



## Investigation and Analysis of the Translation Tests in CET-4: Taking Software Engineering Students in Jiangxi Normal University as an Example

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### Abstract

College English Test (abbreviated as CET) is one of the major language tests in China. Its purpose is to measure Chinese college students' comprehensive ability in English and it plays a positive role in achieving the goal of college English curriculum. Since its birth, CET has been reformed in scoring system, score reporting, test content and test questions, especially in translation test. This will enhance college English translation teaching which has been ignored for a long time. The paper mainly analyzes the reform of the translation test types in College English Test Band 4 and the current situation of translation teaching for non-English majors. 194 software engineering college students in Jiangxi normal university were required to accomplish the questionnaire survey to inquire into the problems they had encountered in CET-4 translation test and their translation learning situation in class, hoping to provide teachers and students with constructive suggestions with regard to college English translation teaching and learning.

**Key words:** CET-4; Translation test types; College English teaching

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## 1. COLLEGE ENGLISH TRANSLATION TEST TYPES AFTER THE REFORM

### 1.1 The Adjustment of Translation Test Types

In 2012, the reform for CET-4 was carried out, mainly to prevent students from cheating. The reform at the end of 2013 intended to urge students to pay more attention to the cultivation of practical ability and English comprehensive ability. In the translation part, the original translation of single sentences in CET-4 is converted to the translation of paragraphs, and the score increases to 15 points. The content of translation deals with China's history, culture, economy and social development. It has 140~160 characters in length. Before the reform, the completion of sentences mainly focuses on the mastery of vocabulary. Therefore, many examinees' one-sided pursuit of vocabulary in the process of preparing for CET-4 leads to the lack of grammar knowledge, as a result, they can read but cannot write well. However, after the reform, the paragraph translation focuses more on students' practical ability to use the language, which is undoubtedly a big challenge for those students who always learn English but pay little attention to its application. Meanwhile, this change also contributes to the reform of college English teaching.

### 1.2 Translation Scoring Standards

The full score of the translation questions is 15 points, and the scores are divided into six grades: 13~15 points, 10~12 points, 7~9 points, 4~6 points, 1~3 points and 0 points. The standards of each grade are shown in the following table:

Grade	Scoring standards
13-15 points	The translation accurately expresses the original meaning. Vocabularies are used appropriately and fluently. basically no language errors, only a few small errors.

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Grade	Scoring standards
10 - 12 points	The translation basically expresses the original meaning. The writing is fluent and coherent without major language mistakes.
7 - 9 points	The translation narrowly expresses the original meaning. There are a lot of language errors, some of which are serious.
4-6 points	The translation conveys only a small part of the original meaning. Vocabularies are inaccurate and there are quite a few serious language errors.
1-3points	The translation was in tatters. Except for individual vocabularies or sentences, most vocabularies do not express the original meaning.
0 points	There are no answers, only a few isolated vocabularies, or the translation has nothing to do with the original text.

## 2. CURRENT SITUATION OF COLLEGE ENGLISH TRANSLATION TEACHING

Translation has not been given much attention in college English courses.

1) Teachers always have misunderstandings about the role of translation. In order to promote students' understanding of the text, they translate the content into Chinese when explaining the text. Therefore, students understand the meaning of the text but do not know why they translate in that way.

2) The teaching methods are relatively simple, and there is no mention of any translation methods and skills in class. Students have no opportunity to learn important translation skills and carry out relevant exercises.

3) The translation materials are simple, and the translation exercises available to students are all from books. If students copy answers from reference books, then the translation practice is useless. After a period of time, the translation skills are not as good as expected. English-Chinese sentences are too literal, stiff and ambiguous, while Chinese-English sentences are too Chinglish.

4) There is a shortage of teachers in teaching translation. The teaching team is mostly engaged in linguistics, subject teaching and other majors, and there is a shortage of high-quality translation graduates. Therefore, the professional translation skills of teachers are not deep enough, coupled with limited class hours, it is difficult to teach students relevant translation skills.

5) Most of the students are poor in self-teaching and learning autonomy, and their English learning is still test-oriented and test-motivated. They neglect to practice regularly, and only make some preparations a couple of weeks before the exam, which accounts for little effect.

## 3. RESEARCH ON THE TRANSLATION TEST IN CET-4

### 3.1 Participants

194 non-English major college students in Jiangxi Normal University participate in this survey. Based on

the condition of teaching and examination of students at ordinary times, it can be understood that software engineering students' polarization in English degree is serious, ie, students with better learning ability have already attended CET-6, while students with poor learning ability even failed for the first time in CET-4, who have to take the second test.

### 3.2 Materials

This research adopts the form of questionnaire survey to investigate the problems encountered by non-English major college students in doing CET-4 translation test, the translation skills and strategies that students used in the test, and the translation teaching strategies by teachers. The questionnaire was published by the author in three software engineering professional classes, who was elected the questionnaire star. In the end, 194 valid questionnaires were collected. Statistical analysis was carried out according to the frequency distribution and percentage of each item.

### 3.3 Results and Discussion

(1) What do you think of the CET-4 translation test types?

Degree	Number	Proportion
Easy	46	23.71%
A little	119	61.34%
Hard	29	14.95%

In the first question, more than half of the students think that the CET-4 translation test are relatively difficult. First of all, from the perspective of test types, the difficulty of the translation questions has increased since the reform. Compared with other test types in CET-4, like the listening and reading comprehension, even if students are not completely certain about the answer, they can still choose one. In addition, English writing test requires students to produce English in the form of discourse, which is also of high difficulty, but students can complete the composition with the vocabulary and grammar within their ability range. However, the translation test is limited because students have to carry out text translation according to what the text provide, and the vocabulary will be greatly confined by the text content, especially after the reform of the translation test, in which some "Chinese characteristic" vocabulary has become a big obstacle for students to translate. What's more, from the perspective of subjects, all the students under discussion are software engineering majors, and most of them have a negative learning attitude towards English. Most of the students are only limited to the study of textbook knowledge. Some even think that the English exam is easy to pass, and they can pass the exam even if they don't listen to the teacher. In this way, when taking translation test, a considerable number of students think that the translation test is a little difficult or even quite difficult.

(2) What kind of problems do you have when taking in CET-4 translation test?

Type	Number	Proportion
The grasp of the original text	20	10.31%
Vocabulary and phrases	149	76.8%
Grammar	25	12.89%

In the second question, 76.8% of students think that the problems encountered in CET-4 translation are vocabulary and phrases. Most students use English learning softwares in the mobile phone, such as vocabulary chopped, scallop, etc., to memorize CET-4 vocabulary. Compared with memorizing vocabulary by using textbook, software learning is more convenient and diversified. Although the ways of memorizing vocabulary have become more and more efficient, this does not prevent vocabulary from becoming obstacles in the process of students' translation, which also reflects that it is not enough to rely on the vocabulary to improve the translation. Students must learn how to use vocabulary in the actual context and find appropriate vocabulary to translate, which obviously requires themselves to spend a lot of time on vocabulary learning. However, in reality, the learning of professional courses in the software class has occupied a large amount of the students' time, and due to the poor attitude of the students towards English learning, most of them are not willing to spend too much time on English or even translation vocabulary practice. In addition, the frequent occurrence of Chinese characteristic vocabulary in CET-4 translation has increased the burden on students' English vocabulary learning.

(3) What other problems do you think you have besides the three choices above?

Type	Number	Proportion
Translation context	36	18.65%
Translation of professional terms	84	43.3%
How to achieve "expressiveness" and "elegance" on the basis of "faithfulness"	74	38.14%

The third question is a further supplement to the second question. Other questions encountered by students mainly focus on the translation of professional terms and the pursuit of "faithfulness", "expressiveness" and "elegance", both of which have demanding requirements for students' English proficiency. Even English majors often have difficulties in terms of terminology and "faithfulness, expressiveness and elegance", let alone non-English majors.

(4) What do you think is the most important thing in translation?

Type	Number	Proportion
Keeping the translation smooth and fluent	111	57.22%
Faithfulness to the original text	54	27.84%
The acceptability of the readers of the translation	29	14.95%

What do you think is the most important thing in translation? 57.22% of the students think the translation should be smooth and fluent. As non-English major

students, this is their basic pursuit in CET-4 translation. Compared with "faithfulness to the original text" and "acceptability of the target audience", "keeping the target text smooth and fluent" is relatively easy to achieve.

(5) What do you think is a good translation?

Type	Number	Proportion
A complete translation of the original message	109	56.19%
A fluent translation	41	21.13%
A reader-friendly translation	44	22.68%

There is no consistency between the fourth question and this one. Only 21.13% of the students think that a good translation should be "fluent". However, more than half of the students think that "a complete translation that original message" is a good translation, and they agree to put faithfulness to the original text as the first priority. However, they do not have too much requirements on the smoothness and polish of the translation, and do not pay enough attention to it.

(6) Which of the following do you think is a good way to review the translation of an exam?

Type	Number	Proportion
Expand vocabulary	117	60.31%
Master translation strategies	64	32.99%
Master grammar knowledge	13	6.7%

In the sixth question, over 60% students choose to enlarge their vocabulary, which is consistent with the result of second question "students think vocabulary is the biggest obstacle in the translation process". Due to their inadequate vocabulary, students cannot find the most suitable or equivalent vocabularies, which not only makes students unable to write, but also increases their anxiety during the examination. Therefore, vocabulary expansion is a link that teachers need to strengthen in the process of teaching and students need to enhance in the process of preparing for exams. In addition, only 32.99% of the students chose translation strategies, which shows that the students do not pay enough attention to translation strategies, reflecting the students' weak awareness of learning translation strategies.

(7) What do you know about translation strategy?

Type	Number	Proportion
Sentence structure	105	60.31%
Positive translation, negative translation	68	32.99%
The sequential method, the reverse method	75	38.66%
Addition, subtraction	72	37.11%
Vocabulary conversion	68	35.05%
Synthesis	78	40.21%

In question 7, students' understanding of translation strategies only accounts for 40.72% of each translation strategy on average, less than half of them. From this, it can be seen that the vast majority of students are rarely exposed to translation strategies in their daily learning. Most of the students have learned English since primary school, nevertheless, they hardly know or are not clear about translation strategies, because

primary and secondary school English learning does not take “translation” as a key ability to cultivate students. Therefore, translation strategies are missing in students’ long-term English learning. Since the beginning of the semester, the students of the software have opened three English courses, namely, reading and writing, listening and speaking, and professional English. Professional English is mainly for the study of software-related terms, which involves translation, but it is quite different from the translation in CET-4. Therefore, students must be exposed to translation strategies in the reading and writing class, and the reason will be analyzed in combination with the eighth question.

(8) Has the English teacher ever taught English translation strategies?

Frequency	Number	Proportion
Seldom	108	55.67%
Never	21	10.82%
Often	65	33.51%

In combination with question 7, software engineering students have had relevant contact with translation strategies in reading and writing class. However, according to the result of question 8, 55.67% of the students say that English teachers seldom teach English translation strategies in class, and even 10.82% of the students say that the teachers do not teach translation strategies. Based on the author’s experience as an English teacher for the majors in software engineering, English teachers seldom mention translation strategies in text translation and seldom assign after-class translation exercises for students. The reason is that the teachers themselves do not have a good command of translation strategies and do not carry out systematic training and learning. In the teaching process, the translation strategy is not mentioned as a key point, and students are only required to understand the main idea of the article. It can be seen that students think “translation is difficult”, teachers’ teaching content and school curriculum are also the main reasons for this result.

(9) Have you used translation strategies and techniques in CET-4?

Frequency	Number	Proportion
Seldom	115	59.28%
Never	28	26.29%
Often	51	14.43%

In question 9, 59.28% students seldom use translation strategies or techniques in the exam, while 26.29% never use them. This result is consistent with the conclusion of question 8. How can students use translation strategies in the exam if they have learned little or no translation strategies? While the number of students who often use translation strategies is smaller than the number of those who think “teachers often teach translation strategies” (14.43% < 33.51%). It shows that even if the students have studied the use of translation strategies but they cannot fully use them in the exam, which indicates that students

and teachers do not take translation strategies seriously, and teachers do not assign much practice to students to encourage them to use translation strategies. At the same time, students fail to realize that translation strategies should be adopted in the process of translation.

(10) Do you think translation strategies and skills are helpful to your translation?

Degree	Number	Proportion
Every much	84	43.3%
A little	104	53.61%
None	6	3.09%

For question 10, 43.3% of the students think translation strategies are of great help to the test translation, 53.61% think they are of some help, and 3.09% of the students totally deny the role of translation strategies. Although students pay little attention to translation strategies, most of them are aware that translation strategies play a positive role in improving translation performance. Therefore, translation strategies should be given full attention and promotion in college English classes.

(11) Before CET-4, will you train for translation test specifically?

Frequency	Number	Proportion
Often	27	13.92%
Sometimes	98	50.52%
Never	69	35.57%

In question 11, whether the students will conduct relevant training on translation test before CET-4, only 13.92% of the students say they often do exercises, and most of the students (50.52%) occasionally do exercises. The most convenient way for students to do translation training is to do CET-4. Since the reform in 2013, only 42 texts of CET-4 can be used by students. By doing translation exercises, students can only familiarize themselves with the types of test, and the method of induction still needs the assistance of teachers, so that it can make themselves aware of the shortcomings in the translation process.

(12) Do you think the translation questions in CET-4 have great influence on your overall score?

Degree	Number	Proportion
Very much	66	34.02%
A little	114	58.76%
Little	14	7.22%

In question 12, 58.76% students think translation questions would have a little influence on the overall score of CET-4, while 34.02% think it has great influence. It seems that the translation is worth practicing. After the reform, the translation test type has been changed from the phrase in the blank to the paragraph in the Chinese-English translation, and the score has been increased from the original 5% to 15%, which undoubtedly increases the proportion and weight of the translation in the whole exam. The influence of the translation in CET-4 cannot be underestimated.

(13) Will the teacher conduct special training for CET-4 English translation in the teaching process?

Frequency	Number	Proportion
Never	46	23.71%
Sometimes	122	62.89%
Often	26	13.4%

Although teachers seldom teach translation strategies, 66.89% of the students say that they will have some CET-4 translation training before the exam. This is necessary because most students lack the initiative to learn English and they cannot summarize relevant skills by themselves. However, 23.71% of the students say that the teacher will not provide special training for translation, and the lack of attention from the teacher will reduce the importance of translation. Therefore, in college English classes, teachers should appropriately increase the content of translation teaching, improve students' translation awareness, impart relevant skills, and help students overcome difficulties in translation.

(14) Is the textbook translation exercise useful for CET-4 translation?

Degree	Number	Proportion
A lot	39	20.1%
A little	135	69.59%
Little	20	10.31%

In item 14, 69.59% of students think that textbook translation exercises are helpful for CET-4 English translation, while a small number of students (10.31%) do not think so. Software majors are different from other non-English majors in that their textbooks use the second edition of new horizons college English. This English textbook lacks targeted, systematic translation theory guidance and translation application. In the first semester of sophomore year, for example, according to the course schedule, the teacher only taught four units. The translation exercises at the end of each unit consist of 6 Chinese-English sentences and 6 English-Chinese sentences. In the Chinese-English exercise, each sentence will be followed by a prompt phrase, which is the key phrase of the unit. Students must use this phrase when translating the sentence from Chinese to English, such as “Wu lun ni shi duo me fu you jing yan de yan shuo jia, wu lun ni zuo le duo me chong fen de zhun bei, ni dou hen nan zai zhe yang cao za de zhao dai hui shang fa biao yan jiang. (no matter how)”. The translations are closely related to the text, and the phrases provided are used to achieve the dual purposes of translation and sentence practice. However, in the process of practice, students' divergent thinking is restrained and the diversity of translation is limited, which is against the principle of language teaching. Moreover, there is a big difference between this type of translation in the textbook and the discourse translation in CET-4. College English translation teaching has a rather random tendency and subjective tendency, and students have difficulties in adapting to the

Chinese-English translation of Chinese history, culture, economy, social development and other aspects in CET-4. In addition, in the English final exam, although there are translation questions, they are closely related to the text content, and the translation questions are copied exactly from the textbook without any innovation. It is meaningless for students to get full marks for the translation tests by rote.

(15) Which aspect of the translation question do you think is difficult for you?

Type	Number	Proportion
Social life	18	9.28%
Economy	112	57.73%
Chinese culture	64	32.99%

For a long time, college English teaching is mainly based on language knowledge and British and American culture, involving relatively little knowledge of traditional Chinese culture, thus leading to students' inability to express a large number of culture-loaded vocabularies. After the reform, the CET-4 translation involves Chinese history, education, culture, economy, science and technology, and social development, etc. For example, the translations of kites, tea, Chinese knots, red, yellow, Wuzhen (town), and yellow rivers have been tested in recent years. The translation materials are much closer to the social reality and real life, with specific context. In spite of this, it inevitably increases the difficulty of translation for students.

## 4. DISCUSSION: COUNTERMEASURES TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' CET-4 TRANSLATION ABILITY

### 4.1 From Test Designer's Perspective

The difficulty of the vocabularies should be moderate, which is in line with the English level of most students, and the difficulty gradually increases. The translated content should be as close as possible to the current popular events and the real life situation of college students. The content should not be limited to depending on too much background knowledge.

### 4.2 From Teacher's Perspective

#### 4.2.1 Attaching Importance to Cultivating Translation Ability

Both teachers and students should have a correct understanding of the importance of translation skills and the role of translation teaching in college English teaching. For any language learning, the ultimate goal is to acquire comprehensive language use ability, namely comprehensive master of listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating skills. Translation, as an important part of English teaching, is an effective teaching method to lay a good language foundation for

students. As for the current college English teaching mode, due to the influence of exam-oriented education, most teachers pay far less attention to translation teaching, either in their teaching guiding ideology or in classroom teaching.

#### **4.2.2 Teaching Translation Theories and Skills to Students Based on the Teaching Materials**

For there is few English teaching materials relating to the relevant translation theory and practice, teachers are supposed to supplement some translation theories and skills in teaching, combining the teaching material content, in a planned and systematic translation knowledge teaching in the classroom teaching. After class, teachers should arrange students translation exercises with the contents taught in class so that students can combine theory with practice, comprehend the similarities and differences between Chinese and English, and flexibly apply the law of bilingual conversion.

#### **4.2.3 Introducing Cultural Background Knowledge and Cultivating Students' Intercultural Communication Awareness**

Without sufficient cross-cultural awareness, it is impossible to translate the exact meaning of the language. In translation teaching, teachers should first consciously introduce Chinese native culture and the culture of English-speaking countries. When introducing English culture, teachers should also add Chinese traditional and distinctive culture. For a long time, there is little information about Chinese culture in college English textbooks. Students learn more about the cultural knowledge of English-speaking countries in class, which leads to students' inability to clearly express their own Chinese culture in English. Teachers can ask students to make full use of network resources to collect materials on a certain topic, tell the similarities and differences between Chinese and western cultures in English in class, and conduct discussion and debate activities so that students can improve their intercultural communication ability and cultural literacy in critical thinking activities. Besides, students should be encouraged to explore the characteristics and differences between Chinese and English in their learning.

### **4.3 From Students' Perspective**

#### **4.3.1 Paying Attention to Sample Tests and True Tests**

The vocabulary, sentence pattern, structure, and type that appear in a true test are closely linked to the examination outline. Students should study true test papers seriously and not do model tests blindly, which can help them achieve better result with half the effort in the preparation for an examination. In CET-4, some Chinese-English translation tests will be designed in a relatively analogous structure, such as “zai zhongguo, peng ren bu jin bei shi wei …, ye bei shi wei…, zai zhong guo ge di…”(Chinese food); “ yi bu fen ren ren wei…xue sheng jiu ying gai…,

ling yi bu fen ren ren wei…zhong guo jiu ying gai…”(Technology); “ xi fang ren hui xuan…zhong guo ren ze hui xuan…”(tea culture); “gu dai yong yu…xian dai zhu yao yong yu…” (Chinese knot). It is suggested that non-English majors should accumulate more templates of the same sentence patterns to recite.

#### **4.3.2 Consolidating Grammar Knowledge**

Non-English major students are supposed to pay attention to sentence structures and grammar knowledge instead of one-sided pursuit of the number of vocabulary. They should put more emphasis on the syntax of complex sentences and special sentence patterns, especially like sentence patterns with subjunctive mood, nominal clauses, attributive clause, which will help translation.

#### **4.3.3 Mastering the Vocabulary With Chinese Characteristics**

Many topics concerning Chinese history, culture, etc. are incorporated into the translation tests, therefore, it is much demanding for non-English majors to master such vocabulary. According to the translation tests, students are suggested to sort out the vocabulary with Chinese characteristics, such as Chinese traditional festivals, historical events, economic culture, tourism and social development. Students have to browse the newspapers or websites of China Daily more often for words and phrases which are related to Chinese characteristics and daily life, or visit some popular English learning websites, such as [hjEnglish.com](http://hjEnglish.com) and [kekeEnglish.com](http://kekeEnglish.com), for vocabulary learning, which is beneficial as to CET 4 translation preparation and future English learning.

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## **CONCLUSION**

The adjustment of CET-4 reflects the developing requirements of the Times, which is bound to attract the general attention of college English teachers and students, and also provides an opportunity for the development of college English translation teaching. Although there are a lot of problems in college English translation teaching, such as the less attention paid to it and the shortage of teachers' professional knowledge. However, with the deepening of teaching reform and more and more urgent social demand for translation talents, it should be expected that under the joint efforts of teachers, students and schools, difficulties will be overcome and the development of college English translation teaching will keep accelerated, and students will improve their translation ability in order to meet the urgent social need for translation talents.

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