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# POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE

—AN EMPIRICAL STUDY  
OF CET WASHBACK

## 正面的还是负面的

——大学英语四、六级考试反拨效应实证研究

辜向东 著



重庆大学出版社

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## 内 容 简 介

本研究把大学英语四、六级考试(CET)的反拨效应界定为CET对大学英语教学的影响。研究的重点是:1)CET参与者对该考试及其反拨效应的认识;2)CET对大学英语课堂教学过程的影响;3)CET对大学英语教学产生的影响;此外作者还分析了影响大学英语教学的非考试因素。本研究是在样本学校、个体教师及全国范围内进行的,运用了课堂观察、问卷调查、面对面访谈和测试等主要研究手段。研究结果表明:CET对大学英语教学产生了明显的正面反拨效应,但其反拨效应的问题远比人们想象的复杂,有一系列的因素影响大学英语教学的产出。

本研究是在2002-2005年(即CET进行一系列重大改革前)进行的,是作者的国家社会科学基金项目“大学英语四、六级考试反拨效应历时研究”的研究基础(07BYY030)。

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## *P*reface

The present study, “Positive or Negative: An Empirical Study of CET Washback”, explores the relationship between the National College English Test (CET) and College English (CE) teaching and learning.

The CET washback is defined as the effect or influence of the test on CE teaching and learning in China. The research is focused on: 1) the CET participants’ perceptions of the test and its washback; 2) the processes of CE classroom teaching and learning, including the CET washback on CE classroom teaching and learning; and 3) the products of CE teaching and learning. In addition, other major factors exerting influence on CE teaching and learning are analyzed.

The study is carried out in both case study settings and nationwide contexts. A wide range of CET stakeholders (e.g. administrators, teachers, and students), about 4,500 in total, is involved. Various research methods are employed, including classroom observation, questionnaire surveys, interviews, tests and analyses of documents, of “coaching materials”, as well as of CET data and of the examinee output in the CET.

The research has found a preponderance of evidence indicating positive washback of the CET on CE teaching and learning. The major findings are briefly summarized as follows.

Most of the CET stakeholders think highly of the test, especially its design, administration, marking and the new measures adopted in recent years. They believe that the positive washback of the test is much greater than the negative washback, and that the negative washback is primarily due to the test users’ misuse of the test rather than the test itself. However, some CET stakeholders are dissatisfied with the overuse of the multiple-choice (MC)

format in the test, the lack of direct score reports to the teachers, the incomplete evaluation of the students' English proficiency without a compulsory spoken English test, and the use of the test as the sole means in evaluating the quality of CE teaching and learning.

The CET has an effect on various aspects of CE teaching and learning. The effect, however, is different in degree. It has more influence on teaching content, teaching pace and attitudes towards teaching, but less influence on teaching methods. The effect varies from university to university, from grade to grade, and from teacher to teacher.

The CET exerts both positive and negative washback on CE classroom teaching and learning. The positive washback has manifested itself as follows: it has promoted the implementation of *College English Teaching Syllabus* in CE classroom teaching and learning; it has urged the administrators to attach great importance to the CE course, thus ensuring the availability of the course at the Foundation Stage; it has motivated both the teachers and the students in their teaching and learning; it has led to a greater emphasis on reading skills and contributed to the students' remarkable progress in reading ability. The negative washback, on the other hand, includes: a more rapid teaching pace, use of "coaching materials" in class, and unsatisfactory completion of the textbook units in Grade Two classes, particularly in the fourth semester.

It has been shown that regular classroom teaching and learning with the creative use of textbooks and other teaching materials result in better test performance and higher test scores. In addition, teacher factors (e.g. the devotion of the teachers to their work, the teachers' English proficiency and their teaching methods) may outweigh the effect of the test on CE classroom teaching and learning.

The "coaching materials" for the CET do not have reliability and validity. They are not to be mentioned in the same breath as the CET test papers. It should be understood that teaching, learning, and testing are not interchangeable processes: for example, teaching is not simply a preparation for

testing.

The research has shown that the CET writing and speaking tests have exerted positive washback on CE teaching and learning. The students have made progress both in their writing and speaking abilities. However, due to many factors, the progress is limited. In fact, there is a dramatic imbalance in English proficiency among the university students across the country. Thus the students' performance in writing and speaking requires much improvement.

The CET has been shown to be an effective means of measurement. Its test results (Mean Graded Scores) can accurately reflect the relative caliber of CE teaching and learning during different periods of time at the same university and at different universities during the same period of time.

The issue of the CET washback, however, is more complicated than what has been supposed in the profession. The CET is part of a complex set of factors that determine the outcome of CE teaching and learning. The other top three factors within the school context are: students' educational background, teacher quality, and administrators' considerations about the CE course and the CET.

In addition to the major findings above, the present research offers suggestions for the reform of the test as well as feedback for the improvement of CE teaching and learning.



# List of Abbreviations

ASL	Abrabic-as-a-second-Language Test
B. A.	Bachelor of Arts degree
B. S.	Bachelor of Science and Technology degree
C1	Candidate One
C2	Candidate Two
C3	Candidate Three
CE	College English defined as a complete course of study
CEB 4	College English Band 4
<i>CES</i>	<i>College English Teaching Syllabi</i>
CET Testing Committee	National College English Testing Committee
CET	National College English Test
CET-4	National College English Test Band 4
CET-4' s	Compilation of the CET-4 test papers published by the CET Testing Committee in 2000
CET-6	National College English Test Band 6
CET-SET	College English Test-Spoken English Test
CQ	Questionnaire for the conference participants
<i>CR</i>	<i>College English Curriculum Requirements</i>
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELT	English language teaching
EM	English majors
EPTB	English Proficiency Test Battery
GT	Grammar-translation
HKCEE	Hong Kong Certificate of Education Exam
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
I-R-F	Initiation-response-feedback
Jing's	A book of "coaching materials" for the CET-4 reading test, edited by Jing (1998)

L	Listening
M. A.	Master of Arts degree
MC	Multiple choice
MCQ	Multiple-choice question
MET	Matriculation English Test
MGS	Mean Graded Score
NSQ	Questionnaire for students nationwide
NTQ	Questionnaire for teachers nationwide
p.	Page
Ph. D.	Doctor of Philosophy degree
P-P-P	Presentation-practice-production
PPT	PowerPoint
R	Reading
S	Speaking
SAQ	Short Answer Question
SCST	School of Computer Science and Technology
SFL	School of Foreign Languages
SSQ	Questionnaire for the sampled university students
STQ	Questionnaire for the sampled university teachers
T3. 1	Teacher One observed in University Three
T3. 2	Teacher Two observed in University Three
T3. 3	Teacher Three observed in University Three
TEM	Test of English Majors
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
U1	Sampled University One
U2	Sampled University Two
U3	Sampled University Three
UE	Use of English
W	Writing
wpm	Words per minute

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