A Study on the Guiding Role of CEF in the Construction of English Competency Criteria in Military Academies

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Abstract—**The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning Teaching Assessment (CEF) is a standard that used to measure a user's common abilities and communicative language. The paper presents the core of CEF from the three aspects as followed: birth of CEF; content and structure of CEF; analysis of CEF scale; inspiration of CEF scale. This study can provide a reference in the construction of English competency criteria in military academies.**

Keywords: CEF, military English, competency criteria

I. INTRODUCTION

China's basic English curriculum standard has elementary school, middle school and high school several grades. In the meantime, colleges and universities have several categories of college English teaching requirements and professional English criteria. They are disjointed in scope, quality and quantity of knowledge, making English teaching in universities, middle schools and primary schools difficult to link up or overlap. CET-4, CET-6 and TEM-4, TEM-8 are two kinds of English certificates, which making obstacles to the employer for the certificate identification and talent selection. Moreover, these standards or programs focus on the systematisms of language knowledge and pay insufficient attention to communicative competence and cultural cognition. Therefore, integrating these separate educational standards or programs to create a common program for language teaching and evaluation. It provides a common basis and reference for all kinds of language teaching materials, curriculum teaching, testing, grading certificates and talent assessment, "It is convenient to link college English teaching with middle school English teaching…"(Chen Guogua, 2002) [1] Scholars all over the world pay great attention to the establishment of English proficiency standards. Lambert (1993:155) pointed out, the key to a country's policy on learning and using a foreign language is a common standard of language proficiency. Han Baocheng (2002) claimed, we should "firstly determine the standard of college students' English ability, then set the different levels according to different ability standards…establish a national standard for assessing college students' English ability." [2] Wang Quan (2004) proposed that "an attempt should be made to establish a system that breaks the boundary between system and department, a unified English proficiency standard that integrates the common requirements of English teaching and practice." [3] However, due to the influence of educational management system, there is no unified standard of English proficiency in China. On the basis of introducing the main foreign scales, this paper introduces in detail the historical background, specific structure and content of the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (CEF)" and discusses its implications for the development of a unified standard of English proficiency in China.

II. BIRTH OF CEF

In the 1960s, Europeans recovering from the second world war felt that the internationalization of society affected all classes of all ages. With the development of internationalization, it is necessary to reorient and reorganize social institutions such as language learning, teaching and evaluation. In the meantime, the impact of information society, economic globalization and scientific and technological knowledge increased the sense of crisis among Europeans. They feel the urgent need to develop people's ability to communicate across language boundaries. On this background, the Council of Europe held adult education teaching problem in Switzerland in 1971. It is the prelude to systematically promote the study of modern language

teaching. The language proficiency scale for effective communication and cooperation among Europeans was developed. In November 1991, the council recommended the development of an inventory of language teaching and language skills for European language work, compiled Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Learning Teaching Assessment. CEF provides a common basis for the design of language syllabuses, course guides, tests and textbook development in the member states of the European council. CEF is a scale developed by a group of linguists under the management of a working group and experts.

III. CONTENT AND STRUCTURE OF CEF

CEF consists of nine chapters and four appendixes. Chapters 1 to 3 describe the purpose of CEF, the underlying pedagogical theory, and the scale structure. The fourth and fifth chapters mainly describe the classification and scale of CEF in terms of language use, learners' or users' abilities in the form of lists and tables. Chapters 6 to 8 illustrate the relationship between CEF and language teaching, task and curriculum design. Chapter 9 discusses the relationship between CEF and language assessment, then list the references according to the chapter order. Appendix A Outlines the technical issues in the development of the language proficiency scale; Appendix B and C summarize the development overview of the two projects respectively. The specific contents of each chapter are as follows.

Chapter one illustrates the political and educational background of the CEF, involving the definition, value, purpose and standard of CEF; goals and objectives of the council's language policy; the understanding and value of multilingual system and so on.

Chapter two outlines the teaching theory of an action-oriented approach, which expounds the common program level of language proficiency, language teaching and language evaluation respectively. CEF interprets the "action-oriented" teaching theory from the perspectives of individuals' general language competence, communicative language competence, language activities, language application environment and tasks, strategies, and discourse. General language ability includes language knowledge, language skills, language personality and learning ability; Communicative language competence includes language, social language and pragmatic competence; while language activities can be divided into language acceptance, language output and interaction. CEF divides learners' language use environment into personal communication environment, public communication environment, professional environment and educational environment.

The third chapter introduces the description criteria of CEF scale in description and measurement, and gives the overall indicators of 6 levels and other related problems.

Chapter four describes the use of language and the problems involved by language users from six aspects: context, communicative theme, task and purpose, communicative language activities and strategies, communicative language process and discourse. Among them, communicative language activities and strategies are stated in the form of "can do" from the aspects of output, receptivity, interactivity, regulation and non-verbal communication.

The fifth chapter expounds learners' competence from two aspects: general language competence and communicative language competence. General language ability includes mastering declarative knowledge, skills, language personality and learning ability. Among them, language personality competence involves learners' attitudes, motivations, values, cognitive styles and personality characteristics. Communicative language competence includes language, social language and pragmatic competence, which consists of vocabulary, grammar, semantics, phonology, spelling and pronunciation. Social linguistic competence includes linguistic markers of social relations, polite customs, expression of national wisdom, register differences, dialects and accents. Pragmatic competence consists of discourse competence, practical competence and interactive schema competence.

Chapter six illustrates how learners, teachers, and the educational sector can use CEF to promote language learning. It talks about what learners learn, how to learn, how to use CEF to learn language, modern language teaching theory, the role of teachers, learners and media in learning and how to view learning mistakes.

Chapter seven describes the real life and the specific role of teaching tasks in language teaching. First, the concept of task is defined, and then the learner's ability to complete the task and the conditions, limitations and strategies of a particular task are discussed.

Chapter eight returns to the meaning of multilingualism: in order to achieve true multilingualism and multiculturalism, more personalized, diverse and patterned elements need to be injected into curriculum objectives.

Chapter nine discusses the relationship between CEF and language assessment. Most of the content of this chapter is related to the thirteen pairs of important discriminative concepts involved in understanding the meaning of assessment: achievement assessment/proficiency assessment; norm reference evaluation/standard reference evaluation; refined learning criteria reference assessment/continuum criteria reference assessment; continuous evaluation/fixed evaluation points; formative assessment/ultimate assessment; direct evaluation/indirect evaluation; behavior assessment/knowledge assessment; subjective assessment/objective assessment; inventory rating/behavior rating; impression assessment/orientation assessment; overall assessment/breakdown assessment; series assessment/category assessment; assessment by others/assessment by self. How to explain the evaluation results? how do we compare assessments under different systems?

IV. ANALYSIS OF CEF SCALE

CEF comprehensively describes the knowledge and skills, language activities and language application environment that language learners must master for effective communication and horizontal standards. It is not a policy document that provides policy guidance, but a common foundation for language syllabuses, curriculum, test design, and textbook development. It encourages reflection and communication on all aspects of language learning, teaching and assessment. It comprehensively describes what language learners should learn to "do" in order to use language for communication, what knowledge and skills should be developed in order to effectively "act", and the influence of the cultural background of language users on language use. It establishes different levels of ability to measure learners' progress at each stage and throughout their lives. Language proficiency is classified vertically into three levels and six levels: the first class are primary users (A), including entry level (A1), basic level (A2); the second are independent users (B), including advanced class (B1), higher class (B2);the third are skilled users (C), including fluency (C1), proficiency (C2). The setting of these grades is not closed. Users can reclassify the two grades of each grade according to the specific situation of learners, so as to divide the language competence of a certain grade in detail. Qualitatively, CEF is a description system of language activities, which consists of six parts. It describes the required abilities at the level of "speaking" and "writing" in terms of acceptance, output and interaction. The six parts are further divided into descriptions of specific activities, such as listening, reading letters and participating in discussions. At the same time, the ability of learners is divided into three aspects: oral fluency, grammar accuracy and social language. In quantitative terms, CEF provides different measures tailored to users at different levels, and sets different levels of competence to measure learners' progress at each stage and throughout their lives.

To sum up, CEF is a very comprehensive scale, including both content criteria and ability criteria and level criteria. As a content standard, CEF provides a comprehensive description of the language knowledge and skills that learners must master; as a level standard, CEF has the function of measuring and evaluating standards. It can evaluate learners' language ability by referring to content standards, and establish reference standards for various test preparation. As a new foreign language teaching standard, CEF reflects the needs of the times and society for foreign language education, and reflects the new ideas of the European Union in the political and educational environment.

V. INSPIRATION OF CEF SCALE TO MILITARY ENGLISH

The spread of the Internet has made many languages more widely used, and a person who cannot communicate in other languages will soon be marginalized and left behind. At the same time, international conferences are becoming more frequent and participants must understand the language used. These frequent exchanges and the variability of information make it more and more necessary to develop people's ability to communicate across language boundaries. All these pose severe challenges to the current English teaching and grading assessment model in China: a person who spends a lot of time and energy learning English from primary school to university and still can't use English to communicate and communicate is less and less tolerated. Therefore, it is urgent to reflect on the existing teaching standards or syllabus, teaching materials, testing and grading evaluation methods, and draw on CEF to develop a unified English proficiency standard suitable for China's situation.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Europe could reposition and reorganize the social institutions of each independent country in order to improve people's ability to communicate across language boundaries. As a unitary country, China is more qualified to establish unified management systems of primary school, secondary school, university and adult education that belong to different educational administrative departments.

In terms of the development process of CEF, we should invite relevant experts and scholars to join us and set up a special research institution to conduct research and exploration from both theoretical and practical aspects. In terms of content, CEF covers all aspects of contemporary language teaching and competency assessment. The learning needs of most Chinese second language learners do not regard language learning itself as the ultimate goal, but as a tool to accomplish certain communicative tasks in various fields of politics, economy and culture. With reference to CEF and the specific situation of English teaching in China, our unified standard should not only focus on the systematization of language knowledge, but also attach importance to communicative competence and cultural cognitive competence. Learners should be regarded as social agents who complete tasks in specific environments and fields, rather than mere language learners. In the construction of the language teaching standard system, it is necessary to establish not only the content standard, but also the ability standard, the level standard and the implementation standard. Thus, China's unified language proficiency standards should have the following characteristics: Unity, readability, comparability, transparency, openness and expansibility.

VI. CONCLUSION

In a word, in the process of English teaching under the background of globalization, it is more and more important to establish a unified standard of English proficiency, which is not only a norm, but also a goal and orientation. It is of great significance to accelerate the construction of English teaching and evaluation standards in China, especially for the military academy cadets.

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