

# Comparison of Language Testing Methods: A Comparative Study on HSK and Other Language Tests

**Qianhuan Lin**

Chongqing Normal University, Chongqing 401331, China

DOI: 10.32629/jher.v5i6.3416

**Abstract:** This study aims to compare the similarities and differences between HSK and other major international language tests, focusing on the differences between IELTS, TOPIK and TestDaF in test format, scoring criteria and evaluation methods. By comparing each language test's listening, reading, writing and speaking parts, this paper explores the applicability, international influence and comprehensive evaluation of language proficiency of different language tests. The results show that although the language tests differ in specific forms and evaluation criteria, they all examine language learners' abilities in multiple dimensions, and their respective design characteristics reflect the specific needs of their culture and language. This article provides theoretical foundation and practical advice for the optimization of language proficiency test and cross-language comparison.

**Keywords:** HSK, IELTS, TOPIK, TestDaF, language proficiency test, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, scoring criteria

## 1. Introduction

In the context of globalization, language proficiency tests have become essential tools for measuring individuals' language abilities. With the deepening of international exchanges, language proficiency assessments are no longer limited to traditional classroom teaching, and an increasing number of standardized language tests have emerged. These tests have become essential standards for students and professionals to measure and certify their language proficiency, providing a scientific evaluation basis for educational institutions, employers, and immigration agencies. However, the testing methods and systems of different languages vary, which reflects the language's characteristics and is affected by each country's culture, education system and language learning needs [1].

Language proficiency tests typically include listening, reading, writing, and speaking, aiming to evaluate candidates' language application abilities comprehensively. Taking Chinese as an example, the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) is a widely recognized Chinese proficiency test in the world, especially favored by candidates who study Chinese in non-native countries. However, in addition to HSK, there are many other language tests worldwide, such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Test of Proficiency in Korean (TOPIK), and the TestDaF, which correspond to different language groups and aim to measure proficiency in English, Korean, and German. Language tests have different forms and significant differences in scoring standards, making them of great comparative value in today's increasingly globalized world [2].

The innovation of this study lies in the comprehensive comparison of the design differences between HSK and other language tests (such as IELTS, TOPIK, TestDaF, etc.) [3] in the core test parts (listening, reading, writing, speaking) and the exploration of the cultural factors and evaluation methods behind these differences. Through cross-language and cross-cultural comparative analysis, this paper reveals the uniqueness and commonality of different language tests and promotes the internationalization of language testing methods. At the same time, this paper provides a reference for language learners to choose appropriate tests and provides theoretical support for educational institutions to optimize language test design.

## 2. Comparative analysis of HSK and other language tests

### 2.1 Comparison of test content and form

The content of language proficiency tests usually includes four parts: listening, reading, writing and speaking, aiming to evaluate the language useability of candidates comprehensively. Different language tests have apparent differences in test content and form due to their different design concepts, purposes and cultural backgrounds.

#### 2.1.1 Test format and content of HSK

The HSK test structure is relatively simple, including listening, reading and writing. This examination is designed to

test the students' basic language skills, with particular emphasis on general vocabulary and grammar. HSK is divided into six levels, of which Levels 1 and 2 mainly focus on testing essential language ability, while Levels 3 to Level 6 gradually increase the language difficulty and complexity of reading and writing. The emphasis of HSK is to test candidates' linguistic understanding by standardized questions, especially the comprehension and expression of written language [4].

### **2.1.2 Test format and content of IELTS**

The IELTS is composed of four parts: listening, reading, writing and speaking. The test content includes both academic language ability and practical English ability required for daily communication. The listening part of IELTS includes four dialogues and monologues covering social life and academic scenes. The reading part includes three academic articles, which test candidates' ability to read quickly and extract information in different situations. The writing part has two questions, which require candidates to write a report and a short essay, respectively, to test candidates' logical expression and argumentation ability. The oral part evaluates the candidate's oral expression ability through face-to-face communication with the examiner.

### **2.1.3 TOPIK test format and content**

The TOPIK test is divided into two parts: elementary (levels 1-2) and intermediate and advanced (levels 3-6), and the test content also includes listening, reading and writing. The elementary part examines basic language skills, mainly involving simple conversations and basic grammatical structures in daily life. The intermediate and advanced parts gradually increase the requirements for academic and complex contexts. TOPIK's uniqueness lies in its listening section, which emphasizes the candidate's understanding of Korean daily, while the writing section requires candidates to complete more complex written expressions [5].

### **2.1.4 TestDaF test format and content**

The TestDaF test is also composed of four parts: listening, reading, writing, and speaking, but the content of the test is more focused on the assessment of academic language skills, particularly those who are not German. The listening part of TestDaF mainly includes conversations and lectures in academic scenarios, and the reading part requires candidates to understand and analyze academic articles. The writing part requires candidates to write academic articles, while the speaking part evaluates candidates' oral expression ability through simulated academic discussions.

## **2.2 Comparison of scoring criteria**

The scoring criteria of language tests are usually based on candidates' performance in four language abilities (listening, reading, writing and speaking). However, the scoring criteria of different language tests have different settings, mainly reflected in the scoring range, standardization level and the emphasis on different language abilities.

### **2.2.1 Scoring criteria of HSK**

HSK's scoring criteria are relatively straightforward. The candidate's total score is the sum of the scores of each part (listening, reading and writing). The maximum score of each part is 100 points, and the final total score is weighted according to the scores of the candidates in the three parts. The scoring criteria of HSK do not distinguish the relative importance of different language abilities but judge the overall language level of the candidates through comprehensive scoring. Through the different levels of score division, HSK can divide candidates' abilities into six levels, from elementary to advanced.

### **2.2.2 Scoring Criteria of IELTS**

IELTS uses a 9-point scoring system with strict evaluation criteria. Each part is scored independently, and the candidate's score range for each part is 0-9 points. The final total score is the average of the four scores. IELTS describes the candidate's language ability, including specific listening, reading, writing and speaking requirements. For example, the speaking part tests fluency and evaluates multiple dimensions, such as grammatical accuracy and vocabulary diversity. Therefore, the IELTS score is more detailed, which can accurately reflect the advantages and disadvantages of the candidate.

### **2.2.3 TOPIK scoring criteria**

TOPIK's scoring criteria are relatively simple, and the test's total score usually determines the candidate's level. The total score requirement for elementary students is more than 80 points, while the intermediate and advanced students require at least 140 points. TOPIK's scoring criteria emphasize essential language ability, but for intermediate and advanced students, mastering grammar, vocabulary, writing skills and the depth of listening comprehension are also highly required.

### **2.2.4 TestDaF scoring criteria**

TestDaF's scoring criteria are represented by TDN (TestDaF level), with TDN 5 being the highest and TDN 3 the lowest. Different German universities have different requirements for TDN. Generally speaking, candidates must achieve a TDN score of 4 or above to be eligible for admission. The scoring criteria of TestDaF are relatively complex, especially for the writing and speaking parts, which not only evaluate the accuracy of the language but also consider the logic and academic nature of the expression.

## **2.3 Evaluation methods and cross-cultural differences**

Although all language tests involve four basic abilities: listening, reading, writing and speaking, there are significant differences in the evaluation methods of each test, which are closely related to cultural background, education system and language characteristics.

### **2.3.1 HSK evaluation method**

HSK's evaluation method is relatively simple, mainly through multiple-choice and short writing questions to examine the candidate's language ability. Its evaluation method focuses on the candidate's vocabulary and mastery of grammatical structure but is relatively weak in examining actual language useability. The standardized test format of HSK makes it highly reliable, but it may also ignore the candidate's ability in actual language communication.

### **2.3.2 IELTS assessment method**

IELTS has a more diverse assessment method, especially the oral part, which can more realistically reflect the candidate's language communication ability through face-to-face communication. In addition, IELTS also assesses the candidate's language ability in academic situations through academic writing and reading tests. This diversified assessment method enables IELTS to reflect the candidate's language level more comprehensively, but it also requires candidates to have comprehensive solid language application ability.

### **2.3.3 TOPIK assessment method**

TOPIK's assessment method focuses on language application in daily life, especially in the listening and writing parts. TOPIK mainly tests essential language ability at the elementary level, while the examination content is more academic at the intermediate and advanced levels. TOPIK's assessment method closely relates to Korea's language learning needs and focuses on mastering basic language skills.

### **2.3.4 TestDaF assessment method**

TestDaF's assessment method focuses on the test of academic language ability, especially in writing and speaking parts, and candidates need to demonstrate strong logical thinking and academic expression skills. TestDaF has a strict scoring standard and can accurately assess whether the examinee has sufficient language ability to cope with the study requirements of German universities.

## **3. Challenges and improvement directions faced by HSK**

As China's official Chinese proficiency test, HSK mainly provides non-native speakers with the ability to learn Chinese. Although its influence is gradually increasing worldwide, it still faces some challenges.

### **3.1 Hardware facilities and cost issues**

A significant challenge the HSK exam faces in the promotion process is the limited hardware facilities. Especially in the oral test, it is necessary to rely on computers and other equipment for recording. However, in some countries, due to poor hardware conditions, the cost of computer maintenance is high, directly affecting the recording quality of oral tests. In addition, the construction and maintenance of standardized examination rooms also require a lot of cost investment. These problems have restricted the popularization and development of the HSK exam to a certain extent.

### **3.2 Promotion and examiner training**

The promotion of the HSK exam is still insufficient. It mainly relies on channels such as Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms for promotion, which is far from meeting the global demand for Chinese learning. In addition, training local Chinese volunteer teachers and government-sponsored teachers to become qualified oral examiners is also an important task. Improving the global popularity of the HSK exam and training more qualified examiners is a significant challenge facing the HSK exam.

### **3.3 The spread and influence of language testing**

The influence of the HSK exam is gradually expanding, but its integration with enterprises, education and other fields still needs to be improved. The following discusses the dissemination and influence of the HSK test from the perspectives of studying abroad and working and proposes directions for improvement.

#### **3.3.1 Application in the field of studying abroad**

Students who pass HSK levels 3 and 4 can apply for scholarships to study in China, and students who pass levels 5 and 6 can apply to study in China for a master's degree. However, compared with other language tests, such as Topik and TestDaF, the HSK test is not widely used in studying abroad. In the future, we can increase cooperation with foreign universities, improve the recognition of HSK certificates, and enable more students to realize their dreams of studying abroad through

the HSK test.

### 3.3.2 Application in the field of work

In the recruitment process of Chinese companies, the Application for HSK certificates is not apparent. In some countries, such as South Korea and Germany, the employment conditions of companies require the corresponding language level certificates. To promote Chinese industrialization, we can strengthen the connection between the HSK test and the needs of enterprises so that the HSK certificate can become a significant advantage for job seekers.

### 3.3.3 Increase the integration of enterprises and education

To enhance the dissemination of the HSK test, the following measures can be taken: (1) Strengthen cooperation with Chinese enterprises, promote the use of HSK certificates in corporate recruitment, and make the HSK test an essential reference for job seekers. (2) Increase the publicity of the HSK test, improve its popularity among international students, and let more students understand the value of the HSK certificate. (3) Research the integration of the HSK test and foreign education systems to improve the recognition of the HSK certificate in international education. (4) Organize various Chinese activities, such as Chinese competitions, cultural exchanges, etc., to enhance the influence of the HSK test.

## 4. Conclusion

By comparing major language tests such as HSK, IELTS, TOPIK and TestDaF, this study analyzed their design concepts, test contents and scoring standards and revealed the characteristics and challenges of various language tests in the context of globalization. First, each language test has its characteristics. HSK focuses on assessing written abilities in basic Chinese, but there is still room for improvement in oral and practical communication. IELTS focuses on comprehensive language ability, primarily academic and daily communication, but the scoring of its oral part may be subjective; TOPIK mainly examines the daily Application of Korean, and as the difficulty increases, the challenges faced by candidates also gradually increase; TestDaF focuses on academic German ability, with strict scoring standards, but it is more difficult for candidates with non-German backgrounds. Secondly, language tests generally face some common challenges. Cultural differences and test fairness issues are still prominent, especially in the assessment of oral and writing; with the development of science and technology, how to combine AI and natural language processing technology to improve the objectivity and accuracy of the test is the main development direction in the future. In addition, assessing oral and practical communication skills still has limitations. How to more comprehensively evaluate the actual language application ability of candidates through technological innovation is a problem that language tests need to solve. In the future, language tests will tend to be intelligent, personalized and technical, the test format will be more flexible, and the scoring system will be more precise to ensure fairness and comprehensiveness.

## References

---

- [1] Chen Xiaoting. (2018). Comparative study on the listening and reading parts of the TestDaF and the new HSK (Doctoral dissertation, Guangxi University).
- [2] Dou Yunpeng, & Bai Zhongnan. (2023). Analysis of the characteristics of the Korean language proficiency level test (TOPIK). *Journal of Huangshan University*, 25(2), 135-137.
- [3] Du Yanhua, & Ma Zongying. (2016). New developments and responses to the Korean language proficiency level test. *Examination Weekly*, (19), 7-7.
- [4] Zhao Linlu. (2022). Comparative study on the new HSK level 6 listening comprehension questions and the IELTS test. (Doctoral dissertation, Xi'an International Studies University).
- [5] Xiao Ruoluo. (2013). Comparative study on the new HSK and IELTS language tests (Doctoral dissertation, Central China Normal University).