A Multidimensional Comparative Study of University English Listening and Speaking Textbooks under Different Compilation Models

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ABSTRACT : *This study conducts a comparative analysis of three widely used university English listening and speaking textbook series published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in China: Functioning in an Intercultural Community, Contemporary College English, and College English Listening and Speaking Course. Using a multidimensional analytical framework and qualitative comparative content analysis, the study examines these textbook series from five dimensions: content organization, orientations toward communicative competence development, instructional adaptability, integration of value-oriented education, and the listening–speaking ratio. The findings identify three relatively stable compilation models: a function–situation-based model, a topic–critical-thinking-based model, and an input–output-based model. Each model demonstrates distinct emphases in task sequencing, communicative focus, and the balance between language input and output, resulting in different pathways for cultivating students' communicative and academic speaking abilities. By conceptualizing textbook compilation models and explicating their relationships with competence-oriented instructional goals, this study contributes to a clearer analytical understanding of speaking textbook design in tertiary English education. The findings also offer practical implications for textbook selection, instructional adaptation, and future textbook compilation in diverse teaching contexts.*

KEYWORDS -*English listening and speaking textbooks; compilation models; function-situation-based model; topic-critical thinking-based model; input-output-based model;*

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the development of oral communication competence has become a central concern in tertiary English education, particularly in contexts where English is taught as a foreign language. In China, the new edition of the College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition) [1] emphasizes elevating foreign language learning ability to a significant position, sets improving students' oral English expression ability as one of the goals, and places prominent emphasis on cultivating students' interpretation skills as well as listening and speaking abilities.

In reality, while university English speaking textbooks in China exhibit a certain degree of diversity in compilation philosophies and formats, there are still considerable differences in aspects such as communicative function orientation, competence structure design, task sequencing logic, and evaluation methods. This has led to considerable confusion among teachers regarding textbook selection and implementation in the teaching process, manifesting as shortcomings such as unclear main threads, vague skill objectives, an imbalance between listening and speaking emphasis, and a lack of supporting materials for academic English.

Therefore, this study takes three widely used university English speaking/listening and speaking textbooks published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press - Functioning in an Intercultural Community,

Contemporary College English, and College English Listening and Speaking Course-as sample materials. It conducts a comparative analysis from five dimensions: the textbook content system, communicative competence, instructional compatibility, integration of value-oriented education, and the listening-speaking class ratio. The research questions this study aims to answer are:

(1) What are the patterned differences in the compilation philosophies and content arrangement among the three textbook series?

(2) What are the respective strengths and weaknesses of the three compilation models in cultivating students' daily communicative competence and academic speaking ability?

(3) What implications do the aforementioned differences have for current university English listening and speaking teaching and textbook compilation?

Based on the analysis, the study hopes to provide insights for the rational selection of textbooks and future textbook compilation.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Currently, research on foreign language teaching materials in China is gradually shifting from experience-based research focusing on empirical induction and partial analysis toward theoretical construction, showing a trend of localization. Based on years of experience in textbook compilation and teaching research, Wen [2] proposed a relatively comprehensive theoretical framework for compiling university foreign language teaching materials at the macro level. This includes aspects such as national and societal needs, the cultural scope of foreign language teaching materials, theories of foreign language teaching and learning, characteristics of learner development, and norms for textbook compilation and management. Regarding cultural content, scholars propose three dimensions: target language culture, native language culture (Chinese culture), and other cultures, aiming to enhance students' cultural confidence and intercultural awareness through comparison [2, 3].

Furthermore, discussions on textbook formats and technological integration have been ongoing. As early as 2007, Chen [4] argued that the "fourth-generation textbooks" based on multimedia environments were largely media packaging of printed textbooks and were not truly designed in combination with teaching philosophies and classroom instruction, resulting in unsatisfactory teaching effectiveness. He proposed the concept of "fifth-generation textbooks," emphasizing that textbooks should be a teaching system guided by theory, based on structure, and centered on methodology. In recent years, against the backdrop of digital transformation in education, Yang [5] reintroduced the concept of "new-format textbooks," arguing that they should not merely be a certain form of textbook but should fully utilize information technology to meet students' autonomous, dynamic, and personalized learning needs.

From the perspective of teaching objectives, reports on textbook compilation research over the past decade show a shift from a "language-skill-centered" approach to "comprehensive competence development." The College English Teaching Guide (2020) [1] pointed out that the teaching objective of college English courses is to cultivate students' English application ability, thereby driving the improvement of their comprehensive abilities, including the development of intercultural communicative competence, autonomous learning ability, and critical thinking skills. Therefore, under this new guiding philosophy, textbooks are seen as an important platform for cultivating students' comprehensive abilities, playing a decisive role in the effective implementation of the teaching syllabus [6, 7].

Despite the overall trend toward systematization and a strengthened competence-orientation in college English textbook research, specialized studies focusing on listening and speaking, particularly speaking textbooks, remain insufficient. Based on an analysis using CiteSpace, Zhao [8] proposed that research hotspots in English speaking teaching in China over the past decade have mainly focused on teaching model innovation, technology empowerment, and situational teaching. There are still some limitations in research subjects, content, and perspectives: the research population is highly focused on students in regular universities, neglecting other groups; most studies only focus on teaching methods and some superficial technical issues, rarely involving issues like the cognitive processing of speaking; moreover, an important factor-textbooks-is often overlooked in these studies.

Besides the domestic studies, some studies focus on the design principles of speaking teaching materials. For example, Hughes [9] believed that speaking teaching materials should cover diverse communication scenarios; Goh [10] proposed that the task design of speaking activities should be suitable for learners' levels and employ scaffolding to help learners produce output step by step, and so on. However, domestic research has not integrated these principles and further applied them to a systematic comparison of different listening and speaking textbook compilation models, which remains a deficiency.

III. METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions concerning differences in compilation models, communicative orientations, and pedagogical emphases in university English listening and speaking textbooks, this study adopts a qualitative and comparative research design. The study conceptualizes textbooks as pedagogical artifacts that embody underlying instructional assumptions, competence-oriented goals, and curriculum priorities, rather than as neutral instructional materials.

Given the exploratory nature of the research and the absence of classroom implementation or learner performance data, a framework-based content analysis was employed. This approach allows for systematic comparison of textbook design features, task structures, and listening–speaking integration patterns, while avoiding premature claims about instructional effectiveness. By focusing on recurring patterns across multiple units and textbook series, the analysis aims to identify stable compilation models and their associated pedagogical orientations.

Accordingly, the methodology consists of three components: (1) the construction of a multidimensional analytical framework to guide textbook evaluation, (2) the selection of representative university English listening and speaking textbook series as research materials, and (3) a qualitative comparative analysis of unit structures and task types to inform pedagogical implications for teaching practice and future textbook compilation.

3.1 Analytical Framework and Evaluation Criteria

To enable systematic comparison across different textbook series, this study developed a multidimensional analytical framework informed by prior research on textbook evaluation, communicative competence development, and tertiary English curriculum design. The framework was designed to capture both explicit structural features and implicit pedagogical orientations embedded in textbook compilation.

Specifically, five analytical dimensions were established: (1) content organization and unit structure, focusing on sequencing logic and module design; (2) orientations toward communicative competence development, including functional language use, situational design, and academic speaking-oriented output tasks; (3) instructional adaptability, examining flexibility across teaching contexts and learner proficiency levels; (4) integration of value-oriented education, analyzing how social, cultural, and civic values are embedded through topic selection and task prompts; and (5) listening–speaking ratio and integration patterns, focusing on the balance and progression between input and output activities.

These dimensions function as evaluation criteria rather than measurement variables, allowing for interpretive analysis of recurring design patterns and compilation philosophies across textbook series.

3.2 Research Materials and Textbook Selection

The research materials consist of three widely used university English listening and speaking textbook series published by Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in China: *Functioning in an Intercultural Community*, *Contemporary College English*, and *College English Listening and Speaking Course*. These series were selected due to their extensive adoption in tertiary English education and their representation of different compilation philosophies.

For comparative purposes, the study analyzed the first part (13 units) of *Functioning in an Intercultural Community*, the first five units of each volume of *Contemporary College English* (20 units in total), and the first five units of each volume of *College English Listening and Speaking Course* (20 units in total). The initial units

were selected because they typically reflect the core pedagogical orientation, task design logic, and compilation principles of each textbook series, thereby providing a representative basis for comparison.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis followed a qualitative content analysis approach combined with horizontal and vertical comparison. Unit structures, activity types, task instructions, and listening–speaking sequences were systematically examined and coded according to the predefined analytical framework. The analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns within individual textbook series as well as contrasts across different series.

To enhance analytical consistency, all units were examined using the same set of evaluation criteria across the five analytical dimensions. Rather than relying on isolated examples, the analysis emphasized repeated design features and stable task configurations that characterize each compilation model. The findings are therefore interpretive but criteria-driven, ensuring transparency and coherence in comparative analysis. Each research question was addressed through specific analytical dimensions: differences in compilation philosophies and content organization were examined through structural analysis, orientations toward communicative competence were analyzed through task design and listening-speaking integration, and pedagogical implications were derived through cross-model comparison and synthesis. The analysis prioritized recurring patterns across units rather than isolated examples, which helped enhance analytical consistency and credibility.

IV.   ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the multidimensional analytical framework, a comparative analysis of unit design, task types, and activity distribution reveals that *Functioning in an Intercultural Community*, *Contemporary College English*, and *College English Listening and Speaking Course* exhibit relatively fixed and significant differences in compilation principles, content design, and goal orientation. Below is a comparison of the commonalities and individual characteristics of the textbooks in terms of content system and communicative competence training, among other aspects.

Regarding "content structure and unit design", the three textbooks have different design philosophies and progression methods. *Functioning in an Intercultural Community* sets unit themes based on specific communicative functions (e.g., request, suggestion, comparison), presenting a fixed pattern: "functional expression-situational dialogue-communicative activity," i.e., a function-situation-based model. This fixed pattern provides clear language scaffolding and turn-taking templates, which helps reduce students' pressure in oral production and enhances the effectiveness and appropriateness of their output. However, this arrangement does not sufficiently support in-depth topic extension and continuous production in complex situations. The content development is linear, task repetition is relatively high, there is no differentiated arrangement according to language proficiency levels, and the effect of recurring key language points across different units is not achieved. In contrast, *Contemporary College English* more often uses life-oriented and social topics as unit teaching content. Each unit typically integrates training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills around a theme. Its compilation format presents a pattern of "topic introduction-multimodal input-critical discussion-comprehensive output." Incorporating value guidance and cultural comparative analysis in authentic scenarios can increase the cognitive content and practical significance of speaking training. However, if sufficient language scaffolding and appropriately graded task design are not provided in the classroom, some students may experience a situation of "able to think but unable to speak," leading to a gap in the quality and depth of their oral production on topics. *College English Listening and Speaking Course* exhibits a relatively clear input-output-based compilation philosophy. Each unit first presents a listening dialogue, guiding from listening to speaking in a step-by-step progression toward oral expression. Overall, this textbook has a distinct listening-speaking linkage feature, where listening comprehension provides the topic and language foundation for subsequent oral production, which helps prevent students from experiencing "speaking blocks." However, the difficulty control for subsequent speaking activities is somewhat low, failing to fully stimulate students' initiative and creativity. Some activity forms are relatively simple, involving only basic communicative activities like retelling and role-play.

Regarding "cultivation of communicative competence", all three textbooks demonstrate "clear philosophy but varying degrees of implementation." This variation is related to their respective teaching and compilation models. Overall, all three textbooks embody the principles of communicative language teaching, i.e., allowing students to use English for communication by creating simulated authentic tasks. However, they have different emphases on aspects such as situational complexity, authenticity of communication, and the degree of cultural penetration. *Functioning in an Intercultural Community*, dominated by a "function-situation" approach, features communicative tasks like "introducing a peer" and "simulating a party." These tasks are goal-oriented and highly structured, which helps cultivate students' ability to use standardized language and manage turn-taking in specific situations. However, the tasks are mostly procedural, offering insufficient support for improvisation and meaning negotiation. *Contemporary College English*, with its "topic-critical thinking" approach, features activities like "exploring stereotypes" and "discussing education," which require students to express opinions and engage in argumentation. This places greater emphasis on critical thinking and sustained expression in complex contexts, while somewhat downplaying systematic training in communicative strategies and linguistic accuracy. In comparison, the input-output model of *College English Listening and Speaking Course* bases its speaking activities (e.g., "role-play interview," "group discussion on listening content") directly on preceding listening materials. This ensures the topic content and language input for communication, reducing students' output anxiety. However, this "listen-then-speak" model can easily reduce speaking tasks to mere retelling or simple responses to listening content, leaving limited space for students to engage in autonomous information exchange, opinion negotiation, or solving real communicative problems.

Regarding "adaptability/compatibility", in terms of classroom instructional design, all three textbooks share the characteristic of being easy to use but difficult to adapt flexibly. For teachers, clear unit objectives and tasks help reduce lesson preparation workload and are suitable for novice teachers in instructional design. However, the general lack of evaluation criteria forces teachers to develop their own evaluation indicators and procedures. Additionally, undifferentiated task levels, a scarcity of listening materials (in *Functioning in an Intercultural Community* and *Contemporary College English*), or insufficient speaking extensions (in *College English Listening and Speaking Course*) all require teachers to invest considerable effort in secondary processing or even providing external materials, which to some extent increases the difficulty of teaching implementation. From the students' perspective, they find the topics in elective course textbooks more interesting and practical, providing a certain degree of interest-driven motivation. However, the problem of insufficient adaptability is also prominent: uniform task difficulty ignores individual student differences, leading to struggling students finding it hard to persist while high-ability students cannot advance further; prolonged use of the same activity patterns may reduce student engagement; excessive emphasis on input at the expense of output may hinder the free expression and confidence building in students' oral production.

Regarding the integration of value-oriented education, the three textbook series adopt a broadly similar strategy of embedding social, cultural, and moral values within unit topics, although the depth and coherence of integration vary across different compilation models. Overall, value-related elements are mainly incorporated through topic selection and discussion tasks, reflecting an approach of topic-based value infusion rather than a systematically sequenced value-education framework. Functioning in an Intercultural Community integrates value-related content primarily through intercultural communication contexts. By addressing differences in etiquette, customs, and communicative norms between cultures, the textbook encourages cultural awareness, tolerance, and intercultural sensitivity. Value orientations are thus embedded in functional language practice, helping students to develop appropriate communicative behavior while fostering intercultural understanding. However, such value integration remains largely implicit and is not consistently developed through extended task chains. *Contemporary College English* incorporates value-oriented education more explicitly through socially and critically oriented themes. Topics related to role models, social development, environmental issues, and personal growth are frequently used as platforms for discussion and reflection. Through these topics, the textbook promotes civic awareness, social responsibility, and reflective thinking. This approach allows value education to be closely linked with critical discussion and opinion expression, although the integration sometimes relies heavily on reading and discussion prompts rather than on structured speaking task sequences that would enable deeper

experiential engagement. *College English Listening and Speaking Course* integrates value-related themes mainly through listening materials, including news reports, narratives, and informational texts. Follow-up speaking activities encourage students to discuss social issues, technological development, education, and environmental concerns. This model supports the development of socially relevant awareness through listening-based input; however, the value-oriented elements are often fragmented and are not systematically connected across units to form a coherent developmental trajectory.

Across all three textbook series, value-oriented education is characterized by topic-based inclusion rather than by a clearly articulated progression of value-related objectives. In some units, the linkage between value themes and communicative tasks appears relatively superficial, relying on brief mentions or general discussion prompts. Deeper integration-such as through sequenced tasks, role-based simulations, or problem-solving activities that require students to actively apply and negotiate values—remains limited. As a result, the effectiveness of value education depends to a considerable extent on teachers' pedagogical mediation and classroom-level expansion.

The differences among the three textbooks in "listening-speaking ratio and integration form" reflect their distinct emphases on various skills and demonstrate relatively fixed teaching strategy characteristics. In terms of the proportion of each skill, both *Functioning in an Intercultural Community* and *Contemporary College English* clearly exhibit a pattern of "more speaking, less listening." In these two textbook series, the number of class sessions and exercises dedicated to "speaking" mostly account for 70% to over 90%. In traditional listening classes, listening materials serve only as supplementary input, often used for topic introduction or language demonstration, playing a limited role in teaching. Conversely, *College English Listening and Speaking Course* adopts the opposite approach of "emphasizing listening over speaking." Listening materials and corresponding comprehension activities account for 70% of total class hours and activity volume. Oral expression training mainly involves the extended application of listening materials and constitutes a very small proportion. This distinction in settings reflects a divergence among compilers regarding the way oral competence is acquired: whether it is primarily through extensive output practice that promotes ability development, or whether sufficient, comprehensible input is considered necessary for ability enhancement.

V.   CONCLUSION

This study conducted a qualitative comparative analysis of three widely used university English listening and speaking textbook series, with the aim of identifying differences in compilation philosophies, communicative orientations, and pedagogical emphases. By applying a multidimensional analytical framework, the study revealed that the three textbook series can be broadly categorized into three relatively stable compilation models: a function–situation-based model, a topic–critical-thinking-based model, and an input–output-based model. Each model reflects distinct assumptions about language learning priorities, task sequencing, and the relationship between listening input and speaking output.

The findings indicate that different compilation models provide different pathways for the development of communicative competence. Function–situation-based textbooks emphasize contextualized language use and pragmatic appropriateness, while topic–critical-thinking-based textbooks foreground discussion, reflection, and opinion expression through thematically organized content. In contrast, input–output-based textbooks prioritize listening comprehension as a foundation for speaking production, highlighting the role of structured input in shaping output practices. These differences suggest that no single compilation model can comprehensively address all communicative needs; instead, each model selectively supports particular aspects of listening and speaking development, including everyday communication and academic speaking-oriented output.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to textbook research in tertiary English education by moving beyond descriptive evaluation of individual textbooks and proposing a model-based analytical perspective on textbook compilation. By identifying patterned relationships between content organization, task design, and communicative orientation, the study demonstrates how pedagogical priorities are systematically embedded in textbook design. The focus on compilation models offers a more abstract and transferable framework for

understanding speaking textbook development, enriching existing discussions on communicative competence and curriculum alignment.

Pedagogically, the findings provide implications for both textbook selection and instructional adaptation. Teachers may draw on the strengths of different compilation models to supplement classroom instruction, particularly when addressing diverse learning objectives such as functional communication, critical discussion, and academic speaking. For textbook developers, the analysis highlights the importance of balancing listening input and speaking output while ensuring coherence in task sequencing and value-oriented topic integration.

This study is not without limitations. As the analysis is based solely on textbook content and structure, it does not examine actual classroom implementation or learner outcomes. Future research may therefore combine framework-based textbook analysis with classroom observation, teacher interviews, or learner performance data to further explore how different compilation models interact with instructional practices and learning processes. Such empirical extensions would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between textbook design and communicative competence development in tertiary English education.

Acknowledgements

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