

Foreign and Local Textbooks Evaluation in the Exam-oriented Environment At Private Colleges in China

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Abstract

I analyze English textbooks at the college level in terms of Bloom's taxonomy. Classrooms textbooks shape the syllabi, even the entire language program and students' impression of the target language. Reasons for choosing a particular book are based on administrators' impressions and expectations of what teaching materials should look like, but not on teachers/students' requests. My research questions: 1. Are these textbooks suitable for Chinese exam-oriented environment? 2. Which kind of textbooks is more suitable for Chinese English learners (especially English majors), the Chinese textbooks or the foreign ones? I use Bloom's taxonomy for analyzing the Cambridge textbooks *New Interchange* (compiled by Jack Richards) taught for Communication course and the *Integrated Skills of English* (compiled by Huang Yuanshen) used for the Comprehensive English course in some Chinese colleges. The series of *New Interchange* and the *Integrated Skills of English* both includes 6 books each for fluent communication, extending grammatical, lexical, and functional skills. I describe advantages and disadvantages of them from Chinese learners' standpoint. My suggestion based on the survey of books' value for Chinese learners. I discuss whether using these textbooks written by foreigners is beneficial for Chinese students.

Keywords

Textbook evaluation, Bloom's taxonomy, Chinese second language learning, Exam-oriented environment

1 Introduction

Textbooks are produced according to the demands of educational institutions and they are the teaching instruments for both teachers and students (Liu, 2005).

Textbooks play an effective role in students' learning and they are important resources of learning activities used in the classroom. They provide the foundation for the content of lessons,

the balance of the skills taught, as well as the kinds of language practice the students engage in during class activities (Goodman and Hou, 2011). Students practice in English courses is largely dependent on learning activities that textbook authors choose to embed in textbooks and they are the basis for teaching.

We need to pay a lot of attention when choosing textbooks for students as it is the main teaching material in class activities and if the English teachers rely heavily on textbooks for teaching and giving assignments, the cognitive skills embedded in the textbooks may have a significant effect on the learning.

I investigate the learning objectives of the textbooks used in a private college in China, and compare the differences between textbooks written by Chinese and foreign specialists, in order to give suggestions about which kind of textbooks is more suitable for Chinese English learners (especially English majors), the textbooks written by Chinese scholars or those written by foreign specialists. This study sets out several objectives: 1. It seeks to describe the advantages and disadvantages of the Cambridge International English Course textbooks and the Integrated Skills of English.

2. It analyzes the series of these textbooks from the viewpoint of Bloom's taxonomy.

3. It compares the differences between textbooks written by Chinese scholars and those written by foreign specialists.

1.1 Private Colleges in China

By the day of May 23, 2011, Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China states out that there are 2101 colleges and universities in China, 18.37% (386) of them are Private College. (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2011)

China has about 29 million college and university students currently and 19.7% (5.72 million) of them are Private College students. (China Independent Colleges On Line, 2011)

1.2 Exam-oriented Environment

Professional qualification certificates become one

of the most important factors when applying a job in China, so the majority of today's students will try to get those certificates, even try for many times.

For English majors in China, the main exams we have to take include TEM4/8 (Test for English Majors-Band 4/8), CET4/6 (College English Test-Band 4/6).

1.3 Methods & Textbook Features

1.3.1 Methods

I use Bloom's taxonomy for analyzing the textbooks and I made open-ended questionnaires to find out what students think about the books.

1.3.2 Textbook Features

In the four-year college education, we have the Communication course and the Comprehensive course for the first three years. The data in this study are the series of Cambridge International English Course textbooks (for Communication course) and Integrated Skills of English (for Comprehensive course).

The reason that I chose these two textbooks is because they are both multi skills course books.

Textbook Features:

1. One textbook from the series of Cambridge International English Course textbooks entitled "Passages-4" (118 pages).
2. First textbook from the series of Integrated Skills of English-1" (295 pages).
3. Both of them are used in Xingjian College during the first term.

1.3.3 *Cambridge International English Course* (compiled by Jack Richards)

We have the third book of these series, the New Interchange for the freshman year; the fourth book, the Passages, for the sophomore year; the fifth (also Passages) for the senior year.

Passages is a two-level multi skills course for upper-intermediate to advanced-level students, and it is carefully coordinated to function as a sequel to New Interchange.

1.3.4 *Integrated Skills of English* (compiled by Huang Yuanshen)

I made an online survey and the results showed that 25 out of 62 colleges in China use this book.

We have had 6 books for the first three years of college, one for each term. We normally finished just a half of each book within one term.

1.4 Other Textbooks

Here is a list of textbooks we use in our college except the *Cambridge International English Course* and *Integrated Skills of English*.

Extensive Reading

English Writing

History of British Literature and Selected Readings

A Practical English Grammar
Interpreting for General Purposes
Chinese-English Translation
English-Chinese Translation
Towards Success in TEM4

Note: All these textbooks are written by Chinese scholars and they each focus on one area.

2 Literature Review

For various reasons, English is becoming more and more global. The teaching of English as a Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) in China has become a nationwide endeavor pursued at all academic levels (Wolff, 2010). EFL/ESL occupies an important position in Chinese students' school life. The selection of a suitable textbook is vital, as textbooks can provide a structure from which the process of language learning can begin (O'Neill, 1982: 110-111). For students who study in countries where English is a foreign language (EFL), it can be argued that the teacher and the textbook are the two most important and immediate cultural links between the student's native culture and the target foreign culture (Otlowski, 2003). This is the main reason which has important implications for the EFL teacher and for textbook selection.

Azizifar, Mansour and Reza (2011: 87) point out that textbook evaluation is an applied linguistic activity through which teachers, scholars, administrators and materials developers can "make judgments about the effect of the materials on the people using them." Evaluating a book helps us to make the most effective use of textbooks.

There are various ways to evaluate textbooks. Naoyoshi, Katsumi, Toru, Masayoshi and Laskowski's paper (2005) evaluate textbooks in terms of the Nippon Decimal Classification (NDC), a system of library classification and the authors used this system to identify topics in textbooks which used as an analytical framework to classify the lesson topics in each textbook.

Most language teachers agree that culture teaching is important in Foreign/Second Language (EFL/ESL) (Chao, 2011). Textbooks are often viewed as the major sources for English as an EFL/ESL that provide both knowledge and culture. In some cases, the writer might be biased towards one way or another. Otlowski's paper evaluated a current textbook in Japan with regard to two specific areas, gender bias and the portrayal of ethnic diversity and he drew the conclusion the traditional role of women as mothers and homemakers is still being perpetuated in many current language textbooks and the ethnic make-up of many of the cultures depicted is not accurately represented. In many cases, substantial sections of

the society presented in their textbooks are underrepresented, or at worse, ignored. Here is an example of gender bias Otlowski gave: “In regard to gender bias, the most noticeable failing is the lack of depiction of women in roles other than those of homemakers and mothers. In all scripts that deal with domestic issues such as the laundry, the kitchen, shopping, women are used to model the conversations; when on the other hand, in situations outside the home the dialogues are mostly modeled by males.” (Otlowski, 2003)

I evaluate the textbook in terms of Bloom’s Taxonomy, a classification of learning objectives within education. It refers to a classification of the different objectives that educators set for students (learning objectives). As Gordani states (2010), the results of textbooks evaluation based on Bloom’s Taxonomy can act as a guide to educational decision-makers, syllabus designers, and textbook developers who wish to modify their practice and materials in such a way as to achieve higher levels of learning objectives. Bloom's most important initial work focused on the process of defining a textbook evaluating concept and making the concept clearly measurable for educational objectives and one of the consequences of the categories in the taxonomy is not only served as means through which evaluation tasks can be formulated, but also provided a framework for the formulation of the objectives themselves. Bloom provides a useful practical tool that was congruent with what was understood at that time about the features of the higher mental processes (Eisner, 2000).

3 Data Analysis

3.1 Data Analysis of the Passages

General Description: the book contains 12 eight-page units and 4 review units. The exercises in each unit are grouped into two thematic lessons. There is a review unit after every three units and a set of Grammar Extensions at the back of the book. Each unit of the book is organized around a central topic or theme and is divided into two four-page lessons (Lesson A and Lesson B).

Table 1

Page	A/B
1	Introduce the topic through listening and oral work
2	Grammar exercises provide controlled practice leading to communication activities
3	Further listening practice and oral work
4 of A	Writing exercises teach practical writing and composition skills
4 of B	Reading passages develop reading skills and stimulate discussion

Note: The First 3 pages of these 2 lessons have the same theme.

In the textbook, we can find out 8 different parts of tasks and exercises and I classify the variety of assignments by using Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956). Starting Point (SP): The introduction of the lesson and group work.

Discussion (D): Motivation and group work.

Grammar Focus (GF): Knowledge – based

Vocabulary (V): Knowledge – based

Listening (L): Studying based on understanding

Writing: Creative study

Reading(R): First – Discussion-Evaluation /analysis Knowledge, Second – answer questions, usually doing with group work.

Role Play (RP): Creative repetition, following the samples, a set of game-based drills plus real-life situations

Table 2 presents the average numbers and the percentage of these tasks and exercises within each of the 12 units.

Table 2

Unit /items	SP	D	GF	V	L
1	2	5	2	1	2
2	2	6	3	1	2
3	2	5	3	1	3
4	2	4	2	1	2
5	2	6	3	1	2
6	2	6	2	1	2
7	2	5	3	1	3
8	2	5	4	2	2
9	2	5	2	1	2
10	2	4	2	1	2
11	2	5	3	1	2
12	2	5	3	1	2
Average	2	≈5	≈2.6	≈1	≈2
%	13%	33%	17.3%	6%	13%

Units /items	W	R	RP	Total	Assignments
1	1	1	0	14	35
2	1	1	0	16	29
3	1	1	0	16	29
4	1	1	1	14	28
5	1	1	0	16	32
6	1	1	0	15	30
7	1	1	0	16	31
8	1	1	0	17	27
9	1	1	0	14	29
10	1	1	2	15	30
11	1	1	0	15	26
12	1	1	0	15	23
Average	1	1	0.23	≈15	29
%	7%	7%	1%		

Brief descriptions of Table 2:

The most important is the Discussion part, and our foreign teachers give us a lot of time to do it during the class. The grammar section is another important part, however, most foreign teachers in

my college do not pay much attention to this part

Table 3

Units /items	Total Assignment	PW/GW	PW/GW%
1	35	17	48.6%
2	29	19	65.5%
3	29	14	48.3%
4	28	15	53.6%
5	32	17	53.1%
6	30	17	56.7%
7	31	17	54.8%
8	27	14	51.9%
9	29	16	55.2%
10	30	20	66.7%
11	26	14	53.8%
12	23	15	65.2%
Total	349	195	55.9%

Note: The most important assignment in this book is the pair work and the group work. 55.9% of the book is based on pair work/group work and even in some units (unit 2, unit 10, and unit 12) the percentages exceed 60%.

Table 3 presents the percentage of the assignment of pair work/group work. Every part in this book has the assignment of pair work / group work. The book is based on the assignments that qualify to be placed very high on Bloom's taxonomy scale.

Illustrations of example (Passages 4 Unit 10 Lesson A)

Assignment	SP	D	GF	V	L
Unit 10	1	4	2	0	2
PW/GW	1	3	1	0	1
Assignment	W	R	RP	Total	
Unit 10	3	0	2	14	
PW/GW	1	0	2	9	

Analysis of the Passages 4 in Terms of Bloom's Taxonomy: Assignments with Coding Scheme Based on Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives (on the basis of unit 10)

1. Starting Point: pair work/group work

Sample Task: discussing different situations in our daily life and giving opinions about the situations by pair work.

Definitions, Key words and Descriptions: Explain ("Do you sympathize with the comment below? Why or why not?"). Relate, support (Why or why not?)

Level: Comprehension, Application, Synthesis and Evaluation

2. Discussion: 50% is pair work/group work

Sample Task: discuss and compare answers in group

Definitions, Key words and Descriptions: Apply & Summarize ("List at least 4 of your 'pet peeves'")

Level: Comprehension/Application

3. Grammar Focus: 50% is pair work/group work

Sample Task: making sentences with the grammar points in the book

Definitions, Key words and Descriptions: Reproduce ("Complete the sentences with your own information")

Level: Knowledge

4. Vocabulary: 50% is pair work/group work

Sample Task: giving definitions

Definitions, Key words and Descriptions: Identify & Define ("Can you match these words with their definitions?")

Level: Knowledge

5. Listening: all pair work/group work

Sample Task: listening to a dialog, answering questions and talking about the dialog and exchanging opinions depend on our experience with partners

Definitions, Key words and Descriptions: Understanding the meaning, translation, and interpretation of instructions and problems ("Listen to J and B talking about something that irritated them. What happened in each situation?")

Level: Comprehension

6. Role Play: all pair work/group work

Sample Task: writing dialogs with a partner and take turns acting out in class

Definitions, Key words and Descriptions: putting parts together to form a whole, with emphasis on creating a new meaning or structure("Now take turns playing the role of a citizen making a complaint and a city official offering suggestion. Ask and answer questions.")

Level: Synthesis/Evaluation

7. Writing: one-third is pair work/group work

Sample Task: reading then put sentences into the letter and writes a letter following the examples

Definitions, Key words and Descriptions: Learned and using a concept in a new situation and create ("A. Read the letter; B. Write a letter of these situations or one of these situations or one of your own")

Level: Application/Synthesis

8. Reading: 50% is pair work/group work

Sample Task: reading the article, compare our ideas to the author's, answering questions in group work

Definitions, Key words and Descriptions: comparing and contrasting a new structure to the ones previously learned ("Read the article, and compare your ideas to the author's.")

Level: Application/Synthesis

Brief analysis of the Passages. The most important assignment in these books is the pair and group work: 55.9% of the book is based on

pair work/group work and even in some units the percentages exceed 60% which places the textbook high on Bloom's taxonomy as the textbooks engage language learners cognitively, so these textbooks are heavily based on communicative language learning to help students talk more in class and advance their creative thinking.

3.2 Data Analysis of the *Integrated Skills of English*

General Description of the book: the book contains 15 units and four review units. Each unit of the book is organized and divided into three parts, Listening and Speaking Activities, Reading Comprehension and Language Activities, and Extended Activities. The unit structure of the units, 3 major parts of tasks and exercises:

1. Every unit uses dialogs to introduce communication skills in the first part, Listening and Speaking Activities. This part includes oral exercises, supplies common-used sentences and formulas.

2. The Reading Comprehension and Language Activities part provides communicated activities which center on texts and grammar learning.

3. The third part, Extended Activities, offers exercises of dictation, reading, grammar, translation and writing in order to make students consolidate what they have learned in the first two parts.

3.2.1 Different assignments of the major parts of tasks and exercises: classified by using Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956):

Part 1: Listening and Speaking Activities (6 assignments, 50% - Knowledge)

Introduction of functions - The introduction of the lesson

2. Listening and speaking - Studying based on understanding

3. Speaking (includes pair work/group work) – Evaluation/Analysis

4. Making dialogues (includes pair work/group work) – Evaluation/Analysis

5. Oral English exercises - Knowledge – based

6. Phrases matching exercises - Knowledge – based.

Part 2: Reading Comprehension and Language Activities (8 assignments, 43.75% - Knowledge)

Pre-reading Task

Discussion (includes pair work/group work) – Evaluation/Analysis

Comprehension Work

discussion (includes pair work/group work) – Evaluation/Analysis

retell the text - Synthesis

activities (includes pair work/group work) – Evaluation/Analysis

Language Work
word exercises - Knowledge – based
expression exercises - Knowledge – based
word and rewrite sentences exercises – Knowledge/ Synthesis

Pronunciation Work - Knowledge – based
Part 3: Extended Activities (6 assignments, 83.3% - Knowledge-based)

dictation - Knowledge – based
reading - Knowledge – based
words and sentences - Knowledge – based
translation - Knowledge – based
writing (includes pair work/group work) - Creative study

cultural information - Knowledge – based
Brief descriptions of the analysis of the *Integrated Skills of English*

The part of basis knowledge is the most important tasks and exercises, and this placed the lowest level on Bloom's Taxonomy scale. The assignment of pair work/group work and the Discussion task, which ranked into Comprehension /Application level-the second and third levels in terms of Bloom's Taxonomy, occupy very little.

4 Comparisons of the *Passage* and the *Integrated Skills of English*

The main content of the *Passage* is multi-skills based on communication, and this can encourage students to use English and gives them opportunities to talk with each other.

The main content of the *Integrated Skills of English* is also multi skills, but base on knowledge, helps students to grasp basic knowledge.

Both of the books haven't been entirely used in our class, we usually skip many tasks and exercises, and every Integrated skills of English book only half used.

5 Comments based on my experience:

1. We have textbooks that oriented on TEM4/8, but none for CET4/6, and textbooks we have for class is not enough for taking tests so students need to buy reference books. Some students feel hard to pass TEM, even CET

2. The English tests for certificates check the basic language and grammar skills and require students to finish in short time. Even though the two textbooks have multi-skills, neither of these books have connections with the tests. The grammar part in textbooks hasn't reached the TEM text level.

3. Foreign textbooks made outside China are suitable for creative learning. Students think that local textbooks are boring because the essays of the books have little connection with daily life and most of

them were written over 10 years ago.

6 Conclusion

In our college, most foreign teachers ignore grammar parts because Chinese teachers of English are experts in grammar. We don't go through every part of the lessons, so big parts of the textbooks are wasted.

For the *New Interchange*, the most important assignment is the pair and group work: 55.9% of the book is based on them and in some units percentages exceed 60% which places the textbook high on Bloom's taxonomy scale as the textbooks engage language learners cognitively. These textbooks are heavily based on communicative language learning to help students talk more in class and advance their creative thinking. The *Integrated Skills of English* is suitable for freshman or junior students to improve their basics. Knowledge and comprehension-based parts are the most important tasks and exercises (57.5%), and this places the book at low level of Bloom's Taxonomy. The assignment of pair work/group work and the Discussion tasks, which ranked high as Comprehension/Application of Bloom's Taxonomy, occupy very little in the units. In this area teachers have to enhance the level introducing creative/analysis-based assignments.

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8 Appendix

Levels In Terms of Bloom's Taxonomy

