A Constructive Study of the Evaluation System of Audiovisual and Speaking Textbooks

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Abstract—**English teaching materials compilation has been developed rapidly at present China, yet the evaluation of teaching materials lags far behind. In combining rational aspects of theories and practices about teaching materials evaluation both at home and abroad with the features of English Audio-visual and Speaking course, this paper attempts to construct an evaluative framework on English Audio-visual and Speaking Teaching Material from three perspectives: macro evaluation, microevaluation, and users' evaluation. Followed by a detailed analysis of the criteria in applying this framework, it hopes that the ideas presented in this paper may trigger more focused researches on the evaluation of English Audio-visual and Speaking teaching materials.**

Keywords— *Audiovisual and Speaking teaching materials evaluation, English Audiovisual and Speaking course, evaluation framework construction*

I. INTRODUCTION

Audio-visual teaching material is a kind of language practice based on electronic teaching material which uses modern audio-visual teaching equipment and integrates materials of audio-visual, listening and speaking. It is an ideal mode of individualized teaching and learning medium to promote the learners' development of listening and speaking ability. In contemporary China's   reform of Elementary English teaching, audio-visual and speaking textbooks have been widely used and recognized. Textbook compiling and publishing agencies have also found this great business opportunity. A large number of audio-visual and audio-visual textbooks have emerged in the textbook market for a time. However, there is a lack of scientific, complete, systematic, practical and operable evaluation system for the use effect and quality guarantee of these textbooks (Zhuang Zhixiang, 2006). Based on the comprehensive analysis of the research results of the evaluation of teaching materials both at home and abroad, and according to the characteristics of audio-visual and speaking courses, this study tries to construct a new system and application standards for the evaluation of audio-visual teaching materials, in order to trigger more peers and experts to pay attention to the weak link of audio-visual and speaking teaching materials evaluation.

II. EVALUATION OF ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS AT HOME AND ABROAD

Cunningsworth(1984,1995, 2002), McDonough & Shaw (1993,) Breen & Candlin (1987), Brian Tomlinson (1998), Ian McGrath (2002) are the most influential evaluators of English textbook assessment abroad. Cunningsworth (1995) proposed an analytic textbooks evaluation checklists from the micro-framework. He has designed a workable reference checklists which focus on the objectives and methods of teaching materials. It covers a wide range from the design and organization, language content, language skills, theme and topics, teaching methods to teachers' reference books and other aspects. He has been considered one of the pioneer scholars in textbook evaluation. As the most common way to evaluate teaching materials is to check what language items textbooks provide in order to meet the needs of learners, and try to find out which language items in the textbooks are available and operable, comparisons and references are the most chosen ways to distinguish learner's language levels and qualities of textbooks. The evaluation framework of McDonough & Shaw (1993) proposed a teacher-centered approach, which focuses on the input and output of language skills as they are the main tasks of textbooks. Their assessment framework consists of two stages: external evaluation and internal evaluation. The external evaluation makes a simple overall judgement of the external (cover, catalogue, introduction, etc.) of the textbook in order to help teachers choose the appropriate textbook. The internal assessment evaluates the introduction of language skills in textbooks from the perspective of teachers or evaluators, the classification and ranking of textbooks, the types of materials, the integration of real language elements, the relationship between testing and practice and learners, etc. The evaluation guideline of Breen & Candlin (1987) is a learner-centered kind of evaluation of textbooks. He suggested that there are two stages in the evaluation process. The first stage focuses on the external learning conditions and requirements, while the second stage puts forward some criteria for classroom design centering on the sensitivity of textbooks as well as classroom language learning. This model focuses more on a teaching method than on the content itself.

Generally speaking, textbook evaluation researches abroad tend to offer workable comparative checklists based on some linguistic theory as a criterion for the evaluators to refer to and meanwhile produce a comprehensive guideline to the evaluative work for teacher participants. Such checklists evaluative methods have produced quite a lot subjective and qualitative analyses, yet it is difficult to get real feedback, and some criteria are difficult to implement, and the validity and reliability of some test variables and data from observation, interview and questionnaires of these evaluative studies are not high (Zhao Yong, Zheng Shutang, 2006).

While Domestic textbook evaluation researches are relatively shallow, simple, backward and with a tendency of more administrative and bureaucracy. The most and frequently used evaluative patterns in practice are mainly by introducing the views of foreign scholars, which have played a very good dissemination role in understanding foreign textbook evaluation researches. Yet there are still quite some scholars made use of the research results of foreign experts to inspire their textbook evaluation research works, such as Xu Jinfen, Xiao Miao (2001). They employed the comparative evaluative checklists of Hutchinson and Waters' to evaluate College English listening textbooks. Zhou Xuelin (1996) based on the summarizing evaluation of foreign scholars researches, put forward six aspects of the evaluation criteria of textbooks. Ailing Qiao (2002) proposed the criteria for evaluating textbooks from the macro and micro aspects of textbook compilation. Among them, Zhao Yong and Zheng Shutang (2006) have pointed out that quantitative criteria should be added to the evaluation of English textbooks. The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis would make the evaluation of textbooks more scientific and objective.

III. CONSTRUCTION OF THE EVALUATION SYSTEM OF AUDIOVISUAL AND SPEAKING TEXTBOOKS

Most traditional textbook evaluation researchers concern relatively overall and comprehensive study, trying not only to cover the overall aspects of textbooks compiling, but also to involve all the aspects of language teaching and learning, which makes the whole evaluation process time-consuming and laborious, with rather low operable manipulation. McDonough & Shaw (1993) suggested that if an effective internal evaluation was to be conducted, at least two units of a set of textbooks should be examined. When Qian Ying (1995) borrowed this evaluation framework, he has to revise and modify, even delete some of the items listed in the form in accordance with the actual situation in China. As the teaching aims and requirements and students' needs varied in China, it proved that borrowing of textbook evaluative framework may not suitable to the real condition in China, especially to the newly prosperous textbook of electric resources. Audiovisual and speaking textbooks fully reflect the development trend of three-dimensional English textbooks in China. In addition to all the characteristics and functions of traditional textbooks, they also shared the characteristics of electronic resourced materials. Such textbook adopt multimedia computer technology such as graphics, text, sound and image, and possess a systematic language knowledge system of digital multimedia textbooks. Accordingly, the author believes that the evaluation of audio-visual and speaking textbooks can be carried out by combining macro-evaluation, micro-evaluation and user evaluation. Macro-evaluation is a macro-overall investigation of the teaching concept employed, content arrangement, ways of language skill presented, compilation level and characteristics of teaching materials. Except the unique characteristics of audio-visual and speaking courses and textbooks, macro-evaluation should also pay attention to the quality of media, intelligent level and software operation and other elements which electronic textbook evaluation might involved. On the contrary, micro-evaluation is a detailed evaluation of the specific teaching content, organizational form of each unit, such as unit teaching objectives, content arrangement, skills training, testing and practice, etc. In addition, the users of the textbooks are students and teachers, so the evaluation of audio-visual and speaking textbooks needs to be combined with user surveys. Questionnaires and interviews are used to collect opinions from different teachers and learners, so as to truly achieve a comprehensive and objective evaluation of the textbooks. The specific framework of the evaluation system is shown in the following figure.
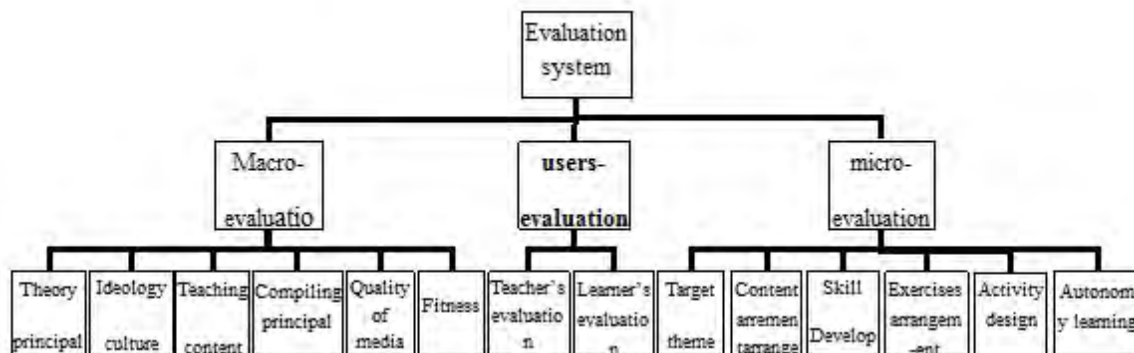

Fig. 1 Evaluation System of Audiovisual and Audiovisual Textbooks

IV. THE APPLICATION OF THE EVALUATION SYSTEM OF AUDIOVISUAL AND SPEAKING TEXTBOOKS

A. Macro-Evaluation

Principles of theory. (1) The compilation of audio-visual textbooks should under the guidance of various language teaching theories. It should adapt certain theories which can meet the needs of the teaching requirements of the learners' listening and speaking capabilities, such as task-based learning of constructivism, imitation and practice of behaviorism (such as parody exercises), interaction activities under the guidance of communicative theory of cognitive language processing mechanism, etc. (2) The compilation of textbooks should be in accordance with syllabus or teaching requirements, take the needs of learners at different levels into consideration, emphasize the cultivation of communicative competence, implement the learning concepts of "individualized learning", "autonomous learning" and "cooperative learning", and focus on the cultivation of students' listening and speaking abilities.

Ideological culture. (1) Audio-visual and speaking textbooks should help to cultivate students' correct moral and values and positive attitudes towards life through materials such as short situational films with stories, plots and characters, which truly and naturally express the ideological themes of friendship, family, mutual assistance and honesty. (2) The characters of video materials can come from different countries and regions in the world. They express their views on the same topic, help students broaden their horizons, understand the customs and customs of the world, life habits, human geography, values and so on. They provide students with a multicultural feast and improve their aesthetic taste and comprehensive cultural literacy.

Content of courses. (1) Audio and video materials in audio-visual speaking textbooks should be rich in genre and wide in subject matter. Dialogues, interviews, reports, sitcoms, radio and television news, historical stories, special lectures, etc. should account for a certain proportion. Topics can cover all aspects of life, such as doctor visits, shopping, job hunting, entertainment, sports, tourism, ideals, diet, festivals, social problems, etc. In addition, textbooks should cover the language communication skills listed in the syllabus or curriculum requirements. For example, language skills as: greetings, requests, suggestions, complaints, orders, invitations, etc., to meet the needs of students' general oral communication. (2) The training of listening skills in textbooks should not only pay attention to the cultivation of comprehension ability of the general idea and main details of the text, the understanding of the speaker's viewpoints, attitudes or purposes, but also involve the training of micro-skills such as pronunciation, intonation and stress. (3) The textbooks should introduce to the readers some effective ways and means to improve their listening and speaking abilities, impart listening and speaking skills and conversation strategies, guide teachers to use the textbooks effectively, and help students improve their listening and speaking abilities.

Writing principles. (1) The compilation of audio-visual textbooks should focus on the cultivation of daily oral English communicative competence. Therefore, textbook should inhence properly deal with the relationship between "input" and "output". Firstly, it provides enough "input" materials for students, and then develops their expressive competence on the basis of improving their comprehension ability. For example, vocabulary, phrases, habitual expressions and listening exercises are provided for students reference and warm up themselves before practicing speaking, in order to prepare students to command necessary patterns and drills, as well as themes to imitate or carry out talks on the same topic. (2) The arrangement of teaching contents should follow the order of Linear propulsion from easiness to difficulty, familiar to unfamiliar. For example, listening materials can start with speak slowly, warm up for oral practice, then gradually normalize the speed, increase the difficulty of listening, and cultivate fluency of oral expression. In addition, audio-visual materials can also change gradually in text, style and difficulty of practice. From informal style to formal style and written language materials, from imitation to discussion, the difficulty increases gradually. (3) The characteristics of textbooks can be embodied in the selection, organization, compilation and presentation of knowledge. They fully demonstrate the characteristics of audio-visual speaking textbooks, such as speaking, listening, reading, writing and commenting after writing.

Media quality. (1) The quality of media is an important index for the evaluation of audio-visual textbooks. The CD-ROM and electronic teaching plan of the textbook should be convenient to use, the interface design is concise, the layout is reasonable, the emphasis is prominent, the audio and video are clear, the animation is vivid, the teaching content should be presented reasonably and effectively, and the students' interest in learning should be stimulated. (2) Network learning platform should be easily available, rich in resources, and are extension of the development of the textbook content. High-quality network platform should have human-computer interaction functions (such as automatic error correction, providing guidance information, adding and deleting personal learning materials, etc.), can realize resource sharing and information retrieval within the system, equipped with e-mail, online chat, forum and other functions.

Fitness. (1) The compilation of textbooks should carry out the teaching concept of "earner-centered" and "students-fronted". In the selection of language materials, the topic should close to students' life, familiar,easy to understand and acceptable and fit for self-learning. The topic should also have a sense of reality and modernity, meet students' current and future communication needs, and arouse students' interest in learning. (2) Exercises, language skills as well as materials for oral practice, are all elements in textbook compilation. It should be adapted to students' autonomous and cooperative learning after class.

B. Microevaluation

Micro-evaluation is a thorough and meticulous evaluation of audio-visual and speaking textbooks, together with a detailed examination of the teaching methods adopted and micro language skills. When evaluating a certain aspects of textbook, two or three units can be selected randomly to make a detailed investigation from the following six aspects. (1) Goals and themes. Is the teaching objective clear? Is each unit organized and logically developed around a certain communicative function, communicative situation or story plot? (2) Content and arrangement. Are contents of unit teaching arranged according to certain rules (e.g. from easy to difficult, from simple to complicated)? Is it consistent with unit teaching objectives and learners'language proficiency? (3) Skills training. Are listening and speaking skills trained in situations that are close to real life applications? Is there any strategy guidance for the training of listening and speaking skills? (4) Practice design. Are the exercises designed in various forms (such as demonstration dialogues, communicative situations, pictures, questions and answers)? Is scaffold built for students to learn to express a certain communicative function? Is it possible to promote the coordinated development of students' listening and speaking skills? (5) Activity design. Are there many kinds of teaching activities, such as follow-up recording, dubbing performance, pair or group dialogue, group activities, role-playing, group discussion and so on? Can these activities stimulate students' interest in learning? Does the task take into account the students' language level, customs, cultural background and so on? (6) Self-regulated learning. Do you provide after-class exercises and after-class learning tasks? Do these exercises and tasks reinforce the corresponding learning strategies? Is the utilization rate of

learning CD-ROM or web-based learning platform very good?   Has training been strengthened to improve students' autonomous learning ability?

C. User Evaluation

It is universally recognized that textbooks should meet the needs of learners. That is to say, students are the real dominants of classroom. Teachers should be a mediator between learners, textbooks, teaching methods as well as target of national curriculum. Thus, whether textbooks meet such concepts have to be judged by students as well as teachers. Teachers and students should evaluate textbooks from their own perspectives to avoid the subjectivity of expert evaluation. Through questionnaires and interviews to understand the views of teachers and students on a certain set of textbooks, and to compare their views, understanding similarities and differences, is an important part of textbook evaluation. The content of teacher's questionnaire and student's questionnaire should be basically consistent to ensure comparability. The difference is that teachers take part in the evaluation as a third party objectively and students take part in the evaluation as the evaluation subject. The interviews mainly adopt the way of question and answer. The interviewees involve both teachers and students. In order to fully understand the views of teachers and students, the interviewees should be different and representative. The interviewees should involve teachers with different professional titles and ages, students with different English proficiency and learning attitudes.

V. CONCLUSION

This study makes a comprehensive analysis through combing different evaluation theory of English textbooks both at home and abroad. It tries to construct a set of evaluation framework and system of audio-visual speaking textbooks in accordance with the characteristics of audio-visual and speaking courses. It has probed into the specific evaluation criteria of audio-visual speaking textbooks according to the framework of the system. The author hopes that this study will trigger a deeper study of the evaluation of similar electric-dimention English textbooks in the academic circles. Due to the lack of experience, this paper inevitably has some shortcomings, I hope you can correct them.

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