

Research on Foreign Language Testing

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Abstract—Foreign language testing is an important part of curriculum system of foreign language teaching in our country and begins in the early 1960s. It belongs to an interdisciplinary subject that involves linguistics, foreign language teaching method and psychology, and it is also an important means to check basic knowledge of foreign language and practical skills of foreign language learners. Especially since the reform and opening up in China, the development of foreign language education has made great contributions for our country to move towards the world and make foreign contacts. This article focuses on exploring research on foreign language testing and analyzes the importance of it, and looks into the future development trends, in order to provide corresponding references for our country to better promote the development of career of foreign language education.

Keywords—foreign language testing; research background; important role; development trend

I. INTRODUCTION

After entering the 21st century, foreign languages, especially English have become important tools of external exchange in our country in political, economic and cultural fields. On one hand, starting from micro perspective, people urgently feel it is essential to learn foreign languages; on the other hand, starting from the macro perspective, in the process of development, our country has more and more requirements for excellent foreign language talents. The series of changes means that foreign language teaching occupies a more and more important position in modernization development of our country. Foreign language testing has become important means to test people's foreign language level and select excellent foreign language talents for our country, society and enterprises. There are concrete forms of foreign language testing such as Public English Test System, National English Contest for College Students, etc.

II. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TESTING

Making a general survey of research background of foreign language testing in our country and its history of development, it is obvious that with the evolution of social development in our country and changes of the position of foreign language testing in political, economic and cultural development, it also presents corresponding development and changes. If we look up pertinent literatures in CNKI and analyze the research contents, we can find that the research contents of foreign language testing have evolved from the

original research on testing theory to the practice testing research, from the research on test reliability to the research on how to better improve the validity of foreign language testing.

In order to better collect the literatures related to foreign language research and grasp the contents of foreign language research, the author mainly makes use of database of CNKI to inquire core periodical literatures related to foreign language research such as *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching*, *Foreign Language Research* and *Foreign Language World*, summarizes and analyzes the research results of relevant foreign language testing of Chinese scholars in recent ten years, and it is found that so far, contents related to foreign language testing mainly show the following aspects:

A. Theoretical and Practice Research of Foreign Language Testing

Theoretical and practice research is one of the main contents of research on foreign language testing. The research emphasis related to it mainly includes two aspects: The first is the research on analysis, application and practice effect of relevant foreign language testing theories. For example, Han Baocheng puts forward in his article that we can make use of modern electronic science and technology to develop new type of language testing system to improve the research effects of relevant foreign language testing theories. The second is to set forth relevant theories of foreign language testing from different perspectives such as pedagogy and sociology, etc.

Besides, on the practice research of foreign language testing, the research emphasis mainly focuses on the research of existing different foreign language testing systems in our country, such as researches on foreign language level test and its test pattern. Taking English test as an example, relevant scholars such as Yang Huizhong concentrate the research on foreign language testing system upon the research on system of CET-4 and CET-6, and comprehensively explore and analyze from aspects such as proposition, question analysis and organization of English test.

B. Research on Test Method of Foreign Language

The research on test method of foreign language has strong significance in practice research. At present, when Chinese scholars research on foreign language testing methods, they mainly focus on three aspects: The first is the

research on testing types, including whether foreign language testing belongs to types of achievement test, or proficiency test or diagnostic test, etc. The second is the research on item type design, namely the designs of reading comprehension, listening comprehension and oral test. They also research and analyze the proportions that different question types account for. The third is the research on testing tool, namely forms of paper testing and computer test, etc. Especially in modern society with rapid development of science and technology, research on foreign language testing that depends on computer and network technique becomes the hot subject of research on foreign language testing.

C. Research on Reliability and Validity of Foreign Language Testing

The research on reliability and validity of foreign language testing bases on the above two research topics and it can be divided into the following two basic research directions: Firstly, starting from macro perspective, research the reliability and validity of foreign language testing under different types; secondly, starting from micro perspective, evaluate the reliability and validity in varies test contents and skills covered by foreign language testing system. In this kind of research achievements, the most typical is the research on the basis of item bias conducted by Nie Jianzhong and Zhang Kun. They think item bias influences the validity and fairness of foreign language testing to some extent, and put forward corresponding solutions through analyzing some foreign relevant research literatures about item bias. It has provided corresponding theoretical references for relevant design personnel in foreign language testing system in our country to better design fair and just foreign language testing with high reliability.

III. IMPORTANCE OF RESEARCH ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TESTING

As an important means for evaluation of foreign language teaching effect, testing is the critical procedure of foreign language teaching system at present. The reasons mainly include: Firstly, in the process of foreign language teaching, teachers can make simple diagnosis and inspection on mastering level of foreign language learners for foreign language knowledge at present, and evaluate foreign language ability of foreign language learners on this basis, in order to improve teaching methods and keep benign interactions between teachers and students. Secondly, different test item types can make teachers grasp the abilities of foreign language learners in mastering foreign language knowledge in various links, such as their listening and speaking abilities and reading ability, and better set teaching materials and courses, teach students in accordance of their aptitudes and improve the quality of foreign language teaching. All in all, the reason why we introduce foreign language testing in foreign language teaching is that it has the functions of evaluation, feedback and adjustment and helps teachers to better arrange and plan the job of foreign language teaching. Therefore, it is of great importance for the research on foreign language testing to better support the

job of foreign language teaching. And it mainly embodies in the following aspects:

A. The Research on Foreign Language Testing Provides Theoretical Basis to Better Carry Through Foreign Language Testing

Foreign language testing is always an indispensable part of foreign language teaching system. The objective of research on foreign language testing is to better provide services for foreign language teaching and improve the level of foreign language teaching in our country. Therefore, the research on foreign language testing plays an important role in foreign language testing and teaching. It provides solid theoretical basis to better carry through foreign language testing and it mainly embodies in: The first is the researches of relevant scholars for foreign language testing theories, such as the analysis of theoretical contents in distinction between different language testing theories, the feasibility of application and practice effect, to provide references in various aspects for teachers to choose appropriate foreign language teaching theories and realize the “individualized teaching” and advancement of foreign language testing and teaching. The second is the research on the system and pattern of foreign language testing, which helps teachers to correctly distinguish the advantages and disadvantages of different systems and patterns of foreign language testing in the process of foreign language testing, and design more appropriate system and pattern of foreign language testing and improve the reliability and validity of foreign language testing.

B. The Research on Foreign Language Testing Provides Guidance for Us to Choose Appropriate Ways, Types and Tools of Foreign Language Testing.

Appropriate ways, types and tools of foreign language testing are important basis to effectively improve the quality of foreign language testing and guarantee its validity and reliability. In research on foreign language testing, the researches on ways, types and tools of foreign language testing under different social backgrounds, or in different education systems and educational phases have provided chief sources for us to use for reference in better carrying through foreign language testing. For example, relevant scholars research the system of CET-4 and CET-6, comprehensively explore and analyze its advantages and disadvantages. It helps the further improvement and development of this test system and provides chief source for other foreign language test systems to use for reference and compare, provides corresponding guidance for foreign language testing under different systems or patterns in choosing the ways, types and tools of foreign language testing, and helps the improvement of integral level of foreign language testing in our country.

IV. DEVELOPMENT TRENDS AND EXPECTATIONS OF RESEARCH ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE TESTING

A. *Development Trends of Research on Foreign Language Trends*

On the basis of the above analysis, it is concluded that relevant researches on foreign language testing will inevitably deeply develop on the basis of existing research. By comparison, in terms of the research on foreign language testing, many foreign countries, especially developed countries such as Britain, America, Japan and Russia have larger intensity of reform than our country. Meanwhile, the research on foreign language testing of relevant scholars in these countries focus on the reflection of test results on students' abilities in mastering foreign language. They also take foreign language testing as important means of educational reform and the improvement of teaching quality, not only analyze students' problems existed in research on foreign language testing, but also analyze problems of teachers and school authorities existed in research on foreign language testing, such as whether teachers thoroughly understand relevant textbook contents, whether teaching methods are right or whether the curriculum of foreign language teaching or foreign language testing system in schools are reasonable, to better apply theoretical research on foreign language testing to practice.

Aiming at the differences existed between China and foreign countries about the research on foreign language testing, the changes of research on foreign language testing in China from theory to practice, and references of research on foreign language testing in foreign countries used by research on foreign language testing in China, the research on foreign language testing in China will present the following development trends:

1) *Build the framework of diversified theoretical research on foreign language testing.* Foreign language testing is an interdisciplinary subject and involves multiple disciplines such as pedagogy, psychometrics and cognitive linguistics. It means that in the development trends of research on foreign language testing in the future, we will think deeply about the multi-angle theoretical research on foreign language testing from macro perspective, and build diversified framework of theoretical research of foreign language testing on this basis. That is to say, we will not only start from the pure and simple pedagogical meaning, but also start from perspectives of research such as modern linguistics and psychology, to promote the diversification of theoretical research on foreign language testing as well as expand the research significance of foreign language testing.

2) *Pay attention to the analysis on the whole process of examinee in foreign language testing.* Looking from the above research contents of relevant scholars in our country, at present, the researches on theoretic and practical significance brought by results of foreign language testing and researches on reliability and validity of foreign language testing system on the basis of theory still occupy the dominant position. That is to say, at present, many domestic scholars still concentrate the research emphasis upon the

research on results of foreign language testing in the process of researching foreign language testing in our country. They pay attention to the research on theory and practice on the basis of results of foreign language testing and ignore the importance of research on the process of foreign language testing. It is a deficiency existed in the current research on foreign language testing system in China. Under this deficiency, in consideration of the expansion of research field of foreign language testing in foreign countries and the references of foreign studies used by domestic scholars in the research process, in terms of the development trends of research on foreign language testing in our country in the future, it certainly will transfer the focus of research from results to the process and strengthen the research on process action of examinee in foreign language testing from the perspectives of psychology and behavioral science.

B. *Expectations of the Research on Foreign Language Testing*

On the basis of the above analysis on theories and development trends of research on foreign language testing, the author puts forward the following two expectations: The first is to pay attention to the intersectionality of research on foreign language testing, which mainly refers to that in the process of research on foreign language testing in our country, relevant scholars should continue to research on aspects such as the theory and practice of foreign language testing, as well as extend the research to other aspects, such as cause a series of behavioral researches on the basis of foreign language testing, namely researches on evaluation of foreign language testing and fraudulent practices in the process of foreign language testing and students' cognitive psychology, to build relatively complete research system of foreign language testing. The second is to make the best of computer and network technique and bring them into the research on foreign language testing, such as the research on how to use computer and network technology to suppress the fraudulent practices in foreign language testing.

V. CONCLUSION

To sum up, foreign language testing is an important part of foreign language teaching system and has important feedback effect for foreign language teaching. Researches on relevant theory provide solid theoretical basis for foreign language teaching. Therefore, in the future research of foreign language testing, it is necessary to further expand the scope of its research to better serve foreign language testing.

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