

The Case for Integrating “Language Power” Theory and Practice Into Modern Second Language Instruction

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English is considered the “universal language” – it is the primary language of the United Nations, international business, international education, social media, internet, and other widely used communication avenues. Throughout the world, English as a second language (ESL) speakers outnumber the number of native English speakers. ^{1,2}

Language Power (LP) is a measure of one’s ability to communicate effectively in a given language, specifically one that is not native to the speaker. As demonstrated in this paper, current instructional programs throughout the world continue to attempt to teach enrollees *how* to communicate in a second language – yet they struggle. They struggle because existing methodologies do not typically result in the learner being able effectively to communicate in the new language. The root cause of this global problem is that learners do not achieve a sufficient level of “native-ness” in their spoken communication. This negatively effects a learner’s academic and job achievement outcomes - despite numerous attempts at language instruction policy and practice reform. ³ Language Power consists of two key components: 1) an ability to speak and be understood, and 2) an ability to listen and understand. Individuals with strong language power possess the ability to communicate effectively in a social environment. When non-native speakers engage in oral communication, native speakers of that language recognize sufficiently well-formed speech, in that it is satisfactorily ‘native’ or sufficiently close to what they know as ‘their language’ in order to be completely understood. When non-native speakers listen to a secondary language, they need to be capable of interpreting and processing words that are spoken at real world rates of speech in the manner spoken by native speakers of that language.

Background:

The Instructional Conundrum

Each year in the United States, many students are required to learn a language other than English in their educational careers. Often, after years of study and quite likely earning passing grades on final and college entrance exams such as the ACTFL (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language) Oral Proficiency Interview, most students cannot speak at a level that will be understood or can they understand basic everyday exchanges at conversational speed in the language’s native country, as one would encounter when watching television or listening to the radio. ⁴

Language is taught to a level of certain academic competencies, further referred to as academic knowledge (AK): 1) grammatical competence to include proper use of grammar, extensive vocabulary knowledge, and appropriate pronunciation, 2) sociolinguistic competence, which is the proper use of words and grammar depending on social situations and knowledge of cultural “politeness”, 3) discourse competence – the ability to use the language in various settings, such as a debate or neighborhood

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gathering, and 4) strategic competence, the ability to use verbal and non-verbal means to communicate, especially during challenging situations.^{5,6}

As previously stated, academic knowledge measures are far more prevalent and comprise the majority items we see in formal language assessment. Also known as “drill and kill”, typical instructional programs continue to focus on rote memorization of vocabulary and grammatical structure instead of practical use of a language – a deficiency in “humanization” of course material.⁷ Furthermore, there is a lack of appropriate materials in an academic setting, driving teachers to create home-made course materials for class.⁸ A study by Houston (2005) demonstrated that students learning Spanish valued “survival-skills” learning (ability to function in a social environment) more than “academic” knowledge of a language.⁹ Moreover, teachers report lack of time and resources to practice a language within the classroom to strengthen competency.^{2,10,11}

Vocabulary items are quite common and take many forms. From simple flash card type exercises to more complex matching games and standard multiple choice, over the years test makers have employed a variety of ways to test the student’s understanding of the meaning of a single word. This item type may be useful to increase the total number of words a student understands, however, it is not an indicator of communication competency unless the item combines either identification of real world audio or oral production that connects the speaker to the real world.

Second only to vocabulary items in number are *grammar items*. These items are typically found in written form, on paper or on the computer screen, and typically present the student with a multiple choice selection to fill-in-the-blank or complete/replace language items in a sentence with the response that is grammatically correct.

For example, Chinese graduate students are supposed to have a high level of English, as they have studied English systematically in college. However, their communication skills are insufficient. The main problems are that 1) there is a gap between the listening materials and the real world English use, and 2) they do not have sufficient training in speaking. Although tests may boast they use “real world examples” to gauge language power, the reliability and validity of the results are highly questioned due to the fact these examples are limited in a testing situation.^{12,13}

The most challenging facet of using a language is in the one-on-one arena, in which a language learner experiences whether their words express meaning to another person and the other person’s meaning is conveyed and understood. A review by Na and Guo (2013), along with other researchers, describes the importance of integrating real world language setting in the classroom.^{14,15}

Additionally, English as a second language (ESL) learners in primary and secondary education are being subjected to high-stake tests for English proficiency – testing that does not correspond to real-world use of English. These tests simply gauge a teacher’s ability to teach a subject in the classroom through a battery of rote memorization and basic grammar. Despite classroom instruction based on the No Child Left Behind Act, ELL students score 47% below their English-speaking peers in academic achievement tests. Additionally, academic tests, due to English limitations of ELLs, are not an accurate representation of what the student understands in courses such as math and science.¹⁶⁻¹⁸

The Curse of the ESL College Students

The number of ESL students in North American colleges and universities has doubled in the last thirty years.¹⁹ Non-English speaking countries struggle to prepare their students to communicate efficiently when studying abroad or accepting jobs in English-speaking nations. Students are required to pass English proficiency tests, such as the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for the purpose of entering universities in English-speaking countries.¹⁰ Overall, preparation strategies have been developed so that students can achieve good scores on these exams.^{20, 21} Students who have do well on these standardized English tests are routinely admitted to universities in English speaking nations and, thereafter, have difficulty understanding their instructors and speaking in class and in social settings, also known as basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). This is despite their ESL learning in their native setting.²²⁻²⁴ They have high academic knowledge - as evidenced by their standardized test scores – but struggle to speak the language in a real world setting, as evidenced by the unfortunately high percentage of foreign students who do not complete their studies abroad.²⁵⁻²⁷ An article in a Chinese online newspaper, *People's Daily Overseas Edition* (2010) speaks to the struggles Chinese students have while studying in the US. The students reported they had difficulty in class due to the speaking speed of the professor and the various English accents encountered.²⁸

Liu (2009) conducted survey-based research on the English competence of Chinese students who prepare for graduate school in a foreign setting where English is the native language. The research focused on four areas: 1) self-assessment on the English listening and speaking competence; 2) assessment on cognition of English listening and speaking competence and learning psychology; 3) assessment on English listening and speaking text materials and pedagogy in China. The students' responses reveal: 1) 100% of them think their listening and speaking competence is not good and believe that they have some communicative obstacles, 2) compared to the foreign setting, the class size is too big due to fewer classes, there appears to be a lack of practice opportunities, and multimedia is not used widely in China, 3) 90% students think that it lacks variety in the method of teaching listening and speaking English (mainly cassette, CD and mp3), and 4) they think the current textbooks are not good.²⁹ Other research with Chinese students and ELL suggests a serious lack in appropriate skills in mastering English on a conversational, real-world level (see Appendix 1).^{24, 27, 30}

Furthermore, in another survey completed by a Chinese professor, student respondents believed that the College English Test (CET) 4 and 6 were just to train them to pass exams. CET 4 and 6 are high-level English tests and a passing grade suggests the students have a high-level proficiency of English.^{31, 32} However, as the professor conducting the survey indicated, even those who pass the exam have difficulty using English in a real world setting.³³ It is the ability of using the language that matters, not the vocabulary and grammar for the test.³⁴ One such measure is the use of multiple choice in language proficiency testing. These tests are designed to “look good” and to “focus on what is considered important in the classroom” opposed to real-time use of speech.³⁵

Occupational Barriers for Adults

The decision to hire someone for a company position may be, to some degree, dependent on the individual's ability to speak a language effectively. In the majority of cases, similar standardized tests are used as a screening mechanism with adults who are ESL learners.¹⁰ One such test, Speaking Proficient English Assessment Kit (SPEAK) has been used to place ESL learners in appropriate classes and support curriculum improvements. SPEAK, through research and examination of the test, does not

realistically measure oral communication competency, leading to invalid results of language fluency and capability to use English in an occupational situation.³⁶

The European Union (EU) recognizes the importance of a multilingual and diverse work force; proficiency testing programs, such as the Common European Framework of Reference used in the United Kingdom, gauge potential employees not only on fluency of a second language, but competency.³⁷ Many potential employees may arrive for an interview and, although have scored high on English proficiency tests, are unable to communicate at a level that gains them a job in an English-speaking nation.

Cultural Barriers of Language

Approximately 18% of the US population speak a language other than English, with 11% representing foreign-born individuals. Culture plays a role in how a person learns a language and communicates what they have learned and is substantially social in context.^{11, 19} Moreover, lexical and grammatical pieces of language are strongly cultural, leading to a level of language complexity.¹⁹

Three paradigms can be considered when examining non-native speakers in a US culture: 1) communication apprehension, 2) self-perceived communication competency, and 3) social inclination to communicate. Insufficiencies in oral communication courses for English as a second language learners and appropriate curriculum contribute to the lack of oral communication competencies.^{25, 38} These apprehensions contribute to the failure of some foreign students. In a qualitative study among Chinese graduate students, 94% of students reported their academic experience was negative and not “enjoyable” due to “tremendous” language barriers.^{21 19} Additionally, study abroad programs were thought to be a “cure all” for language and cultural barriers. However, students often arrive to their host countries linguistically underprepared.³⁹

It is suggested that improving upon language competencies can lead to greater rates of post-secondary education success in ESL students.^{19, 21} Furthermore, improving upon speech can limit biases and preconceptions of native listeners towards the ESL speakers, bettering social interactions.¹

A Needed New Concept “Language Power”

Language Power, further referred to as Language Power Theory (LPT) is the study of actual communication ability. Communication ability is the competence to *speaking to be understood* and *listening to understand*. LPT draws from and supports ideas from language knowledge, understanding there is a pragmatic and social structure that needs to be in place for successful language learning “...since conversation is the most fundamental means of conducting human affairs”.⁵

Academic Knowledge vs Language Power

AK is what students obtain in traditional language programs in traditional educational institutions. For largely historical, political and commercial reasons these traditional programs center on the course’s “book”. This can be considered ‘book learning’ because the lack of available, cost-effective technology leaves no other option but to begin learning a language by ‘reading it’.^{40, 41}

Conversely, LP traditionally develops with no book at all, nor any presumption of an ability to read. This is how we all learn our native language. Infants learn to speak their native language because they learn it ‘through their ears’ as a cognitive process, not through a book.^{42,43} To compare the efficacy of these two methods is revealing, in most cases, individuals come fully to master their native language resulting in high degrees of LP while only a fortunate small percentage of learners are able to obtain high levels of language power when learning a second language via traditional methods.

Speaking to be Understood

LPT considers speaking to be understood, a simple transmit and receive process in which the speaker produces oral language that will be understood by a native speaker of that language. Research has shown that among Chinese students, even though the Chinese learners can construct grammatically correct English, it sounds awkward to a native ear. LPT advocates learning language to support the speaker’s ability to produce oral language to a certain level of “native-ness”. Native-ness is the result of sufficient quality of pronunciation, fluency, rhythm and intonation.^{19,42,44}

Research demonstrates that intonation of speech (i.e., pitch, speed, volume, etc.) is an important factor in learning conversational language.⁴⁵ It is one of the primary measures of LP because it assesses the speaker’s ability to get his message across in a way that is completely understood by the native speaker. Key among these elements is a subset of fluency known as Rate of Speech (ROS) that is often measured in words per minute or more recently in phonemes per second.

Furthermore, non-native accents tend to result in longer processing times for the listener unless under optimal conditions – this is a two-fold effect on both the non-native speaker and the native listener and non-native listener and native speaker.⁴⁶ Furthermore, ESL learners tend to use sociolinguistic rules of their first language, leading to communication breakdown.^{1,19}

Measuring one’s ability to speak and be understood has always been challenging since it is usually measured orally during a “live interaction” - a teacher works “one on one” with a student, perhaps asking questions and grading oral responses.^{10,11,47} Naturally, due to budget and time constraints, these types of measurements cannot be done nearly as often as desired. Furthermore, the subjective nature of these types of tests severely dilutes their validity and reliability. Yet, until recently, oral tests have been the only measure used to determine if what the student is saying will be understood by a native speaker of that language.

In recent years, several countries have begun to employ computer-aided language learning (CALL) systems to assist their students in learning English.⁴⁸ Research has shown in primary and secondary education, CALL programs are more engaging, assist students in cognitive abilities, and can be tailored to meet the needs of the learner.⁴⁹

CALL has been employed to improve speech of ESL learners - however, there is a need to improve software to incorporate different levels of learning, specifically around oral communication. Recent tests of oral language systems show that they would be feasible to use in tangible applications.^{45,48,50,51} Furthermore, qualitative studies of computer-based programs “proved to be a potent motivator in language learning”; the outcome measures positively impacted by CALL were worker participation in union-based activities, such as negotiations, meetings, and a variety of services.⁶

Listening to Understand

LPT considers *listening to understand* the ability of a person to listen and understand a non-native language at real world rates of speech with all the attributes of pronunciation, fluency rhythm and intonation.²³ A review of data by Endress and Hauser (2010) demonstrates that adults listen and interpret language based on prosodic cues and these cues vary from language to language. The authors explain that listening to a native language has segmentations, similar to beads on a string, which differentiate words allowing the context to be fully understood. However, for non-native listeners, even if they have studied the particular second language, they have a difficult time segmenting words causing them to simply run together.⁵² For example, the authors explain stress (loudness, pitch, and duration) on certain syllables is different between English and French and although listeners can discern some prosodic cues of a foreign language, lack of “language power” hampers competent understanding.

Furthermore, adult learners of a non-native language depend on lexical information that is already ingrained in their native language. Non-native speech may have different sets of language processing during parsing, which may impact comprehension.⁵³ These differences can be highly situational, such as in academic listening.²³

Measurements of listening ability often require at least enough technology to broadcast recordings or require teachers to produce oral language.⁵⁰ The biases of oral tests for listening and language comprehension is regrettably apparent when the tests involve a variable amount of teachers’ partisanship on what defines listening comprehension of a language.

Computer Language systems have now come to the forefront and now have the ability to broadcast or “playback” audio for use in the assessment of listening skills.^{45, 48} However, for this type of measurement to effectively measure LP as opposed to AK, the test items must be formed in a way that emulates real world listening. Specifically, the Rate of Speech (ROS) must be that of the real-world. Non-native speakers, when they attempt to use a second language conversationally in a real-time environment, must be able to process and interpret what they hear – at the rate at which the native speaker is speaking.⁴³

Conclusion:

With millions of learners around the world studying languages, yet failing to achieve a satisfactory level of actual communication ability, the time has come for developing new methods for both learning and assessment. Common examples of high AK and low LP include students from around the world who come to study in English speaking countries. They know a great deal “about” the language, in this case English but they have great difficulty actually using the language. At the other end of the spectrum consider the thousands of immigrants to English speaking countries with no formal training (AK) who learn the language ‘through their ears’ and go on to integrate into their new societies as they attain increasing degrees of LP.

AK can support the development of LP. Certainly traditional language has value that is not the issue. The issue is how can LP most efficiently be increased? This is a promising area for further research. The clear initial direction is to study how can we make the way we learn a second language more closely approach the way we learn our native language; conversely, how can we learn more through our ears? How can we know if what we are saying is at a level that will be understood by native speakers of that language?

LPT's foundation is the practical, real world nature of true communication ability, and for that reason, calls for the ability to determine the native-ness of oral production and speech. Our hope is that, with the fast paced advances we now see in speech recognition and computing technology, we will begin to see objective and scientific measures of native-ness, or the ability to be understood by a native speaker.

Furthermore, LPT calls for the ability to measure ESL learners' ability to understand real world English at real world rates of speech. Again, with advances in speech and computing technology, we will be looking for education technology providers to create ways in which ESL learners can engage with computer applications to develop their listening ability by gradually increasing the rates of speech to that which they will experiences typical conversations in the real world.

The next generation of computer assisted language learning programs must take Language Power into account, concentrating on the capacity of a learner to speak and listen effectively. Academic Knowledge of a second language is useful. However, Language Power is at least a useful adjunct, and quite possibly even more useful by itself than academic knowledge.

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Appendix:

Mandarian Chinese Articles Summaries (in English)

1. Liu, Wenyuan. 2012. The Research and Reflection on the English Listening and Speaking Competence of Chinese Students Studying Abroad. *English Teachers* (4): 39-43

This survey-based research, conducted in 2009, on the English competence of Chinese students who study English and prepare for graduate school in a foreign country where English is the native language. The research is focused on four areas: 1) self-assessment on the English listening and speaking competence, 2) assessment on cognition of English listening and speaking competence and learning psychology, and 3) assessment on English listening and speaking text materials and pedagogy in China. The students' responses reveal: 1) 100% of them think their listening and speaking competence is not good and believe that they have some communicative obstacles, 2) compared to the foreign setting, the class size is too big and classes are fewer in China; there lacks practice opportunities in China; and multimedia is not used widely in China, 3) 90% students think that it lacks variety in the method of teaching listening and speaking English in China (mainly cassette, CD and mp3), and 4) they think the current textbooks are not good. For example, the textbooks are different from the real-world uses, neglecting the different accents, slang, etc. According to these responses, the author gives the following reflection and suggestions: 1) create various language learning environments; 2) change the focus of teaching and reduce the influence of "test orientation"; 3) change pedagogy and make use of strategy teaching.

This research lends supports to the "language power" theory that the language competence should be measured by the user's real ability to use it. Although the Chinese students study English in college, the listening and speaking skills are not emphasized. Rather, "passing the test" was the primary focus of the students. Also, from the research we can see that there is a gap between what is taught in the textbook and what is used by native speakers. Lack of practice, neglect of the importance of listening and speaking skills, and the gap between textbook English and real-world English, contribute to the language insufficiency of the Chinese students who intend to go to graduate school in an English-speaking country.

2. Chen, Weidong. 1993. Analysis of English Language Competence of Chinese Students in England. *Foreign Language Teaching and Research* (1): 52-58

Based on questionnaire data, this study analyzes the English language use of Chinese mainland students who studied in the UK. The research focuses on the English language training before they went abroad. The research concerns four skills - listening, speaking, reading and writing. The most important causes for the difficulties of each skill are analyzed.

The article points out the difficulty that the students had in following the native speakers' speech and in recognizing the different accents, as they were taught only standard English before going to the UK. This fact suggests that the actual use of a language is more varied than what is taught in the classroom, which tends to be standard. In terms of spoken English, lack of practice and the inability to think in English are the main causes of the difficulty in English use.

The findings suggest the importance of the language use in its natural setting. The students need to adapt to the variety of different accents and the native way of thinking. These finding echoes the theory of language power that highlights the actual use of the language.

3. Liu, Jinyu. 1994. English Language Ability and Cultural Adaptation of Chinese Students Studying in the US. *Liaoning Normal University Academic Journal (Social Sciences Edition)* (6): 57-59

This article analyzes the English language ability and cultural adaptation of Chinese students studying in the US. In term of the English language ability, the author found that although the students should have had high TOEFL scores and had intensive English training, their language ability was far from good. The primary difficulties were listening and speaking ones. In their Chinese college English classes, the speech was standard and slow in the text materials, and students' spoken skill was neglected. The result of this kind of teaching was that the Chinese students had a hard time understanding different accents and lacked confidence to talk in the classroom. According to this research, students said the English they learned from school in China was different from what American people used.

This research suggests that the English knowledge one learns is not the same as the ability that he has in the use of the language, as this research shows that the students were supposed to have a high level of language proficiency since they must have passed the TOEFL with high score and have had enough language training. It suggests that it is the communication skill that matters in a language study, which is exactly what the language power theory argues.

4. Deng, Yaochen. 2013. The Usage Patterns of Formulaic Sequences in Chinese EFL Learners Oral Production. *Foreign Language and Their Teaching* (3): 60-65 & 87

This research analyzes the English usage patterns of formulaic sequences of Chinese learners qualitatively and quantitatively. The research finds that the Chinese learners who have a high level of English still can't use English well for communication. The author compares the usage of these Chinese learners and that of native speakers, and finds that their strategies of using the spoken language are different. The Chinese learners either overuse the formulaic sequences or rely too much on vocabulary and grammar, which make their speech not native and even incorrect.

This article is helpful for understanding the difference in language use between non-native and native speakers. It also provides insights into how to measure the English proficiency and effectiveness of a learner. The language learners should know the actual use of the language by native speakers so that they can use the language more effectively. The article mentions that even though the Chinese learners can construct grammatically correct English, it sounds awkward to a native ear. Therefore, as the language power theory maintains, whether the usage

of English is effective depends on the real-world communication, rather than that the mere knowledge that a person knows about that language (grammar, vocabulary, etc.)

5. Lu, Ling. 2001. A Study on the English Language of Chinese Overseas Students. *Journal of Guangxi Commercial College* 18 (4): 22-24

This research, based on the survey conducted in 2000 on the English of Chinese students who already received a Bachelor's degree or above in China and was studying in the UK, reveals the situation of English teaching in China and the difficulty of the students' English use in the UK.

The research reveals that the vocabulary and grammar were emphasized, while listening and speaking were less focused in the English teaching in Chinese colleges. The difficulties that the students faced when they arrived in the UK were in listening and speaking and writing. After they stayed in the UK for a period of time, they thought their listening comprehension improved most, followed by writing and then speaking. The great majority of the students considered their English at medium or low level. Among the list of 15 suggestion choices for English teaching in China, the students gave the "inviting more foreign teachers to teach in China" the first priority.

Since the Chinese students did not have much practice in listening and speaking, their communication skills were less satisfactory, even they were good at vocabulary and grammar. Such a fact supports the idea in the language power theory that the real-world language skills, especially the listening and speaking, are the key in communication, not the knowledge of a language.

6. Wang, Su'e. 2012. Language Problems of Overseas Chinese Graduate Students and Their Insights into English Teaching for Graduate Students in China. *Academic Degree and Graduate Education* (4) : 35-37

This paper analyzes the language problems of Chinese overseas graduate students in three aspects: listening, speaking and writing, and discusses what insights these problems provide to the English teaching for graduate students in China. In terms of listening, research shows that Chinese graduate students studying overseas had problems in the rate of professor's speech, slang, transition of speech, and accent. Chinese students tended to keep silent during classes. Their insufficient listening and spoken skills were important causes. Chinese students' writing skill was also not good even they had studied abroad for a certain period of time.

The author believes that these problems can help to improve the English teaching for graduate students in China. The author gives some suggestions accordingly: 1) To use listening materials of real-world occurrence instead of slower speech and the "pure" setting without any noise; 2) Graduate students should be encouraged to talk in English in the class; 3) Graduate students should be given more training in academic English writing.

Chinese graduate students are supposed to have high level of English, as they have studied English systematically in college. However, their communication skills are insufficient. The main problems are that 1) there is a gap between the listening materials and the real-world English use; 2) Also, they don't have enough training in speaking. Therefore, the ability to understand spoken English and ability to speak are essential to communication in an English-speaking setting.

7. Liu, Youquan. 2011. Suggestions on How to Improve English Ability of Vocational School Students. *Test Weekly* (55): 109

The paper analyzes the problems in the English teaching for vocational school students in China and provides advice on improving students' English ability. According to the author, the problems are: 1) the course length is too short; 2) lack of teachers and lack of training for teachers; and 3) too much focus on passing tests.

The advice that the author provides includes: 1) The teacher should raise questions and encourage students to discuss in the class rather than only lecturing; 2) The college should provide English elective courses for students to use English and improve their ability of actual use; and 3) To promote a campus-wide English-learning atmosphere.

This paper highlights the problem that passing the English test was the primary goal of teaching and learning, and proposes an alternative philosophy of English teaching that is focused on more on practical use of the language. The author suggests that the practical use of English is more important than passing the test.

8. Xinhuanet. May 24, 2006. Tsinghua University Professor Says CET 4 and 6 Should be Terminated. Originally from China Youth Daily. *Xinhuanet*, http://news.xinhuanet.com/school/2006-05/24/content_4591287.htm

Sun, Fuchu, a Tsinghua University professor teaching English was worried about the English teaching in China. He thought that English had become totally a tool for test. He objected the College English Test (CET), an English test that initiated in 1987 nation-wide for college students. According to the professor, this standard test was against the law of language acquisition. Professor Sun said that even though students could pass the exam, they couldn't read English literature and made a lot of mistakes when they wrote a thesis in English.

According to the questionnaire for students conducted by the professor, the students believed that the CET 4 and 6 were just to train them to pass exams. This article points out that different from the way the professor studied English, which was more effective, students now were busy preparing for the test, trying only to memorize vocabulary and study grammar. The professor

suggested that in order to solve the problem, quality education should replace "exam-oriented education".

CET 4 and 6 are high-level English tests. Students are supposed to have high-level proficiency of English if they pass them. It is not the case, however. As the professor points out, even those who pass the exam have difficulty in using English. It is the ability of using the language that matters, not the vocabulary and grammar for the test, as is proposed in the language power theory.

9. Dai, Jianwei and Wu Fangge. 2010. How to Overcome the Language Obstacles When Studying Overseas. *People's Daily Overseas Edition*, Section 6, January 22, 2010.

Several Chinese students studying in the US talk about their English use. They all had language problems when they arrived in the US. These problems include listening comprehension, accent, and the speed of reading.

According to these students, the causes of their language problems include: 1) the lack of English-speaking environment; 2) the vocabulary and sentence structure learned in China were not like how the native speakers used them; 3) and the rate of speech of professors was fast; 4) native accents were hard to understand; and 5) the English textbooks they used in China were not practical. They believed that the solution was to think in a native way and practice using English often.

This article suggests that the English that the Chinese students learned in China was different than the real-world uses, which made it difficult for them to communicate. In order to communicate well with native speakers, the learners should try to get familiar with the use of the language in its real setting, rather than focusing on the textbook knowledge. Or they need to have certain degree of "language power", for them to have effective communication with native speakers.

10. Zeng, Kai et al. 2001. Investigation and Thinking on the Actual English Communicative Competence of Chinese Students Studying in the UK. *Foreign Languages and Their Teaching* 9: 37-39

Based on the investigation of the actual English communicative competence of Chinese students studying in the UK, the author summarizes the strengths and weaknesses of English teaching at Chinese colleges, and provides some suggestions on the reform of English teaching at Chinese colleges.

The focus of the investigation is on the actual English communicative competence of Chinese students who received higher education in China. The investigation is consisted of three parts:

analysis on the English test scores, informal interviews and random observations. Their TOEFL scores indicate that their English was good enough to meet the UK university requirements. However, these students had some difficulties in using English: 1) Although they could handle the study in the UK, it was difficult for them to read articles with much cultural background; 2) It was not too difficult for them to write a thesis or daily issues, but they thought their words couldn't convey the meaning they wanted to express sometimes. In terms of listening and speaking, they had considerable obstacles. While their listening comprehension improved greatly after one-year study, their spoken English hadn't improved much. One of the students said he couldn't understand 80% of the class. Another student thought that the school would be impressed by her high TOEFL score, while it turned out that the school recommended her to attend a language training course instead.

The observation results show that their communication with native speakers worked, but was not smooth: 1) their voice and tone were not standard, 2) they made a lot of mistakes in grammar and their sentence structure lacked variety, 3) their vocabulary was inaccurate and they didn't have enough everyday vocabulary, and 4) they were not familiar with idioms used by British people. Their common characteristic was their weakness in spoken English and listening comprehension.

The author analyses the reasons for the students' incompetence of communication in English: 1) There is not enough listening class; 2) the class is based on teacher-centered approach and students do not have much time to speak; and 3) the English tests (CET 4 and 6) do not place importance on listening and do not even include a spoken English part. The author suggests that in order to improve the English teaching, students should be given more training in the cultural background of the language use, more opportunities to practice, and more subjective questions on the English tests should be added.

This paper echoes several points advocated in the language power theory: 1) Standard English tests, such as TOEFL and CET 4 and 6, cannot show accurately how well a student can use the language; 2) for an effective communication, the language learner should've achieved a certain degree of nativism of the language. This requires the learner be familiar with the language use in the real setting (accent, idiom and cultural background, etc.), which is often hard for the learner to learn in a classroom or from a textbook; 3) practice and use are key to the language acquisition, and students often lack enough opportunities to use the language, resulting in their unsatisfactory competence.

11. Jia, Shaodong. 2010. Exploring the Pragmatic Functions of English Conversational Routines and its Implications in the EFL Classroom. *Humanities & Social Sciences Journal of Hainan University* 28(2): 111-116

The author explores the concepts, classifications, pragmatics theories and teaching philosophies of the conversational routines from the perspective of pragmatics. According to the author, how

much a foreign language learner masters the conversational routines reflects how well he can use the language for communication.

In terms of the teaching of conversational routines, according to the author, studying conversational routines is an effective way to improve spoken language. However, the output of conversational routines is considered to be one most difficult aspect in foreign language learning. First, research reveals that students prefer memorizing individual words and neglect the important information (vocabulary routines and conversational routines). The result is that students "know" a lot about the language, but can't use it well. Second, the class focuses on article interpretation and neglects the lecturing and practicing of conversation, conversational routine and culture. Third, communicative skills and language fluency are neglected, while grammar and translation are the main teaching focuses in large-class foreign language teaching. Fourth, it is hard to teach as conversational routines are closely associated with culture. And last, foreign language learners are not familiar with the rules of conversational routines used by native speakers, and this causes misunderstanding in communication.

According to the author, the goal of spoken language teaching is to enable the learner "express himself", and the foreign language teaching should be focused on this goal. The same is true for the conversational routine teaching, as conversational routines are often used in communication. The author highlights the importance of conversational routines in language acquisition: its native context, implications and cultural background associated.

This paper shares similar points with the language power theory in both a general and specific way. In general, this paper emphasizes the real-world use of language in foreign language teaching: its context, cultural background, and the rules of the language used by native speakers. Or in other words, the language competence of a language learner is tested through his communication in the real setting with native speakers, which involves something beyond the language itself. Specifically, too much emphasis on memorizing vocabulary can only lead to the accumulation of the learner's knowledge about the language, and does not contribute to his communicative skill development of that language.

12. Na, Li and Guo, Aiping. 2013. The Insights of the Dynamic Analysis on Spoken English Grammatical Errors into English Teaching. *Teaching and Management* 18: 110-112

Using error analysis theories as the framework, this paper provides a statistic on frequency change of the grammatical errors in the spoken English audio records of the 40 students, collected over a one-year period. The goal is to provide insights into spoken English teaching in China.

The grammatical errors of the students are grouped into nine categories: noun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, article, pronoun, semantic chaos, and Chinglish. This study found that the most frequently occurred errors are in the verb and Chinglish categories. Another finding, which is surprising, is that in general, the errors haven't been reduced even after one-year study.

According to the author, the interference of the students' mother language and the characteristics of spoken English are the factors leading to the students' errors in spoken English.

The author suggests that the teacher should correct the verb use errors of the students and give explanation accordingly. Also, the class should focus more on the language atmosphere resembling the real situation than on the lecture. This paper highlights the necessity of creating a language setting (movie, video, online chat, etc.) that resembles the real world where the language is used. This should be more effective than the teaching mode that the lecture is the dominant part of the class, while listening materials are only supplementary. We can infer from this paper that the students should practice English more in order to avoid the errors, which are often caused by the Chinese way of thinking. Accordingly, in the view of language power theory, one's language competence should be measured by the degree of the nativeness of his language use.

13. Ge, Jinshu. 2012. Investigation on and Coping Strategies of Spoken English Learning Demand of Vocational School Students. *Jiangshu Education* 4: 59-60

The demand for spoken English learning has increased recently in China. Under this situation, the author conducted a research on the actual demand of spoken English learning of vocational school students and the existing problems.

The study shows that: 1) the students' learning purposes are various while the demand for improving spoken English is unanimous; 2) students wish to have effective communication in English with teachers and classmates; 3) students wish to have lively and varied methods of spoken English learning; 4) there are many problems in spoken English learning; 5) the students have some psychological problems: being afraid of communication and lack of confidence.

The author's suggestions include: 1) the teacher should provide feedback on students' spoken English properly; 2) to place importance on frequently used vocabulary; 3) to help students build confidence by encouraging students use English in their group activities; and 4) to provide more opportunities for students to practice English to overcome psychological problems.

This paper implies that effective communication using a foreign language not only involves the language itself, but also the process of communication that includes other dimensions such as psychology. It also implies that communication is key to language teaching and learning. In addition, it highlights the significance of practice in language learning. All these aspects lend support to the language power theory that places importance on the training of students' communication skills.

14. Yu, Zhiwei. 2008. Problems in College English Test 4 and 6 and the Reform Paths. *Modern Education Science* 1: 93-96

This paper explores the negative effects College English Test (CET) 4 and 6 brought on English teaching and learning in Chinese colleges. The problems are: 1) the focus on the passing rate of the tests imposes pressure on teachers and students. One of the results of too much focus on passing the tests is that students have a lot of knowledge about English but limited ability to use it; 2) The CET 4 and 6 certificates are weighed too much by employers; 3) The focus on the passing of CET 4 and 6 is against the nature of education; 4) CET 4 and 6 focus on vocabulary and grammar and use multiple-choice questions to a large extent. The consequence of such a test mode is that grammar is given more importance while the actual use of the language is neglected. In turn, college students do not have the competence of English use. 5) The questions do not focus on testing students' ability to use the language.

The author provides some suggestions on how to reform CET 4 and 6. First, CET 4 and 6 shouldn't be required tests for all college students. Second, to make the society less rely on CET 4 and 6. Third, to improve evaluation system and eliminate the passing rate of CET 4 and 6 from the evaluation system. Fourth, teachers should provide a better learning environment to provoke the learning interest of students. And lastly, to reform the testing mode, and add the multiple-level and varied test modes.

This paper accentuates the English teaching problems in Chinese colleges. The significance of CET 4 and 6 produced many negative effects on college English learning and teaching. On the one hand, the emphasis of the tests on vocabulary and grammar results in the insufficient training for students in communication skill development. On the other hand, too much use of multiple-choice questions in the tests makes students pay attention only to rules and test-taking skills, and can not reflect the students' ability to use English. The language power theory contends that some standard tests, because of their designs, cannot measure the learners' ability to use the language. The CET 4 and 6 should be examples of such standard tests.

15. Chen, Chunyan. 2009. Problems in the English Tests in China and Suggestions: CET 4 and 6 as Examples. *Da Zhong Ke Ji* 1: 168-169

This paper analyses the problems in current English tests in Chinese colleges using College English Test 4 and 6 as examples. The author points out that employers tend to hire employees who can speak English, while graduates usually can't speak English well. The major reason is that the passing rate of CET 4 and 6 is an important criterion for evaluating higher education quality, and is a requirement for degree awarding by many universities. As a result, the university and student focus on only passing the test and neglected the training of students' ability to use the language.

The author also points out that one of the major characteristics of the modern language tests is the emphasis on credibility rather than effectiveness. CET 4 and 6 are good examples of such tests. In other words, these tests place importance on knowledge while concern less about

actual ability. Such a tendency is reflected on the over use of objective questions, or multiple-choice questions.

Additionally, according to the author, the listening comprehension accounts only 20 percent of the total score in CET. The multiple-choice testing mode is very different from the real-world use. The requirement that only students who get a written score of 80 in CET 4 and 75 in CET 6 are qualified to take the oral exam hurts students' interest and passion.

Based on these problems, the author advocates that reforms should be carried out accordingly. One of the emphases that the author makes is that more subjective questions should be added in order to reflect the actual language competence of the test taker.

This paper coincides with the language power theory in several aspects: 1) the design of standard English tests, or specifically the extensive use of multiple-choice questions, can not reflect test-takers' actual use of the language; 2) the actual communication skills should be focused upon in language teaching and learning, rather than the knowledge about the language. Otherwise, learners will only know the language, but cannot use the language well for communication in the real world.