

# Comparison and Mode Analysis between IELTS Oral and CET-SET

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**Abstract.** On the basis of analysis into CET-SET and IELTS oral test, Structuralism and Communicative approaches are briefly analyzed as well as the marking method. The test mode and ranking system are compared in different aspects and it is hoped that it will provide an alternative possibility to oral teaching reform in this respect.

**Keywords:** Oral Test, SET, IELTS, Marking

## 1. Introduction

Communicative competence is strongly emphasized in language learning process in recent years. Definitely, the ultimate goal of language learning is for communication, while communication refers to verbal communication in the first place. Therefore language teaching becomes more and more verbal communication competence oriented. Thus the assessment of verbal communication competence of language learner becomes an increasingly important question of study. However, compared with language competence of listening, reading, and writing, oral assessment is far more difficult than them. The main causes are that the oral assessment is heavily subjective, reliability of assessment is rather low, and it takes plenty of time and energy to test it. The essay aims at comparing and analyzing two major verbal communication competence tests mode, which are widely used in China, and putting forward some suggestions of improving verbal communication competence of college students of China.

## 2. Article review

With the development of language research, linguisticians advanced many different conceptions of language. Chomsky brought about the conception of language competence and language performance, competence refers to an abstract form of language ability in Chomsky's theory. Other linguisticians pointed out the fact that many other form of abilities would be used in the real communicative activities beyond language competence. For a instance, Hymes suggested that the utilizing of language involve a series of socioculture factors. No matter in the case of oral or written form of communication, not only language would be grammatically correct, but listeners' or readers' culture background and the abilities of comprehension should be considered. Halliday put forward functional grammar, which stated that the same sentence would have different function in various occasions.

Communicative competence of language includes not only language abilities and also competence beyond language, thus these factors should be considered in language teaching and testing. Aim of language testing is to assess language use abilities of students, so various kinds of factors of communicative competence should be tested as an integrate part of language competence.

### 2.1. Structuralism and Communicative

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Compared with several hundreds years history of language testing of reading and writing, verbal assessment is rather young and became a part of language competence test in 1940s. There are two modes of oral test: Structuralism and Communicative.

Structuralism stemmed from Saussure, it emphasizes integrity and synchronicity, and the whole is prior to the part in logical means. Language abilities and subsection competence are stressed in structuralism testing, for instance, accuracy in pronunciation and intonation, correctness of grammar, fluency. Examinees are required to react promptly to external stimuli.

Typical testing modes of structuralism are reading aloud an assigned paragraph, filling in dialogues, and oral presentation. It is called a one-way mode, as shown in fig. 2.1



fig 2.1 one-way mode

Communicative mode is extension of language communicative competence theory, so authenticity, function, and interactivity are keys of the mode. Role play, interview and discussion are commonly used, then communicative testing belongs to two-way mode, as shown in fig. 2.2

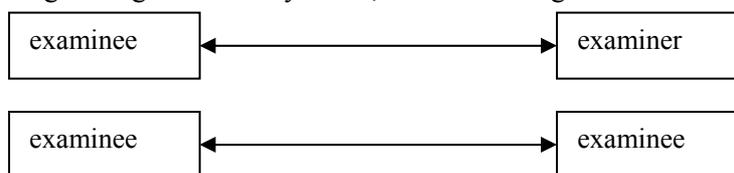


fig 2.2 two-way mode

## 2.2. Analytic Marking and Holistic Marking

When structuralism mode is applied in the testing, analytic marking is a common marking methods. Analytic marking refers that testing is analyzed into several parts, each part has an amount of marks, the total mark is the sum of all the parts. The mode is widely utilized and the analytic parts are shown as follow fig. 2.3

analytic parts	
pronunciation	pronunciation, coherence, plosion, stress, intonation
grammar	tense, voice, subject-verb concord, plurality
vocabulary	accuracy and abundance
fluency	fluency and naturalism
content	to the point, logicity

fig 2.3 analytic parts of oral test

Conclusions can be found from the above fig that the level of accuracy and fluency of language using are stressed in structuralism mode. Different weight can be assigned to the parts of testing to adapt different examinee. The merit of the mode is its high reliability, and the demerit is that it is a one-way test and lacks of communication.

Marking system of communicative mode is holistic marking, examinees are classified by communicative competence and communicative efficiency. An typical example is IELTS which examinees are classified into nine levels and every level contains ten kinds of language competence. 1). length of speaking 2). coherence of sentence 3). range of language 4). speed of speaking 5). flexibility 6). accuracy 7). felicity 8). independence in speaking 9). times of repeating 10). times of unnecessary pause

To sum up, communicative mode can reflect real communicative and interactive language competence of examinees, and it has a better and more precise marking system to indicate communicative competence of examinees, so it enjoys a popular favor, however, structuralism mode has other types of merits such as high reliability and low requirement for the examiners.

## 3. Comparison and qualitative analysis between CET-SET and IELTS

Language communicative competence of examinees is the key to IELTS oral test, which aims at assessing the abilities of the examinees to survive and be O.K. in English speaking countries. Not only the language competence, but the validity of communication are taken into consideration, so the IELTS oral test is closely related to communicative strategies and skills in the process of communication. Therefore, language competence by no means guarantee the success of IELTS oral test.

While in CET-SET test, examinees are expected to be evaluated by direct performance under a real language situation. As a large-scale language testing system, many merits of global language testing system, for example, IELTS Oral, TOEFL TSE, are referred into CET-SET. Examinees are required to participate in various types of oral communication, their language competence is assessed by their performance in the test. The required language function and linguistic conceit are all listed in Syllabus of College English Teaching, such as friendly communication, mutual communication, attitude, persuasion, affection, existing, space description, time, bringing out opinions, arguing.

### 3.1. Testing Modes and Contents

In CET-SET, there will be two examiners and three examinees in a test, total test time is twenty minutes. There are three parts of the test: part one, examiners talk to examinees by means of asking and answering for five minutes; part two, each examinees give their opinions for one and a half minutes for each and then a discussion in group for four and a half minutes, ten minutes in total; part three, further talking between examiners and examinees to make sure language competence of examinees, about five minutes.

In IELTS oral, language communicative competence is assessed through answering different types of topics and questions. There will be only one examiner and one examinee in a test. It has also three parts. Part one, introduction, both examiner and examinee introduce themselves to each briefly, examinee is allowed to talk about his own life, hobbies, works and so on freely, examiner help to decrease stressful feeling of examinee, four to nine questions, involving four to six topics, will be given by examiner in four or five minutes; part two, Extended discourse, examinee talks about his familiar topics under guidance of examiner for three to four minutes; part three, discussion, examinee will have a deeper discussion on the topics extending from part two with examiner, examinee are required to discuss four to five minutes in the part. The total testing time is about fifteen minutes.

By comparison between SET and IELTS oral, many similarities can be found in the first part of the two, which is called lead-in part. Examiners will ask some easy questions about examinees to relax their tension feeling in the test, and to make sure they can fully make use of their language abilities; however, part two and three of the two test are so different by means of testing mode and number of speakers in the test.

### 3.2. Benchmarks of Assessment and Scale

#### 3.2.1 Comparison and analysis of Benchmarks of marking

The benchmarks in SET and IELTS oral are similar but not identical. There are four parts of benchmarks in IELTS oral: F stands for fluency and coherency; V stands for vocabulary; G stands for grammar range and accuracy; P stands for pronunciation.

In SET, benchmarks are as follow: A refers to accuracy of pronunciation, intonation, and grammar; B refers to field of discourse; C refers to length of speaking, contribution in communication; D refers to coherence of speaking; E refers to flexibility of communication to deal with various situations and topics; F refers to appropriateness of speaking and right choice of words.

#### 3.2.2 Comparison and analysis of Rating Scale in SET and IELTS oral

The results of IELTS oral are described in the following nine rating scale:

9 point	Expert Speaker. speaks fluently and coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features; develops topics fully and appropriately
8 point	Very good Speaker. speaks fluently with only occasional repetition; develops topics coherently and appropriately
7 point	Good Speaker. speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence; uses a range of connectives and discourse markers with some flexibility

6 point	Competent Speaker. is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times; has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics
5 point	Modest Speaker. usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition; produces simple speech fluently while complex communication causes problems
4 point	Limited Speaker. cannot respond without noticeable pauses; is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics
3 point	Extremely Limited Speaker. gives only simple responses and is frequently unable to convey basic message; uses simple vocabulary to convey personal information
2 point	Intermittent Speaker. pauses lengthily before most words; only produces isolated words or memorized utterances; little communication possible
1 point	Non Speaker. no communication possible

fig 3.1 IELTS oral rating scale

The results of SET are described in four rating scales as follow:

A + (14.5-15 points), A(13.5-14.4 points)	able to communicate orally in familiar field, no difficulties in most cases
B + (12.5-13.4 points), B(11-12.4 points)	able to communicate orally in familiar field, may make frequent mistakes with complex structures, though these rarely cause comprehension problems
C + (9.5-10.9 points), C(8-9.4 points)	able to communicate orally in familiar field with simple language
D (below 7.9 points)	unable to communicate

fig 3.2 CET-SET rating scale

The scale of IELTS oral is nine, and SET is four, IELTS oral has more rating scales, so has a more precise benchmarks system. Both of the tests are using holistic marking mode, which means holistic marking is a better choice in mass-scale test system.

### 3.3. Comparison and Analysis of Test Mode

One of the basic principles of modern test theories is what is needed, what is tested. Oral test mode can be classified into three types: direct mode, half-direct mode and indirect mode. First, Indirect mode means the oral competence is evaluated in an indirect way. Writing, distinguishing sounds, and filling dialogue are means to assess examinee's verbal competence, it was proved to be lacking of reliability and validity. Second, Half-direct mode refers that designed questions are recorded on tapes or other media, examinee is required to answer the questions and the answering is also recorded on a certain media, after the test, all the records will be collected and sent to judges. A typical instance is TOEFL-TSE. Third, direct mode includes interview, dialogue, discussion and so on, examiner and examinee speak face to face to ensure a chance for examinee present their language competence totally.

SET is a kind of direct mode test, the mode is shown in fig. 3.3

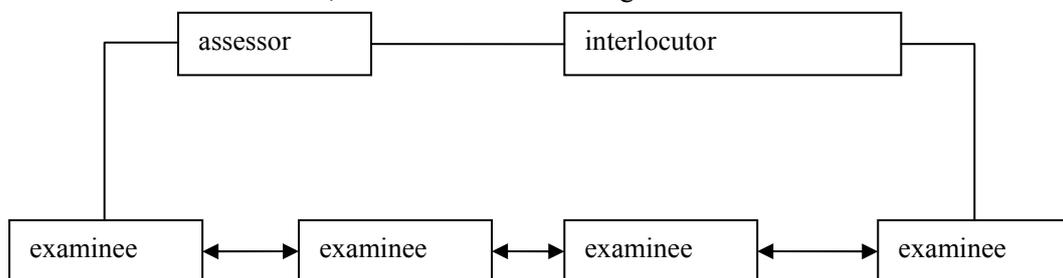


fig 3.3 SET mode

In SET, interlocutor is in charge of asking questions and assessor is responsible for scoring, three examinees will be asked questions in turn, and then they ask questions and discuss with each other to accomplish task of test. The mode is rather efficient and flexible, language communicative competence of examinee can be entirely assessed through talking among examiner and examinees. BEC oral test of Cambridge University is an example of the mode.

IELTS oral test mode is rather special, it is a combination of direct mode and half-direct mode, shown in

the following fig. 3.4



fig 3.4 IELTS oral mode

In IELTS, examiner is responsible for many things: asking questions, control the process of test and marking, so the mode put a heavy work load to examiner and low in efficiency. Therefore IELTS oral adapts half-direct mode to record the process of oral test on tapes for re-evaluating after test. In this way, validity can be guaranteed in a certain degree. while SET also records test process on video tape, not for re-evaluating but for scientific research.

#### 4. Conclusion

Direct mode, holistic marking are the most popular means of oral test to assess language communicative competence. SET and IELTS oral adapt these modes in the test. Though SET is only Chinese student oriented, it uses IELTS oral for reference to guarantee its validity and becomes more efficient than IELTS oral.

Examinees of IELTS oral are non-native speakers who want to go to English speaking countries to study and work, however, CET-SET is only for Chinese college students. Different examinees result in different test mode between the two test. Language tests in Britain emphasize oral competence constantly so oral test exists in almost all language test. In China, language test rarely have oral test part, oral test is rather new to most Chinese. However, more and more teachers and students find that it is a huge deficient. In China, language test always has plenty of objective questions, examinees may have very high scores in language test but be poor in language communicative competence, especially, verbal communicative competence. It is urgent and active demand of era to promote oral training in college language teaching. Language test without oral parts is deficient. Benchmark and rating scale system of IELTS oral give reference for China's language teaching and testing. Though SET suits Chinese students better, it is impossible to cover all the college students, let alone all language learners in China. Only those excellent students have chances to take part in. The reality of lacking examiners lay restraints on the SET.

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