

**DEVELOPING AN ENGLISH PROFICIENCY TEST
FOR FOURTH-YEAR SECONDARY STUDENTS ¹**

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ABSTRACT

The researcher-constructed English proficiency tests, after having been administered and subjected to item analysis, yielded 80 valid items, or 61.54% out of 130 original items under the discrete-point test; and 49 items, or 75.38% out of 65 items under the integrative test. Those valid items constituted the final items in the revised form of the discrete-point and integrative tests.

Both tests proved to have reliability coefficients of 0.84 for the discrete-point test and 0.97 for the integrative test. The use of both types of test is recommended to effectively evaluate learner's English language proficiency. English teachers must also be reoriented to the combined use of the two types of test to effectively determine students' actual English proficiency level.

KEY WORDS: English proficiency test. Test in English. Discrete-point test. Integrative test.

¹ Part of the MS thesis of the senior author.

INTRODUCTION

Conducting an English proficiency test is usually carried out by schools as part of their admission or qualifying requirements for prospective students. Results of this test may also be used for determining students' language problems and as basis for designing instructional content, activities, and approaches in English teaching.

Applied linguists have recommended approaches in constructing language proficiency tests. They strongly advocate that language tests should not only measure linguistic competence (grammar, structure, and vocabulary) but also communicative competence (ability to use the language in actual communication). As linguistic competence can be measured using the discrete-point test, and communicative competence by the integrative type of test, they recommend the use of both types in administering an English proficiency test.

Oller (1977), Braine (1972), and Briere (1978) as cited by Rionda, (1980) support the idea of using a combination of the two types of test to achieve more meaningful results. Seroy (1979) likewise believes that both discrete-point and integrative tests, when administered together, will yield substantial information which may serve as basis in addressing problems in language teaching and learning.

Preparation of a functional language proficiency test does not end after construction of the test items. Scientific procedures have to be carried out to assess its validity and reliability before it can be adopted for wide use. Hence, this study attempted to: 1) construct two types of language proficiency test, the discrete-point and integrative tests in English for high school seniors, and administer them to the high school seniors in six different schools; and 2) analyze through item analysis the validity and reliability of the two tests and come up with the improved versions of the tests.

METHODOLOGY

Test Instruments Used

Two types of English proficiency test, the discrete-point and integrative tests, were prepared in this study. The discrete-point test included phonology, lexicon, and syntax. This test used multiple-choice type of questions, with four choices under each item. The integrative test, on the other hand, included reading comprehension, listening comprehension, maze, cloze, lecturette, and dictation tests, which were all provided with clear instructions to properly guide the examinees.

Steps in Constructing the Test

The steps suggested by Harris (1969) were adopted in constructing the two types of test used in this study: 1) Planning the test, 2) Preparing the test items and directions, 3) Submitting the test material to the course adviser for review, recommendation, and researcher's subsequent revision, 4) Pretesting the test instruments and subsequent revision after the pretesting, and 5) Reproducing the two types of test.

Sampling Procedure and Test Administration

The two types of test were administered to all fourth year high school students in the six purposively selected sample schools composed of three city/municipal high schools and three barangay high schools. The city/municipal high schools consisted of the ViSCA Laboratory High School* at the Visayas State College of Agriculture, Baybay, Leyte; Western Leyte College, Ormoc City; and Leyte Agro-Industrial School in Leyte, Leyte. The barangay high schools consisted of the Caridad National High School in Barangay Caridad, Baybay, Leyte; Conalum National High School in Barangay Conalum, Inopacan, Leyte; and the Bontoc National High School in Barangay Bontoc, Hindang, Leyte.

* now the Leyte State University Laboratory High School (LSU-LHS)

- 4. I. Diff. any)
- } Discarded (compiled for future use)
- I. Disc. 0.19-below)

The validity and reliability of the two tests were determined using the following computations: 1) mean and standard deviations of the discrete-point and integrative tests; 2) indices of difficulty and discrimination as a measure of validity of each item in the tests; and 3) coefficient of reliability using the Kuder-Richardson Formula, as follows:

$$r = \frac{K}{K-1} \left(1 - \frac{E_{pq}}{S^2} \right)$$

- Where K = the number of items in the test
- S² = the variance of the test
- p = the difficulty of the item taken from the item analysis work
- q = 1- p
- pq = the product of the index per item and q.
- This is carried to four decimal places

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis of Test Items

Discrete-Point Test

More than one-third (40%) or 52 out of 130 items were retained; 28 (21.5%) were revised (either made easier or more difficult, except for those which the researcher felt no need to revise for practical reasons); and 50 (38.4%) were discarded (Table 1). The combined results of retained and revised items show that majority, or 80 items (61.5%) under

Table 1. Summary of retained, revised, and discarded items under the discrete-point test.

	Retained		Revised		Discarded		Total Number of Items	%
	No. of Items	%	No. of Items	%	No. of Items	%		
Part I. Phonology								
A. Sounds	8	40	5	25	7	35	20	100
B. Stress	5	25	4	20	11	55	20	100
Part II. Lexicon								
A. Antonyms	3	30	2	20	5	50	10	100
B. Synonyms	14	40	8	22.9	13	37.1	35	100
Part III. Grammar & Structure								
A. Structuring	6	40	1	6.7	8	53.3	15	100
B. Adverbs, Adjectives & Prepositions	11	55	4	20	5	25	20	100
TOTAL	52	40	28	21.5	50	38.4	130	100

the discrete-point test were found to be valid items and were therefore included in the final form of the test.

Integrative Test

Table 2 shows that out of 65 items in the integrative test which were subjected to item analysis, 31 (47.7%) were retained; 18 (27.7%) were revised (either made easier or more difficult); and 16 (47.6%) were discarded. The combined results of retained and revised items show that 49 (75.4%) out of 65 items were found to be valid and were therefore included in the revised form of the test. The dictation test, which was not subjected to item analysis (due to absence of a workable procedure for analyzing items under this test), was retained in the final form of the test.

Table 2. Summary of retained, revised and discarded items under the integrative test.

	Retained		Revised		Discarded		Total Number of Items	%
	No. of Items	%	No. of Items	%	No. of Items	%		
Part I. Reading Comprehension	9	60	5	33.3	1	6.7	15	100
Part II. Listening Comprehension	4	40	3	30	3	30	10	100
Part III. Lecturette Test	5	50	5	50	0	-	10	100
Part IV. Maze Test	6	40	5	33.3	4	26.7	15	100
Part V. Cloze Test	7	46.7	0	-	8	53.3	15	100
Sub-Total	31	47.7	18	27.7	16	24.6	65	100
Part VI. Dictation Test	*25	100					25*	100
TOTAL	56	62.2	18	20.00	16	17.8	90	100

* Not included in item analysis; hence, segregated in the above computation

Reliability of the Two Tests

The computed reliability coefficient of the discrete-point test was 0.84 while that of the integrative test was 0.97. According to Diedrich (as cited by Vallete, 1967 and Seroy, 1979), a good test is reliable if it has attained a reliability coefficient of 0.60. For a standardized test, a minimum reliability coefficient of 0.90 is required. The integrative test in this study, therefore, met the required reliability coefficient of a standardized test, while the discrete-point test almost made it to the mark with a very slight deficiency. The results of the study suggest that both tests are reliable.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION

Majority (80, or 61.5%) out of 130 items in the discrete-point test were valid items based on the combined results of retained and revised test items. For the integrative test, a great majority (49, or 75.4%) out of 65 items which were subjected to items analysis (the dictation test was not subjected to item analyses) were found to be valid.

Both tests had high reliability coefficients of 0.84 for the discrete-point test and 0.97 for the integrative test. These results suggest that the tests were highly reliable based on Diederich's reliability criteria.

Recommendations

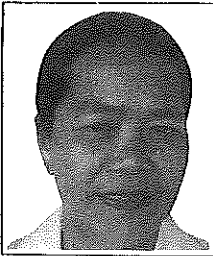
1. Language learners must be exposed to the integrative type of test, aside from the discrete-point type, which is commonly used. The former effectively assesses the internalized grammar of the language learner, while the latter the "surface structure" of the language. Both types of test should complement each other to effectively evaluate learner's English proficiency.
2. Language teachers must be reoriented to the use of both types of test. The importance of using the integrative type must be emphasized inasmuch as this nature of test, despite its effectiveness, has not been fully utilized.
3. School administrators must promote the art of language proficiency test construction and validation as a procedure before formally administering the tests. Moreover, they must also initiate seminars which delve into the trends and approaches in language teaching.
4. Future researchers may use the revised versions of the test instruments in this study (or its prototype) for another set of trial runs

in other schools. Sampling may be improved for a more accurate estimation of the validity and reliability of the tests.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



The author obtained her B.S. degree in Agricultural Development Education with major in Development Communication and her M.S. degree in Language Teaching from the Visayas State College of Agriculture (now Leyte State University).

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