

The Criteria of Spoken English for Non-English Majors in Chinese Colleges

—A case study of International Cruise Service Major

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Abstract—With globalization of education listening and speaking in English is comparatively significant rather than writing or reading, but there is on the lack of criteria to assess college non-English major students English speaking. Cooperating with world top 500, RCI cruises company, international cruise service major investigates a set of standardized spoken English criteria for non-English majors in colleges. The criteria are perfectly linked to the recruitment of international companies.

Keywords—*criteria, spoken English, college*

I. THE SPOKEN ENGLISH TEST PAST AND PRESENT

Under the general tendency in world globalization, Non-English majors in China's colleges gradually go abroad as "Luban Workshop". "Luban Workshop" has taken Chinese techniques and college education to other countries, which is benefit for education exchange. More and more colleges in China starts to cultivate international talents for the world and increasing students are willing to find global companies to work. However, Chinese students focus on reading and writing and ignore listening and speaking due to Chinese traditional English teaching methods. In contemporary China, majority of non-English majors in colleges assess students English by written tests and ignore speaking. The internationalization of college majors need transfer the objective of talents cultivation in English subject from reading and writing to listening and speaking, which our society requests. Even if some colleges take English oral tests, the scoring criteria are based on an individual teacher's standards, and there is no consistent and unified scoring criteria[1]. The assessment of spoken English is on the lack of validity and reliability. The criteria of spoken English are indisputably necessary to be drawn up.

II. THE BACKGROUND OF MAPPING SPOKEN ENGLISH TEST

Tianjin Maritime College (short as TMC) has intimately cooperated with Royal Caribbean International Cruises(short as RCI) and established a training center to cultivate the cruise talents for RCI since 2014. The training center doesn't serve TMC only but also trains cruise talents from hundreds of alliance colleges such as Shandong Maritime College, Qingdao Ocean Shipping Mariners College, Jiangsu Maritime College, Zhejiang Institute of Communications, Harbin Vocational and Technical College, etc. In combination of production and

education, in effect, we realize the recruitment standards of future employers are much more important. The comparatively convenient conditions that TMC works with one of the world top 500 corporations, RCI and keeps long-term friendship with plenty of colleges in China provide tons of benefits to revise and develop cruise major talents cultivating objectives. The recruiters of RCI demonstrate the only recruitment method they adopt is either face to face interview or Skype interview. Skype is a sort of telecommunications application software that specialized in video chatting and voice calls between computers or mobiles. Their recruitment standards range from English proficiency, personality, related knowledge and skills, loyalty to appearance. The primary standard of recruitment for RCI is the English proficiency among five aspects. It can be seen that English for International corporations is the crucial key to open their door to be recruited. Additionally, both in the step of recruitment interview and daily routine work on cruises our students have to survive in English speaking environment. Spoken English becomes one of essential competency to the college students in international majors. And, despite getting more attention, spoken English is still out of the test system of non-English majors in colleges.

III. THE INVESTIGATION OF ENGLISH SPEAKING REQUIREMENT OF RCI

Besides written English test, in order to establish a complete spoken English testing system, the criteria should be pictured as priority. A criterion-based test is always reliable and valid. The standards of English speaking requirement of RCI from recruiters are too general to be criteria to assess college students. To gather information of English speaking proficiency RCI needs is an approach to figure out the specific details of college spoken English test criteria. We design a questionnaire combining The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (short as CEFR) testing standards handing out to Human Resources officers and managers in different departments on Oasis class, Quantum class, Mariner class cruises in RCI fleet. CEFR is a guideline used to describe English language achievements of non-English speaking learners across Europe and, increasingly, in other countries. A European Union Council Resolution recommended using the CEFR to set up systems of validation of language ability with experiments-based evidence in 2001. CEFR is becoming the European standards for grading an individual's language

proficiency. It is widely accepted and used. The framework of reference for English aims to help teachers recognize students' language qualifications and intends to evaluate the language qualifications of candidates to employment. It is divided into 6 levels from listening, reading, writing and speaking. The questionnaire to investigate spoken English standards in RCI applied the speaking standards of CEFR only, because RCI

recruits crew concern about spoken English mainly. The 6 levels of CEFR applied in the questionnaire are from A1 which is beginner to C2 which is mastery, describing specific spoken English proficiency. CEFR levels and description are listed in the questionnaire to ask RCI personnel to choose their preference

TABLE I. THE ENGLISH PROFICIENCY DESCRIPTION OF EACH LEVEL IN CEFR[2]

| Level | Level name | Description |
|-------|--------------------|---|
| A1 | beginner | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people they know and things they have. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help. |
| A2 | elementary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of their background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need |
| B1 | intermediate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics that are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans |
| B2 | upper intermediate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in their field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. |
| C1 | advanced | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer clauses, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express ideas fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices. |
| C2 | mastery | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express themselves spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in the most complex situations. |

We receive 126 pieces of feedback from HR department and other operation departments in RCI cruises. Summarizing the feedback from RCI ships HR officers and division managers, the report of our questionnaire is saying that 70% entrance positions in RCI cruises as assistant waiter, room service attendant, bar utility request spoken English level at B1 or above while 30% entrance positions in RCI cruises as café attendant, public area cleaner request spoken English level at A2 or above. Some higher positions do not open to new college graduates who is short of working experience as waiter, bar server, cruise staff, guest service officer requiring spoken English level at B2 or above.

IV. CRITERIA CONSTRUCTION OF SPOKEN ENGLISH

The criteria would be accessible to all teachers or examiner and the number of levels within each criterion would have to represent real distinctions in the performance of actual candidates. Appropriate criteria for assessing is a useful guideline for the teaching. Teachers could adjust their teaching content or approaches according to test results to develop students' English[3]. When mapping spoken English criteria, we sincerely consider what English levels are perfectly

matching talents cultivation objective for college non-English majors and what are key elements in spoken English. Consequently, the entrance positions English requests, B1 and A2, are involved in college spoken English test criteria in international cruise service major as qualified spoken English ability. The basic entrance positions need crew are able to speak English at A2, so A2 level is set as the dividing line between pass and fail. B1 is the aim all teachers make efforts to educate their students to achieve. On the basis of CEFR and other international valid English tests like TOEFL and IELTS[4], the description of each level are specifically separated into four different aspects, fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, also pronunciation[5]. They are four fundamental elements which structure the spoken English. Moreover, the spoken English criteria are set 9 levels from 0 to 100 points. Every 10 points are in each level. Score 50 as the cut-off score, equals to A2 in CEFR. Spoken English criteria for non-English majors in colleges is below.

TABLE II. SPOKEN ENGLISH CRITERIA FOR NON-ENGLISH MAJORS IN COLLEGES[6]

| score | fluency and coherence | lexical resource | grammatical range and accuracy | Pronunciation |
|-------------|--|---|---|---|
| 90-99 | speaks fluently with only rare self-correction and coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features | uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics | uses a full range of structures naturally and appropriately | uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety |
| 80-89 | speaks fluently, hesitation is usually content-related and only rarely to search for language | uses a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning | uses a wide range of structures flexibly | uses a wide range of pronunciation features |
| 70-79 | speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence | uses vocabulary resource flexibly to discuss a variety of topics | uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility | show all the positive features but sustained |
| 60-69 | is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times | has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics to length and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriate items | uses mix of simple and complex structures, but with limited flexibility | uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control |
| 50-59 | maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction | manages to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility | produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy | uses a limited range of pronunciation features |
| 40-49 | cannot respond without noticeable and speak slowly with frequent repetition and self-correction | is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent errors in word choice | attempts basic sentence forms but with some incorrectness | mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener |
| 30-39 | speak with long pauses, has limited ability to link simple sentences | only produces isolated words or memorized utterances | cannot produce basic sentence forms | speech is often unintelligible |
| 20-29 | cannot speak sentences, except a few isolated words | only produces isolated words | cannot produce basic sentence forms | speech is often unintelligible |
| 20 or below | no communication possible | | | |

In order to test the validation and reality of criteria, we invite 2 English teachers in TMC, 2 crew trainers in RCI training center and 2 RCI recruiters to be interviewers following the criteria to exam 50 Chinese new crew in RCI training center on TMC campus. 6 interviewers stay together to score the crew they interview. The highest score from 1 interviewer and lowest score from 1 interviewer are deleted and scores from the other 4 interviewers to one candidate are calculated averagely as a final result. 50 Chinese crew from TMC and alliance colleges have their positions including 8 bar utilities, 4 cleaners, 12 assistant waiters, 14 room service attendants, 12 café attendants in RCI and attending new crew training in TMC. Each candidate is evaluated for 15 minutes. All questions are related to daily life and study from IELTS. The results of interview show the average score of cleaners and café attendants is 56.78 while the average score of assistant waiters, bar utilities, room service attendants is 63.26. It is obvious that the spoken English criteria is consistent with the RCI requirement of English proficiency. This is the first step in the college talent cultivation revolution.

V. SUMMARY

Chinese colleges used to focus English tests on reading and writing so much that Chinese college students were good at mute English that means students can read and write in English only. Their listening and speaking are too weak to communicate by oral. In meanwhile, the development of

internationalized majors in Chinese colleges are prosperous. It requests talents are good to oral communication when they work in international companies. In order to turn the mute English cultivation to applied English cultivation, revising objective of talents cultivation becomes an urgent affair. English proficiency requirement in the objective of talents cultivation needs change as priority. Tianjin Maritime College works with Royal Caribbean International cruises closely. Under this benefit situation, it designs a questionnaire of entrance English proficiency to HR officers and division managers in RCI cruises. The questionnaire adopts the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages testing standards, because it is widely used in European countries to identify students' English ability. The feedback from cruises demonstrates A2 elementary users in CEFR, who can understand sentences and communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters, are filled in café attendant, public area cleaner positions while B1 intermediate users, who can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters and describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans, are filled in assistant waiter, room service attendant, bar utility positions. Therefore, the statistics of English requirement from RCI cruises become the guideline of setting spoken English criteria in colleges. A2 as the basic entrance English requirement equals to cut-off

score, 50. The other international recognized tests TOEFL and IELTS spoken English criteria show the necessary elements of English are fluency and coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, also pronunciation. The 9 different ranks from 0 to 100 in the new spoken English criteria in Chinese colleges for non-English majors are designed and used to assess 50 Chinese new crew from variety of provinces in China in RCI training center. The spoken English score of them proves the new criteria of spoken English in colleges.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This study was supported by Tianjin Municipal Association of Higher Vocational & Technical Education (XVII4130)

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