

Sustainable Growth of China's Standards of English Language Ability from Perspective of Eco-semiotics

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Abstract

Researches centered on China's Standards of English Language Ability from the launch of project to draft it to its implement in 2018 and further up to now, have been done a lot on theoretical basis to construct such national scale, its validity, linking to tests and application to every level of English teaching and learning. However, exploration on semiotic significance leaves blank. Eco-semiotics emphasizes interaction between the subject and factors in its umwelt and then, the subject achieves sustainable growth. So, here, in this paper, CSE is taken as a sign, the subject in its umwelt. CSE can get sustainable growth on the basis of interaction with factors (learners, teachers, researchers and translators) of microscope in its umwelt. In the process of interaction, CSE detects requirements from microscope umwelt and interprets information it gets and makes relevant response, ultimately gain its growth.

Keywords: *sustainable growth, growth of a sign, China's Standards of English Language Ability, eco-semiotics.*

INTRODUCTION

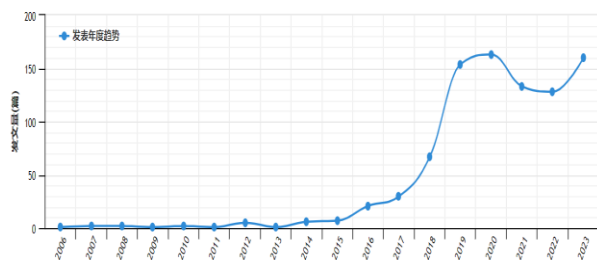
Issued on 12 February, 2018 by Ministry of Education of People's Republic of China, officially released on 13 April, 2018 and implemented on 1st June of the same year, China's Standards of English Language ability (the CSE) "defines the levels of English ability of Chinese learners and users of English, and describes the features of their English language ability at each CSE level."(Ministry of Education of PRC, 2018) It is "applicable to English assessment, and can be used as a yardstick for English teaching and learning as well." (Ministry of Education of PRC, 2018)

China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) is a nine-level scales to define learners' and users' English language ability from perspectives of language comprehension, language expression, pragmatic ability, language knowledge, interpreting and translation and language strategies. The English ability of Chinese learners is divided into three stages (elementary stage, intermediate stage and advanced stage) and nine levels further with three levels for each stage, which is illustrated in the standard as follow:

Table 1 CSE levels

English ability development stages	Level
Advanced Stage	Level 9
	Level 8
	Level 7
Intermediate Stage	Level 6
	Level 5
	Level 4
Elementary Stage	Level 3
	Level 2
	Level 1

Around the year it published, researchers have done their researches evolving the CSE, which can be presented clearly by searching on the website “CNKI”, China’s Academic Journals Full-Text Database. While searched as subject and database confined from 2014 up to the date the data retrieved (29-03-2023), China’s Standards of English Language Ability appears in 573 articles. Trend of publication yearly can be illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Trend of Articles counted by years

From the analysis of theme and sub-theme, we can find that the researches orient from China’s Standards of English Language Ability cover the theoretical background to draft this standard (including abilities, descriptors, validities, etc.), its process to compile (named English ability, validity verification, standard enactment, etc.) and effects (empirical study, mapping study and application, etc.). Only one paper discuss CSE from perspective of philosophy by Feng Li & Yan Ming (2018) “addressing the theoretical issues of

‘description’ by elaborating on its ontology, epistemology and methodology”.

While literature search turn to Google Scholar, researches oriented CSE are few to find except some Chinese writers publishing their articles on international journals and the link between CSE and UK exams.

However, semiotics consideration has always been far beyond researchers’ concern related to the CSE though semiotic perspective may broaden research scope and promote researches to a deep level. This paper would like to interpret the CSE from perspective of ecosemiotics taking the CSE as the subject in its umwelt with foci on micro scope by observing its interaction with its factors, namely teachers, researchers, learners and translators to see how the CSE making meaning in the interaction with its researchers, learners, teachers and translators so as to predict how much it can be accepted in practice in such micro scope and enlighten readers’ mind to make more application of the CSE and boost it further.

Literature Review

This part will review literatures about the CSE at first to present the current situation of researches centered on the CSE, semiotics later and ecosemiotics then to clarify the two definitions, and the definition of umwelt, a framework to this research at last.

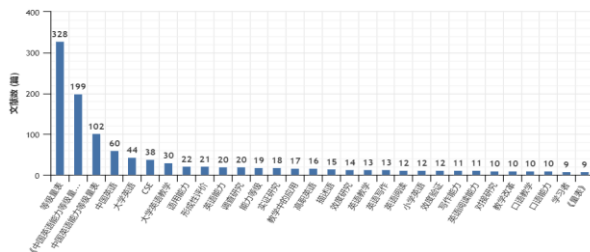
China’s Standards of English Language Ability

China’s Standards of English Language Ability is the first official documents to define learners’ language ability from elementary stage, intermediate stage to advanced stage with three levels in each stage, which can be applied from elementary school to English majored college students or even higher than that.

Tim Hood (2021), Director Examination China at British Council, assumed, "The launch of the CSE will change the Chinese assessment system, which will have a meaning influence on the Chinese English teaching and students learning", which well interpreted the significance of the CSE.

Government-support, researchers' diligence and teachers' great contribution ensure the CSE developing before and after its launch. From the analysis of theme and sub-theme of the data (papers retrieved from CNKI), we can find that the researches oriented from China's Standards of English Language Ability cover the theoretical background to compile this standard (including abilities, descriptors, validities, etc.), its process to compile (named English ability, validity verification, standard enactment, etc.) and effects (empirical study, mapping study and application, etc.). More details can be illustrated in the following two charts:

Figure 2 The Analysis of Theme for Literature Retrieved from CNKI



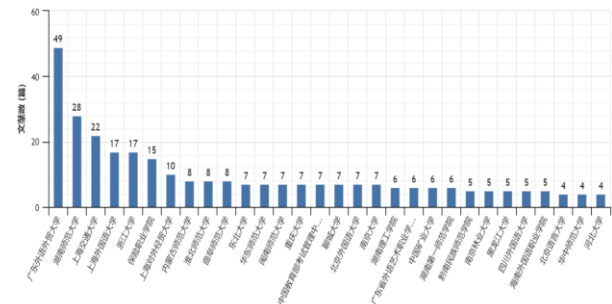
The analysis of the theme shows that of 573 articles, 328 take 'standard scale' as theme, further among them, 301 (with 199 in book title marks and 102 without book title marks) thematized by 'China's Standards of English Language Ability'. And 'English in China' with 60 articles and another 44 with 'college English' follows.

The first five subthemes are 'China's Standards of English Language Ability' (with no book

title marks), 'descriptors', 'standard', 'learners' and 'CSE'. The data shows that researches centered on the CSE extend the CSE itself to develop and try its descriptors and the learners' application.

The data presents clearly researchers with interests in the CSE would like to focus their study on college English or college English teaching, or the data can also be interpreted that the researchers may come from college, with the occupation background easily draw their attention the college English education, which may be verified by the origin of the author as in Figure 3.

Figure 3 Authors' Origins of the Research Papers



The authors and their origins show that researches oriented to the CSE are confined to few authors who mostly participated in the draft of the standard. Eight of the first ten authors on the list are the participants of the standard compiling, which may be translated that the CSE didn't get much attention from common researchers and teachers as expected.

The data from CNKI tells that, although the researches of China's Standard of English Language is of great importance in China's English acquisition, English teaching, English teaching policy, English teacher improvement and China's discourse planning in the world, the Standard didn't arouse much attention,

especially lack of philosophical research centered on it.

While literature search turns to Google Scholar, researches oriented the CSE are few to find except some Chinese writers publishing their articles on international journals and the link between CSE and Aptis, IELTS and TOEFL. .

However, as Daniel Chandler (2007) put forward, “For semioticians who are drawn towards philosophical realism, reality is wholly external to and independent of how we conceptualize the world.” Therefore, semiotics will give the standard a philosophical consideration which will grant readers and researchers profound solution to evaluate the practical use of the CSE and meanwhile, push the study on the CSE further.

Semiotics

What is semiotics? “The shortest definition is that it is the study of signs”. (Daniel Chandler, 2007) Hereby, a sign is not only what the signs we refer in our daily life, say, ‘visual signs’ like words, drawings, paintings, photographs or even body language, but involves more than that. Charles Peirce (cp: 2.242) defined, “A Sign is a representamen of which some interpretant is a cognition of a mind. Signs are the only representamens that have been much studied. ” (Peirce, cp: 2.242) And further, he discussed, “Anything which determines something else (its interpretant) to refer to an object to which itself refers (its object) in the same way, the interpretant becoming in turn a sign, and so on ad infinitum. ” (Peirce, cp: 2.303) Therefore, a sign can be verbal and can be non-verbal; can be visible and can be invisible. “When we gesture, talk, write, read, watch a TV program, listen to music, look at a painting, we are engaged in primarily unconscious sign-based behaviours of various kinds.” (Marcel Danesi, 2007a)

Semeion in the Greek, Semiology in Saussurian’s, Semeiotics in Locke’s term and Significs coined by Victoria Lady Welby can all be referred to Semiotics, which is ultimately, in 1969, adopted by the International Association of Semiotics Studies with the spelling of ‘semiotics’.

Umberto Eco’s definition to semiotics goes like this, “semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign”. (Eco 1976: 7) Then, Daniel Chandler in his *Semiotics: The Basic*, states, “Semiotics involves the study not only of what we refer to as ‘signs’ in everyday speech, but of anything which ‘stands for’ something else”. And Denasi (2007a:11) noted, “semiotics can be defined simply as the science of meaning”. Again Denasi(2007a: 12)explained further, “Instead of studying meaning by contemplating it directly, as traditional philosophy does, semiotics studies how it is built into signs and texts of all kinds (words, symbols, drawings, musical compositions, etc.). In short, semiotics studies ‘produced meaning’ in order to understand semiosis.”

Semiotics is a study to investigate a sign’s meaning making, and meaning making makes a new sign through interpretation, which forms a continuum and ultimately, the growth of a sign achieved.

Ecosemiotics

As defined by Timo Maran & Kalevi Kull (2014), “eco-semiotics is, in the broadest sense, a branch of semiotics that studies sign processes as responsible for ecological phenomena (relations between species, population patterns, and structures). In particular, it studies the role of environmental perception and conceptual categorization in the design, construction, and transformation of environmental structures.”

Timo Maran & Kalevi Kull (2014) precisely described the research scope of ecosemiotics and perspective the researchers may take. The term was widely accepted that it was first put forward by Winfried Nöth (1998). However, it may appear a few years earlier, according to Timo Maran & Kalevi Kull (2014), "Alfred Lang (1993) had used the term semiotic ecology and proposed a corresponding research programme rooted in Peircean semiotics. In 1997, American semiotician Jay Lemke (1997) used the term in the context of social semiotics."

Umwelt

Umwelt, derived from German with the meaning of 'environment' (or 'surroundings'), is the "biological foundations that lie at the very epicenter of the study of both communication and signification in the human [and non-human] animal".(Sebeok, 1976) The term is usually translated as 'self-centered world'.(Kull, Kalevi, 2010) And to Jakob Von Uexkull (1982), Umwelts are 'subjectively universes', which was further explained by the example of the stem of a blooming meadow-flower. He took the first umwelt as: "In the Umwelt of a girl picking flowers, who gathers herself a bunch of colorful flowers that she uses to adorn her bodice." In this example, as Uexkull explained, the flower stem the girl gathered plays a role of ornament. Another umwelt he took is here to make comparison, "In the umwelt of an ant, which uses the regular design of the stem-surface as the ideal path in order to reach its food-area in the flower-petals".(Uexkull, 1982) Here, in this umwelt, the identical flower plays a role of a path. The two examples are enough to present the idea of umwelt that it is a 'subjectively universe'. What the things in the world are depends on the subject's interpretation.

This research will employ the concept of umwelt as frame work to analyze the umwelt in which China's Standards of English Language Ability (the CSE) survives. In this umwelt, the CSE interacts with components in it with meaning interpretation continuously and achieve its growth ultimately.

Methodology

This research attempts to uncover the interaction between China's Standards of English Language Ability, the Chinese official document for English language ability assessment, and micro scope components in its umwelt from perspective of ecosemiotics. In order to conduct this research successfully, textual analysis to the CSE and other related documents, in-depth interview to researchers, teachers and students, literature review on English assessments and ecosemiotics, introspection on policies and theories will be given in the development of the study.

In the process of textual analysis, firstly, the CSE is taken as a text to be analyzed by employing corpus based analysis. Jack Caulfield (2022) defined textual analysis as "a broad term for various research methods used to describe, interpret and understand texts. All kinds of information can be gleaned from a text – from its literal meaning to the subtext, symbolism, assumptions, and values it reveals." The methods are usually conducted under the context of society, politics, culture and art to detect the relationship between the text and its context. The CSE, as a text, will be interpreted by gleaning the words, and key words compared with other official documents related.

To get better understanding of the interaction between the CSE and factors in its umwelt, semi-structured interviews to teachers, researchers and learners are conducted. Present

internet interview grants researchers opportunity to contact respondents (Louis C., Lawrence M. and Keith M. (2007)) and convenience to make comparatively flexible communication with interviewees through real time chat via WeChat and Voov in China. The interview is as semi-structured interview. As Louis C, Lawrence M and Keith M.(2007) defined, “Semi-structured qualitative interviews for individuals and groups gather data on the more intangible aspects of the school’s culture, e.g. values, assumptions, beliefs, wishes, problems. Interviews will be semi-structured, i.e. with a given agenda and open-ended questions.”

Data Collection

Data in this research comes from two ways: texts and semi-structured interviews. Texts come from papers published and searched from CNKI, China’s Academic Journals Full-Text Database and the CSE itself. In order to find facts published papers didn’t cover, semi-structured interviews were given to six respondents (5 teachers and researchers and 1 student) as supplement.

Textual Analysis

Texts that are analyzed in this research come from the CSE itself and literatures focus on the CSE, namely, academic papers adopted from journals and books.

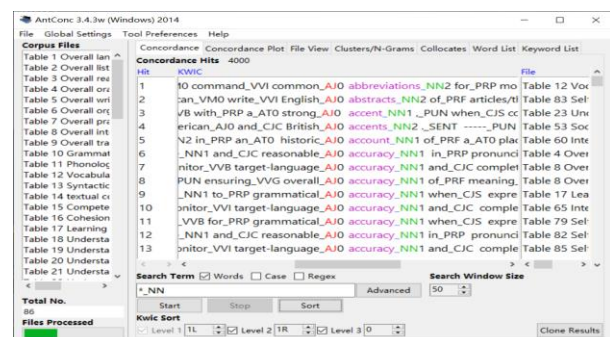
The first part of texts is the CSE, the official standard for English teaching and learning. The CSE, which is comprised mainly by 86 tables, is cut into 86 text files as raw corpus. Then the corpus is cleared by text manager (software to batch texts) to clear redundant space and blank lines (ref to Pic. 1) to guarantee the validity of the results searched by corpus process software Antconc.

Picture 1 Comparison between Raw Data and Cleared Data

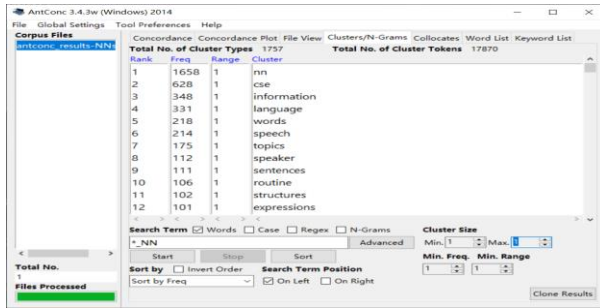
Raw data	Cleared data
CSE 9 Can accurately and thoroughly understand a large variety of language materials. Can easily use all manner of expressions to engage in in-depth verbal communication with others	CSE 9 Can accurately and thoroughly understand a large variety of language materials. Can easily use all manner of expressions to engage in in-depth verbal communication with others
CSE 8 Can understand different types of language materials on a variety of topics; can communicate with others tactfully and effectively	CSE 8 Can understand different types of language materials on a variety of topics; can communicate with others tactfully and effectively
CSE 7 Can understand language materials on a range of topics, including those related to academic and work interactions, effectively present in relevant stylistic conventions and the features of a particular register of language	CSE 7 Can understand language materials on a range of topics, including those related to academic and work interactions, effectively present in relevant stylistic conventions and the features of a particular register of language
CSE 6 Can engage in in-depth discussion and exchange with others on a range of related academic matters and express him/herself clearly, appropriately, smoothly, and in a conventional manner	CSE 6 Can engage in in-depth discussion and exchange with others on a range of related academic matters and express him/herself clearly, appropriately, smoothly, and in a conventional manner
CSE 5 Can understand language materials on a range of topics (including subjects of a particular register of language)	CSE 5 Can understand language materials on a range of topics (including subjects of a particular register of language)
CSE 4 Can discuss a range of familiar topics in academic and work interactions, effectively present in relevant stylistic conventions and the features of a particular register of language	CSE 4 Can discuss a range of familiar topics in academic and work interactions, effectively present in relevant stylistic conventions and the features of a particular register of language
CSE 3 Can understand language materials on general topics discussed in a variety of situational contexts; can communicate, discuss, and negotiate with others on topics such as study and work in familiar situations, accurately, coherently, and appropriately	CSE 3 Can understand language materials on general topics discussed in a variety of situational contexts; can communicate, discuss, and negotiate with others on topics such as study and work in familiar situations, accurately, coherently, and appropriately
CSE 2 Can understand simple everyday language materials, given specific or key information; can communicate with others on familiar subjects in familiar situations; can describe the details accurately, clearly, and coherently	CSE 2 Can understand simple everyday language materials, given specific or key information; can communicate with others on familiar subjects in familiar situations; can describe the details accurately, clearly, and coherently
CSE 1 Can understand simple and frequently used language materials; recognize basic information; can use short and simple discourse to greet and interact with others, introduce him/herself and interact with others	CSE 1 Can understand simple and frequently used language materials; recognize basic information; can use short and simple discourse to greet and interact with others, introduce him/herself and interact with others

The cleared data is coded grammatically through CLAWS Part-of-speech tagger, a tagging software for English text having been continuously developed since the early 1980s. According to CLAWS7 Tagset, nouns in these texts are coded as ‘NN1’ for ‘singular form’ and ‘NN2’ for ‘plural form’. Open all 86 files in AntConc 3.4.3 (corpus analysis engine), and search ‘*_NN’ for concordance to get all nouns (singular and plural) in the corpus (the CSE). (Refer to Pic 2) And take the result as data, open the file of the result again in Antcon to get the frequencies of the nouns from the previous got data, which shows the most concerned ingredients.(Pic 3) By reading and judging the top 20 keywords, 11 of which were picked out to be analyzed as ingredients in the CSE.(Table 2)

Picture 2 Search ‘*_NN’ for Concordance by AntConc 3.4.3



Picture 3 Search '*_NN' for Frequency by Antconc 3.4.3



Picture 5 Example for Keyword cluster

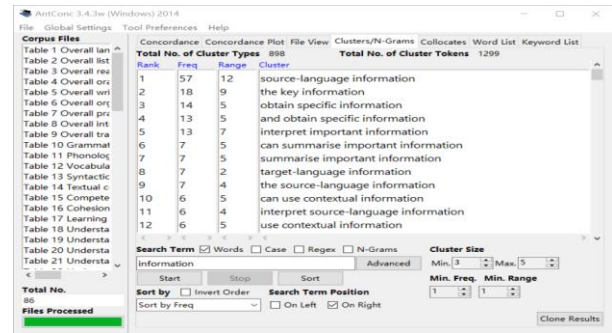
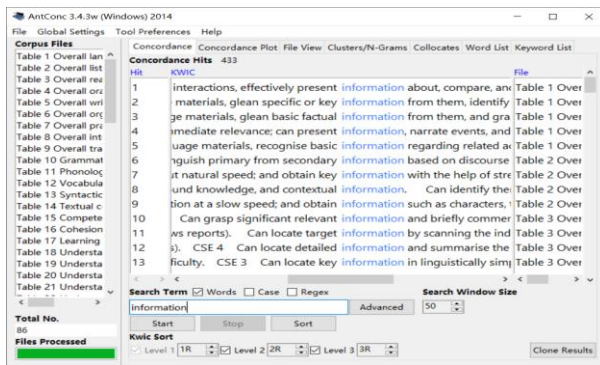


Table 2 Top 11 Keywords Selected from 20

Rank	frequency	Type
3	348	information
5	218	words
6	214	speech
7	175	topics
8	112	speaker
9	111	sentence
10	106	routine
12	101	expressions
13	98	content
14	97	texts
16	91	knowledge

According to the selected keywords, further analysis based on corpus was made as illustrated in Picture 4 and Picture 5, to observe the keywords' concordance and clusters so as to make understanding on the facets the CSE tried to consider.

Picture 4 Example for Keyword concordance



The second part of texts involves literatures on the CSE, which involves research papers published in and out of China, which are mostly downloaded from CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure), a China scholar website and few are from international journals and some official websites; official documents relating to teaching guides and policies at every level (compulsory education, senior middle school, vocational school and college education), some of which come from Baidu.com and some of which are published books gained from purchase.

Published papers from CNKI are searched by keying-in 'China's Standards of English Language Ability' with full-text searching and being selected form keywords summary reading one by one and scanning the full texts when necessary. The texts are analyzed from categorization for 2 stages: pre-publication, and post-publication, according to time, author, keywords, theme, subtheme, origin of the author, origin of the papers.

Research Findings

In this section, the interaction between the CSE and factors in its umwelt, like the CSE itself, teachers, learners, researchers and translators, such individuals as micro scope, is analyzed from perspective of ecosemiotics.

CSE as the Subject

The CSE, taken as a text in this research, is placed in the setting of an environment taking itself as a subject. Halliday and Hason (1976), defined 'text' as "a SEMANTIC unit: a unit not of form but of meaning. Thus it is related to a clause or sentence not by size but by REALIZATION, the coding of one symbolic system in another. A text does not CONSIST OF sentences; it is REALIZED BY, or encoded in, sentences." (Halliday and Hason, 1976)

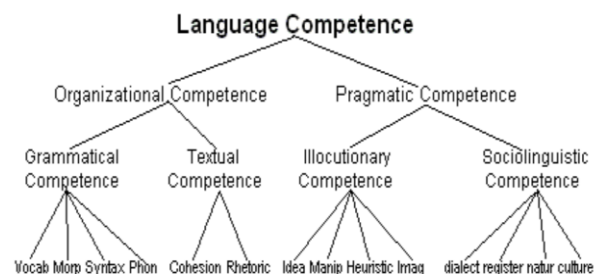
Sebeok(2000:29) thinks: "Texts incorporate the structural properties of the signifiers with which they are constructed, but they are not conceptually equivalent to the aggregate of their signifieds". Further, he puts forward, "the context is the situation" in which a text is "constructed, used, occurs or to which it refers".

From the corpus-based analysis, it is manifested that the main concerns of the CSE focus on: information, words, speech, topics, speaker, sentences, routine, expressions, content, texts and knowledge. These words, as elements the CSE respond to the environment it detects describing as the requirements by language teaching and learning, are employed over 90 times in this text with 40096 tokens. The word of the highest frequency, 'information', even reached 433 times appearance in the text, which can be interpreted that in order to meet the requirement of language teaching and learning, information is the first index to evaluate. And further exploration from the result of 'information' cluster, verbs collocate with 'information' are 'obtain', 'interpret', 'summarise', 'convey', 'use', 'remember' and so forth to indicate what activities should be assessed in language learning.

More words with high frequency are analyzed in the same way and the results come into being obvious that the CSE detects requirements from environments, as what qualities language learners should have, including activities they deal with 'information', 'words', 'speech', 'topics', 'sentence structures', 'texts', 'expressions' and 'knowledge'.

These components are in line with the framework of Language competence, which emphasizes organizational competence and pragmatic competence in language assessment from perspective of grammatical competence and textual competence, illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence as he illustrated in his famous tree figure: components of language competence.

Figure 4 Components of Language Competence (Bachman 1990, 87)



Bachman(1990) interprets organizational competence as abilities involving: "controlling the formal structure of language for producing or recognizing grammatically correct sentences, comprehending their propositional content, and ordering them to form texts." While pragmatic competence is interpret as "the abilities discussed thus far pertain to the organization of the linguistic signals that are used in communication, and how these signals are used to refer to persons, objects, ideas, and feelings. That is, they concern the relationships among signs and their referents. Equally important, in communicative language use, are

the relationships between these signs and referents on the one hand, and the language users and the context of communication, on the other.” (Bachman, 1990)

The construct of the CSE seriously put these theories into consideration and detect demands from language teaching and social life. On the contrary, the CSE itself depicts learners' language ability (through observing the results from corpus analysis by Antconc) from how they process 'the content', how they process 'the expressions', how they process 'information', how they process 'knowledge', how they process 'sentence', how they process 'speech', how they process 'text', how they process 'words'. Accordingly, the CSE came into being as three-stage, nine-level (three for each stage) scale to evaluate English ability from faucets of listening, reading, speaking, writing and translating to cope with demands.

By examining papers published on journals in and out of China, it can be find that the CSE is not compiled in one day and it does not only exist in one day. It has its history to be born and live and has its future to develop. In this process, it may contact and communicate with every element in its environment and as a consequence, may affect these components at the same time.

From the program of drafting such a standard started up, the CSE went through pregnant, birth, growth and now it's growing on the way with its sister (the Standard of Activities) being compiled. Each phase witnessed researchers' and applicants devotion to the CSE. Two stages are observed here, in this paper: pre-publication stage (from 2014 to the end of 2017) and post-publication stage (from 2018 to 2022, and up to this paper finished, the first month of 2023).

At the stage before the publication of the CSE, researches concentrated on probing the

demanding to launch such a scale and theory foundations to draft the scale.

The launch of the CSE is an adaptation. The interpreters involving policy makers and researchers detected the situation of English language teaching in China and made the decision to start the project to adopt this official document.

The State Council of the People's Republic of China announced its document On Deepening the Reform of the Examination and Enrollment System in Sep. 2014 to put forward that the job of the establishment of foreign language ability assessment system should be reinforced. This announcement can be inferred as the state concern on the event of setting up a coordinate assessment system to grant the nation to adapt the present situation for foreign language teaching and learning in China.

First of all, there is no consistent standard to guide English education for the learners from the beginning to college, even higher than college. Consequently, teaching, learning and testing on different levels have been conducted under its own guided principles. The two disadvantages may be manifested: one is the learners have to strive to make up the gap between levels while they step from one level of education to another. For example, elementary testing system doesn't involve speaking and listening in it, which triggers teaching and learning to a reading-centered focus. It results in the imbalance of learners' input and output ability.

Secondly, there is no coordinate guidance to shape the whole teaching process, which makes the gap between every step to the next level of education (primary school and junior middle school, junior middle school and senior middle school, senior middle school and college). This gap makes the teachers and learners hard to get

consistence in their teaching process. And the gap exists in different places as well: developed cities and remote countryside, big cities and small cities and even schools with good teaching facilities and schools with not-so-good teaching facilities in the same city.

Many reasons may serve for the problem; however, a fully organized testing system must be a vital one among them.

At last, there is no recognized standard to match world's requirements. As we have experienced lockdown during covid-19, a number of Chinese who intended to study overseas didn't get the chance to take examinations as IELTS or TOEFL. The embarrassing situation inspired researchers to think critically: Can we set a bridge to make the examinees to be tested in one examination system while the result can be recognized by another examination system? Can different testing systems set coordinate standards to evaluate examinees' language proficiency?

The problems call for a standard to stand out to cope with the situation and that is the reason why China's Standards of English Language Ability (the CSE) was launched to solve these problems. And further, the developers of the Standard are on the way to match its system to IELTS.

Here, on account of the demand coming from the environment, the birth of the CSE became possible. In other words, the CSE, the subject in this umwelt interpreted the meaning conveyed by the signs from the environment and adapted with its appearance. That's the result of interaction the CSE made with its environment. The government detected the signs the environment manifested: the inconsistency of the standard at different levels hindered language learners' improvement to mapping the gap between levels; the imbalance

between areas caused the gap between learners' English performance; the requirements from the English learners bearing intention to study abroad but qualification English tests (such as IELTS or TOEFL) suspended because of Covid-19. The government, as the interpreter of such signs, announced to optimize English testing scheme in On Deepening the Reform of the Examination and Enrollment System and the project to draft a national standard to coordinate English language teaching at all levels, later, named China's Standards of English Language Ability.

Papers published before publication of the CSE can present how it interacts with the environment as well. The numbers get slightly growth yearly. Three of four papers in 2014 are news for launching this official document. And the only one on scales of foreign language proficiency is written by Guo Baoxian(2014), who compared and commented scales of foreign language proficiency in the present world (including ACTFL, CEFR, CLB, ISLPR). The author hasn't gone on doing the research of such topic later, but the paper can be taken as an exploration to setting up a scale for learners in China.

While at the stage of post-publication, focus turned to how to apply the CSE into teaching practice and mapping it with other standards and testing systems in the world as well.

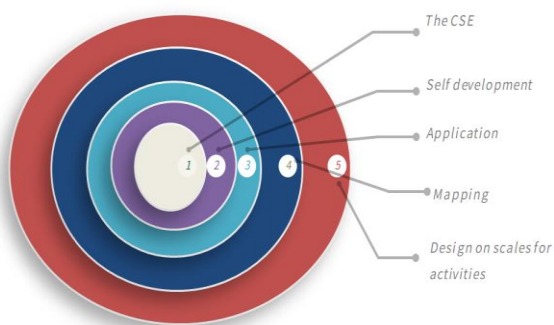
The CSE got its birth in the interaction with the factors in its umwelt and its application. Its self-development represents its adaptation to the environment. The CSE, as a sign, gains its growth in this interaction with these factors of the umwelt and achieves development in this process of interaction. And further, this development makes the possibility of living for the CSE being guiding document for English education.

Papers after the launch of the publication present a trend of growth for the CSE as a sign, from perspective of the number of papers, the theme and subtheme's expansion and observations on how the CSE interacts with these ingredients.

The numbers of papers on journals from CNKI got a booming after the launch of the CSE in 2018. And then the numbers go steadily in the following four years. The trend can be interpreted as a sign for the representation that researches oriented the CSE were recognized and developed by researchers. Through researchers' research, thinking, empirical practice and findings, the CSE gain it growth.

Another sign from the analysis of the journal papers is analysis on titles, subtitles and even subjects and keywords. The analysis indicates that the research centered on the CSE extends its domain radiating out from the scale gradually year by year and involve some subjects into the circles each year to enlarge its sphere, just like a tree having sensed space and sunlight and sprouted branches and leaves, achieved its growth ultimately. The growth of the CSE in years after its launch can be illustrated in Figure 5 as follow:

Figure 5 Domain's Extension of the Research Centered on the CSE after its Launch



The core in this figure represents the research in 2018, the year the CSE released. Forty-three researches in this year were mainly about the news of its publication, theoretical exploration, and its application on college English teaching and English teaching in vocational school generally with only two of them discussed application in reading and one in listening, of which, 27 counts on the CSE's self-development and 16 for application, according to statistics.

The number of papers on the CSE in 2019 got doubled with 54 for application and 40 for self-development, which is a sign that the scale gained much more attention than previous year and researchers' eyes are on its application, which is also verified by interviewees in my in-depth semi-structured interview. They agree that at the starting point of the scale's implement, they got 'very excited' and pay close attention on its development and application. One of them read through the standard and delivered a lecture for English teachers in Bohai University and later in the next year, a teacher in that school published a paper on the CSE.

Papers are fully centered on the exploration of development and application but the subjects got detailed expansion with specific research domains as speaking, listening, reading, writing and pragmatics competence involving almost every levels of schooling from primary school to college English education and even some specialized education like training for airhostess and chef engaged.

Another two big events in 2019 are the successful linkage between the CSE and UK Exams at the beginning of the year and mapping with TOFEL test at the end of the year to fulfill its goal to link China's language scales to global testing systems.

The number of application in the coming three years exceeds that of development far with 59 to 21, 51 to 27 and 61 to 19. Research domains extend further newly involving interpretation and translation and linking to in-house English proficiency test into consideration in 2020. Meanwhile, some researchers devote to verify validity of the CSE in detailed sub-scales and more application on sub-scales are probed.

While, in 2021, global linkages to the CEFR on listening and writing are discussed and domestic linkages with compulsory English teaching guide and English teaching in secondary school are concerned. At the same time, the leading person who drafted the CSE, Jianda Liu(2021), turned to his attention of upgrading the scale by “adding more descriptors based on typical language activities, building a descriptor bank with tagging information and providing more useful information for the development of other language standards”.

Therefore, in 2022, typical language activities centered descriptors are discussed more and application is extended from language input to more about language output. Corpus based analysis on the CSE is detected.

Interaction between the CSE and Teachers

In the relationship between the CSE and teacher, the latter is easily to be considered as the subject, who applies the CSE into their teaching, self-improvement and even in their family English language policy. While seldom take the CSE as the subject, whose *umwelt* entailing in teacher as an ingredient.

The interaction between the CSE and teacher is no more than a process of communication, involving perception and interpretation. In this process, the relationship between the CSE and teacher is considered as two subjects, each of

them is independent and not subject to the other. Teachers perceived the reasonability and operability the CSE bearing, and applied to their objective-making, teaching material option, teaching plan mapping, teaching procedure design and at the same time, gained their self-improvement by consulting the CSE. And the CSE detects teachers' needs and gets booming while perceived, applied and employed in teachers' self-improvement.

But findings from published papers tell that its reasonability is grasped by teachers and operability is not. Teachers think self-assessment scales are most applicable, which can be applied directly. The problem was detected by Fan Tingting & Zeng Yongqiang(2019), who construct reading ability attributes tagging framework on the basis of China's Standards of English Language Ability.

What's more, Data from the in-depth interview shows that when teachers making their teaching objectives, they are not likely to taking the CSE into consideration, firstly because it's beyond most teachers' reach (for it's not of that popularity) and secondly because in-house student training plan are primarily teachers' concern while they drafting their teaching syllabus. Then the operability and popularity may become the target to work for the CSE and through the process, the CSE may gain its growth.

The CSE may gain its growth through teachers' planning their lessons and designing their teaching procedures by involving the scale into consideration. The CSE is drafted for language assessment primarily, however, aiming to get involved in learning, teaching and assessment all in. Therefore, teachers' application to teaching plan mapping, teaching material selecting and teaching procedure designing can

push the CSE forward and may be taken as supplement of the scale. Meanwhile, teachers' practices boost application of the CSE and support the CSE to achieve growth further.

Interaction between the CSE and Learners

The CSE gives learners signs what they can interpret as what they are required to study while acquiring English in China, especially self-assessment scales application in learning process involvement.

Learners' application of the CSE mainly comes from teachers' introduction because the CSE hasn't reached the level of wide popularity known to all levels in the environment of language learning yet, wherein the CSE is broadly employed by individuals relating to English language learning. However, once it is introduced to learners through certain application, it can be acknowledged by learners and be used further to provoke learners' interests, to set up their learning objectives, to help them choose appropriate teaching services and periodically to evaluate their language aptitude. In this communication, learners successively detect information they received from the CSE and improve themselves accordingly. And on the contrary, the process provides information for the CSE that how it is employed, how well it is employed and what should it do to adapt to the application by learners. For example, in the semi-structured interview, the interviewee feels that "The scale is not very practical because when making self-assessment, she has to turn to every scale to pick out scale 5 to read and evaluate". The feedback may encourage researchers to re-develop the Standard to meet users' need, which may be taken as a growth of sign after interpreting information sent by learners.

Interaction between the CSE and Researchers

Researchers acquire its status as another element in the environment centered by the CSE. Interaction between the CSE and researchers has been going throughout the whole process of the growth of the CSE as a sign, and at the same time, the researchers gain their growth.

Before the release of the CSE, researchers tend to explore theoretical basis to draft this national language assessment scale from perspective of comparison of language scales around the world, discussion of language assessment theory, expedition of the structure for the CSE, clarification of significance and objectives to draft the CSE and examination on scientific methodology to delineate language abilities.

After the release of the CSE, researchers geared their attention from the development of the CSE to its application. This transition can be labeled as an adjustment to the growth of the CSE. Apparently, the researchers are striving to apply the CSE to multi-level English teaching (including primary school, high school, secondary school, vocational school and college) from dimensions of reading, listening, and then writing and speaking, interpretation and translation and even involving pragmatic ability and construct ability. On the contrary, the CSE may get development by this chance the researchers' endeavour. Researchers' published papers and works form paratexts for the CSE, labeled as a part of the CSE, precisely the part of extension of the subject in its umwelt.

Another group of beneficiaries in this interaction are researchers themselves. Taking Liu Jianda, the leading expert in the project of drafting the CSE, as example, from 2014 up to now, he has published 34 papers about the CSE on Chinese journals. Subjects of his papers manifest development of the CSE from zero to

multi-dimension application and addition. At the early stage of the project, he detected the theoretical framework of constructing a language scale for Chinese English learners in his Basic ideas for the development of English proficiency rating scale in China (Liu Jianda, 2015a), Exploration of foreign language evaluation based on standards (Liu Jianda, 2015b) and addressed significance of the CSE in China's Standards of English Language Ability: Returning to the Essence of Education (Liu Jianda, 2017a), Developing China's Standards of English Language Ability Scientifically (Liu Jianda, 2017b); later after the CSE implemented, his interests turned to the application of the CSE to English teaching, English learning and English assessment and devoted to formative assessment in college English teaching and further explored reform of non-majored college English teaching. After linking the CSE to Aptis, IELTS and CEFR, Liu Jianda continued to develop the CSE from perspective of validation and English Textbooks. His progress indicates research focus variation of the CSE and the CSE gain its progress at the meantime while paratexts centered on the CSE produced successively. By the chance, the CSE gains its growth. And this process is so-called semiosis.

The Interaction between the CSE and Translators and Interpreters

The Interaction between the CSE and Translators is not as obvious as other relationships mentioned in this paper afore, mainly because the CSE is the second practice to define translation and interpretation abilities after the Interagency Language Roundtable scale, the standard grading scale for language proficiency in the United States' Federal-level service. There's not much experience to borrow and translators and interpreters have not given much attention to such assessment.

However, researchers and college teachers have already arouse awareness to the application of the CSE translation and interpretation scales into translators and interpreters' cultivation.

Conclusion

Sustainable growth based on interpretation to information the umwelt sending to China's Standards of English Language Ability has successively achieved through the process in which the CSE drafted, implemented, applied and further developed.

The CSE, as a language ability scale, interprets its evaluated targets' English ability via descriptors which coming from researchers of the scale interpreting English language performance. In this semiosis, English language performances are signs, researchers are interpreters and descriptors are objects. And descriptors form signs, the CSE becomes objects and researchers are interpreters in the successive semiosis. Then, the CSE becomes a sign, learners, teachers, researchers and translators are interpreters, and their application work as objects in next semiosis. Then, the continuum forms, in which the former objects become signs in the later semiosis.

The CSE and its umwelt, set up by elements as learners, teachers, researchers and translator and interpreters interact constantly to exchange information and ultimately achieve growth for both parties (the CSE and elements in its umwelt), which implies that semiosis in this case is dynamic.

The CSE and its elements from micro scope interact with two directions; grow at both parties in the interaction; and reach sustainable development at large. The CSE can only survive in such sustainable growth by detecting

what demands its environment requires and developing itself promptly. The project was funded by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP), China's leading foreign language publisher, initially and then transited to the National Education Examination Authority (NEEA), a institution founded in 1987 under supervision of the Ministry of Education, in late 2014, which grant the CSE status of a national project under the auspices of a governmental organization. (Yan Jin et al, 2017) Such big- concerned project should get survival and development for long. Then, sustainable development should be achieved to guarantee its growth. This is deemed as a fate of the CSE, as a sign.

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