

English Language Teaching Strategy and Testing

# 英语教学策略与测试

(测试篇)

主 编 由春英

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## 前 言

本书是详细阐述英语教学理论与测试的著作。近年来,国内出版了几种英语教学理论与测试方面的著作,但针对英语专业本科的教学实践,有的过于偏重理论,有的过于艰涩,有很多不适宜的地方。

本著作汲取了国内外语言教学理论与测试方面的重要研究成果,是为英语专业本科生,英语教师及准备参加英语教师证书考试的朋友编写的英语教学与测试指导著作,内容详实,论述严谨,深入浅出,注重实用,并能站在语言教学的前沿,将语言教学与语言理论密切结合,对当前英语教学及测试的理论与实践进行了全方位的论述,分析和介绍。

全书分为上下两册,即策略篇与测试篇。

本书为英语教学测试篇。英语测试(English Language Testing)是应用语言学的一个重要分支。英语测试研究涉及心理语言学、教育学、认知科学、语言习得理论、语言学、语用学以及教育测量学等多个领域。英语测试是个理论概念,包含测试理论、试题制作原则与方法、测试结果分析与解释等方面的内容。

英语测试是英语教师专业知识和技能的一个重要组成部分。当前,许多高等师范专业英语在本科生阶段开设英语测试课程。英语测试是英语语言教育硕士的必修学位课程之一。在普通教育教师提高学历的过程中,师范院校为在职专科升本科的教师们开设的课程中,也必然要有英语测试。这是因为英语测试的基本理论和实践与学生评价技术已经是我国教师职业专业化的一个重要内容。

本册书共分为11章,第一章简要介绍英语测试学;第二章介绍测试的功能与种类;第三章介绍测试的要素;第五、六、七、八和九章分别介绍了写作、听力、口语、词汇和语法测试;第十章介绍了试后报告;第十一章介绍了测试的发展与改进。

本册书主编由春英,副主编薛丽、刘喜波。本书完成情况,第一、二、三、四章由刘喜波负责编写;第五、六、七、十一章和术语表为由春英负责编写,第八、九、十章由薛丽负责编写,统稿由春英。

鉴于编者水平有限,书中难免有不妥之处,恳请读者不吝赐教。

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## **List of technical terms of English language testing**

## **Selected Bibliography**

## Chapter One A Brief Survey of English language Testing

### *Lead - in :*

This chapter offers a brief survey of English language testing in the following aspects: a) *general approaches* to English language testing; b) *major areas of concern in research and practice* in the past twenty years or so; c) *main features* of some of the current large - scale English language tests, etc. The purpose of the chapter is to help you form a *clear picture of what has happened* in the field of English language testing.

### 1 What's a test?

Testing is a very familiar means of evaluation in English language teaching. There are three tests for students at school or at college: a *quiz* is given after each lesson, in the middle of the term a *midterm test* is given and at the end of the term a *final test* is given to the students by teachers. In some tests, students are required to choose the best or the correct one out of the given choices, and in others they are required to write down the keys to the questions. When setting questions, we may ask ourselves such questions: Why are such questions and items chosen? What's the focus which is concerned in the English testing today? How about the development and trend of English language testing in the past few years?

It seems to me that firstly it is necessary to ~~look~~ *look back* *general approaches to English language testing*; secondly *the focuses (trends of development of English language testing)* in this field in the past twenty years. And finally, I will introduce some of the *current large - scale English tests and their characteristics* in and abroad. It will be very helpful to know and learn this subject well, especially in English language testing and it is beneficial to use the test means.

### 2 Four approaches to English language testing

Looking back upon the history of language testing, we find that language



testing had formed several methods or approaches according to different views on the nature of language at different times.

## 2.1 The essay – translation approach

This approach is commonly referred to as the pre – scientific stage of language testing.

Features: a) No special skill or expertise in testing is required. The subjective judgment of the teacher is considered to be of paramount importance.

b) Tests usually consist of essay writing, translation, and grammatical analysis (often in the form of comments about the language being learnt. )

c) The tests also have a heavy literary and cultural bias.

d) Questions are answered in written style and critically read by manual work.

Public examinations resulting from the essay – translation approach sometimes have an oral component at the upper intermediate and advanced levels – though this has sometimes been regarded in the past as something additional and in no way an integral part of the syllabus or examination.

## 2.2 The structuralist – psychometric approach

This approach is based on the theory of structural linguistics, emphasizing that different language elements can be separately tested, for example, phonetics, grammar and vocabulary can be separately tested without any context. Moreover, skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing can also be separately tested.

Features: a) One question can be used to test one language element or one skill; b) Some methods of structuralist – psychometric survey are adopted, emphasizing reliability and objectivity of the language test. Its representative form is multiple – choice item, which not only suits the demand of one question testing one element, but the test items also suits statistics and analysis after testing.

Such features of the structuralist – psychometric approach are still valid for certain types of test and for certain aims. For instance, the desire to concentrate on the testees' ability to write by attempting to separate a composition test from reading

is commendable in certain respects.

### 2.3 The integrative approach

Features: a) This approach involves the testing of language in context and is thus concerned primarily with meaning and the total communicative effect of discourse; b) Integrative tests are often designed to assess the learner's ability to use two or more skills simultaneously. Integrative tests are best characterized by the use of cloze testing and of dictation, translation and writing etc. Take cloze testing as an example. It also can be used to test the grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehensive abilities of the students at the same time. Furthermore, the abilities of grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension can be tested in a set context

The principle of cloze testing is based on the Gestalt theory of 'closure' (closing gaps in patterns subconsciously) Thus, cloze tests measure the readers' ability to decode interrupted 'or mutilated' measures by making the most acceptable substitutions from all the contextual clause available. Every word is detected in a text (usually every fifth, sixth, or seventh word), and students have to complete each gap in the text, using the most appropriate word. The text used for the cloze testing should be long enough to allow a reasonable number of deletions – ideally 40 or 50 blanks.

### 2.4 The communicative approach

Heaton (1991) holds the opinion that the communicative approach has the resemblance with the Integrative Approach in certain degree – – – – both emphasize the *sense* not the *form and structure* of the language, even so there is essential difference between them: the communicative approach pays more attention to language *use* in the process of communication.

Here have two essential notions

A. Usage – means language form and structure;

B. Use – means communicative function and use of the language.

Application of language use is the final goal for language learning. Mastering

language form is the method to realize the goal. So, the final standard to measure language fluency of the person is *to see if he /she communicate effectively in the language environment*. Communicative approach includes the element of “usage”, but many of it are to evaluate the students’ communicative ability (use) in the given language environment.

Features: a). Communicative tests are concerned primarily with how language is used in communication; b). Communicative tests must reflect the culture of a particular country because of their emphasis on context and the use of authentic materials; c). Communicative tests have introduced the concept of qualitative modes of assessment in preference to quantitative ones.

As mentioned above, a good test will frequently combine features of the communicative approach, the integrative approach and even the structuralist approach – depending on the particular purpose of the test and also on the various test constraints.

### Conclusion:

With the development of communicative approach in language teaching field, language testing had been affected since 1980’ and a series of researching tests for testing communicative ability appeared. A survey of these tests shows the following features: 1) *information gap*: It has been designed in the test in order to require the students to get the knowledge that they don not know through various information which has already been drawn into; 2) *task dependency*: Complement of one task should be based on the pre – task. e. g. : students are asked to make a conversation on the phone about an appointment first, and then they are required to write a note according to the conversational contents; 3) *tests emphasize focalization*: The contents of the test are designed according to the students’ requirements; 4) *lay particular emphasis on testing language ability*: It includes language knowledge, language function and property of language use etc; 5) *qualitative modes of assessment*: In tests this mode is adapted instead of quantitative modes of assessment

or as a supplement.

Qualitative modes of assessment belong to criterion – referenced while quantitative modes of assessment belong to norm – referenced.

### **3 Trends of development of English language testing in the past twenty years**

Since 1980s English language tests have stepped into an active developing stage, it has been valued and concerned gradually. There appear many new research results in which some new ideas and approaches play active roles in promoting researches of English language testing. Therefore, this part will give a brief account of developing trends of the language tests in the past twenty years.

#### **3.1 Effect of testing methods**

The research core in recent years is that testing methods affect test achievements. Some scholars did series of researches on these subject. The achievements of their research show that testing methods affect both testing achievements and tested abilities. Bachman (1990:111 – 159) put forward a theory frame about effects of a testing method.

The theory frame includes five factors:

- a. The testing environment;
- b. Test rubric;
- c. The nature of the input;
- d. The nature of the expected response;
- e. The relationship between input and response.

#### **3.2 Analysis of tests**

Means of test analysis:

(1) Means of quantitative analysis:

- a. Item response theory;
- b. Generalization theory;
- c. Criterion – referenced measurement

(2) Means of qualitative analysis:

Introspection – a method that candidate acquaints himself with the test strategy and the process of question item through self – description.

### 3.3 Features of the candidate

Another focus that language researchers concerned was the features of the test takers in the past twenty years.

Some researches show that different culture, language and national backgrounds lead to different test achievements. Therefore, features of the test takers have been taken into consideration when tests are designed.

Four kinds of characteristics of the test takers:

(1) Personal characteristic

a. Age

b. Sex

c. Native language

d. Level and type of general education

e. Type and amount of preparation or prior experience with a given test

(2) Background knowledge;

(3) Language proficiency;

(4) Test attitude (the attitudes of the activity and cooperation when answering questions)

### 3.4 Re – recognition of the nature of language proficiency

Nature of language proficiency – language proficiency is multicomponential. It's composed of a series of related common competences and a total competence.

Modes of communicative language proficiency (Bachman 1990)

(1) Language competence;

(2) Strategic competence;

(3) psycho – physiological mechanism.

## 4 Testing and teaching

A large number of examinations in the past have encouraged a tendency to

separate testing from teaching. Both testing and teaching are so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other. Tests may be constructed primarily as devices to reinforce learning and to motivate the student or primarily as a means of assessing the student's performance in the language. In the former case, the test is geared to the teaching that has taken place, whereas in the latter case the teaching is often geared largely to the test. Standardized tests and public examinations, in fact, may exert such a considerable influence on the average teacher that they are often instrumental in determining the kind of teaching that takes place before the test.

A language test which seeks to find out what candidates can do with language provides a focus for purposeful, everyday communication activities. Such a test will have a more useful effect on the learning of a particular language than a mechanical test of structure. In the past even good tests of grammar, translation or language manipulation had a negative and even harmful effect on teaching. A good communicative test of language, however, should have a much more positive effect on learning and teaching and should generally result in improved learning habits.

Now a number of well-known public examining bodies attempt to measure the candidates' success in performing purposeful and relevant tasks and their actual ability to communicate in the language. In this sense, such examinations undoubtedly exert a far more beneficial influence on syllabuses and teaching strategies than in the past. However, even the best public examinations are still primarily instruments for measuring each student's performance in comparison with the performance of other students or with certain established norms.

#### **4.1 Testing reasons**

The function indicated in the preceding paragraph provides one of the answers to the question: Why test? But it must be emphasized that the evaluation of student performance for purposes of comparison or selection is only one of the functions of a test. Furthermore, as far as the practicing teacher is concerned, it should rarely be

either the sole purpose or even the chief purpose of testing in schools.

Although most teachers also wish to evaluate individual performance, the aim of the classroom test is different from that of the external examination. While the latter is generally concerned with evaluation for the purpose of selection, the classroom test is concerned with evaluation for the purpose of enabling teachers to increase their own effectiveness by making adjustments in their teaching to enable certain groups of students or individuals in the class to benefit more. Too many teachers gear their teaching towards an ill - defined average' group without taking into account the abilities of those students in the class who are at either end of the scale.

A good classroom test will also help to locate the precise areas of difficulty encountered by the class or by the individual student. Just as it is necessary for the doctors to diagnose the patient's illness, so it is equally necessary for the teacher to diagnose the student's weaknesses and difficulties. Unless the teacher is able to identify and analyze the errors a student makes in handling the target language, he or she will be in no position to render any assistance at all through appropriate anticipation, remedial work and additional practice.

The test should also enable the teacher to ascertain which parts of the language program have been found difficult by the class. In this way, the teacher can evaluate the effectiveness of the syllabus as well as the methods and materials he or she is using. The test results may indicate, for example, certain areas of the language syllabus which have not taken sufficient account of foreign learner difficulties or which, for some reason, have been glossed over. In such cases the teacher will be concerned with those problem areas encountered by groups of students rather than by the individual student.

A test which sets out to measure students' performances as fairly as possible without in any way setting traps for them can be effectively used to motivate them. A well - constructed classroom test will provide the students with an opportunity to

show their ability to perform certain tasks in the language. Provided that details of their performance are given as soon as possible after the test, the students should be able to learn from their weaknesses. In this way a good test can be used as a valuable teaching device.

#### 4.2 Testing content and standard

The development of modern linguistic theory has helped to make language teachers and testers aware of the importance of analyzing the language being tested. Modern descriptive grammars are replacing the older, Latin-based prescriptive grammars; linguists are examining the whole complex system of language skills and patterns of linguistic behavior. Indeed, language skills are so complex and so closely related to the total context in which they are used as well as to many non-linguistic skills that it may often seem impossible to separate them for the purpose of any kind of assessment. A person always speaks and communicates in a particular situation at a particular time. Without this kind of context, language may lose much of its meaning.

Before a test is constructed, it is important to question the standards which are being set. What standards should be demanded of learners of a foreign language? For example, should foreign language learners after a certain number of the months or years be expected to communicate with the same ease and fluency as native speakers? Are certain habits of second language learners regarded as mistakes when belonging to native speakers? What, indeed, is "correct" English?

Examinations in the written language have in the past set artificial standards even for native speakers and have often demanded skills similar to those acquired by the great English essayists and critics. In imitating first language examinations have proved far more unrealistic in their expectations of the performances of foreign learner, who have been required to rewrite some of the greatest literary masterpieces in their own words or to write original essays in language beyond their capacity.

#### 4.3 Testing the language skills



Four major skills in communicating through language are often broadly defined as listening, listening and speaking, reading and writing. In many situations where English is taught for general purposes, these skills should be carefully integrated and used to perform as many genuinely communicative tasks as possible. Where this is the case, it is important for the test writer to concentrate on those types of test items which appear directly relevant to the ability to use language for real - life communication, understand and respond appropriately to polite requests, advice, instructions, etc. would be preferred to tests of reading aloud or telling stories. In the written section of a test, questions requiring students to write letters, memos, report and messages would be used in place of many of the more traditional compositions used in the past. In listening and reading tests, questions in which students show their ability to extract specific information of a practical nature would be preferred to questions testing the comprehension of unimportant and irrelevant details. Above all, there would be no rigid distinction drawn between the four different skills as in most traditional tests in the past, a test of reading now being used to provide the basis for a related test of writing or speaking.

Ways of assessing performance in the four major skills may take the form of tests of:

- \* Listening comprehension, in which short utterances, dialogues, talks and lectures are given to the testees;
- \* Speaking ability, usually in the form of an interview, a picture description, role play, and a problem - solving task involving pair work or group work;
- \* Reading comprehension, in which questions are set to test the students' ability to understand the gist of a text and to extract key information on specific points in the text;
- \* Writing ability, usually in the form of letter, reports, memos, messages, instructions, and accounts of past events, etc.

It is the test constructor's task to assess the relative importance of these skills