The Discussion of the College English Teaching Based on the Analysis of Toefl

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ABSTRACT. *Under the circumstance of globalization, the excellent acquisition of English has become more and more crucial. This study analyzes one of the most widely accepted international English tests to provide with beneficial suggestions for the improvement for the college English teaching in China. This paper firstly introduces the development of the language testing in the world and focuses on the illustration of the current most frequently adopted test model---the communicative language testing. Then, this study analyzes the communicative language testing the IBT TOEFL based on the theory of communicative language testing theory from the perspectives of the goal, the contents and the types of the questions of the IBT TOEFL. At last, this paper discusses the communicative language testing features and concepts reflected in the IBT TOEFL and the enlightenments and implications concluded from the IBT TOEFL for improvement of college English teaching.*

KEYWORDS: *Communicative language testing; The ibt toefl; Implications for college english teaching*

1. Introduction

The language testing model and concept has changed a lot since 1940s, from the pre-scientific ones into the structuralism ones. Until 1990, the most convincing and acceptable model and concept for language testing has been the communicative language testing one mentioned by Bachman. The communicative language testing model enjoys many advantages that other language testing model cannot compare with. Back to China, although the Chinese Education Ministry has already set up to merge the communicative language teaching into the syllabus of the college English teaching, many universities still focuses on the courses of the intensive reading and adopts the translation teaching methods. Thus, based on the analysis of the one of the international successful communicative language testing---the IBT TOEFL, this study draws some suggestions and implications to the reform and improvements for the Chinese college English teaching

2. Literature Review

As for the development of language testing, it covers three stages. To begin with, the language testing existed before 1940 was regarded as the pre-scientific language testing. For the language testing of this period, it shared one distinguish feature that language was taught as a discipline. Thus, teachers of this time mainly taught language as a kind of semiotic system which included knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and phonetics. In addition, there was no clear and accurate measurement for the testing of language skills and techniques at this time, so the testing results mainly relied on the objective evaluation and judgment given by teachers (as cited in Bachman & Palmer, 1991).

The second stage is the psychometrics structuralism language testing or the modern language testing. In 1940s, the structuralism linguists represented by Bloomfield firstly put forward that the language was a kind of habit and was constructed by different units. Thus, teachers of this period would separate the language into various parts such as the vocabulary, the sentence patterns and so on. Teachers believed in the structuralism explanation of language would test students' capability and skills in each component of language. While the behaviorism psychologists represented by Skinner also firstly brought with that language was a series of stimuli and reaction processes. Combining with these two theories, the psychometrics structuralism language testing was established. The famous language testing authoritative figure Lado stressed the adoption of separable items with high reliability but the he and the linguists of his time ignored the validity of the test (as cited in Z.M.Wu, 2003).

The last stage is the psychological linguistics and sociolinguistics language testing or the post-modern language testing. In 1965, Chomsky defined language as system which was composed with limited grammar rules but could generate unlimited sentences. He further distinguished the concepts of competence and performance. He thought the competence referred to the potential people using certain language rules while the

performance referred to the concrete and detailed conditions people using language rules.

However, in 1970s, the sociolinguists represented by Hymes firstly criticized severely on Chomsky's definition of language for Chomsky totally ignored the social function of language in his definition. In order to make up the deficiency of Chomsky's theory, Hymes(1972) put forward the concept of communicative competence. According to Hymes, the communicative competence included the correctness of the grammar and the feasibility, the appropriateness and the acceptability in using language.

Based on Hymes' communicative competence, Canal (1983) and Swain (1985) presented a new communicative competence model that suitable for both linguistics theory and teaching practice. This new model covered four language competence as the grammar competence, the social language competence, the textual competence and the communicative strategic competence. The model mentioned by Canal and Swain influenced a lot in the fields of foreign language teaching and language testing.

In 1990s, Bachman (1990) displayed another communicative language competence model. He considered that the communicative language competence was to combine the language with their using contexts. This model covered three parts, the language competence, the strategic competence and psychophysiological mechanisms. Among these, the language competence was composed by the organization competence and the pragmatic competence. The strategic competence referred to the ability to use different language knowledge in real life communication and the mental psychophysiological mechanisms regarded the communication of language as a kind of physical phenomenon which involved of neuro and psychological processes. Bachman's model of communicative language competence absorbed the research results of modern linguistics and applied linguistics and provided with a solid and reliable theoretical foundation for the development of communicative testing.

As the most widely used and popular testing forms, the communicative test owns its unique advantages. First of all, it emphasizes the analysis of requirements. For the communicative testing stresses on learners' abilities to appropriately use language in certain social environment. Thus, the designers of the communicative tests will conduct an analysis on the social requirements of the tests and thus set up the goals and evaluating aspects of the test.

Secondly, the communicative test is different from other tests because of its authenticity. Bachman believes that the authenticity should be defined from two aspects, the real-life authenticity and the international authenticity. The real-life authenticity means that the features of the tasks given in the tests should be in accordance with the characteristics of the language used settings in real life. The international authenticity measures the participating degree of language competence factors after subjects completing the testing tasks.

Thirdly, because of the authenticity of the communicative test, it will comprehensively test listening, speaking, reading and writing in the textual level instead of testing them separately and one by one. At last, the communicative test usually adopts the criterion-referenced measure to judge the abilities of the subjects. The judges emphasize the objective evaluation, for the communicative test focus on whether the performance of the subject could satisfy the requirement of the authentic communication in real life.

3. Methodology

This paper analyzes two authentic versions of IBT TOETL based on the Bachman's theory of communicative model. The analysis is conducted from the following four aspects, the objective of the IBT TOEFL, the contents of the IBT TOEFL and the types of the questions of the IBT TOEFL. Based on these analyses, this paper discusses the communicative language testing features reflected in the IBT TOEFL. In addition, based on these findings and discussions, the suggestions for the improvements of the college English teaching are also provided with in this study.

4. Results and Findings

This paper analyzes the one authentic version of IBT TOEFL attached in the ETS enrolling system and another real one tested by the author of this study in December, 2008 to find out the objective, the contents and the types of questions of the IBT TOEFL.

4.1 The Objective of the Ibt Toefl

The IBT TOEFL is the abbreviation of the Internet Based Test---Test of English as a Foreign Language. The TOEFL is held by the American Educational Testing Service to test the English level of the students of the

non-English-speaking countries who apply for the universities, colleges or graduate institutes in America, Canada and some other countries in Europe, Oceania and Southeast Asia. The testing form has changed from the PBT--the paper based test, the CBT---the computer based test to the IBT---the internet based test. Since the year of 2005, apart from the test sites in America, all the other test sites has took the IBT as their only testing form of TOEFL.

4.2 The Contents of the Ibt Toefl

The testing contents of the IBT TOEFL include four parts, the reading test, the listening test, the speaking test and the writing test. As for the reading part, the IBT TOEFL reading test covers three to five complete and profound academic articles with about seven hundred words for each. The contents of the selective articles almost cover all the disciplines in modern higher education system.

As for the listening test, the IBT TOEFL provides with two to three conversations and four to six lectures. For the conversations, they are mainly some discussions about the daily study life at the campus, while the lectures mimic the real classroom settings and the topics of them ranged from the astronomy, the economy, the history, the literature, the arts to many other disciplines. All the recording materials in the listening part mimic the real daily teaching of professors and the authentic conversations among students, professors and teaching staff at the campus.

As for the speaking test, the IBT TOEFL covers six questions including two independent questions and four comprehensive questions. The speaking test of the IBT TOEFL also mimics the academic atmosphere in North American universities and every aspect of students' campus life and focuses on the testing of the students' real communication ability. The ultimate goal of the speaking test is to evaluate whether students could communicate smoothly in their real study life after they arriving in North America.

As for the writing test, the IBT TOEFL is composed of comprehensive writing and the independent writing. The comprehensive writing combines the reading materials, listening to lectures and writing summaries together. The topic of the comprehensive writing includes the education, the humanity, the business, the engineering, the technology, the natural science and the social study. The independent writing asks students to write an argumentative article with the topics about the education, the culture, the geography, the society, the sports, the environment, the tourism, and the energy.

4.3 The Types of the Questions of the Ibt Toefl

As for the IBT TOEFL, it tests students' abilities in the aspects of reading, listening, speaking and writing. The whole test lasts about four hours, with the total score of one hundred and twenty and thirty score in each component. As for the reading test, the IBT TOEFL has the following types of questions. It has the chart questions, the vocabulary questions, the reference and relations questions, the sentences simplification questions, the texts insert questions, the facts and information questions, the inference questions, the rhetoric and purposes questions and the denial and excluding questions.

The questions of the listening test in the IBT TOEFL could be generally divided into three categories with seven types. The listening part has the basic comprehensive questions which includes the questions test the main ideas and the details of the listening materials. As for the main idea questions, it further covers the gist content questions and gist purpose questions. The second category covers the pragmatic understanding questions. These questions usually appear as the function questions and the attitude questions. The last category is the connecting information questions. This kind includes the organization questions, the connecting contents questions and the inference questions. In addition, the new types of questions such as the multiple choice questions, the matching questions, the order questions and form filling questions also appear.

The questions of the speaking test in the IBT TOEFL are composed of two kinds of questions. As for the two independent questions, the students are asked to look at the questions in the screen then prepare for fifteen seconds and answer them within forty-five seconds. The next two comprehensive questions require students to read a paragraph first within forty-five seconds then listen to a material related to the paragraph. The topics of these two reading and listening materials are campus life and academic study. The listening materials are composed of conversations and lectures. The students have twenty seconds to prepare or organize the notes and sixty seconds to answer the question. The last two comprehensive questions need students to listen to a campus life conversation and an academic lecture. After the listening, the students are required to prepare for twenty seconds and answer the question within sixty seconds.

The last test is the writing test. In this part, the first question is the comprehensive writing. The students firstly have to read an academic lecture within three minutes. Then they listened to an academic lecture of about one and a half minutes. During the listening, the reading material is vanished. After the reading and listening, the students have twenty minutes to check the note of reading and listening to summarize the difference between the views put forward in reading and listening and write them down within one hundred and fifty to two hundred and twenty-five words. The next question is independent writing. In this part, students are asked to write an argumentative article under the given topic of three hundred words within thirty minutes.

5. Discussion

Based on the analyses of the objective, the contents and the types of the questions of the IBT TOEFL, this paper discusses the communicative testing features reflected in the IBT TOEFL and provides with the suggestions and enlightenments for the college English teaching.

5.1 The Communicative Language Testing Features Reflected in Ibt Toefl

The IBT TOEFL is a comprehensive test which combines the testing of reading, listening, speaking and writing together. It is designed under the ideas of the communicative language testing and stresses the communicative function of language. This paper discusses the communicative language testing features reflected in the IBT TOEFL and presents them in the following.

To begin with, the IBT TOEFL tests students' overall language abilities instead of testing one certain isolated language skill. It aims at testing students' performance of using language under certain context and circumstance. These lift the validity and authenticity of the test. In addition, the whole IBT TOEFL lasts about four hours. This is also a challenge to students' language skills, psychological status, social and communicative abilities and psychical conditions.

Secondly, the IBT TOEFL lays an emphasis on testing students' abilities to apply English into practice and to use it to communicate. The IBT TOEFL do not over stress on the acquisition of certain skills such as vocabulary or grammar, but focus on testing students' abilities to live and study smoothly abroad. Thus, the questions of IBT TOEFL are very representative and focused. Through this way, the designers of the IBT TOEFL analyze the requirement in advance and thus lift the reliability of the test. At the same time, the IBT TOEFL emphasizes on the testing of students' social abilities and knowledge. The test asks students to acquire not only the language skills but also to know about the knowledge of education, the humanity, the engineering technology, the economy and fiance, the natural science and the social study.

The backwash of these asks teachers to connect the teaching of language with their students' majors and future professionals and pays attention to cultivating students' abilities to use language under certain communicative settings or communicative tasks.

Thirdly, the material selected in the IBT TOEFL is authentic and scientific. These materials mimic the real academic lectures and campus life conversations in universities of North America. Students even could learn much professional knowledge and many native expressions and be familiar with the study processes, the assignments forms and the various daily life conditions.

Fourthly, the scoring system of IBT TOEFL is scientific. The questions of the IBT TOEFL usually test students' comprehension to the whole and key information but do not test the unrelated details. In addition, the objective questions take a certain percentage in the IBT TOEFL. For these questions, the judges of the IBT TOEFL evaluate students' answers comprehensively and entirely instead of only noticing tiny mistakes and flaws.

At last, the IBT TOEFL reflects the importance of the proficient usage of computer and internet. For the IBT TOEFL relies on the computer and the internet to test students, thus, students need to be able to be proficient and familiar with the reading English materials on the computer screen, talking to the computer and typing. Actually, in the era of information technology, the teachers and universities should also uses more various information technology and facilities to improve daily English teaching.

5.2 The Implications to College English Teaching

The IBT TOEFL aims at evaluating whether the students of non-English speaking countries could be adapt to the study and life in universities abroad. Now, the IBT TOEFL has been accepted by more than six thousands

universities and institutes of one hundred and thirty countries, it is an authoritative international standard test. The requirements and designing of the IBT TOEFL, to a large degree, reflects the modern society's requirements to students' English level. Thus, the IBT TOEFL has important implications to the college English teaching.

To begin with, the objective of the college English teaching should focus at cultivating students' abilities to apply English into practice and use it in daily and work communication. Although the Education Ministry has already set these as the goals of the college English teaching, in real practice, the college English teaching in some universities still emphasizes on the course like the intensive reading. Nowadays, English is more like to be used as a communicative tool and more and more people need to directly use English to negotiate and to communicate or apply English into their work, thus, the college English teaching should not only stresses on the cultivation to reading comprehension or translation, but to be adjusted to cultivate students' English communication abilities.

Secondly, the college English teaching should cultivate students' reading, listening, speaking and writing abilities equally and comprehensively. But due to the historic reasons, our English teaching emphasizes on the cultivation of reading abilities. Our students have made big progress in the aspects of reading and grammar after high school education, but the abilities to apply English into practice are comparatively weak. However, the reading, listening, speaking and writing test   accounts thirty scores equally in the IBT TOEFL, this reflects that the international society needs students with comprehensive English skills. Thus, this paper suggests that the pattern of the college English teaching could be changed to follow the professional English teaching, which is to set up reading, listening, speaking and writing courses individually instead of the intensive reading only.

Thirdly, the college English teaching should cultivate students with both proficient English skills and the profound professional knowledge. The academic materials in the IBT TOEFL reflect that the international society require students not only to use English in daily communication but also to use it to acquire and handle professional knowledge in various fields.

Fourthly, the teaching methods and techniques should be improved. The IBT TOEFL fully reflects the challenges and opportunities the modern technology bring to college English education. The teaching assisted with modern high-tech could help students to read more, to improve their vocabulary acquisition and writing practice, more importantly it will stimulate students' interests and motivation for learning. Some universities use the multimedia facilities, the self-study learning network platform and advanced education software to assist college English teaching which improves the teaching effect and quality, saves the resource and improves the learning efficiency.

At last, the methods and designing concept of the college English testing need to be reformed and adjusted. Although the syllabus, the textbooks and the teaching methods are changed to be more communicative, the reform of the language testing in China progresses slowly. The test of the present time still focuses on the memorization of the knowledge and lacks of clear testing objective. Comparative with the IBT TOEFL, this paper believes the language testing in China should be changed from the following perspectives. At first, the computer or internet based form could be used in the college English teaching. This could save teachers' time on making and marking examination papers and improve the working efficiency and quality. Secondly, the types of the questions should be various and the subjective questions should be largely added. Thirdly, the goals of the language testing should be clear and the questions should be more focused. Through these two ways, the language testing for college English teaching in China could be improved with higher reliability, validity and strong, practical, suggestive and beneficial backwash.

6. Conclusion

This paper firstly introduces the development of the concept and model of the language testing in the world and the most popular, scientific and accepted language testing concept and pattern at present. Secondly, this paper analyzes two authentic versions of IBT TOEFL, which is widely accepted as an international standard test for English level, from the perspectives of the objective of the test, the contents of the contest and the types of the questions of the test. Thirdly, based on the analysis, this study also discusses the communicative language testing features reflects in the IBT TOEFL. In addition, based on the communicative language testing concepts ling through the IBT TOEFL and the comparison between the IBT TOEFL and the traditional language testing in China, this study also provides with several suggestions for the improvements of the college English teaching and testing.

The limitations of this study are mainly two points. Firstly, the survey and the description of the current college English teaching are not comprehensive, detailed and accurate. This may cause that the problems and the suggestions for the improvement of the college English teaching don't hit the point. This paper suggests the

following study could conduct a questionnaire of the current college English teaching situation in advance. Secondly, the analysis of the types of the questions of the IBT TOEFL is not accurate enough. This paper suggests the following researchers to analyze the number and counting percentage of the questions of each type of the IBT TOEFL in order to conclude more scientific and convincing data.

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