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An Analysis of the Listening Comprehension in CET-6——Illustrated by the CET-6 Test on June, 2018

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	The College English Test Band Six (CET-6) is one of the most widely applied exam across China. As a national teaching test, CET-6 is sponsored by the Department of higher education of the Ministry of education of The People's Republic of China and held twice a year. In this study, 77 sophomores of different majors were tested using the listening test in June 2018. It is ensured that the test method is exactly same as that of CET-6. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the content and specification of CET-6 listening comprehension test, and to evaluate this part in detail according to the real data, including score report and item analysis, trying to provide some enlightenment for the revision of the examination.

1. Introduction

The College English Test (Band Six) is one of the most widely applied exam across China and has received widespread attention since its design and application. The College English Test is a large-scale criterion-related norm-referenced test designed and developed by the National College English Test Committee for Band 4 and 6 under the supervision and leadership of the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education [1]. In the past 30 years, many research has been done to study the design of the test [2-4], the washback effect [5,6] and the reliability and validity of the test [7,8] and so on. Based on the detailed research into the CET test, this study mainly focuses on the analysis of test content and specifications of listening comprehension under the Non-reciprocal Language Use Model [9] and the detailed evaluation of this particular part based on real data, including score report and item analysis.

2. Analysis of Listening Comprehension of CET-6 (2018.6)

2.1 Test Specifications

Bachman and Palmer [10] has divided the testing development and design into three stages: design stage, operationalization stage and administration stage. The test specification provides a detailed description of all the parts of the exam and has guiding significance for the all the three stages. Zou Shen [11] explained the reason for developing a clearly test specification as follows: 1) The test proposition staff needs to refer to the test specification

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to clearly understand the content and method of the test and to write test items in accordance with the requirements of the specification. 2) Exam raters need to use the test specifications to evaluate the exam results. 3) The exam specification helps test developers grasp the overall design of the exam. 4) In addition, the exam specification helps to maintain the stability of the exam. From the analysis of the test specifications we can know what the test tests and how it tests it.

The Listening Comprehension section tests the student's ability to obtain verbal information. Recording materials are read in standard British English or American English at a rate of approximately 150 words per minute. The proportion of listening scores is 35%, of which dialogue accounts for 15% and essays account for 20%. The question types are multiple-choice questions and the time duration is 35 minutes. In order to gain test participants' concentration, the listening comprehension is conducted at the beginning of the test and the answer sheet is handed in immediately after hearing. The test content of the exam on June, 2018 is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Test Content of the Exam on June, 2018

Test Tasks	Genre	Topic	Sum of Item
Listening Converstions	Interview	Business	4
	Daily conversation	Food Health	4
Listening Passages	Science article	Geography	3
	Social life article	Psychology	4
Lectures and Talks	Science record	Alien species	3
	lecture	Multiculturalism	3
	Magazine article	Reader's Digest	4

The testing texts are selected from the original English materials, including conversations, lectures, radio and television programs, newspapers, magazines and books in daily life. The selection of the test paper reflects the authenticity and the diversity of the listening tasks. Since the advent of Communicative Language Teaching, efforts have been made by material developers and teachers to make learning tasks as realistic as possible [12]. Choosing the authentic material preserves the speaker's voice intonation, emotions and scenes, and individual differences of the speaker. As a communicative English listening test, in order to reflect the candidate's ability to understand, it is advised to use real life-based listening materials.

2.2 Qualitative Study on Construct Validity Based on Non-Reciprocal Language Use Model

The classic definition of validity is that validity refers to whether a test has achieved its intended purpose and whether it has measured what it is measuring [13]. If the candidate's language proficiency in answering the question is roughly the same as the tester's desire to use the test paper to test the candidate's language ability, the construct validity of the test paper is relatively high; otherwise, the construct validity is relatively low.

The Listening Comprehension part of the CET-6 requires candidates to meet the higher requirements in the College English course teaching requirements: Students can basically understand the conversations and lectures of English-speaking people, and can understand the domestic familiar English radio and TV programs with long length. The speed of speech is about 150 words per minute. Students can also grasp the central meaning of the center, grasp the key points and related details as well as understand the professional courses taught by foreign experts in English.

Based on Bachman&Palmer's Non-reciprocal Language Use Model (showed in Figure 1), the required competence can be further interpreted and explained. Language competence refers to the knowledge of language itself including organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge, which means that the language learner should know how utterances or sentences and texts are organized and how utterances or sentences and texts are related to the communicative goals of the language user and to the features of the language use setting. For organizational knowledge, test participants are required to be able to recognize prominence within utterances, recognize grammatical word classes and chunks and sentence constituents and so on, thus understanding the main idea and getting specific details from the conversation. As for pragmatic knowledge, it requires the ability to recognize the communicative functions of utterances, according to situations, goals, participants and procedures, thus predicting outcomes from events described or inferring links and connections between events. The strategic competence indicates the ability to use the above mentioned language knowledge, including the use of cognitive strategy and meta-cognitive strategy. In CET-6 test, test takers need to perceive and understand the hearing material, keep some important information in their short-term memories and retrieve those information when doing the tasks. Meta-cognitive competence is also required for monitoring and adjusting the listening process such as planning to pay special attention to specific language aspects such as the tone of the speaker to better understand the conversation or make guesses and inferences about the topic based on what has already been said when they have trouble understanding the conversation.
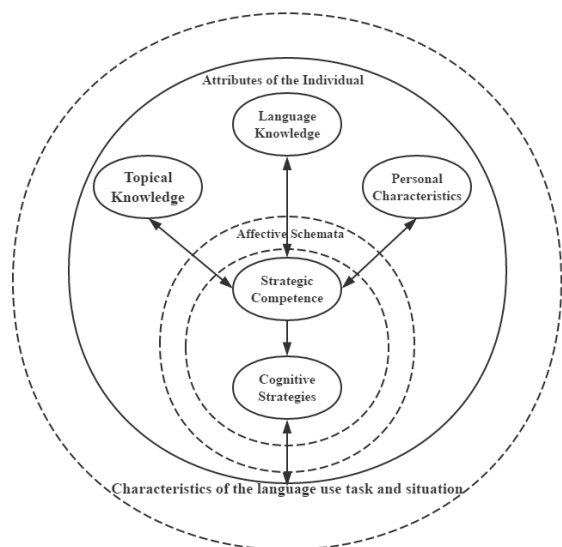
Figure 1. Non-reciprocal Language Use Model (Bachman&Palmer, 2016)

To sum up, the task-based listening construct description mainly concludes the following parts:

1) Understanding main ideas and important details

a. Undertand main ideas

b. Get important details

c. Judge the speaker's point of view and attitude

2) Understanding the implied meaning

a. Speculate implied meaning

b. Judge the communicative function of discourse

3) Understanding the listening material using language features

a. Identify speech features

b. Understanding inter-sentence relations

The CET-6 test is regarded by the academic community as the most authoritative, scientific and most effective test in China. Its proposition is closely related to the syllabus. Different types of questions are used to test the different listening abilities of candidates, that is, the ability to get information by listening. These abilities or requirements are theoretical and can be regarded as the constructs of the listening comprehension for the CET-6 test that is the hearing ability that the test is supposed to detect. If the above-mentioned ability or requirement is comprehensively verified during the test, it proves that the listening comprehension of CET-6 has a high construct validity and achieves the test purpose.
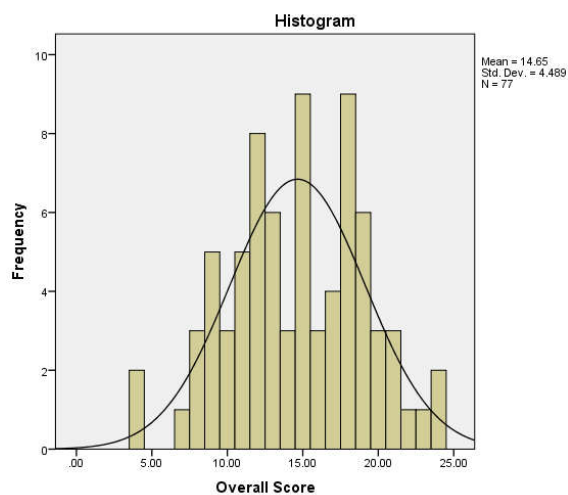
3. Listening Comprehension Test

3.1 Participants

Adopting stratified sampling method, 119 college sophomore students were invited to participate in this research. Only 77 students agreed to participate in the research majoring in Economics, News and Communication, Civil Engineering, Energy and Power, Computer, Medicine and Administration and so on. They are going to attend the formal CET-6 test this year so all the willingly participants are highly motivated to do this test. Before conducting the research, participants were fully informed about the research purpose, research process and time duration. The listening comprehension test on June, 2018 was used in this research and the test was conducted just like the official CET-6 test.

3.2 Score Report

All the data are collected and analyzed in SPSS 24.0. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the scores of the subjects in the simulation test. The total score is 25 points, 1 point for each question, and the average is 14.65. The highest score is 24 points and the lowest is 4 points. Among them, there were 9 subjects with a score of 18 and 9 subjects with a score of 15, accounting for the largest proportion 11.7% of the total number relatively; followed by subjects with a score of 12, accounting for 10.4% of the total. The normal curve and the result of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test (Z=0.097, p=0.070>0.05) show the data are normally distributed.

Figure 2. Score Distribution of the participants

The genre and topic of the three sections in listening comprehension have been already shown in table 1. By calculating the correct rate for each section, the average correct rate of the three sections is relatively 70.5%, 52.9% and 53.1%. In order to test whether there is significant difference among three sections, Paired Sampled T-test is conducted using SPSS 24.0 and the results are shown in table 2.

Table 2 Paired Sampled T-Test for different sections

		Paired Samples Test						
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Mean		Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
				Lower	Upper				
Pair 1	LSec1 - Sec2	1.93506	1.83057	.20861	1.51958	2.35055	9.276	76	.000
Pair 2	LSec1 - Sec3	.32468	2.05479	.23416	-.14170	.79105	1.387	76	.170
Pair 3	LSec3 - Sec2	1.61039	1.98783	.22653	1.15921	2.06157	7.109	76	.000

As the above table illustrates, it was found that there is a significant difference between Section 1 and Section 2 (t (76) =9.28, p<0.01) as well as between Section 2 and Section 3 (t (76)=7.11, p<0.01) but no significant difference between Section 1 and Section 3 (t(76)=1.39, p>0.05). Through the comparison of the means it is found that the score of both section 1 and Section 3 is significantly higher than section 2. The reason for this phenomenon can be speculated in terms of the length, difficulty, the familiarity of the topic and participants' attention and concentration. Section 1 consists of two short dialogues, which contains many pauses and changes in voice tone. Because the dialogues are not very long, the answers are densely spreaded in the talk and it is easier for test takers to remember the important information during the listening process. However, when it comes to section 2, the length of the listening material increases greatly and the topic suddenly changes from daily talk to geography and psychology, which is not easy accessible topic for students. Students who are not well prepared psychologically for this part will face immediate sense of growing difficulty and fail to adjust to section 2. It is advisable for test takers to be fully aware of the testing components and be strategically prepared for this part like taking more notes and trying to infer some implied meaning of the article. As for section 3, test takers are getting accustomed to the longer and complicated articles and the topics like environmental issues and the history of a magazine are more common to students. With more topical knowledge, students can understand the article better and even make guesses based on what they already know. Take item 20 in section 3 for example, the question is "What must you avoid doing with your Indian Colleague?" with four choices "show them your palm; giving them gifts of great value; drinking alcohol on certain days of a month; clicking your fingers loudly in their presence". 79.2% test takers get the correct answer for some of them already know about Indian culture that Indian must not drink alcohol on the first and seventh of

the month for religious belief.

3.3 Facility Value

Facility Value (also F.V.) is normally used to evaluate the difficulty of the test items and should only be used for objective items. The ideal range of F.V. is 0.3 to 0.7. Calculating all the F.V. of all the test items, most of the items are in the ideal range but item 6 (F.V.=0.84) and 9 (F.V.=0.25) stand out. This two items are further investigated for reasons why they are too easy or too difficult for the students.

Item 6: According to the speakers, what affects children's choice of food most?	
A) Its fancy design.	B)TV commercials.
C)Its taste and texture.	D)Peer influence.

Item 6 tends to be too easy for the students and should be not accepted for a proficiency test with the value of F.V.=0.84. The reason is that this passage mainly talks about advertisements and junk food, it is obvious that the correct answer is B) TV commercials as long as the test takers know that commercial is the synonym for advertisement.

Item 9: What can be found in the Vally of the Kings?	
A) Stretches of farmland.	B) Typical Egyptian animal farms.
C) Tombs of ancient rulers.	D) Ruins left by devastating floods.

This item is a bit hard for the students for it's designed to test the ability to get the detailed information and there are lots of confused information in the text. Choice A is the answer for the Nile and choice B is confusing choice for changing "farmland" from the listening material to "farms". Choice D is also mentioned in the passage as "flood annually" but in the article it is beneficial for the residents nearby rather than devastating. This item can be accepted and it gives some implications of the teaching process. Teachers should try to enlarge the vocabulary and geographic knowledge of some famous river and

civilizations. Skills to distinguish detailed information should also be more often practiced during the daily learning and teaching process.

4. Conclusion

This research is to understand the construct in the hearing test and to evaluate the listening ability students are supposed to have using the Non-reciprocal Language Use Model [9]. At the same time, the research method of simulation test is also adopted to evaluate and analyze the students' English listening ability. The CET-6 has become an important yardstick for many colleges and universities to measure the quality of English teaching. This survey also plays an important role in promoting the reform and innovation of college English teaching, and also a try to provide insights for the revision of the test. The results should be considered cautiously for the sample size is not very large and other factors like Discrimination Index should also be taken into consideration.

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