

## An Oral Test Using Expansion Drills

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### Introduction

Oral tests are used routinely by companies, language institutes and higher educational facilities like colleges and universities. This enables them to determine the ESL comprehension level of a sample group. Companies may use this information to accept or reject a job applicant. Language institutes use this information to determine what program level to place the new student (ie. beginner, elementary, intermediate, or advanced). Tests of this sort are as diverse as they are numerous. Although they measure a number of factors (like size of vocabulary, grammar knowledge, knowledge of idiomatic expressions, comprehension, retention, fluency, and pronunciation) the test always attempts to answer this question, "How good is this person's English"

Freshmen students enrolled in the Aircraft Management Department at Inha Technical Junior College were given such a test. I recorded the scores each student received next to their names in my attendance roster. I referred to the scores periodically while performing in-class individual student-teacher drills. While performing a question-answer drill it was found that lengthy questions presented a higher degree of difficulty to students who received low scores on the oral screening test where as those who received high scores had little or no difficulty at all with them. A similar corollary was noticed when I presented individuals with expansion drills; if they scored high on the oral

screening test they were able to handle an expansion drill of 10 words or more. Low test scorers experienced difficulty as soon as this drill exceeded 5 words.

It was with this background information that I set out to see if a more simplified oral test could yield similar results as the conventional oral screening test that our students received initially. If the vocabulary and grammar used in such a test lay within the capabilities of even the poorest students, (ie. the middle school level) then such a test would not only show their true comprehension level but also that listening retention was directly related to the length of the question. Perhaps poor listening comprehension resulted in the low scores on the initial screening test.

### Oral Test 1

100 college freshmen students were randomly selected from a sample group of 252. Each student was individually presented the following test by the author of this paper. Their responses to each question were analyzed and graded in the following manner:

- (a) a grammatically correct, rapid response received a perfect score of 4.
- (b) a slight grammar mistake and/ or prolonged hesitation or pauses during or before the question resulted in a score of 3.
- (c) several grammar mistakes and/or fluency problems resulted in a score of 2.
- (d) incomplete or single word answers received a score of 1.
- (e) an incorrect response received a score of 0.

From the above criteria one can see that a perfect score receives  $15 \times 4 = 60$ .

#### The Test:

1. Do you have a big house?
2. Does your house have 3 bedrooms?

3. Does your house have a beautiful flower garden?
4. Are you tall?
5. How tall are you?
6. Who is taller, you or your father?
7. Where is your school?
8. Does your school have many classrooms?
9. Are there many pictures on the wall in the classroom?
10. What time is it?
11. What time do you have lunch?
12. What time do you get up for school every morning?
13. Do you eat breakfast?
14. Who do you eat breakfast with?
15. What do you usually eat for breakfast?

In this test the vocabulary and grammar are all at the middle school level. Idiomatic expressions have been omitted. All questions are in the simple present tense. This test encompasses 5 subject areas: the house, height, the school, time, and breakfast. Each question referring to these subject areas is immediately preceded by 2 follow up questions. The follow up questions are progressively more lengthy than the question before it.

The students are requested to answer using complete sentences. For example if the question is, "Do you study every night?" then acceptable answers would be of the following form:

Yes, I study every night.

No, I don't study every night.

No, I study every morning.

No, my father studies every night.

One word answers or short phrase answers like:

No.

Yes.

No, I don't.

Yes, I do.

were discouraged.

**Results****Chart 1**

Student	Ranking	Score	Student	Ranking	Score
27	1	54	3	12	36
30	4	46	7	13	34
18	4	46	25	15	31
14	8	40	21	15	31
1	9	39	6	16	29
9	11	37	29	18	26
11	11	37	19	18	26
16	11	37			

Actual student names have been replaced with numbers. So as to conserve paper I have randomly selected 15 students from the sample group of 100 to represent my findings.

Students were ranked on the basis of their test scores. The students with the highest score received a ranking of 1. Students who received an identical score received the same ranking. Students with the lowest score received the lowest ranking.

**Chart 2**

Question #	Average score	Question #	Average score
1	3.5	9	2.4
2	3.1	10	3.7
3	2.6	11	2.9
4	3.8	12	2.1
5	2.9	13	3.6
6	2.6	14	2.0
7	3.3	15	2.2
8	3.0		

Question 4 received the highest average score. It was the least difficult question for the sample group to answer. Question 14 received the lowest average score. It was the most difficult question for the sample group to answer.

The results from Chart 2 can be arranged into the following 3 groups:

- (a) *Group 1* which contained questions 1, 4, 7, 10, and 13 received average scores of 3.3 or more.
- (b) *Group 2* containing questions 2, 5, 8, and 11 received average scores from 2.9 to 3.1.
- (c) *Group 3* containing questions 3, 9, 12, 14, and 15 received scores of less than 2.6.

Group 1 questions on an average received responses which were 84% correct. The majority of the mistakes made were either simple grammar mistakes or the improper use of articles. In general responses were fairly automatic. It was very rare that the students required these questions to be repeated.

Group 2 questions produced multiple grammar mistakes as well as the misuse of articles. The students requested that the majority of these questions be repeated at least once prior to answering them. There was also an increase in the amount of time needed to answer the questions in this group.

In Group 3 questions incomplete answers and wrong answers were common. The students required these questions to be repeated numerous times but were still unable to answer them properly in the majority of cases. The amount of time required to answer each question in this group was the greatest of the 3 groups.

### **Analysis of Results**

To this point the following facts remained clear:

- (1) Short questions were the most readily answered. They also belonged to the Group 1 category which means they rendered the least amount of answer defects.
- (2) Long questions produced the fewest correct responses and the greatest amount of difficulty to the students. The key factor here was that these questions needed to be repeated several times before the students could answer them with a relatively high degree of proficiency. Once repeated these questions were answerable. One's

initial hypothesis is that these questions contained either complicated vocabulary or grammatical structures and patterns that were unfamiliar to the students. This however wasn't the case. So as to prove this the initial screening test was applied this time as a written test to the same group of students.

The students were allowed a maximum of 30 minutes to complete this written test. Written test grading was identical to that used for oral testing as explained earlier. Spelling mistakes had no effect on these scores.

Chart 3

Name	Oral test score	written test score	oral ranking	written ranking
27	54	58	1	2
30	46	57	2	3
18	46	56	3	4
14	40	53	8	7
1	39	53	9	7
9	37	51	11	9
11	37	45	11	15
16	37	50	11	10
3	36	45	12	15
7	34	49	13	11
25	31	48	15	12
21	31	46	15	14
6	29	45	16	15
29	26	40	18	20
19	26	43	18	17

Note: So as to conserve space only 15 students have been randomly selected from the sample group of 100.

From the above results we see that all of the students increased their average scores on the written test. Rankings remained relatively constant to what they were in the oral portion of the test.

Chart 4 results show that group 1 questions (ie. questions 1, 4, 7, 10, and 13) increased by an average of 0.1 above the oral test scores. This grouping showed the smallest increment of change among the 3 groups. Group 2 scores increased by an average of 0.4. Only slight grammar

Chart 4

question #	oral test avg. score	written test avg. score	% increase
1	3.5	3.6	0.1
2	3.1	3.4	0.3
3	2.6	3.2	0.6
4	3.8	3.9	0.1
5	2.9	3.3	0.4
6	2.6	3.1	0.5
7	3.3	3.6	0.3
8	3.0	3.4	0.4
9	2.4	3.0	0.6
10	3.7	3.8	0.1
11	2.9	3.4	0.5
12	2.1	2.9	0.8
13	3.6	3.7	0.1
14	2.0	2.8	0.8
15	2.2	3.0	0.8

mistakes were noticed. Group 3 scores showed the greatest increase. Written responses to these questions were an average of 0.8 higher than the oral responses were. Slight grammar mistakes were also common.

### Analysis of Results

Students whose listening ability was poor scored low on the listening test and considerably higher on the written test. The marked improvement on the group 3 questions can be attributed to the fact that:

(a) the grammar structures and patterns were not beyond their language capabilities.

(b) the vocabulary was not new to them.

Since the group 3 questions were the most lengthy perhaps this factor resulted in the above results. So far the results obtained in Chart 4 point to the fact that long questions received the greatest number of errors. This would explain perfectly why *listening retention* decreased

with the length of the question (ie. the students couldn't remember what was asked of them in the question) I now set out to see if that hypothesis was true.

*Purpose:* To show that listening retention decreases as the length of the question increases.

The following test was presented orally to the same sample group of students. They were once again graded according to the criteria layed out earlier. The students were asked to respond in the following manner:

Q: Do you sleep?

A: *No, I don't* sleep.

Notice that the number of questions in each sentence is always increased by one word only. Once again I confined the selection of the vocabulary in the questions to the Middle school level. The same "Do you.....?" pattern was used for each question. In actuality all one needed to do for a perfect response was to say, "No, I don't" then repeat the question portion of the sentence.

### Oral Test 2

1. Do you dance?
2. Do you eat lunch?
3. Do you study every evening?
4. Do you play baseball every winter?
5. Do you wash dishes with your mother?
6. Do you read comic books in the library?
7. Do you talk on the phone twice every Sunday?
8. Do you paint houses for extra money with someone's help?
9. Do you take the express train twice every other Saturday night?
10. Do you put on clean clothes whenever you go to house parties?

As the length of the question increased the test scores decreased in 9 out of the 10 questions.

Let's now compare the oral test 1 results and the oral test 2 results. Students whose rankings were in the upper third of Oral Test 1 for



**Chart 5**

Question #	Avg. Score	Question #	Avg. Score
1	3.9	6	2.8
2	3.8	7	2.2
3	3.6	8	1.5
4	3.5	9	1.6
5	3.1	10	0.4

**Chart 6**

Name	oral test 1 ranking	oral test 2 ranking
27	1	3
30	2	1
18	3	4
14	8	8
1	9	6
9	11	9
11	11	13
16	11	11
3	12	10
7	13	17
25	15	9
21	15	14
6	16	15
29	18	15
19	18	17

the most part remained in this upper level with relatively few exceptions. Similar results were also obtained for students who were ranked in the middle and lower levels.

### Conclusions

Since the statistical variation regarding OT 1 (Oral Test 1 rankings and OT 2 (Oral Test 2) rankings were relatively insignificant (see chart 6) one can conclude that good listening retention is a precursor

to good listening comprehension. After all, one must be able to remember what the question asks before being able to respond to it.

From the results obtained in Chart 5 we see that as the number of words in a question increased, listening retention decreased providing the vocabulary, grammar patterns, and grammar structures used lay within the language capabilities of the students.

Language screening tests similar to my OT 1 are as varied and diverse as the subjects they are administered to. They don't however measure one's language learning potential, only what has already been learned.

A test like my Oral Test 2 is an oversimplification of the standard screening Oral Test used by companies or institutes across the country. Unlike the more conventional screening tests which probe a wider area of one's language knowledge this simplified test simply measures one's listening retention.

I have demonstrated in this paper that students who performed well on the general screening test (OT 1) also performed well on the listening retention test. I hope to show in a future paper that listening retention exercises can enhance one's performance on general screening tests. If my simplified version of oral testing truly does measure language learning potential then a test of this sort can currently be used to select individuals who will most rapidly elevate their current language abilities.

## **Applications**

Company executives may use a test of this sort to select those individuals who are most likely to increase their ESL ability in the shortest period of time and therefore reduce the high costs of consequent language training.

Colleges and Universities may find this test of benefit when used for "tracking" their students. In a program of this sort students are placed in a class of students who show a similar learning potential. The

instructor then has the ability to alter the amount of material presented to the students depending on their ability to master it. In general the rapid learners receive the accelerated program and the slow learners receive a decelerated program as well as the specialized instruction they require to elevate their ESL level.

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## 〈국문초록〉

## 확장연습을 통한 구두표현력 테스트

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대학 1학년생 252명의 표본 그룹 중에서 임의로 100명을 선발하여 15개의 질문을 실시하고 각 15개의 질문에 대한 답변을 분석해 본바, 5개 이내의 어휘로 된 질문은 테스트 그룹에게는 어려움이 없었으나 질문이 길어질수록 답변 수준은 감소하였다.

“Do you.....?” 패턴을 이용한 더 단순화된 구두 이해 테스트를 같은 표본 그룹에 제시하고 이 테스트 중에서 각 연속 질문은 앞의 질문보다 어휘를 하나씩 늘렸다. 이 단순화 된 구두 테스트에서 답변을 잘 한 학생들은 역시 처음이 더 다양한 구두 테스트에서도 잘 한 것으로 나타났다. 역시 긴 질문이 전체 학생 그룹에게는 아주 어려운 것으로 나타났으며 질문이 길어질 수록 칭취 이해가 감소함을 보여 주었다.

그러므로 이 새로운 단순화 형태의 구두 시험이 테스트 그룹의 DSL 이해 수준을 적절히 측정 할 수 있음을 결론지었다.