



QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS OF VOCABULARY  
IN COLLEGE ENGLISH TEXTBOOK EVALUATION

# 大学英语教材评估中 对词汇量化分析的研究

赵勇·著

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# 前言

近年来大学英语教材市场的繁盛使得客观的教材评估成为一项非常迫切的任务。然而国内的教材评估无论是在理论还是实践方面,都相对比较滞后。国内的教材评估基本上采纳的还是国外几个比较流行的评估理论框架,尚未形成自己的评估理论和科学的评估方法。

本书首先详细地介绍和分析了以 Cunningsworth, McDonough 和 Shaw, Breen 和 Candlin 等为代表的三个国外较有影响的英语教材评估理论框架,尤其是它们各自的理论特点,发现这些评估体系虽然都有各自的特定语言学理论的支持,但也存在一些共性。总体来说,这些现行的教材评估体系所采取的是定性分析方法,过分依赖主观性较强的个人判断,从而影响了评估的可靠性。此外,问卷和对照表的设计与分析也存在较为严重的效度和信度问题。

针对教材评估中出现的种种问题,本书试图寻找一种更为可靠和有效的方法,作为现行教材评估体系的一种补充。本书认为,二语习得研究中被普遍接受的学术成果和语料库语言学的快速发展及应用能够为新的评估方法提供可靠的理论基础和实施工具。

二语习得理论为外语教学提供了广泛的理论指导和教学实践的基础,同时二语习得领域的研究和发展也为教材的编写和评估提供了相当可靠的理论依据。本书认为,教材编写和教材评估实际上是相辅相成的关系,教材关注的重点其实也应该是教材评估的重点,二者在实践中都受到二语习得理论研究的指导和影响。本书通过对二语习得研究中一些成果的分析,将教材量化评估的突破点确定在二语习得的重点之一——词汇上,并从词汇层面对教材评估提出了四条标准:核心词汇的覆盖率,生词密度,生词复现率,以及搭配的典型性。

本书把词汇作为教材评估的一个突破点主要基于以下两点理由，一是词汇习得在整个二语习得与教材编写中已确立的举足轻重的地位——许多学者都认为词汇在二语习得中的地位比语法更为重要；二是词汇本身在教材评估中具有可量化的条件。由于现行教材评估体系中存在太多的定性分析，我们迫切需要一些定量的标准来作为重要的补充。从这个意义上讲，本书提出的上述四条标准其实正是现行教材评估体系中严重缺乏的。

近年来语料库的快速发展和应用为教材评估提供了很好的检查工具和评估平台。语料库的应用范围已经十分广泛，但是将语料库用于教材评估迄今尚未发现相关的研究。因此，本书通过建立教材语料库来对教材进行评估，是在这一领域进行的崭新尝试，也希望能给现行的教材评估带来一些新的思路。

为了验证本书提出的四条评估标准，我们选择了一套大学英语教材——《新视野大学英语》，并专门建立了自己的供评估使用的 *New Horizon College English* (NHCE) 教材语料库，以期获得教材评估中所需的量化数据。同时，本书在该教材语料库的基础上以大型通用语料库——英国国家语料库 (BNC) 为对照，对《新视野大学英语》进行了基于语料库的量化评估测试和分析。由于该评估建立在大量定量分析的基础上，故结果客观可信，这也为其他大学英语教材的类似评估提供了可靠的方法和依据。

本书的主要意义在于打破了现行教材评估体系中定性分析过于泛滥的局面，提出了自己的客观定量分析标准。当然本书对词汇量化评估的重视并不意味着对现行教材评估体系中定性分析的全盘否定，因为无论教材编写还是教材评估都离不开定性分析和定量分析。本书提出的词汇量化标准只是对现行教材评估体系的一种有益的补充。对教材评估进行进一步全面的定性、定量分析，将是教材评估领域一项开创性的尝试，本书在这方面的探索为今后教材评估的理论研究与实践提供了新的方向和可能。

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# Chapter One

## Introduction

### 1.1 The Significance of Textbook Evaluation

#### 1.1.1 The Purposes and Importance of Textbook Evaluation

A textbook, or a coursebook, in this book may be loosely defined as a published book whose main aim or function is to assist foreign learners of English to improve their linguistic knowledge and/or communicative ability.

A textbook is a primary learning tool given to learners. Researchers have found that 98% of classroom instruction is from teaching materials, not teachers, and 90% of students' homework time is structured by materials (as cited in Suárez, 2001). Richards (2005) also claims that "Much of the language teaching that occurs throughout the world today could not take place without the extensive use of commercial textbooks"(p. 1).

Since there are too many textbooks of different characteristics on the market, choosing an appropriate textbook seems to be quite a challenging task. In deciding what textbooks are to be used, the educational authority and teachers have to particularly consider what outcome these textbooks will bring about to the learning experiences and eventual level of proficiency in English of their students. That is because once students are used to a particular way of learning imposed by the textbook, it will be difficult to change it later if a wrong direction has been made in the book.

Therefore, textbook evaluation is of significant importance for both language teaching and language learning. Firstly, it reveals the strength and

weakness of particular textbooks for teachers and educational administrators to consider in the adoption of new textbooks. It helps them to choose the appropriate textbooks according to their aims or needs. Besides, it is also useful in teacher training programs and helps teachers to learn more about the characteristics of textbooks. They will know more clearly about the structure of the whole materials and get a clear picture of methodology in the process of evaluation. Finally, the thorough analysis of the textbook may also provide the writer with some creative ideas for future revisions.

Evaluation will inevitably involve comparisons. When several textbooks are in competition on the market, especially in competition for adoption, “a standard procedure and a common set of criteria, applied evenly to the different coursebooks, will be of great help in making the process more objective, leading to more reliable results” (Cunningsworth, 1995/2002, p. 14).

### 1.1.2 The Urgency of Objective Textbook Evaluation in China

College English teaching in China has made great progress since China began its reform and opening up more than two decades ago. Various English textbooks with unique characteristics have come into the market since the beginning of the 1990s. Among them are *College English* by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, *New College English* by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, *New Century College English* by Nanjing University Press, *College Core English* by Higher Education Press, *21st Century College English* by Higher Education Press and Fudan University Press, and *New Horizon College English* by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, all of which are quite popular now. The newly published *New Era College English* by Tsinghua University Press, *New Experience College English* by Higher Education Press, and *New Concept College English* by

Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press add more varieties to this field, offering prospective users more choices.

Which textbook series is better or more suitable for our college English teaching and learning? What characteristics do they have? Unfortunately, there is no feasible textbook evaluation theory that could be directly adopted under our domestic circumstances due to the lagging behind of textbook evaluation in China.

Actually textbook evaluation in China came to be a focus of study much lately. There was little choice for college English textbooks even a decade ago. Consequently, evaluation was not such an important task for most English teachers and learners. Since there are so many English textbooks nowadays with their own advantages and disadvantages on the market, which makes it hard for teachers and learners to choose according to their own needs, it is urgently important for us to establish a scientific textbook evaluation system to further improve English teaching in China. Therefore, textbook evaluation is of special significance for college English teaching in China.

(**Note:** College English, in this book, specifically refers to the English course for general purposes taken by all college students in China as a compulsory course, which is usually guided by a national teaching syllabus. College English in China is largely different from that for English majors.)

## 1.2 Some Problems Existing in Textbook Evaluation in China

“Evaluation is basically a matching process: matching needs to available solutions. If this matching is to be done as objectively as possible, it is best to look at the needs and solutions separately” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 97). To judge whether they are matched, a combination of professional experts’ ideas and feedback from questionnaires or checklists, which aim to

collect opinions from different teachers and learners, is widely adopted in textbook evaluation in China. This approach apparently has its own merits and demerits. The advantage is that opinions of almost every aspect of a textbook could be attained from different sources. The disadvantage, however, is also obvious. Some problems that have been collected in the textbook evaluation process in China are as follows.

### **1.2.1 Different Needs Resulting in Different Judgments on the Same Textbook**

College English teaching in China has made great progress in the past more than twenty years, especially after the reform and opening up. The English proficiency of college students has been distinctively improved. Admittedly, given China's unbalanced educational levels among different regions, the needs of students from a key university cannot be the same as those of students from a quite ordinary university in the central and western regions of China.

According to the statistics (Wei Dongwang, 2005), the vocabulary capacity of non-English major students in China who just enter college ranges from 1,133 to 3,500. To have a balance, *The College English Teaching Syllabus* issued in 1999 required that the basic vocabulary of students who have not entered college should be 1,800 on the basis of an investigation into the vocabulary capacity of 12 key university students and those from universities in remote areas like Xinjiang, Yunnan and Guangxi.

Therefore, a textbook appropriate for key university students might be too difficult for those from universities of remote areas. And all students will, of course, have different attitudes towards the same textbooks. Even students from the same university may be of different English proficiencies. This situation makes things complicated. It is known that in China the

English teaching of almost all universities is instructed by the same national teaching syllabus consisting of specific requirements on the course. Therefore, what the syllabus can do is to make a compromise to take all situations into consideration, which will of course fail to meet the needs of certain teachers and students.

In practice, different areas, different universities, and even different teachers and students, may have different judgments and opinions on the same textbook reflected by questionnaires based on the same evaluation checklist. Hence, it is sometimes difficult to collect consistent opinions from teachers and students of different universities simply by questionnaires or interviews.

### **1.2.2 Unstable Factors Affecting Textbook Evaluation**

Since the textbook evaluation bases its result mostly on questionnaires or interviews which have many unstable variables that are difficult to control in the process, the final judgment is inevitably inaccurate to some extent. To sum up, the factors in a questionnaire or an interview that might affect the evaluation accuracy can be analyzed as follows.

#### **(1) Different emphases on the two sides of teaching and learning**

Teachers and learners may have different emphases on the skills needed and the materials favored. Sometimes, therefore, teaching materials will have to make a compromise to balance the two sides' different concerns. Of course, it is now widely acknowledged that learners' needs and interests should be the main focus in language learning and teaching. Teachers' concern and sense, however, should not be ignored in textbook compilation either. Because teachers and learners, in general, see teaching and learning from their own perspectives respectively and sometimes learners just can not foresee what is really helpful for their future development for the lack of experience. Therefore, different emphases from learners and teachers might pose problems

in textbook evaluation on deciding what is really good for them.

For example, according to an investigation (Zheng Shutang & Wei Naixing, 1996), about 62.5% of the learners in a questionnaire claimed that the textbooks being used were bad or fairly bad in training speaking ability. While the analysis of teachers' responses shows that classroom activities are still largely occupied by the traditional methodology of imparting linguistic knowledge from teachers to learners. What is more, Zheng Shutang and Wei Naixing (1997) also found that teachers and learners have different interests in choosing subjects of materials. Teachers seem to pay more attention to the subjects that are believed to be helpful for the future development in the learners' professional fields, while learners to their own emotional likings, such as novels, biographies, and social customs. Jin Lixian *et al.* (2005) made an investigation on Chinese college students and revealed the top 20 topics for their English reading, which are similar to Zheng Shutang and Wei Naixing's findings. These disagreements are quite common in the relationship between learning and teaching. Hutchinson (1987) expresses similar opinion from the teachers' side: "What you think learners are doing in a particular activity may be very different from what the learners think they are doing. They may well enjoy and find useful something which you consider a poor activity and vice versa" (p. 41).

The expert opinion is the most common form of evaluation (Dick & Carey, 1991). Experts are supposed to give professional judgments on textbooks. In his analysis of questionnaires from experts and students for the purpose of a textbook revision, Suárez (2001) noticed that the experts varied in their own opinions significantly, while students stay consistent in their evaluations and observations, which are totally different from expert opinions.

This lack of agreement between expert evaluation and formative evaluation of the material makes a strong argument

for utilizing a combination of sources of feedback to determine revision priority. If we were only to rely on expert opinion about the difficulty of our text, we would likely fail to revise sections that cause students difficulty (Suaréz, 2001, p. 38).

Therefore, this discrepancy posed from different points of view will definitely play a role in textbook evaluation due to different emphases.

(2) Personal influences of emotional factors from the interviewees

The accuracy of a questionnaire is influenced by many factors. Sometimes it is hard to eliminate all the irrelevant emotional factors when true opinions are expected from the interviewees by means of questionnaires. These factors include the experts' preconceived preference for or dislike of the textbook which had been formed before evaluation, their personal bias and traditionalism, etc.

Expert opinions are usually based on personal judgments deriving from different evaluation procedures and standards that are often unique to the individual. Therefore, the process of expert judgment is somewhat a "black box" in which professional experiences and expertise are strongly relied on and hence those interferential emotional factors will to some extent disturb the evaluation result.

Other factors like the learners' feelings towards the course and the teacher, their attitudes in filling out the questionnaire etc., will also severely affect the objectivity of the textbook evaluation.

In a constructivist's view, learning is actually a process of interaction between the learner and the outside world. The focus of teaching is on the empowerment of the learner. The teacher's role is to engage learners in the discovery of knowledge and provide them opportunities to reflect upon and test theories through actual applications of knowledge. Teachers serve as the media of interaction between learners and teaching materials in classroom



activities. If the emotional interaction between teachers and learners fails, it will consequently affect learners' efficiency of interaction with materials and their attitude towards the textbook. A good teacher will make a dull textbook interesting and a bored teacher will make attractive materials tiresome. In a word, the relationship between teachers and learners will influence the judgment on textbooks. Besides, the attitude in filling out the questionnaire is also worth mentioning. A casual attitude or reluctance to present true feelings because of certain pressure will also affect the final evaluation result.

These personal influences of emotional factors are almost inevitable and hard to control in the whole process of textbook evaluation. Minor deviation from the true judgment due to emotional factors sometimes may be ignored if it does not significantly affect the final evaluation result. However, strong personal emotional factors will undoubtedly lead the evaluation to deviate from the right path.

### (3) Validity in the designing of the checklist or questionnaire

Many textbook evaluation systems would provide a checklist based on certain criteria to perform a kind of matching process. However, using these checklists without any adaptation will be dangerous and may not bring out what is truly needed. Cunningsworth (1995/2002) also suggests that it is best to identify your own priorities and draw up your own checklist because different criteria will be applicable in different circumstances. Sheldon holds the same opinion. He thinks that textbook evaluation criteria are emphatically local, that is to say, "any culturally restricted, global list of criteria can never really apply in most local environment, without considerable modification" (Sheldon, 1988, p. 242).

Almost all evaluation systems tend to embrace every aspects of the textbook being evaluated, aiming for comprehensiveness. "Swales (1980) has criticised this tendency, arguing that the more questions one asks of a set