

# Enlightenment of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages on Developing English Proficiency Standards in China

**Mei Gan**

*Tiangong University, Tianjin 300387, China*

**ABSTRACT.** *Based on the introduction of the current situation of English proficiency standards in China and Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, this paper points out the Enlightenment of the latter on the establishment of a unified English proficiency standard, and emphasizes that when we formulate a unified English proficiency standard, we should take communicative language competence theory as the guidance, adopt the international general language competence grading system, and adapt to the needs of different levels.*

**KEYWORDS:** *CEFR; English proficiency standard; Communicative language ability*

## **1. Introduction**

Language proficiency standard is a series of descriptions of language level of language users, which usually includes several levels from zero to close to the level of native language. The unified language ability standard provides a unified standard for teaching, learning and evaluation. It is the key for a country to formulate a language policy for learning and using foreign languages (Lambert, 1993). It provides a basis for syllabus formulation, teaching organization and textbook compilation, points out the learning direction for learners and tests whether the learning achievements have reached the expected goals, and also provides a basis for enrollment and social employment for specific reference (Clark, 1985). Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching and evaluation is a programmatic document on language learning, teaching and evaluation formulated by the European Council, which is a good reference for China to formulate a unified English proficiency standard.

## **2. The current situation of English proficiency standards in China**

### ***2.1 English curriculum standard in basic education stage (experimental draft)***

The standard designs English courses from the third grade of primary school to the graduation of senior high school. The goal of English courses is designed into nine levels according to the ability level. There is a certain relationship between the level setting and the grade, and it is not completely equal to each grade. The first level is the teaching reference target of the third and fourth grade of primary school; the second level is the teaching reference target of the fifth and sixth grade of primary school; the third, fourth and fifth level are the teaching reference target of junior high school; the sixth, seventh and eighth level are the teaching reference target of senior high school; the Ninth level is the teaching reference target of foreign language school, foreign language characteristic school and other school students with foreign language specialty. According to the standard, level 2, level 5 and level 8 are the basic requirements for graduation from primary school, junior high school and senior high school respectively. In addition, the standard puts forward that the evaluation system of English curriculum should pay attention to reflect the main position of students in the evaluation and strive for the diversification of evaluation methods. It should combine formative evaluation with summative evaluation, and combine qualitative evaluation with quantitative evaluation. This evaluation system provides useful inspiration for us to formulate a new unified standard of language ability[1].

### ***2.2 College English teaching requirements***

In order to meet the needs of the development of higher education in the new era and the reform of College English teaching, the Department of higher education of the Ministry of Education organized experts to publish and promote the "requirements" in 2007 after three years of pilot on the basis of the 2004 experimental draft. Requirements points out that college English course is an integral part of higher education. It is not only a basic language course, but also a quality education course to broaden knowledge and understand world culture. The training objectives include the following four aspects: English language knowledge, English comprehensive application skills, especially listening and speaking skills, English learning strategies and cross-cultural communication ability. The requirements reflects the latest educational concepts and linguistic research results, including the theoretical research achievements in quality education, general education, intercultural communication ability, humanism, student-centered teaching mode, computer-aided teaching, autonomous learning, learning strategies, etc[2].

### ***2.3 Syllabus of English major in Colleges and Universities***

The syllabus is the basis for English majors to organize teaching, compile teaching materials and check and evaluate teaching quality. According to the teaching law of English majors, the four-year teaching process is generally divided into two stages: basic stage (first and second year) and senior stage (third and fourth year). The main teaching task of the basic stage is to teach English basic knowledge, carry out comprehensive and strict basic skill training for students, cultivate students' ability to use the language in practice, good learning style and correct learning methods, and lay a solid professional foundation for entering the senior stage. The main teaching tasks in the senior stage are to continue to develop the basic language skills, learn English professional knowledge and related professional knowledge, further expand the scope of knowledge, enhance the sensitivity to cultural differences, and improve the ability of comprehensive use of English for communication. English major courses are divided into three types: English professional skills, English professional knowledge and related professional knowledge. Generally speaking, English should be the teaching language. Although the above-mentioned syllabus at all levels and versions conform to certain principles of language teaching, it plays an important role in promoting teaching at all levels. However, they are isolated from each other and lack necessary connection. Their understanding of the core issue of foreign language education, language ability, is still at the level of "skills + knowledge"[3].

## **3. Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and Its Enlightenment**

### ***3.1 A survey of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages***

The formulation of CEFR has gone through a long process. In 1991, the European Council proposed to develop a unified standard of language ability suitable for the needs of member states in order to achieve the goal of closer solidarity among Member States. The draft of CEFR was published in 1996. After repeated consultation, discussion and demonstration, it was officially published in 2001 and published by Cambridge University Press in 2003. In order to help the majority of experts and scholars engaged in language teaching and research in China better understand the concept and methods of European language teaching, and promote the reform and development of foreign language teaching and Chinese as a foreign language teaching in China, Beijing Foreign Language Teaching and research press was authorized by the European Council to introduce and publish the Chinese version of this document in 2008. CEFR is a common framework for language teaching and evaluation in Europe, including European languages. It comprehensively introduces the contents that foreign language learners must learn to use foreign languages to achieve communication, and lists in detail the knowledge and abilities that foreign language learners must master to have effective speech acts,

including the cultural factors that support language, and assesses the progress of each stage of learners Step 3: set different ability levels. In addition, CEFR also introduces the ways and methods of learning and teaching languages, the role of tasks in language teaching and learning, and the constructivist language learning model[4].

### ***3.2 The Enlightenment of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages on the establishment of unified English proficiency standards in China***

CEFR has a lot of implications for the development of a unified standard of English competence in China, especially for the discussion and application of communicative competence. The cultivation of communicative competence is the ultimate goal of language teaching (H.D. Brown, 2000). When people use language to communicate, there are two forms: oral and written. The former is conducted through the spoken language, and the latter through the written language. Therefore, communication ability can be divided into oral communication ability and written communication ability. There have been many researches on communicative competence. The word "competence" was first proposed by Chomsky (1965), which refers to the internalized knowledge of an ideal person's language grammar, that is, the ability of people to understand and speak sentences, including those never heard before. After that, Hymes (1966) put forward the concept of "communicative competence", which means that people can not only use grammatical rules to form grammatical sentences, but also use these sentences appropriately to complete the communication process on the basis of considering the speaking scene, the relationship between speakers and the purpose of communication[5].

Specifically speaking, communicative competence includes possibility, feasibility, appropriateness and performance. The theory focuses on the context of utterance and the different communicative functions of language. For example, a person can use the sentence "he is a good person" to complete different functions such as complaining, reminding, condemning, etc. according to different speakers, speaking places, intonation, etc. Widdowson (2003) pointed out that the defect of hymes' communicative competence lies in that the four aspects of his communicative competence are isolated from each other without paying attention to their interrelations, which is not in line with the requirements of communication. After a systematic study of communicative competence, Canal & Swain (1980) summed up four components: grammatical competence, social linguistic competence, strategic competence and discourse competence. In formulating a unified standard of English ability, we should be guided by the theory of communicative language ability, pay attention to the practical application of language, adopt the international general language ability grading system, adapt to the needs of different levels, set up the ability framework by means of language communication and expression, and emphasize the comprehensive use of language[6-8].

#### 4. Conclusion

In a word, on the basis of investigating the relevant language ability standards in various regions of the world, we should consider both the foreign language education policies and objectives of our country, and develop a unified standard of students' English ability according to the actual situation of domestic language use, so as to realize the connection between our English teaching in higher education stage and English teaching in basic education stage.

#### Acknowledgements

The author acknowledges financial support from Tianjin Philosophy and Social Science Project (tjww15-018).

#### References

- [1] Liu Jingguan (2012). A study on the match between CET-4 and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Henan: Henan Normal University.
- [2] Wang Jiling, Zhang Yuxiang (2017). Research on English ability cultivation of English majors from the perspective of CEFR. *Journal of Huaibei Normal University (PHILOSOPHY AND SOCIAL SCIENCES EDITION)*, vol.38, no.1, pp. 140-144.
- [3] Cai Jigang, Cai Jigang (2012).The influence of CEFR on foreign language teaching in China. *China University teaching*, vol. 10, no. 6, pp.6-10.
- [4] Cen Haibing, Zou Weicheng (2011). A study on the influence of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages on College English education in China. *Chinese foreign language: Chinese English edition*, vol. 08, no. 4, pp. 31-38.
- [5] Wang Yingli, Wang Haihua, Xu Lin (2016). Study on the applicability of ILR and CEFR to college English competence assessment framework. *College English teaching and research*, vol. 0, no. 5, pp. 105-106.
- [6] Zhang Feng, Wang Fei (2013). The Enlightenment of Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: learning, teaching and evaluation on foreign language education in China. *Science and technology information*, vol. 14, no. 26, pp. 46-47.
- [7] Liu Yan, Gao Linlin, GE Zhongqiang (2014).The Enlightenment of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages on College English proficiency standards . *Business Herald*, vol. 11, no. 9, pp. 193-193121.
- [8] Wang Li, Wang Hua (2019). Principles and methods of constructing the evaluation system of ESP competence scale. *Journal of foreign languages*, vol. 8, no. 3, pp.79-85.