improve the teaching quality and teaching level. At the same time, students pay a lot attention and take part in all kinds of tests with different levels, hoping to get as many certificates as possible to show their English competence. Teachers should make their utmost effort to develop students' actual comprehensive abilities in their classroom teaching.

##### B. *Insights to Shift Focus*

How to shift our focus in order to adapt to the tests? From the contents of the ETIC, we find that it is more suitable and targeted to develop student's comprehensive abilities, especially their speaking ability and writing ability in their daily use. Compared with CET-4 and CET-6, it's more practical in students' job-hunting and daily communication, so it will encourage them to improve their English learning. When it comes to classroom teaching, when we read an article, we should shift our focus from the traditional way of choosing the right answers to a more practical practice. For example, when we come across an expository writing, we should analyze the features and structures of an exposition first, for example, if the article is organized in a chronological order and is made up by a series of studies and results, we can just pay attention to these time markers and the results of these studies while ignoring these examples. In this way, we can grasp the main ideas quickly; or if in an article, an object is

introduced by its definition or by some examples, then the article analyzes the causes for its emergence and finally provides feasible solutions to deal with it and so on, then students can follow this pattern: pointing out an object-analyze it-solve it to get the main idea. After knowing these features, students can apply these techniques into their reading which will help them obtain effective information in a short period of time. And at the same time, they can make a summary and present it in the class. Likewise, when we come across an argumentation, we also need to know its features, and then the students can extract the words and expressions they learned in the text to express their opinions. We can also set some different settings and learn some daily usage. Students' biggest problem in English learning might be what they have learned is irrelevant to what they want to use in their everyday life and work. And this test provides a means to connect our knowledge with our daily application, especially in our work. The improvement of English competence needs a lot of students' practice. In the class, the biggest challenge for teachers is to present a balanced approach between language knowledge and language skills. Teachers are usually dominant and students are passively learning.<sup>[5]</sup> At the same time, the teachers don't provide the environment for the students to practice their English. On the students' side, most of them find it is difficult to speak it out or they find hard to put what they want into proper English. Most of what they say is Chinglish. In order to improve students' communication ability or real interactive ability, teachers should be qualified to help them on English language level as well as on cultural knowledge level. Teachers should also get rid of the traditional teacher-centered approach to a student-centered approach to guarantee that students will have enough time to apply their knowledge into interactive situations with real-life language use. Studies show that the most effective way for students to improve their English is to spend a lot of time listening to English songs, watching English movies while imitating, taking part in all kinds of competitions and debates and communicating with other foreign friends through WeChat or other social media. During this process, they will accumulate knowledge, enlarge their vocabulary as well as apply what they have learned into practice. In other words, if students want to master English, they have to practice. While teachers, they should help lay a solid foundation of basic knowledge for the students and also should help students realize the importance of language input through various ways, thus developing students' communication skills. In order to shift the focus of teaching, the teachers should improve their own comprehensive abilities and create a good language environment to inspire students' enthusiasm.

#### V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

English Test for International Communication (ETIC) is a newly-introduced test, it provides some insights for the teachers to improve their teaching methods and urge teachers to present a balanced approach between language knowledge and language skills. On the students' side, they should shift from their normal knowledge accumulation to knowledge application, improving their comprehensive skills. However, there is no perfect testing system in the world, we should keep innovating and trying to improve our testing system.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was financially supported by “China Language Assessment (No.ZGWYCPJJ2018028B)”.

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