

The Backwash Effect of Language Testing on Professional English Learning and Teaching

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Abstract. The backwash effect of language testing is a relatively new research field in applied linguistics. The backwash effect of language testing on ESP teaching cannot be ignored. This paper analyses the influence of the English Certificate Examination for Navigation Technology Major on the teaching of English for Navigation Technology Major, and puts forward some measures to improve its positive backwash effect.

Keywords: language testing; backwash effect; professional English teaching.

1. The Concept of “Backwash Effect”

Backwash or washback refers to the influence or reaction of testing on teaching (including teaching and learning) in the field of education. here are several explanations for backwash in foreign educational circles: Prodromou (1995:13) believes that backwash is the direct or indirect influence of testing on teaching methods. Mcnamara (2003:73) believes that the backwash effect of testing is the impact of testing on teaching. Later, British applied linguists introduced the concept of "backwash" into the field of linguistics. Huhges defines backwash as "the impact of language testing on teaching and learning", and points out that language testing can have good or bad effects on teaching and learning. Mesisck argues that "backwash effect" refers to the effect of testing on teachers and students engaged in language teaching to varying degrees to do things they did not need to do, which should be interpreted as "backwash effect". On the other hand, Wall and Anderson also point out that test developers and candidates not only believe that language testing has an important impact on teaching and learning, but also investigate the impact of specific areas (such as teaching content, teaching methods, achievement assessment methods, etc.), positive and negative directions and predictions. Clearly, backwash has the potential to affect not only individuals, but also the entire education system and all aspects that testers need to investigate. Therefore, the effect of backwash is much more complex than that of simple teaching tests.

Although different scholars have different perspectives and explanations, the common point is that scholars use "backwash" to explain the impact of language testing on teaching and learning. Testing is an important part of the teaching process. Testing and teaching promote and restrict each other. Teaching restricts testing from Macro-Objectives to specific means. Testing plays an important role in backwash of teaching objectives, content, methods, and even reliability and validity.

This kind of backwash effect has dual characteristics: scientific testing can have a positive impact on teaching, play a positive backwash role, can point out the correct direction of teaching, ensure and promote the realization of teaching objectives; but unscientific testing has a negative impact on teaching, plays a negative backwash role, may lead teaching into a wrong direction, affect or even hinder the realization of teaching objectives. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of teaching, we must seriously study the backwash effect of testing on teaching, give full play to its positive backwash on teaching, and overcome its negative backwash to the greatest extent.

2. The Backwash Effect of Language Testing on Teaching

2.1 Target Backwash

Language Testing is accompanied by the emergence of language teaching. Language teaching objectives determine language testing objectives. Language testing objectives must serve the realization of language teaching objectives. However, the development of language teaching and

language testing is not always synchronized. Once the language testing system is established, it will have a certain time limit of relative stability. It has a positive or negative backwash effect on language teaching. First of all, the backwash effect of language testing on language teaching is that the goal of language testing will greatly affect teachers' choice of language teaching objectives. Language testing objectives play an extremely important role in backwash of language teaching objectives. If the goal of language testing is scientific and accurate, it will be able to detect the teaching goal scientifically and effectively, and actively promote the realization of the teaching goal or revise it. On the contrary, if the goal of language testing is not scientific and accurate, it will not be able to scientifically detect the teaching goal, but also hinder the determination and Realization of the follow-up teaching goal.

The following is an illustration of the "Maritime English Teaching Syllabus for Maritime Technology Majors in Colleges and Universities" issued by the State Education Commission. The "syllabus" clearly stipulates that the teaching goal of senior English majors of maritime English in Colleges and universities is "to continue to lay a good foundation in language skills and further expand knowledge, focusing on cultivating comprehensive English skills, enriching cultural knowledge and improving communicative competence." In the actual language teaching process, teachers tend to ignore the teaching goal of "enriching cultural knowledge" mentioned in the syllabus, and organize teaching around the test goal of "comprehensive language skills and communicative competence". Fortunately, the goal and concept of the test are advanced, which to some extent promotes the improvement of language teaching quality.

2.2 Content Backwash

The content of language testing decides the choice of language teaching content to a great extent. Taking the Maritime English Certificate Examination as an example, after the reform of the overall certification of Maritime Technology Major, the focus of the examination has been shifted to the test of reading and writing ability. The number of reading topics increased from two to four, and the score increased from 12 to 24. Writing questions have changed from simple translation sentences to the compilation of various marine documents. This change in the content of the test will inevitably lead to changes in the teaching content of English for nautical technology majors. In the course setting, the proportion of reading and writing courses is increased. Secondly, in the teaching of Navigation English, teachers will unconsciously further strengthen the training of reading and writing ability. Through reading comprehension, vocabulary analysis, translation and writing practice, students' English level will be greatly improved. Thus, this course can become a course to train students' comprehensive English skills, especially reading comprehension and writing ability, which truly meets the requirements of the syllabus. It can enhance students' understanding of the whole industry through reading and analyzing extensive materials. To cultivate students' ability to analyze and think independently about reading materials related to their major, and to consolidate and improve their English language skills. Therefore, the positive backwash effect of language testing content on language teaching content should not be underestimated.

In the course of the development of language teaching and language testing, both have gone through three stages marked by different teaching and testing systems. Current language teaching and testing belong to the third generation of teaching and testing system dominated by communicative approach, which emerged at the end of the 20th century. This new teaching and evaluation system consider that the content of learning, teaching and examinations should be competence, not language knowledge in the first system or skills in the second system (Li Xiaojun, 1997). This new evaluation system is based on the accuracy, fluency and appropriateness of language use. (Gu et al. 2006)

The following author compares the dominant communicative language teaching and communicative language testing in the third generation of teaching and testing system from five aspects: development stage, language outlook, objectives, content and methods, from which we can clearly see the great backwash effect of language testing content on language teaching content.

Table 1. A Contrast Table of Communicative Language Teaching and Testing

parameter	Development Stage	Language View	Objectives	Contents	Methods
Communicative Competence Testing	Since 1980	language is a complex of knowledge, skills and abilities. it emphasizes communicative competence	measuring communicative competence	language communicative competence (linguistic knowledge, skills and abilities)	communicative competence testing method
Communicative Competence Teaching	Since 1970s	Language is a complex of knowledge, skills and abilities, emphasizing communicative competence	developing students' communicative competence	developing students' communicative competence (language knowledge, skills and abilities)	communicative competence teaching method

The third-generation view of language testing holds that "language is a complex of knowledge, skills and abilities". It emphasizes that the content of "measuring communicative competence" test is mainly "language communicative competence" (language knowledge, skills and abilities). This determines that the content of language teaching should be based on information and have a real language environment. Students should not only master language knowledge, but also develop their ability to communicate effectively in the real context.

Although logically speaking, it should have been teaching before testing, testing whatever is taught, first having a syllabus, then an examination syllabus. But in the actual teaching and testing, few teachers and students can do this. Although the educational circles have been calling for the absence of exam-oriented education, the usual performance in classroom teaching is: what the syllabus emphasizes is what the teacher strengthens in the teaching, and what the syllabus does not emphasize or does not emphasize at present will be weakened accordingly in the teaching. The negative backwash effect of language testing content on language teaching content is evident.

2.3 Method Backwash

Language testing methods also have an important backwash effect on language teaching methods. Take the Maritime English Examination as an example. Today, with the vigorous development of foreign language education, as an authoritative language test in China, and as a reference level test to test the examiner's individual and comprehensive language competence, in order to measure the examiner's four skills of listening, reading, writing and translation, and to reflect the examiner's practical language competence, the Maritime English Examination should adopt "communicative test".

Let students play a professional role in language communication activities, and judge students' language proficiency by observing students' ability to use language to communicate in real context. However, due to the lack of large-scale oral examination conditions, the current examination is still mainly based on basic reading comprehension, which is to some extent separated from the real scene communication activities. This kind of testing method has a negative backwash effect on the teaching methods of professional English for sophomores and above. The teaching methods of sophomores and above often neglect the "communicative competence teaching method", weaken the training of oral and practical communicative competence, scene simulation, role playing, classroom discussion and other rich classroom forms are often simply taught and selected by teachers. Exercise replaced. The backwash effect of language testing methods on language teaching methods is thus highlighted.

2.4 Reliability and Validity Backwash

Scientific and fair test should have high reliability and validity. The higher the reliability of the test, the more objectively and accurately it reflects the language competence of the subjects; and the higher the validity of the test, the more effectively it reflects the language use and communicative competence of the subjects. However, many scholars (Henning 2001; Heaton 2002; Xiao Chunlin 2001) have found that contradiction and opposition are the main characteristics of the relationship between reliability and validity. Validity requires language testing to emphasize the integrity, artistry, diversity of test subjects, and the content and form of the test as close as possible to the reality of language use. The requirement of reliability makes language testing emphasize the scientific nature of language, divide language into different parts, pay attention to the homogeneity of test questions, and make the content and form of language testing divorce from the reality of language use. Therefore, it is difficult for any test to have both high reliability and high validity. At present, the linguistic tests in the educational circles tend to be too standardized and scientific, and to pursue the reliability of the tests unilaterally and excessively, at the expense of the validity of the tests.

As a proficiency test to monitor the teaching quality of maritime English, the certificate test of maritime English has made positive and correct exploration in the field of parallel development of reliability and validity. The increase of assessment examination and the test of both listening and conversation have ensured the high reliability of the test and the high efficiency of the test. It has played a positive role in the professional teaching of maritime English. Backwash effect.

3. Measures to Improve the Positive Wash back of Testing

Although different types of tests and different aspects of tests may have different effects on teaching and learning, there is no doubt that language testing has a backwash effect on teaching. Therefore, a thorough study on the backwash effect of testing is a topic that needs to be paid attention to in the current teaching of English majors, in order to minimize its negative backwash effect and give full play to its positive backwash effect.

Hughes (1989) put forward seven suggestions to improve the positive backwash effect: test should cultivate ability; test content should cover a wide range of areas and have unpredictability; use direct test; use scale reference; achievement test should be based on teaching purposes; make teachers and students understand the test; and provide help to teachers when necessary.

Bailey (1996) summarized four aspects to improve the positive backwash effect of the test: language learning objectives, authenticity of the test, learner autonomy and self-assessment, feedback of the test results. On this basis, eight criteria to measure whether a test has a positive backwash effect are put forward: whether the participants understand the purpose of the test and the test results; and the feedback of the test results. Whether the test results are clear, detailed and timely; whether the test participants think the test results are fair and credible; whether the test has tested the teaching content of the curriculum plan; whether the test is based on clear goals and objectives; whether the test is based on correct theoretical principles; whether the test uses real discourse and test tasks; whether the test participants have conducted self-assessment.

Bailey (1996) summarized four aspects to improve the positive backwash effect of the test: test design strategies; test content Strategies; logistical Strategies; interpretation strategies. The design strategy originates from Bailey (199), Hughs (1989) and Wall (19) and is embodied in: selecting a wide range of unpredictable samples; designing scale reference tests; testing based on teaching days; testing based on reasonable theoretical principles; designing objective performance tests; and using direct tests.

The content strategy combines Hughs (1989), Heyneman and Ransom (1990) and Kellaghan and Gleaner (1992) perspectives, including: testing learning ability; using more open-ended questions (rather than multiple-choice questions); testing should reflect the course comprehensively rather than unilaterally; testing higher-level cognitive ability to promote teaching through examinations; adopting diversified testing forms including written, oral, listening and practical operations. The

content of the test should be extensive and should not be limited to the academic field; the real tasks and texts should be used.

Logistics strategy/support strategy summarizes Hughs (1989), Heyneman and Ransom (1990), Kellaghan and Gleaned (1992), Shoham (1992) and Bailey (1996). It summarizes the following strategies: to ensure that examinees, teachers, test managers, curriculum designers understand the purpose of testing; to ensure that language learning objectives are clear; to provide necessary assistance to teachers to ensure that teachers understand testing. Examination; give detailed and timely feedback to schools on the performance and difficulties of students at different levels in public examinations; ensure that teachers and administrators participate in different stages of the testing process; and provide detailed scoring reports.

The explanatory strategies of test results mainly come from Kellaghan and Gleaney's (1992) and Bailey's (1996). Specifically, they refer to: ensuring credible, reliable and fair test results for testers and performance users: considering the influence of non-teaching factors when evaluating test results and rankings; predictive validity research; improving the professional ability of test institutions, especially test design ability; and ensuring that the test results are credible, reliable and fair. Each Testing Committee has the ability of scientific research; the testing institutions work closely with the curriculum organization and educational administrators; develop regional professional networks, carry out exchanges, and share forums.

Drawing on the views of the above-mentioned scholars and combining with the reality of English teaching in China, we may discuss the measures to improve the positive backwash effect of the test from both internal and external factors.

First of all, from the internal factors of the test, the content and skills of the test must be consistent with the teaching purpose, so that the test paper itself has strong reliability and validity. Secondly, from the external factors of the test, we should correctly use the test means, avoid the interference factors that affect the reliability and validity of the test, and ensure the authenticity, reliability and validity of the test.

As mentioned earlier, the relationship between reliability and validity is that if there is no reliability, the validity may be very low, but if there is no validity, the existence of reliability will be questioned. If validity is the dominant factor in language testing, it will undoubtedly have a positive impact on foreign language teaching and promote the development of foreign language teaching towards "cultivating students 'ability to use language'".

We can improve and ensure the efficiency of English major test from the following aspects: first, increase the ratio of subjective test questions and reduce the ratio of objective test questions; second, implement communicative language test with high efficiency characteristics. Communicative language testing conforms to the training orientation of modern foreign language teaching and is the complement and development of separate and comprehensive testing forms. Modern multimedia technology makes it possible for communicative language testing to be highly situational. Situational testing helps to improve students' interest and motivation in learning. Thirdly, curriculum tests closely related to textbooks should be added so as to make the testing more pertinent.

Because the test questions with high reliability are seldom influenced by external factors, many tests for different students will produce relatively stable and consistent test results. We can achieve the high reliability of professional English tests from the following aspects: Firstly, multiple sets of questions are randomly selected. Secondly, improve the validity and quality of the test questions. Thirdly, standardized marking, strict, standardized, unified, pipe lining, and careful review should be adopted. In addition, a scientific test and evaluation system should be established, with various forms, not only summative assessment, but also procedural assessment, and evaluation means to be fair and objective.

4. Summary

In a word, language testing means can only be perfected through continuous exploration and attempt. It can play a positive role in language teaching and promote language teaching.

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