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A Proposal for the Construction of Test Bank for Advanced English of English Majors in China¹

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ABSTRACT

Advanced English is a comprehensive core course for college English majors in China to cultivate students' linguistic performance, cultural knowledge and critical thinking ability. High-quality teaching of Advanced English is required both for teachers and students. The establishment of a high-quality Advanced English test bank is conducive to improving students' linguistic performance and improving the validity of educational measurement. This study first puts forward the disadvantages of the current exam and the necessity of the construction of Advanced English test bank, and then proposes guiding principles and the steps of constructing the test bank, finally lists and illustrates the items in Advanced English test bank. This study will pave a way for the development of test bank in all subjects.

Keywords: Advanced English; linguistic performance; test bank; construction.

JEL classification code: I20; I21; I23

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Examination is one of the necessary means to check the quality of teaching. At present, most universities in China still use the traditional way to set test papers, that is, the teachers manually edit the test paper and determine the contents and scoring standards. To set papers in this way is inevitably of arbitrariness and the test paper is also lack of standardization. Based on the examination results obtained in this way, it is difficult for the teaching and management departments to objectively evaluate the teaching quality. The establishment of a standardized and reasonable test bank is not only conducive to the improvement of teaching quality, but also to the development of teaching management.

1. Previous Studies of Test Bank

Research on "test bank" is not rich both in China and around the world. Tapsai (2015) carried out a research on online test bank management system in Integration Model by asking 102 students to learn and test online. In this experiment, after a test, the instructor checked the result and suggested that students with low achievement score to review the online lessons related to their weakness. The students were tested again after they have reviewed the suggested online lesson and the results

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showed that their achievement was improved significantly. Bristol(2018)questioned the use of test bank. He pointed out that “Using test banks can be problematic if the faculty copy–paste questions directly into their examinations. Using a test bank as a way to come up with ideas is great when the questions are critiqued for validity related to learning objectives.” Zhang(2010) made an analysis on the test bank built for college English. Wang (2011) discussed the principles of building a test bank. Liu (2014) stated the significance of building test bank. It is noticed that in the past research, Tapsai drew a favorable conclusion that test bank is promising while Bristol worried the misuse of test bank. In regards to both conclusions, it is necessary to look for evidences from the practice and the past researches to judge if the construction of a test bank is feasible or not. For Chinese scholars who are interested in this field, they only discussed the significance and principles in a general way and analyzed a test bank for college English. Is it good to build a test bank for Advance English? What are the significance and principles? What should be included in this bank? All the questions will be covered in this paper.

2. Necessity of Test Bank construction

Language testing comes along with language teaching. Language testing serves language teaching. In modern language testing theory, reliability and validity are two important indicators checking test paper quality. Reliability refers to the degree to which an experiment or evaluation procedure gives consistent results each time it is employed. That means it will always get similar results with the same test standard even when the subjects change. Validity refers to the degree in which our test or other measuring device is truly measuring what we intended it to measure (Chen, 2009: 6-7). Reliability and validity are closely related with each other. In order to guarantee the reliability, the paper setting teacher must take all aspects into consideration, including increasing the objectiveness of contents and realizing the scientific nature of the subjective items. To ensure validity, paper setting teachers should accurately grasp the key and difficult points in textbooks, be fairly familiar with teaching objectives and contents, scientifically design various test items, and carefully set the proportion of scores, so as to objectively reflect students' language performance (Wang, 2011:114). The manual test paper setting is traditionally done by the teachers who are responsible for the teaching of this course. In essence, it is the teachers themselves to test their own teaching quality. Therefore, reliability in the test cannot be guaranteed. Additionally, there is no a unified rule for test question types, the coverage, and the degree of the difficulty. Therefore, validity cannot be guaranteed either.

Test bank refers to a scientific collection of a large number of test items, which are compiled and collected based on certain specifications. On the one hand, test bank system can help teachers timely prepare all kinds of test questions, generate standard test paper, and analyze the students' achievements. On the other hand, test bank system can also record and save students' achievements, and generate the test summary, which will greatly reduce teachers' burden, and effectively improve the efficiency of the whole test process. (Zhang & Wang, 2010:172). Therefore, it is necessary and urgent to establish a test bank for Advanced English course in order to scientifically assesses students' mastery of the knowledge and improve the teaching quality.

3. Principles of the Test Bank construction for advanced english

Firstly, the test bank should be designed practically. The task of language teaching is to cultivate learners' ability to use language, while the purpose of language testing is to test the quality of language teaching. Therefore, test bank should decide the test points and design test questions in each teaching stage based on the teaching materials. Those summative tests are combined with formative assessments to make a comprehensive assessment of students' learning situation and objectively reflect the teaching quality and learning effect.

Secondly, the test bank should be designed pertinently. Test bank is designed to test students' learning achievements of this course at the end of each semester. Accordingly, the content of the test must be set around the textbooks currently used in the course. Therefore, it is necessary for the teachers to carefully study the Syllabus for English Majors at Universities and Colleges issued by the

Chinese Ministry of Education, take the current textbook of Advanced English into consideration and design test bank with pertinence.

Thirdly, the test bank should be designed scientifically. The test paper setting teachers should fully review and discuss the Syllabus for English Majors at Universities and Colleges, current textbooks, and the test paper setting plans to revise, select and store them in the database to ensure the quality with a unified standard. The test bank's content should be classified distinctly, and the test items should be diverse. When test papers are set, paper setting teachers should take students at all levels into consideration by distinguishing the difficult points from the easy ones. The test items should be diversified, such as multiple choices, filling in the blank, error correction, questions and answers, etc., so as to facilitate extraction and meet different test requirements (Wang, 2011:116)

4. Steps of construction of Advanced English Test Bank

The construction of Advanced English test bank should be based on the Syllabus for English Majors at Universities and Colleges, closely follow the classroom teaching content, and focus on the checking of students' linguistic performance. Therefore, the main task of the construction of the test bank should include the learning of software, the management of the software platform and the planning of the test syllabus. In addition, the test coverage, test items, selection standards, test paper editing, test quality, test update and the dynamic management of test bank, etc. are what the test organizers should take into consideration as well. The specific steps of the construction of Advanced English test bank are as follows:

4.1 Setting examination syllabus

Test is carried out to check the overall teaching quality effectively. Therefore a set of scientific test paper is necessary. In order to guarantee the quality of the test bank, an examination syllabus for Advanced English based on the Syllabus for English Majors at Universities and Colleges should be established first. All the crucial aspects described in the Syllabus for English Majors at Universities and Colleges including the course properties and teaching goals as well as the requirements of language skills in terms of reading, writing and translating for senior students majoring in English should be fully discussed and followed. The examination syllabus should be based on the characteristics of the course itself, centering on the teaching objectives of Advanced English and reflecting the characteristics of Advanced English in cultivating students' linguistic performance and thinking ability.

4.2 Items classification and collection

First, items should be collected according to the test type, content and the degree of difficulty required by the test syllabus. Secondly, the paper setting teachers should discuss and determine if the selected items are appropriate or not, deleting the outdated content and introducing the new and appropriate items into the scope of the test bank. In addition, to scientifically measure the difficulty of the test, paper setting teachers are recommended to employ the measurement software as a tool to check the selected test articles. In this way, it will be free of the problems of arbitrariness and subjectivity existing in traditional examination.

4.3 Evaluation of selected items

Items in test bank will be selected and organized as a set of test paper to test students at the end of the semester in order to check the teaching quality. Will the set of paper reflect the teaching purpose and the requirements of the teaching syllabus of Advanced English? Before the set of paper is applied, professional teachers should be invited to work as evaluators to evaluate this paper. In carrying out this evaluation, the repetition rate of items, the degree of the difficulty and the appropriateness of instruction expression should be considered carefully.

4.4 Management of test entry

Items are subject to rigorous review before they are stored in the bank. Since the whole process is completely carried out on the test bank software platform, it is necessary for those staff responsible for this task to carefully study the operation principle of the test bank platform and master the operation of the platform.

4.5 Maintenance and update of the test bank

The construction of test bank is only one of the ways to realize the purpose of improving teaching quality. Therefore, in teaching practice, the teaching evaluation should be carried out in time, the feedback from students should be analyzed, the content of test bank should be constantly adjusted and enriched, and the construction system of *Advanced English* should be improved steadily (Liu, 2014:61).

5. Items in Advanced English test bank

The construction of Advanced English test bank must be based on the textbooks currently used. The content of the test bank includes vocabulary, grammar, reading, translation, and writing etc.

5.1 Vocabulary and grammar

Vocabulary test is used to check students' comprehension of English words. Grammar test tends to check students' basic grammar knowledge and the ability to use grammar in the level of discourse. This part includes two types of questions: the first type is multiple choices based on sentences, which can be selected from textbooks or extracurricular materials to assess students' ability to use words, collocations and common expressions. The second type is filling-blank with a short passage, which can be selected from textbooks or extracurricular materials. Students' ability to use vocabulary and phrases is assessed by filling in the blanks. This part mainly tests students' mastery of the meaning, collocation and usage of words and phrases as well as their ability to properly use grammatical structures.

5.2 Reading comprehension

The students who complete the course of Advanced English are required to read articles on general topics with moderate difficulty in language, master the general idea, facts and details, understand the author's views and attitudes and analyze the article to some extent. The reading comprehension section tests students' ability to obtain information through reading. This section includes two types of test: multiple choices and question-answer based on the content of the essay.

5.3 Writing

This part requires students to make notes when they read written materials with similar difficulty to the texts from their textbooks, and write 250-300 words short essays on certain topics or outlines within the specified time. Clear expression and no major language errors are required.

5.4 Translation

The translation section assesses students' ability to understand the text accurately within the given time and express it accurately in Chinese or English. The test item of this part is a passage translation. There are no more than ten "test points" in each passage. Students are required to understand the meaning of each sentence according to the context of the passage and express it accurately in Chinese or English (Zhang & Wang, 2010:172-173).

6. Conclusion

The construction of the test bank of Advanced English is a comprehensive and time-consuming project. A series of important issues, including how the design of test items is to highlight the features of advanced English in cultivating students' linguistic performance and western cultural knowledge from the practical operational level, how to select and organize the test questions scientifically based on the theory of language test, how to control the quality of the test questions, and How to ensure the dynamic management and update of test bank need to be explored in practice. (Liu, 2014:61)

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