



英语  
测试实用教程  
A PRACTICAL  
COURSE  
IN ENGLISH  
TESTING

杨端和 于燕京 编著  
刘 钦 审校

云南大学出版社

# 英语测试实用教程

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云南大学出版社

Yunnan University Press

1992

滇新登字 07 号

责任编辑 李继毛

封面设计 杜伟

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云南大学出版社出版发行

(云南大学校内)

昆明市印刷厂印刷

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开本: 787×1092 1/32 印张: 10.9 字数: 245.7 千

1992 年 4 月第 1 版 1992 年 4 月第一次印刷

印数: 0001-2700

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ISBN7-81025-189-9/H·5 定价: 5.40 元

## Foreword

As the Southwest China English Teacher Training Center, housed in Yunnan Normal University and financially supported by UNESCO, has begun to enroll teacher-trainees from Sichuan, Guizhou and Yunnan Provinces and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, we feel an urgent need to offer an English testing course at the center. In our opinion, testing is a weak link in our country's foreign language teaching and learning. Many language teachers do not have any knowledge about testing and evaluation. Every school term they write various test papers of their own, but they do not know if their tests are good or not, nor can they use statistical means to analyze the test results. In offering this course, we have assumed the task of writing a course book for our teacher trainees at the center.

In this course book, we intend to outline the general principles of language testing; to classify English tests according to different criteria and purposes; to exemplify a wide range of testing techniques; to demonstrate how these techniques can be effectively used to assess the four macro-skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing; to verify how various statistical methods may be applied in evaluating test results; and to help our teacher-trainees

improve their own test-writing skills.

Needless to say, in compiling a course book of this kind, we have drawn heavily upon some other works in the same line during the writing, and these works have been listed in the Main Bibliography at the end of the book as our acknowledgements.

We wish to express our gratitude to Professor Gui Shi-chun of Guangzhou Institute of Foreign Languages, without his enlightening course in Educational Design, Testing and Statistics one of the compilers followed when he sought for an M.A. in the Institute, this book would have never been written. Our indebtedness is due to Dr. D.V.Ingram, Chief Examiner of Australia. When we attended a training course in Griffith University, Australia, he personally gave us a series of lectures on language testing and allowed us to have access to those papers on testing written by him and many books he possessed. We are grateful to Professor Yang Chuan-zhe, Dean of Foreign Languages Department, Yunnan Normal University, who has showed great concern over the compiling of this book and always offered invaluable suggestions and comments. We also want to thank Mr. Li Ji-mao, the young and promising editor at Yunnan University Press, who is directly responsible for the publication of this book and whose persistent effort has made this book published ahead of schedule.

It was not until we had begun the writing that we suddenly realized that our effort was actually the first attempt to

write an English testing course book in our country. Since such is the case, and since this book has been written in a hurry to meet an urgent need, mistakes and improper arguments may have crept in at one or other places. We sincerely hope testing experts, our colleagues and students will make comments and suggestions on how to improve this book.

Finally, if our students should consider this book useful and take it as a “lead-in” to their further study of English testing, we would feel our efforts amply rewarded.

Yunnan Normal University

Kunming

April 1992

The compilers

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# Chapter 1 English Testing, Some Basic Concepts

## 1.1 Introduction

Recent developments in Communicative language teaching are now resulting in a widespread reappraisal of language tests and techniques. Not only have the shortcomings of the traditional approach to language teaching and testing been strongly attacked, but the whole psychometric basis of language testing has been seriously questioned. However, we should take care not to discard every well-tried and proven method of testing in our search for some magic formula or new technique which will enable us to solve our problems in the assessment of language used as communication. All too often in language testing, as in language teaching, there seems to be a tendency for many to accept half-formed theories readily and apply them hastily and uncritically. It is always important for our English teacher-trainees to keep the best of established methods while, at the same time, seeking to develop where necessary new and more appropriate techniques to reflect the different emphases now being placed on language learning.

It might be emphasised at this stage that a concentration solely on such aspects of communicative competence as authenticity, appropriacy and register is inappropriate if the testing of grammatical system of the language is neglected and regarded as subordinate or inferior in any way. Language still consists of grammar. While testing grammatical competence within a model of language learning, however, we should pay more attention to ways in which the selection and production of a language form is determined not only by its grammatical correctness but also by its function within a given communicative area.

While it is always important to experiment with new testing techniques, it is also essential to attempt to develop existing techniques much further. After falling into disrepute in the 1960's, the long-established dictation test has been the subject of considerable research during the last decade. At the same time, a number of criteria for evaluating spoken language have been suggested, and multiple-choice items and cloze procedures have been introduced as new techniques for assessing performance on advanced reading tests. However, as the American linguist J.W. Oller points out: "There is no basis to conclude that a single test such as a dictation or a cloze test is the best way..... A multiplicity of testing methods concentrating on the kinds of language tasks which language users will be expected to perform makes the best language test in any given set of circumstances."

## 1.2 Types of tests classified

Language tests can be classified according to various criteria. There is some confusion regarding the terminology used to denote the different types of language tests in use, but a number of test specialists agree on the following broad division.

### 1.2.1 Tests classified according to the purpose

Types of language tests can be classified according to various purposes for which the tests are written. These purpose-oriented tests are again subdivided into the following four kinds:

#### 1) *Achievement tests*

These tests can be further subdivided into class progress tests and (standardised) achievement tests.

*Class progress tests* Most teachers are, at some time or other, required to construct various class progress tests. Each progress test situation is unique and can only be evaluated fully by the class teacher in the light of his knowledge of the students, the program which they have been following, and his own particular aims and goals. It is illogical to expect general purpose tests and books of tests to function as effectively as a test constructed specially for a particular situation: therefore, one of the purposes of this textbook is to help the English teachers construct their own language tests.

The progress test is designed to measure the extent to

which the students have mastered the material taught in the classroom. It is based on the language programme which the class has been following and is just as important as an assessment of the teacher's own work as the student's own learning. Results obtained from the progress test enable the teacher to become more familiar with the work of each of his students and with the progress of the class in general. The class progress test is a teaching device, its backwash effect on teaching and motivation being important features. A good progress test should encourage the student to perform well in the target language in a positive manner and to gain additional confidence. Its aim is to stimulate learning and to reinforce what has been taught, therefore, the progress test is chiefly concerned with allowing the student to show what he has mastered. Scores on it should thus be high (provided, of course, that progress has indeed been made).

*Achievement tests* Achievement (or attainment) tests, though similar in a number of ways to progress tests, are far more formal tests and are intended to measure achievement on a large scale. Most annual school examinations take the form of achievement tests; all public tests which are intended to show mastery of a particular syllabus are also achievement tests. These tests are based on what the student is presumed to have learned—not necessarily on what he has actually learned nor on what has actually been taught. Achievement tests frequently take the form of secondary school tests and school certificate examinations; many are

based on a published syllabus and exert a strong influence on its effectiveness in schools. Constructors of such tests rarely teach any of the students being tested (often an advantage provided that the test constructors are very familiar with the teaching and learning problems of the testees). Indeed, this is often a prerequisite before anyone can be appointed to any position of responsibility in connection with this type of test, though this principle obviously cannot always be applied to school examinations.

Several achievement tests are standardised: they are pretested, each item is analysed and revised where necessary, norms are established and comparisons made between performances of different students and different schools. Since such tests are administered year after year, it is possible to compare performances of students one year with those of students taking the test another year.

## 2) *Proficiency tests*

Whereas an achievement test looks back on what should have been learned, the proficiency test looks forward, defining a student's language proficiency with reference to a particular task which he will be required to perform. Proficiency tests are in no way related to any syllabus or teaching programme; indeed, many proficiency tests are intended for students from several different schools, countries and even different language backgrounds. The proficiency test is concerned simply with measuring the student's control of the language in the light of what he will be expected to do with it

in his future performance of a particular task. Does the student know enough English, for example, to follow a certain university or college course given in the medium of English? Does he know enough English in order to function efficiently in a particular type of employment for which he has applied? The proficiency test is thus concerned with measuring not general attainment but specific skills in the light of the language demands made later on the student by his future course of study or job. For instance, English Proficiency Test (E P T) constructed in our country, Test Of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) in the United States, the Cambridge English Certificate Test in Great Britain and Australia Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR) in Australia are all English proficiency tests to assess if a candidate knows enough English to survive and to follow courses in English-speaking countries.

### 3) *Aptitude tests*

A language aptitude test is designed to measure the student's probable performance in a foreign language which he has not started to learn: i.e. it assesses his aptitude for learning a language. Language learning aptitude is a complex matter, consisting of such factors as intelligence, age, motivation, memory, phonological sensitivity and sensitivity to grammatical patterning. The relative weighting given to these elements must depend on many factors and thus vary considerably from one individual to another. Some specialists in this field maintain that it is neither possible nor desir-

able to take an overall measurement of language aptitude; consequently aptitude is sometimes divided into various aspects according to the specific tasks for which a person is being trained: e.g. listening, interpreting, translating. Aptitude tests generally seek to predict the student's probable strengths and weaknesses in learning a foreign language by measuring his performance in an artificial language. The ability to learn new phonemic distinctions and also to use language patterns in an unfamiliar but logical manner is tested by means of the artificial language.

#### 4) *Diagnostic tests*

Although the term diagnostic test is widely used, few tests are constructed solely as diagnostic tests. Achievement tests and proficiency tests, however, are frequently used for diagnostic purposes: areas of difficulty are diagnosed in such tests so that appropriate remedial action can be taken later. Sections of tests which lend themselves particularly well to diagnostic purposes are phoneme discrimination tests, grammar and usage tests, and certain controlled writing tests. Clearly, weaknesses indicated in a test of vocabulary are not highly significant in themselves and can only be regarded as indicating general weaknesses. Similarly, many existing tests of reading comprehension are not very suitable for diagnostic purposes. Tests of writing and oral production can be used diagnostically provided that there is an appreciation of the limits to which such tests can be put. Since diagnosing strengths and weaknesses is such an important fea-