A Comparative Evaluation of Materials Selection in the Integrated Course of *NHCE* and *NPCE*

ZHU Lingjie[a],*; HUANG Qian[a]

[a] School of Foreign Languages, Zhejiang University of Technology, Zhijiang College, Shaoxing, China.
*Corresponding author.

Abstract

Based on the theories of textbook evaluation, this research chooses materials from the first and second volumes of the Student's Books in *New Progressive College English Integrated Course* (short for *NPCE*, published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press in 2017) and *New Horizon College English Reading and Writing Course* (short for *NHCE*, published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2015) as research subjects for comparison and analysis. The paper analyses the two sets of books in terms of language, contents and exercises according to the *College English Course Requirements*, and tries to find out which one can better cater for the needs of students. The comparative analyses mainly includes word quantity, word difficulty, word frequency, the proportion of new words, the total number of sentences and their complexity, the genres and topics of the texts and the comprehensiveness of exercises. Results indicate that *NHCE* is more suitable for students in terms of language and picks passages which have different emphases from *NPCE* and focuses more on arousing students' thinking, while the topics and exercises in *NPCE* are more comprehensive. Both sets of books have their advantages and disadvantages. It is expected that this research will provide textbook compilers with help and reference in their future work.

Key words: College English; *NPCE*; *NHCE*; Textbook evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the new century, education has been continuously reformed, and various college English textbooks have sprouted, each of them having different characteristics and quality. As pointed out by Suarez (cited in Zhao & Zheng, 2006), 98% of in-class instruction stems from textbooks rather than teachers, and 90% of after-class assignment is also instructed by textbooks. The textbooks serve as a medium between teachers and students, which enables educational activities to be carried out. To some extent, the selection of proper college English textbooks not only affects the selection and application of teachers' teaching methods, but also plays an essential role in students' learning process. Therefore, it is extremely important to use scientific textbook evaluation theories to compare and analyze teaching materials.

Researchers abroad began researches on materials evaluation since the 1980s. Seaton (1982) makes a checklist including some detailed items to evaluate a textbook. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) put forward that textbook evaluation is a process of matching and the using of checklist is necessary. Detailed and sophisticated as these two checklists are, some of the contents have become out of date or unreasonable with the changing situation of syllabus development and teaching reality. Grant (1987) proposed that a set of good textbook should satisfy the need of syllabus, learner and teacher. He divides the evaluation process into three stages: initial evaluation from the perspective of theory, detailed evaluation from the perspective of teaching reality, and the last stage, in-use evaluation from the users' opinions about the textbook. Cunningsworth (1995) divides the process of evaluation into two steps — impressionistic overview and in-depth evaluation. Among the different approaches and criteria, they can be divided into four types: integrated, detailed, teacher-centered and learner-centered.

However, there have been relatively fewer researches in this field in China, most of which are based on foreign

studies, and our current work of compiling college English textbooks are still far from satisfactory. Zhuang (2006) pointed out three main problems in textbook compiling in China. First, it does not pay adequate attention to theories in the course of compiling; second, it copies others' ideas and methods without considering the national conditions; third, it lacks a scientific, complete and practical evaluation system. According to Wen & Mo (2013), textbooks at home fail to properly consider the difficulty of texts, the amount of exercises and new words and the connection with high school textbooks, and lack the attention to teachers' career.

This paper analyses *NHCE* (*New Horizon College English*) and *NPCE* (*New Progressive College English*), two sets of currently-used textbooks in Chinese universities and colleges for non-English majors, comparing the types and topics of the narrow-sensed materials, the quantity and complexity of sentences, and the quantity, difficulty and frequency of vocabulary in these sets of books. This research is devoted to exploring and finding textbooks that are more suitable for Chinese college students' English learning, helping the editors in the subsequent textbook compiling work and promoting the steady development of college English teaching.

2. AN OVERVIEW OF MATERIALS EVALUATION

2.1 Definitions of Materials and Textbook

According to Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, textbook is "a book that teaches a particular subject and that is used especially in schools and colleges." In Collins COBUILD Advanced Dictionary of American English, a textbook is "a book containing facts about a particular subject that is used by people studying that subject." However, terms like "textbooks", "course books" and "courses" are often used interchangeably with "materials" (Chen & Sun, 2011). As suggested by Tomlinson (1988), language materials refer to anything that is used by students or teachers to facilitate language learning. Chen and Sun (2011) defined the concept of materials as "anything used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of a language in broad sense, such as course books, cassettes, videos, CD-ROMs, dictionaries, grammar books, readers, workbooks, teacher's books, photocopied materials, and other authentic materials, such as newspapers, photographs, advertisements, radio/TV programs". According to them, in the narrow sense, materials are the textbooks which are considered as the core materials in language learning. As we can see, both textbooks and materials are supposed to teach students something to learn. In this thesis, materials represent the narrow sense, meaning the passages and exercises in textbooks.

2.2 Characters of Good Materials

According to Cunningsworth (1984), the teaching materials should meet the needs of the learners and be consistent with the goals of the language learning program. It should also achieve the purpose of enabling learners to master language skills efficiently. It is necessary to consider the learnability of the materials, and to consider the relationship between language, learning process and learners. Cheng and Sun (2011) concluded 20 features of good materials which are partly taken from Tomlinson (1998). To name a few of them, materials should help learners to develop confidence; materials should meet learners' needs; materials should get the learners ready to acquire the points being taught; materials should expose the learners to language in authentic use; materials should draw learners' attention to linguistic features of the input; materials should provide the learners with opportunities to use the target languages to achieve communicative purposes; materials should permit a silent period at the beginning of instruction; materials should not rely too much on controlled practice; materials should provide opportunities for outcome feedback; materials should introduce learning methods and strategies to solve problems; materials should provide a stimulus to learning; materials should be student-centered.

To sum up, materials are supposed to be student-oriented. For specific texts, they should be representative in different genres, humanistic in various topics and authentic for daily life use. For exercises, they should aim to improve learners' skills. Only in that way can materials truly be attractive for learners.

2.3 Purpose of Materials Evaluation

There have been heated discussion about the role materials play in the teaching process, but there is no doubt that materials evaluation has been one of the most critical influences a teacher needs to take into consideration when making decisions.

Pauline and Kevin (1992) proposed that there are two main functions of evaluation. First, evaluation serves as a means of explaining and confirming existing procedures; second, it also helps to gain information to bring about innovation or change. McDonough and Shaw (1993) suggested that the evaluation of teaching materials benefits us in two ways: it can be helpful to choose and use the most suitable ones for language programs; and people can evaluate the course books that are already in use so that they can adapt the materials to meet students' and teachers' needs.

According to Cheng (2011), there are six aspects to be discussed about the purposes and meanings of materials evaluation. First, materials evaluation can help educational administrative department, schools and teachers to make right decisions when choosing textbooks. In current China, the textbooks adopted by most of accredited and certified schools are likely to be evaluated and chosen by

educational administrative departments. Before finally choosing the ideal one, they usually organize a certain number of people to analyze and evaluate some optional textbooks, taking students' needs into account. Apart from the educational administrative departments, more and more textbooks are chosen by schools and teachers. This kind of pre-use evaluation is to avoid unnecessary trouble in later use. Second, materials evaluation can be useful in adaptation for teachers in actual teaching. There is no textbook which can completely meet one specific group of students' needs. Therefore, teachers are supposed to make adaptations based on what students actually need according to the evaluation results. Third, materials evaluation helps educational administrative departments, schools and teachers to re-evaluate the textbooks. This kind of post-use evaluation is mainly to verify whether the previous choice is right. Then, materials evaluation is beneficial to textbook compilers in that it help them improve the weaknesses of their books found in current use. Some foreign language textbooks used at home, originated from excellent foreign textbooks. The well-known textbook *New Concept English* is a case in point. Published in British in 1967 and introduced to China in 1985, *New Concept English* has gained tremendous population since then and had different versions among the market. Until 1997, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press gained the copyright and invited the author, L.G. Alexander, to revise the sets of books specifically for Chinese, which led to the current version. Besides, materials evaluation helps textbook compilers recognize how the textbooks contribute to students' learning, considering the actual situation that some compilers failed to notice after the textbooks were published. Only in this way can textbooks be more considerate and humanistic. Last, materials evaluation is conductive to the study of materials evaluation itself in the long run. All those merits and demerits in the process of evaluation can be the valuable experience.

Therefore, evaluating and choosing suitable textbooks is of importance for both teaching and learning. Materials evaluation can help teachers deepen their existing knowledge of teaching, such as considering the students' needs, and then adapt materials in practical teaching; it also helps textbook compilers reevaluate textbooks already in use, and then absorb the advantages of the existing textbooks to develop better ones in future.

2.4 Approaches of Materials Evaluation

Researchers abroad began researches on materials evaluation since 1980s and each of them has proposed a well-designed checklist of their own. Cunningsworth's revised a quick-reference checklist (1995) for selection and evaluation of the textbook including the objectives and methods, design and organization, language content, skills, topics, pedagogy, teacher's reference books

and practical consideration. He proposed a detailed comparison checklist for each language layer, from which we can see that he was concerned about language itself and regarded it as a system. He believed that language can be divided into smaller units, such as functions, structures, and that different levels of language in vocabulary, pronunciation and text can be classified and distinguished. For example, in order to evaluate the linguistic content of the textbook, the evaluation criteria should include language form and usage, grammar, vocabulary, speech, text analysis and so on, and then the comparison checklist would focus on certain aspects of the language, such as grammatical forms, vocabulary, collocation and so on.

McDonough and Shaw's (1993) evaluation model consisted of two stages — external and internal evaluation. The former means a simple overall judgment of the textbook from the outside such as covers, introductions, contents. If the textbook passed external evaluation, then it would be evaluated by a more detailed and concrete internal assessment, which details the introduction of language skills, the grading and sorting of textbooks, the types of materials used in specific textbooks, the integration of real language elements, the relationship between exercises and learners, and the adaptability of the learning style of teachers and different learners.

Breen and Candlin (cited in Wang, 2010) also divided the evaluation process into two stages. The first stage focuses on the function and use of textbooks, covering 4 aspects, namely, the objective and content, the requirements for learners, the requirements for teachers and the function of it as in-class resources. The second stage focuses on the elements about learners, which are: the needs and interest of learners, the learning approach of learners and the process of both teaching and learning in class. They suggest that both teachers and learners should take part in the whole evaluation to make the process more reasonable.

Tomlinson (1998) proposed another categorization of materials evaluation, including pre-use evaluation, whilst-use/in-use evaluation and post-use evaluation. A pre-use evaluation is carried out to predict the value of materials prior to their use. A whilst-use/in-use evaluation is performed to measure the value of the materials during their use. A post-use evaluation is conducted to assess the worth and the effects of the materials after their use. All these types can serve different evaluation purposes.

The approach adopted in this thesis draws on Cunningsworth's (1995) revised quick-reference checklist, mainly focusing on grammatical forms, vocabulary, collocation, text analysis and so on.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 Research Questions

The research aims at constructing a material evaluation framework and conducting a comparative evaluation of the integrated course of two sets of currently-used college English textbooks, namely, *NHCE* (*New Horizon College English*) and *NPCE* (*New Progressive College English*). The research is to find out the answers to the following questions:

a. Which set of books has more suitable vocabulary and sentences?

b. Which set of books has more satisfactory texts in terms of variety of topics?

c. Which set of books has enough and various exercises to reinforce language skills?

These questions will be answered based on the results of the comparative evaluation of the two sets of books.

3.2 Research Subjects

Two sets of widely-used textbooks are chosen in this research. The first set is *New Progressive College English Integrated Course (NPCE)*, compiled by Li Yinhua and published by Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press in 2017. This research is to analyze the first two students' integrated course books of the set. There are 6 units in each book and one text and two reading passages in each unit.

The other set of books under comparison is the third edition of *New Horizon College English Reading and Writing Course (NHCE)*, compiled by Zheng Shutang and published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in 2015. This research is to analyze the first two volumes of students' books. There are 8 units in each book and two texts in each unit.

3.3 Research Tools

This research uses Excel 2010, Wordsmith 4.0 and Range 32 to collect and analyze statistical data. Excel 2010 is used for basic data, such as the total number, the average length of the text and the proportion of new words in main texts.

Wordsmith 4.0 serves as a retrieval program to retrieve all the words in these four books. It can retrieve the search items specified by users from large amount of data, show the total number of its occurrence, and display all the occurrences of the search items in lines of context. It includes three tools: Concordance, Keyword and WordList. The WordList tool is used to produce a list of ordered words that appear in the target files. These can be utilized to compare the frequency of a word in different text files. In the WordList, we can compare two lists, or carry out an analysis for stylistic comparison purposes. The present research uses this tool to produce a list of the most frequently used words in CET-4 and those in the two sets of books.

Range 32 is used to compare the vocabulary of different texts at the same time. It can be used to compare a text against vocabulary lists to see what words in the text are and are not in the lists, and to see what percentage of the items in the text are covered by the lists. The lists are compiled by Nation and other experts who did a long-term research on English vocabulary. The word lists contain three BASEWRDs with climbing difficulty levels. BASEWRD 1 and BASEWRD 2 contain the most frequently-used 1000 word families respectively. There are 4119 words in BASEWRD 1, and 3708 words in BASEWRD 2. The two BASEWRDs cover about 87% words used in English texts. Apart from the basic words, BASEWRD 3 contains 570 word families (3107 words) – some academic words used in college and middle school textbooks. The words not in the lists are rarely used vocabulary, and the more a text contains these words, the more difficult it is for people to understand.

3.4 Research Methods

The objective data of a total of 68 passages in the four books are collected. After reading through the whole 68 passage, the author uses Excel 2010 and Wordsmith 4.0 to calculate the quantity of the vocabulary, the quantity of sentence and complex sentence, the length of each passage, and the ratio of new words in main texts and of complex sentence in those texts. Then the author also uses Wordsmith 4.0 for detail analysis such as word frequency to find out how much they are in line with the words in CET-4, and uses Range 32 for measuring word difficulty. In the meantime, the author also analyzes the genres and topics of each passage, the comprehensiveness of exercises and then compares the two sets of books.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Comparisons of Vocabulary and Sentences

4.1.1 Comparisons of Vocabulary

Vocabulary is fundamental for the development of the five basic skills: listening, speaking, writing, reading and translation. The small number of vocabulary in store is definitely the stepping stone in students' English learning. Therefore, to enlarge students' vocabulary is the priority for a textbook. In addition, a certain number of new words and expressions should be taken into account to meet the requirements of the *College English Curriculum Requirements*. A scientific textbook is the kind whose new words are spread through the text and has proper proportion. In that way, students can feel easy and delighted to learn.

According to Cunningsworth (1984), the proportion of new words in a text should not exceed 5% of the total because under the opposite condition students are to have difficulty in understanding the whole idea of the text and cannot memorize these new words efficiently under the premise of understanding the context . After analyzing the statistics with the help of Excel 2010, the result of the quantity and the average proportion of the new words in each book's main text (there are 6 main texts in *NPCE*, 8 in *NHCH*) are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1
Quantity and average proportion of the new words

Item	NPCE1	NPCE2	NHCE1	NHCE2
Total size of new vocabulary	241w	243w	367w	374w
Length of the texts	3948w	4414w	6589w	6890w
Average proportion of the new words	6.10%	5.51%	5.57%	5.43%

(The letter "w" in the table stands for "words".)

From Table 1, it is easily concluded that the average proportion of the new words in each book is relatively high. Although both *NPCE* and *NHCE* cut the proportion in the second book, which is in line with the standard, the proportions are still higher than 5%, especially in book1 of *NPCE*, which exceeds 6%. In the respect of new words' ratio, both sets of books may pose difficulty for college students who do not have a solid language basis.

In addition, the recurrence rate of the new words should be attached great importance to. With the help of Wordsmith 4.0, this research chooses 50 of the most frequently examined words in CET-4 and compares the recurring times in *NPCE* and *NHCE*. The results of high frequency words in the two sets of books are listed in Table 2. The second, third, fifth and sixth columns stand for the times the words occur in each set of books.

Table 2
Word frequency in *NPCE* and *NHCE*

Technology	NPCE 10	NHCE 8	Silver	NPCE 1	NHCE 1
consequence	0	4	temperature	1	0
industry	7	0	account	1	3
frequent	0	4	adapt	1	1
assistant	3	3	alcohol	1	7
criticism	0	1	associate	3	3
effective	3	1	benefit	6	6
innovation	6	0	civilization	3	2
inhabitant	0	1	community	7	6
attach	2	2	conflict	3	3
decline	1	5	demand	2	5
potential	1	5	indicate	0	3
recession	0	1	opportunity	3	11
abrupt	1	1	productive	0	1
prevent	2	0	supply	11	2
profession	3	1	unique	1	3
control	6	13	addition	3	2
evidence	2	3	commitment	2	7
expression	1	4	concern	9	2
force	4	6	consider	5	13
involve	2	3	consumption	2	0
process	5	7	contribute	1	3
reverse	0	1	ethic	1	0
require	4	4	excellent	2	4
shortage	4	1	wireless	0	2

From the table, it can be seen that there are 15 words in the list whose frequency is higher in *NPCE* than that in *NHCE*, 25 words occur more times in *NHCE* than in *NPCE*, and the rest 10 words have the same frequency in both sets of books.

According to Wang (2006), important words should be repeated at least 7 times in the upcoming materials so as to facilitate the memorization the words. In order to test which set of books pays more attention to this aspect, the new words listed in the Glossary of Text A are entered into Wordsmith 4.0 to calculate their recurrence rate. Table 3 reveals the results of new words frequency in the two sets of books.

Table 3
New word frequency in *NPCE* and *NHCE*

Frequency	NPCE		NHCE	
	Number of new words	Ratio (%)	Number of new words	Ratio (%)
>=7	24	4.96	14	1.89
>=5	54	11.16	31	4.18
>=3	120	24.79	116	15.65

It can be seen from Table 3 that the ratio of new words occurring more than 7 times in *NPCE* (4.96%) is higher than that in *NHCE* (1.89%). So are the ratios of words whose frequencies are higher than 3 and 5 times. Therefore, in terms of word frequency, *NPCE* is more consistent with the theory proposed in Wang (2006), thus may have a more positive effect on students' vocabulary memorizing and building. However, the words in *NHCE* accord more with the requirement of CET-4, which is more conducive to students passing CET-4.

Range 32 is used to measure the difficulty of words, and the total number of words in the two sets of books and distribution of words in each BASEWRD and Not in the Lists of the data in Range 32 are shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Word difficulty

Tokens/% Word Lists	NPCE	NHCE
One	1818/39.75	1838/37.83
Two	687/ 15.02	912/ 18.77
Three	468/ 10.23	687/ 14.14
Not in the lists	1601/ 35.00	1422/29.27
Total	4574	4859

(Token: the number of words occurring in each BASEWRD)

As the proportion of words shown in Table 4, the percentage of BASEWRD1 in NPCE (39.75%) is higher than that in NHCE (37.83%). But the percentages of BASEWRD2 and BASEWRD3 words in NHCE (18.77%, 14.14%) are both higher than those in NPCE (15.02%, 10.23%). However, NHCE (35%) has a higher percentage

of Not in the Lists Words than NHCE (29.27%). The figures show that there are more basic words in NPCE than in NHCE, while there are more intermediate-to-advanced-level words in NHCE than in NPCE, and there are less rare words in NHCE than in NPCE. Therefore, it can be concluded that there are more suitable words for college students in NHCE. However, words in NPCE are scattered among various difficulty levels, with more rare words and low-level words which are not as efficient in terms of vocabulary building for college students.

4.1.2 Comparisons of Sentences

The role sentences play in the text is equal to that the words play. The number of complex sentences affects students' comprehension of the passage as well, which can also be defined as a measurement of the difficulty of the passage. And the ratios of the complex sentences in each book are lis Table 5.

Table 5
The ratios of the complex sentences

Item	NPCE1	NPCE2	NHCE1	NHCE2
The number of complex sentences	398	473	460	501
The total number of sentences	644	717	849	882
The ratio of the complex sentences	61.80%	65.97%	54.18%	56.80%

Table 5 shows the ratio of complex sentences in *NPCE* is obviously higher than that in *NHCE*, which means the texts in *NPCE* are relatively harder for students to comprehend, thus they may lose their interests in learning. On the other hand, with the improvement of students' reading competence, the difficulty of the passages increases accordingly, as is indicated by the higher ratio of complex sentences in the second books of each set.

4.2 Comparisons of Texts

4.2.1 Quantity and Length

The quantity and length of texts are most directly concerned with their difficulty. According to Nuttall (1982), students are likely to develop their interests in textbooks which consist of short and easy passages in that it can quickly meet students' satisfaction. The author has set up the statistics of the four books, and the quantity and average length of texts can be seen below in Table 6.

Table 6
Quantity and average length of texts in the four books

Book	*NPCE1*	*NPCE2*	*NHCE1*	*NHCE2*
Quantity	18	18	16	16
Average length	640.444	675.389	815.5	855.1875

From the table, it can be seen that there is not much difference between the two sets of books in terms of the quantity of texts, while the average length of texts in *NHCE* is obviously higher than those in *NPCE*, thus *NHCE* may demand more patience from students who are not used to longer texts. However, considering the results of sentence difficulty analysis in 4.1.2, sentences in *NHCE* are also relatively less complex than those in *NPCE*, thus students have longer texts that read more fluently. Therefore, the two sets of book actually present different reading experiences to students, which may further lead to different teaching styles. On the other hand, analyzed in longitudinal view, the length in the second book of each set is higher than the first one, which is considered to be proper for students' learning development.

4.2.2 Type and Topic

The types and topics of materials are equally important. To be clear, both *NHCE* and *NPCE* apply "narrow reading", put forward by Krashen (1987), which means the materials of several passages of the same topic fairly contribute to students' learning because with the knowledge accumulation of background information in hand, they can easily understand the main idea of similar articles and gain confidence. There are many kinds of different types of materials such as narratives, argumentations, expositions, periodical extracts, advertisements, speeches. And there should be various types in a book as much as possible to meet students' need and broaden their horizon. Table 7 and Table 8 are the results of the classification of types and topics of the materials in the four books, after analyzing 18 texts from *NPCE* and 16 texts from *NHCE*.

Table 7
Types of the materials in the four books

Type Book	Narrative	Argumentation	Exposition	Description	Letter	Interview	Diary	Speech	Essay
NPCE1	9	2	3	1	1	1		1	
NPCE2	8	2	4				1		3
NHCE1	4	5	3		1			1	2
NHCE2	7	7	1						1

It can be seen from the Table 7 that *NPCE* has relatively more types than *NHCE*. Although it contains many traditional types mentioned above, especially narrative, it also has other types of materials such as description, letter, interview, speech and essay. However, the types of materials in *NHCE* are not as varied; there is a lack of other types besides the traditional ones.

Table 8
Topics of the materials in the two sets of books

Subject Matter	*NPCE*	Percentage	*NHCE*	Percentage
Social Science	**3**	**25%**	**2**	**12.5%**
Education	2	16.67%	1	6.25%
Sport	0	0	1	6.25%
Political Science	1	8.33%	0	0
Natural Science	**5**	**41.67%**	**1**	**6.25%**
Environment	2	16.67%	0	0
Technology	3	25%	1	6.25%
Humanities	**4**	**33.33%**	**13**	**81.25%**
Feminism	0	0	1	6.25%
Heroism	0	0	1	6.25%
Language	0	0	1	6.25%
Dream	1	8.33%	0	0
History	1	8.33%	0	0
Employment	0	0	1	6.25%
Human and Animal	0	0	1	6.25%
Psychology	0	0	1	6.25%
Philosophy	0	0	1	6.25%
Interpersonal Relationship	2	16.67%	6	37.5%
Total	**12**	**100%**	**16**	**100%**

And from the Table 8, each set of books has their characteristics and emphases to place on. NPCE adopts a comprehensive view, including within its scope of discussion events in modern or ancient times, at home or abroad, the current popular theme "Chinese Dream", the urgent and life-threatening environmental problems, the eternal topic — love, or the bitterly painful memory of war-time, etc. However, NHCE pays almost an exclusive attention to humanity (81.25%), trying to convey the true values in daily life, which far exceeds natural science (6.25%) and social science (12.25%).

On the one hand, the topics of materials in both sets of books are authentic. A textbook which includes authentic topics is close to students, arouses their interests and contributes to language learning. For college students who have already dabbled in English, they clearly know what they want to learn for their future career, and the authentic materials can provide them with certain background knowledge and satisfy their needs in learning, thus helping them improve the communicative competence. For teachers, good materials that put language in authentic use can be conducive to their teaching, for they can be more creative when students are immersed in English. As shown in the footnotes of the textbooks, the texts in NPCE are extracted from periodicals like Reader's Digest and Science, newspapers, such as China Daily, The Washington Post, or are taken from some websites like http://www.moralstories.org/. Students can be reassured

that they have an access to pure English materials and are motivated.

On the other hand, *NHCE* is not as considerate as *NPCE* in terms of cross-cultural awareness. With extensive and profound history, China now is the second economic entity, exerting an essential impact on the international stage. As an international language in contemporary China, English should shoulder the responsibility of not only accepting foreign cultures but also conveying Chinese culture to the world. Quite a few foreign people are interested in Chinese, and they are thirsty for more knowledge about China, such as Chinese traditional festivals, local specialty and living habits and so on. It is a pity that college students who have learned English for so many years cannot display the Chinese culture to them in fluent and competent speeches. Therefore, the current college English textbooks should place some emphases on Chinese culture. There is at least one reading passage in each unit of *NPCE*, like "China's Water Situation" in Unit 5 of *NPCE*1 and "The Butterfly Lovers — The Legend of Liang and Zhu" in Unit 2. However, *NHCE* does not have a part about Chinese culture, which leaves much to be improved. Adequate background information about China should instill in the textbooks so that students can apply it whenever they communicate with foreigners. Only in this way can they realize the importance of English as a communication tool and can they deepen their cultural identity.

Furthermore, *NHCE* fails to pay more attention to the field of natural science, and therefore fails to connect the inner world of human beings to the natural environment on which our existence depends. For example the popular concept of ecological protection (humans should live in harmony with the nature and protect it from being destroyed), and the recent development of science and technology that have changed the shape and depth of our civilization are among the fundamental issues needed to be addressed by modern people. The topics concerning natural sciences are thus important for nurturing a sense of responsibility in college students other than instilling in them the knowledge of how the machine of modern world operates.

4.3 Comparisons of Exercises

Exercises are an essential and dispensable part to enforce the comprehension of the texts and the usage of the vocabulary, phrases and sentence structures. Therefore, in the following part, the exercises of two sets of books will be analyzed from two different respects of quantity and skill types according to the detail tasks.

First of all, there is an introduction about exercises in the two sets of books. To be clear, this section of the analysis only focuses on the exercises following the main text, considering the efficiency in actual situation — teachers usually pay attention to the main exercises because of the limitation of time. On the one hand, there

are two major sections of exercises in *NPCE*. One section is presented after the text, which centers on key words and expressions, including "Understanding the Text" and "Focusing on Language in Context". In "Understanding the Text", there is "Text Organization" which is presented by the form of a table or questions, and "Comprehension Check" that contains main ideas, details and difficult sentences of the text, illustrated by the form of blank filling, questions and multiple choices respectively. In "Focusing on Language in Context", there is "Key Words & Expressions", "Usage/ Collocation/ Word Formation", practiced by the form of underlined part replacing or sentence completing with the word or phrase in brackets, "Comprehensive Practice", "Cloze" and "Translation (with Chinese and half of the sentences in English given for practicing sentence patterns)". For the record, there is another part of "Advanced Translation" (Chinese to English) in the second book of *NPCE*, abiding by the step-by-step approach. The other section is presented after the whole reading passages in each unit called "Integrated Skills Practicing", containing three major parts, namely, "Viewing and Listening (blank filling)", "Speaking (role-play, interview, group discussion)", "Writing".

On the other hand, there are four sections of exercises after Text A in *NHCE*. The first section is "Reading Comprehension", which is similar to *NPCE*, including "Understanding the Text" presented by questions and "Critical Thinking" with open questions and discussion. The second is "Language Focus", most of which are similar to *NPCE*, including "Word in use", "Word building", "Expressions in use" with the form of filling the blank with given words and phrases or the words and expressions related to the introduction of word formation or collocation, and the specialty of *NHCE* is that it boasts the "Banked Cloze" which is in line with the form in CET-4. After that there is the part of "Structure Analysis and Writing". The analysis of text structure is foreshadowing the structured writing. Both of them have a sample following an application example. The last section is "Translation (Chinese to English and English to Chinese)". And there is a "Unit Project" at the end of each unit which contains "Group Discussion", "Survey Conduction", "Presentation" and similar task-based exercises.

Therefore, for the quantity of the exercises, *NPCE* has the same number of exercises as *NHCE* in the bigger section and two more parts in the small sections of exercises than *NHCE*. However, each set of books has its own specialty. In comprehension of the text, *NPCE* does not have "Critical Thinking (open questions and discussion)" in *NHCE*, but it does have "Comprehension of Difficult Sentences". Besides that, it also has "Sentence Patterns and Listening" parts, while *NPCE* does not give sample sentences in "Structure Analysis" as *NHCE* does.

Besides, it is necessary to check whether the text book concerns adequately on five basic skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation) in English learning. Table 9 is the illustration of how the five basic skills are tested through various tasks.

Table 9
Tasks for Five Skills in *NPCE* and *NHCE*

Skills/ Tasks	Unique tasks in *NPCE*	Similar tasks in *NPCE* and *NHCE*	Unique tasks in *NHCE*
Listening	Listen to Topic Related Materials and Fill in the Blanks		
Speaking	Role-play, Interview	Group Discussion	Survey, Presentation
Reading	Multiple Choice, Cloze	Answering Questions	Critical Thinking, Banked Cloze
Writing	Sentence Patterns, Words Replacement and Usage	Composition, Word Formation and Collocation, Blank-filling of Words	Structure Analysis, Sample Writing
Translation	8 Sentences		2 Paragraphs

It can be concluded from the table above that only *NPCE* has exercises for listening skill. Although *NHCE* has its own listening materials, it should take listening exercises into consideration like *NPCE* in that listening is of importance in our daily communication and is practical for college students to avoid the "dumb English".

For speaking skill, all the practices in both sets of books are originated from group discussion, and on the basis of which there are role-play, interview and presentation and so forth which are various and different from normal forms, and may arouse students' interests. Speaking tasks in *NPCE* are mostly carried out in class such as role-play, which is a simulation, while those in *NHCE* are practiced after class that requires students' self-consciousness to practice their oral skill in actual situation, which is more challenging if students follow the instruction.

Reading skill is practiced mainly in text comprehension. Among them, "Critical Thinking" in *NHCE*, a shining point of the design, is conductive to students' further understanding and independent thinking, which can be used for reference. *NPCE* also pays attention to the organization of the texts so that students can comprehend the texts efficiently from the whole. In addition, to practice the words and phrases and to test students' competence in passage coherence, "Cloze" and "Banked Cloze" in *NPCE* and *NHCE* respectively help students to prepare for CET-4 as claimed in their prefaces.

For the training of writing, both sets of the books make efforts to make preparation for the writing so that students can be less afraid of it. Both of them first focus on word, and *NPCE* also emphasizes sentence pattern that can be

52

used in writing and translation, while *NHCE* lays stress on the big structure: it exemplifies one or more paragraphs to analyze the structure and gives a similar structure for students to analyze. Genres like argumentation and narrative are included. And then students are asked to make a composition based on the same structure with an outline provided. Through this process, writing is not the tough bone anymore.

For translation part, there are 8 sentence translations from Chinese to English in *NPCE* which aims to practice students' language skills, while there are two paragraph translations in *NHCE*, one is Chinese-to-English and the other one is English-to-Chinese, both of which relate to all aspects in society, no matter at home or abroad, modern or ancient times. Difficult as it is, it also helps students to understand and express the difference between Chinese culture and western culture, thus improve their skills in cultural communication. However, paragraph translation is more challenging than sentence translation in that the former not only requires the output of basic words and sentence patterns, but also the construction of syntax and the coherence of the text.

To conclude, both sets of the books make great efforts to put the five skills into practice but in different methods. For listening, *NPCE* schedules a part in it while *NHCE* doesn't. And for the rest four skills, both of them have their own ideas and intentions, considering students' needs.

5. CONSLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Through a comparative evaluation of the two sets of books, it is found that the contents of the textbooks are basically suitable for the requirement of the *College English Curriculum Requirements*, and are in line with the students' competence. The major findings of the study are summarized below:

The content analysis reveals that *NHCE*, in general, is more suitable than *NPCE* in the aspects of language, content and exercises.

1) According to the statistics produced by Excel 2010 and Wordsmith 4.0, the proportion of new words in both sets, according to Cunningsworth (1984), is off the standard. The average proportion of new words is 6.10% in NPCE1, 5.51% in *NPCE2*, 5.57% in NHCE1 and 5.43% in *NHCE2*, which are completely higher than the ideal standard 5%. The problem of excessive new words is especially prominent in *NPCE* texts. In terms of the recurrence rate of the words, *NPCE* can play a more effective role in students' vocabulary memorizing while *NHCE* is more appropriate for students to meet the requirement of CET-4. Moreover, the vocabulary in *NHCE* are more suitable for college students in that it focuses on more intermediate- and upper-level words, while *NPCE* contains much more basic and rare words which are not

cost-efficient for college students who are usually busy and are anxious to master the language within the shortest period of time.

2) The ratio of complex sentences in *NPCE* is obviously higher than that in *NHCE*. Complex sentences, especially lengthened sentences are often tremendously challenging for students to comprehend. Therefore, materials in *NPCE* are little difficult to read than those in *NHCE*. On the other hand, the average length of texts in *NHCE* is also significantly longer than that in *NPCE*. Therefore, students reading a text from *NPCE* may find it easier to preview it because it is much less challenging in language; so the teachers can also organize more in-class or outside-class activities for more flexible teaching methods. However, since a text from *NPCE* is shorter but more complex, teachers may have to rely on more class instruction for students to get the gist of it.

3) In terms of the choice of topics, most of the reading materials in *NPCE* are selected from newspapers and magazines published in recent years, relating to events in modern or ancient times, at home or abroad, so the topics can arouse the students' enthusiasm and stimulate their interest. In contrast, the materials in *NHCE* are more emotional, and are prone to the topic of humanity, trying to convey the true values in daily life which urge people to introspect. However, it fails to touch upon the topics of natural science. The topic-related materials in both of the two sets of books are authentic, which is helpful to students' English learning. However, as for cross-cultural awareness, *NHCE* does a poor job than *NPCE*. There is at least one reading passage in each unit of *NPCE* that is related to China today, conveying Chinese culture to people in other countries; while *NHCE* is mostly English culture-oriented and does not makes efforts to explore the theme of "Chinese culture integrating with the world".

4) In respect of exercises, *NHCE* develops a cross-cultural awareness in its translation exercises to make up the weakness in topic designing, but does not contain drills for listening skill. Besides, both sets of books have thoroughly taken students' needs into consideration and have adequate exercises to practice their skills.

Based on the findings above, the research is expected to provide new empirical advice that is to shed light on the issue of compiling new textbooks. The implications are drawn and presented as follows:

Firstly, textbook compilers should pay more attention to the design and selection of new words and its proportion in the whole passage which should be limited within the range of students' acceptance. Only in that way can students set up their confidence and arouse their interest in English learning. Secondly, a moderate amount of difficulty of sentences is necessary in that students can actually learn something not only in the process of acquiring academic knowledge, but also in solving problems with their everyday experience. Thirdly, topics

should be various and authentic, concerning all respects of our life and the world as much as possible, which, obviously, should be student-centered. Both sets of books do well in that aspect. Fourthly, exercises in integrated courses should be more compressive. What's more, with the rapid development of China, materials in college English textbooks should draw on the profound Chinese culture and the current situation in China, to help students introduce our own culture to foreigners and know more about our country.

REFERENCES

Cunningsworth, A. (1995). *Choosing your course book.* Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann.

Cunningsworth, A. (1984). *Evaluating and selecting EFL teaching materials*. London: Heinemann.

Grant, N. (1987). *Making the most of your textbook*. London: Longman Group (UK) Ltd.

Hutchinson, T., & Waters, A, (1987). *English for specific purposes: A learning-centered approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Krashen, S. D. (1987). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. New York: Prentice Hall International (UK) Ltd.

McDonough, J., & Shaw, C. (1993). *Materials and methods in ELT*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Nuttal, C. (1982). *Teaching reading skills in a foreign language*. London: Heinemann.

Pauline, R. D., & Kevin, G. (1992). *Evaluation*. London: Oxford University Press.

Seaton, B. (1982). *A handbook of English language teaching terms and practice*. Stuttgart: Macmillan Education Press.

Tomlinson, B. (1998). *Materials development in language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cheng, X. T., & Sun, X. H. (2011). *English materials design and evaluation*. Beijing: Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press.

Wang, L. F. (2010). A brief analysis on *Evaluating and Designing Language Teaching Materials* by Breen and Candlin. *The Merchandise and Quality*, (10), 148.

Wang, Q. (2006). *A course in English language teaching*. Beijing: Higher Education Press.

Zhao, Y., & Zheng, S. T. (2006). A theoretical analysis of several western textbook evaluation systems and their implications for the college English textbook evaluation in China. *Foreign Language Education*, *27*(3), 39-45.

Zhuang, Z. X. (2006). On the establishment of a Chinese framework of FL textbook compilation and evaluation. *Foreign Language World*, (06), 49-56.