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The Minimal English Test: A Strong Correlation with the Paul Nation Vocabulary Test: A Preliminary Study*

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1. Introduction

This research investigates a correlation between the Paul Nation Vocabulary Test (PNVT) and the Minimal English Test (MET). The PNVT has been established as one of the most salient English proficiency tests in the research area of second language acquisition (SLA). Although it has been widely adopted in order to measure subjects' English proficiency, there is a major drawback: it takes 10 to 30 minutes, depending on the subject, to administer the PNVT. If there were an alternative timesaving proficiency test which measures as effectively as the PNVT, it would make a dramatic difference in collecting SLA data.

As an alternative method we selected the MET since it takes only a few minutes for learners to complete. The MET has its origins in the Simple Performance-Oriented Test (SPOT) developed by Kobayashi et al. (1995). The SPOT requires the test taker to fill a blank with a single Japanese *Hiragana* while listening to the tape. The test developers have shown that there is a strong correlation between the SPOT and the Tsukuba Japanese Proficiency Test, an established test consisting of four Japanese language elements: vocabulary, grammar, listening, and reading comprehension which takes 150 minutes to administer. On the other hand, the SPOT can be administered in three minutes. The MET has a similar characteristic: it requires the test takers to fill in English vocabulary consisting of fewer than four letters, and only takes a few minutes to administer. The present research investigates the correlation between the MET and the PNVT. There were 159 subjects in the study, all Japanese learners of English. The results show that there is a strong, statistically significant correlation between the scores of the MET and the scores of the PNVT ($r = .81$).¹

The organization of this paper is as follows: Section 2 gives an overview of the materials and the methodology of the present research, Section 3 is an analysis the data, Section 4 reports the results, Section 5 addresses further issues, and Section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Materials and Methodology

Section 2.1 gives an overview of the Minimal English Test (MET) developed by Maki, Wasada and Hashimoto (2003), and Section 2.2 gives an overview of the Paul Nation Vocabulary Test (PNVT). Lastly, in Section 2.3, the methodology of the present research is introduced.

2.1 Materials of the Minimal English Test (MET)

The MET is a simple test which requires the test taker to supply a correct English word with four letters or fewer into each of the 72 blank spaces for the given sentences written on one piece of A4 paper while listening to the sentences on a CD. The MET is

based on Lessons 1 and 2 of the textbook for college freshmen written by Sakamoto, Furuya, and Hubenthal (2001) and the CD that accompanies it. The contents of the textbook are essays on the modern society of the United States. The sentences on the CD last about five minutes at a speed of 125 words per minute. The MET is shown below.

The Minimal English Test

Name: _____ Date: Month ____ Day ____ Year _____ Score: ____/72

Please write an English word with four letters or fewer into each blank, while listening to the CD.

1. The majority of people have at least one pet at () time in their ().
2. Sometimes the relationship between a pet () or cat and its owner is () close
3. that () begin to resemble () other in their appearance and behavior.
4. On the other (), owners of unusual pets () as tigers or snakes
5. sometimes () to protect themselves () their own pets.
6. Thirty years () the idea of an inanimate () first arose.
7. This was the pet (), which became a craze () the United States and
8. spread () other countries as ().
9. People () large sums of money for ordinary rocks and assigned () names.
10. They tied a leash around the rock and pulled () down the street just () a dog.
11. The rock owners () talked () their pet rocks.
12. Now () we have entered the computer age, () have virtual pets.
13. The Japanese Tamagotchi---() imaginary chicken ()---
14. () the precursor of () virtual pets.
15. Now there () an ever-increasing number of such virtual ()
16. which mostly young people are adopting () their ().
17. And () your virtual pet (),
18. you () reserve a permanent resting place () the Internet in a virtual pet cemetery.
19. Sports are big business. Whereas Babe Ruth, the () famous athlete of () day,
20. was well-known () earning as () as the President of the United States, the average
21. salary () today's professional baseball players is () times that of the President.
22. () a handful of sports superstars earn 100 times () through their contracts
23. () manufacturers of clothing, (), and sports equipment.
24. But every generation produces () or two legendary athletes () rewrite
25. the record books, and whose ability and achievements () remembered () generations.
26. () the current generation Tiger Woods and Michael Jordan are two () legendary
27. figures, () of whom () achieved almost mythical status.
28. The () that a large number of professional athletes () huge incomes
29. has () to increased competition throughout () sports world.
30. Parents () their children to sports training camps () an early age.
31. Such () typically practice three to () hours a day,
32. () weekend () during their school vacations
33. in order () better their chances of eventually obtaining () well-paid position
34. on a professional () when they grow ().
35. As for the () young aspirants who do () succeed,
36. one wonders if they () regret having () their childhood.

The test taker is verbally given the following instructions in advance.

1. Write your name and the date on the top of the sheet.
2. Write an English word with four letters or fewer into the blank spaces, while listening to the CD.
3. The CD lasts about five minutes.
4. There is about a three-second interval between Line 18 and Line 19.

After the above instructions are given, the volume of the CD is checked, and the MET is administered.

2.2 Materials of the Paul Nation Vocabulary Test (PNVT)

The Paul Nation Vocabulary Test (PNVT) was developed by Paul Nation in 1990 (Nation (1990)), and has been a commonly-used language proficiency test to quickly check subjects' English proficiency levels, e.g., as a placement test for an English language school. This vocabulary test consists of 90 vocabulary questions spread in five bands (18 questions in each band) based on frequency levels. The lowest level A is selected from 1,000 most frequently used vocabulary, the next level B with 2,000, C with 3,000, D with 5,000, and the highest level of E with 10,000, that undergraduate university students should be familiar with. The example of the PNVT adopted for this research is shown below.

Paul Nation Vocabulary Test

How to Administer the Test

Find the most suitable vocabulary from 1 to 6 that matches the words/phrases on the right. Use the separate answer sheet when you fill in the answers.

Examples

Level F

[1]	1. business	<input type="checkbox"/> part of a house
	2. clock	
	3. horse	<input type="checkbox"/> animal with four legs
	4. pencil	
	5. shoe	<input type="checkbox"/> something used for writing
	6. wall	

The actual test is divided into 5 levels from A to E. As you proceed, the level will be higher. Turn the page and begin the test.

Level A

[1]	1. original	<input type="checkbox"/> complete	[2]	1. apply	<input type="checkbox"/> choose by voting
	2. private			2. elect	
	3. royal	<input type="checkbox"/> first		3. jump	<input type="checkbox"/> become like water
	4. slow			4. manufacture	
	5. sorry	<input type="checkbox"/> not public		5. melt	<input type="checkbox"/> make
	6. total			6. threaten	

[3]	1. blame	<input type="checkbox"/> keep away from sight	[4]	1. accident	<input type="checkbox"/> having a high opinion of yourself
	2. hide			2. choice	
	3. hit	<input type="checkbox"/> have a bad effect on something		3. debt	<input type="checkbox"/> something you must pay
	4. invite			4. fortune	
	5. pour	<input type="checkbox"/> ask		5. pride	<input type="checkbox"/> loud, deep sound
	6. spoil			6. roar	

[5]	1. basket	<input type="checkbox"/> money paid regularly for doing a job	[6]	1. birth	<input type="checkbox"/> being born
	2. crop			2. dust	
	3. flesh	<input type="checkbox"/> heat		3. operation	<input type="checkbox"/> game
	4. salary			4. row	
	5. temperature	<input type="checkbox"/> meat		5. sport	<input type="checkbox"/> wining
	6. thread			6. victory	

...

Level E

[5]	1. dregs	<input type="checkbox"/> worst and most useless parts of anything	[6]	1. auspices	<input type="checkbox"/> being away from other people
	2. flurry			2. casualty	
	3. hostage	<input type="checkbox"/> natural liquid present in the mouth		3. froth	<input type="checkbox"/> someone killed or injured
	4. jumble			4. haunch	
	5. saliva	<input type="checkbox"/> confused mixture		5. revelry	<input type="checkbox"/> noisy and happy celebration
	6. truce			6. seclusion	

Paul Nation Vocabulary Test

Name: _____ Date: Month ____ Day ____ Year ____

	Level A	Level B	Level C	Level D	Level E
[1]					
[2]					
[3]					
[4]					
[5]					
[6]					
Points	A: /18	B: /18	C: /18	D: /18	E: /18
Total	/90		%		

The test taker is verbally given the following instructions in advance.

1. Write your name and the date on the top of the sheet.
2. Read the instructions on the first page of the test materials.

After the above instructions are given, the test taker begins the actual PNVT.

2.3. Methodology

This survey was conducted at Gifu University and Kochi Gakuen College during the period from October 2004 to December 2004. The MET and the PNVT were administered in this order. For the PNVT, the test takers were given enough time to complete the test at their own pace. The two tests were administered on the same day in order to examine the test takers' English proficiency.

3. Analysis

3.1. Data

In this survey, the samples were obtained from Gifu University and Kochi Gakuen College. The total number of samples was 159 as shown below.

Institution	Number of Samples
Kochi Gakuen College	86
Gifu University	73
Total	159

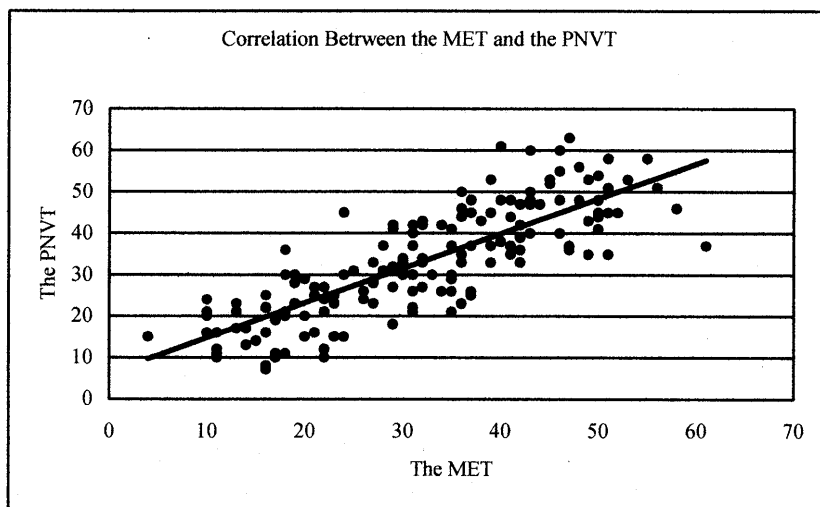
3.2. Analysis

We analyzed the data (the scores of the MET and the scores of the PNVT) by a simple regression analysis (correlation analysis) using Microsoft Excel. The level of statistical significance was $p < .05$. The results are shown below.

Regression Statistics	
Correlation Coefficient (R)	0.805985
R Square	0.6496
Adjusted R Square	0.64738
Standard Error	7.819069
Observations	159
P-value	1.389E-37

The results of this analysis are more clearly represented by the following graph.

The Correlation Between the MET and the PNVT



4. Results

As the above analysis shows, there turned out to be a relatively high correlation between the scores of the MET and the scores of the PNVT ($r = .81$, $p = 1.389E-37$, and $n = 159$). The regression line was $y = 0.841x + 6.312$.

5. Further Issues

Although there was a statistically significant correlation between the scores of the MET and the scores of the PNVT 2004, there is one issue which should be addressed in a future study: the study should be replicated with a wider range of samples.

We are planning to ask more institutions to participate in this project in order to get more reliable results with respect to the correlation between the scores of the MET and the PNVT. Although only two institutions participated in this study, other institutions have already shown an interest in participating in the next one. In the near future we expect to replicate our research with much wider range of participants.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, the MET, developed by Maki, Wasada, and Hashimoto (2003), has turned out to be able to predict PNVT scores with an administration time of about five minutes. This is a useful finding since the MET can dramatically reduce the amount of time needed to measure participants' English proficiency. As was mentioned earlier, it has been a problem to administer the PNVT since it takes 10 to 30 minutes, or sometimes even longer if the participants' English proficiency is low. Although the PNVT has been established as one of the most efficient and widely used English proficiency tests, the length of time to administer it has always been a problem.

Maki and Niinuma (2005) argue that administering the MET in series also develops learners' English proficiency. There was an 8% gain after administering the MET 10 times. Therefore, it can be said that (1) the MET can measure the learner's English proficiency within a very short period of time, (2) the MET is as reliable as the PNVT, (3) the MET can be used as an alternative English proficiency test for any research which aims to investigate participants' English level, and (4) based on the results of the MET an instructor, in an English teaching environment, will be able to provide instruction and materials that are most suitable to individual learners.

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Note

- * We are indebted to Bill Perry for proofreading the draft of this paper.

1. We follow Yanai (1998) in interpreting values of correlation coefficients. She assumes the following correspondence between correlation coefficients and their characteristics.

Correlation Coefficients	Characteristics
$0 \leq r < 0.2 $	almost no correlation
$ 0.2 \leq r < 0.4 $	weak correlation
$ 0.4 \leq r < 0.7 $	moderate correlation
$ 0.7 \leq r < 0.9 $	strong correlation
$ 0.9 \leq r < 1.0 $	extremely strong correlation