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## **The Minimal English Test (MET) and the Writing Test (WT): A Preliminary Study\***

Hideki MAKI, Chise KASAI, Yuka MORITA, Kenichi GOTO, Yoichi MIYAMOTO,  
Fumikazu NIINUMA, Koichi SAWASAKI, Yukiko UEDA, Masahiko DATE, and  
Kenjiro TAGAWA

Gifu University, Gifu University, Gifu University, Gifu University, Osaka University,  
Kochi Gakuen College, University of Shizuoka, Kanda University of International  
Studies, Shobi University, and Shobi University

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### **1. Introduction**

In any language, there are 4 types of proficiency to be considered: (1) reading; (2) listening; (3) writing; and (4) speaking. However, it is not clear how they are related to each other, and whether or not they are dependent on each other. This is because there are tests which measure the listening and reading proficiency relatively easily (e.g., TOEFL, TOEIC, etc.); however, the writing and speaking proficiency is not so easily measured by such standardized tests. In this project, we focus on the writing proficiency of ESL learners in Japan, and address the question as to what relationship the writing proficiency has to the listening and reading proficiency.

In order to measure the writing proficiency, we invented a writing test which we call the Writing Test (WT, hereafter), and in order to measure the listening and reading proficiency, we used the Minimal English Test (MET, hereafter), which Maki, Wasada, and Hashimoto (2003) developed. They found a relatively high correlation between the scores of the MET and the scores of the College Entrance Examination (English Part) 2002 administered by the College Entrance Examination Center ( $r = .68$ ,  $p < .05$ , and  $n = 154$ ).<sup>1</sup>

Further, Maki et al. (2005) found a correlation between the scores of the MET and the total scores of the TOEIC Bridge (TB, hereafter). The TB consists of two sections, Listening and Reading, and each section contains 50 questions. They found that it is the total scores of the TB, rather than the scores of the Listening or Reading Sections individually, that had the highest statistically significant correlation with the scores of the MET ( $r = .51$ ,  $p < .05$ , and  $n = 96$ ). This indicates that the MET measures the sum of the listening and reading proficiency. In this paper, we use the MET to measure the sum of the listening and reading proficiency.

The research question of this paper is stated in (1).

#### **(1) Research Question**

What relationship does the writing proficiency have to the sum of the listening and reading proficiency?

In this paper, we analyzed the data obtained from college students of 5 institutions: Gifu University, Osaka University, Kochi Gakuen College, University of Shizuoka, and Shobi Gakuen University. The set of data was collected from December 2003 to June 2005. The result of the correlation analysis was that there was a high correlation between the scores of the MET and the scores of the WT.

The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 gives an overview of the materials used in this paper (the MET and the WT), and Section 3 gives an analysis of the data. Section 4 reports the result, and Section 5 concludes this paper.

## **2. Materials**

In this research, we use the data of the two tests: the MET and the WT. We briefly review these below.

### **2.1 The Minimal English Test (MET)**

The MET is a simple test which requires the test taker to fill a correct English word with 4 letters or less into each of the 72 blank spaces of the given sentences written on one piece of A4 paper, while listening to the CD which produces the sentences. 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 CD lasts about 5 minutes with a speed of 125 words per minute. The MET is shown below.

The Minimal English Test

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: Month \_\_\_\_\_ Day \_\_\_\_\_ Year \_\_\_\_\_ Score: \_\_\_\_\_/72

Please fill an English word with 4 letters or less into each blank spot, 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 4 instructions in advance.

1. Write the score of the College Entrance Examination (English Part) you took in 2004.
2. Fill an English word with 4 letters or fewer into blank spaces, while listening to the CD.
3. The CD lasts about 5 minutes.
4. There is about a three-second interval between Line 18 and Line 19.

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

## 2.2 The Writing Test (WT)

The WT is a test that requires the test taker to translate 25 Japanese sentences into English, as shown below. This test is written on one piece of A4 paper, and the time limit is 15 minutes. The answers to the WT are provided below the WT.

### The Writing Test (WT)

Translate the following Japanese sentences into English.

1. 正男は学生です。  
Masao-wa gakusee desu.
2. この本は、面白い。  
Kono hon-wa omoshiroi.
3. 公園に犬がいっぱいいます。  
Kooen-ni inu-ga ippiki imasu.
4. 花子は、正男が好きです。  
Hanako-wa, Masao-ga suki desu.
5. 正男は、牛乳を飲まない。  
Masao-wa gyuunyuu-o noma-nai.
6. 花子は、病気ではなかった。  
Hanako-wa byooki dewa nakatta.
7. ここに名前を書いてください。  
Koko-ni namae-o kaite kudasai.
8. 英語を話すのは、難しい。  
Eego-o hanasu-no-wa, muzukashii.
9. 正男は、フランス語が読める。  
Masao-wa Furannsugo-ga yomeru.
10. 日本語を勉強したことがありますか？  
Nihongo-o benkyoo shita koto-ga arimasu ka?
11. 花子は、昨日ここに来たかもしれない。  
Hanako-wa, kinoo koko-ni kita kamoshirenai.
12. 私は、明日雨が降ると思います。  
Watashi-wa, asu ame-ga furu to omoimasu.
13. 私は、花子がこのいすを作ったかどうか知りません。  
Watashi-wa, Hanako-ga kono isu-o tsukutta kadooka shirimasenn.
14. 私は、正男にこの本を読んで欲しい。  
Watashi-wa, Masao-ni kono hon-o yonde hoshii.
15. ラジオを聞きながら、花子は、朝食を食べた。  
Rajio-o kiki nagara, Hanako-wa, chooshoku-o tabeta.
16. 東京に行った時、私は、正男に会った。  
Tookyoo-ni itta toki, watashi-wa, Masao-ni atta.

17. 雪が降れば、泳ぎません。  
Yuki-ga fureba, oyogimasen.
18. 正男は、東京で何を買いしましたか？  
Masao-wa, Tookyoo de nani-o kaimashita ka?
19. 花子が読んだのは、この本です。  
Hanako-ga yonda-no-wa, kono hon desu.
20. この町は、あの町より小さい。  
Kono machi-wa, ano machi yori chiisai.
21. 花子が昨日見た男は、正男です。  
Hanako-ga kinoo mita otoko-wa, Masao desu.
22. あなたは、花子が何を食べたと思いますか？  
Anata-wa, Hanako-ga nani-o tabeta to omoimasu ka?
23. この大学は、10年前に建てられた。  
Kono daigaku-wa, 10 nen mae-ni taterareta.
24. 花子は、正男にりんごを食べさせた。  
Hanako-wa, Masao-ni ringo-o tabesaseta.
25. 正男は、花子にりんごを食べさせられた。  
Masao-wa, Hanako-ni ringo-o tabesase-rareta.

### The Answers to the Writing Test (WT)

1. Masao is a student.
2. This book is {interesting, funny}.
3. There is {a, one} dog in the park./  
{A, One} dog is in the park.
4. Hanako {likes, loves} Masao.
5. Masao {does not, doesn't} {drink, have} milk.
6. Hanako {was not, wasn't} {sick, ill}.
7. Please write (down) your name here.
8. {It is, It's} {difficult, hard} to speak (in) English./  
To speak (in) English is {difficult, hard}./  
Speaking (in) English is {difficult, hard}.
9. Masao {can, is able to} read French.
10. Have you (ever) {studied, learned} Japanese?
11. Hanako might have come here yesterday.
12. I {think, guess} (that) it will {rain, be rainy} tomorrow.
13. I do not know {if, whether} Hanako made this chair (or not).
14. I {want, hope, would like} Masao to read this book.

15. (While) listening to the radio, Hanako {ate, had} breakfast./  
Hanako {ate, had} breakfast while listening to the radio./  
Hanako {ate, had} breakfast, (while) listening to the radio.
16. When I {went to, visited} Tokyo, I {met, saw} Masao./  
I {met, saw} Masao(,) when I {went to, visited} Tokyo.
17. {If, when} it snows, {I, we} {will not, won't} swim./  
{I, we} {will not, won't} swim(,) {if, when} it snows.
18. What did Masao buy in Tokyo?
19. {It is, It's} this book that Hanako read.
20. This town is smaller than that {town, one}.
21. The {man, guy} {who, whom, 0} Hanako {saw, met} yesterday is Masao.
22. What do you think (that) Hanako ate?
23. This {university, college} was built ten years ago./  
This {university, college} has been built for ten years.
24. Hanako {made, had} Masao {eat, have} {an apple, apples}./  
Hanako forced Masao to {eat, have} {an apple, apples}.
25. Masao was {made, forced} to {eat, have} {an apple, apples} by Hanako.

### 3. Data Analysis

#### 3.1 Data

The MET and the WT were administrated at the following institutions during the period from December of 2003 to June of 2005: Gifu University, Osaka University, Kochi Gakuen College, University of Shizuoka, and Shobi Gakuen University. The total number of data samples was 409, as shown below.

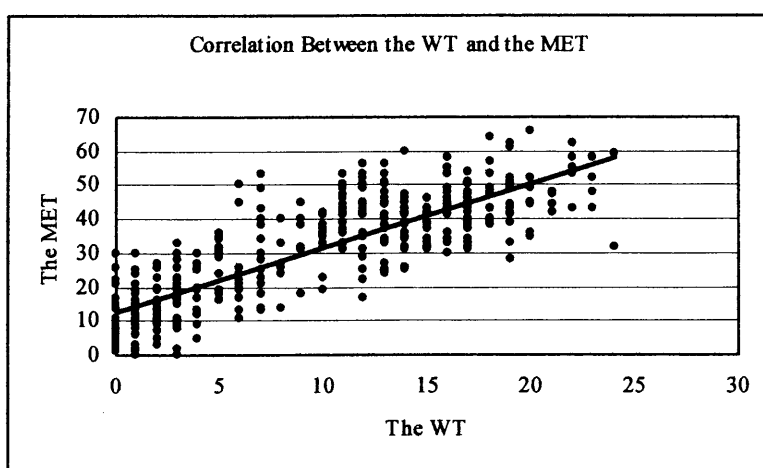
Institutions	Number of the Data
Gifu University	99
Osaka University	74
Kochi Gakuen College	72
University of Shizuoka	60
Shobi Gakuen University	104
Total	409

#### 3.2 Data Analysis

We analyzed the data (the scores of the MET and those of the WT) by a simple regression analysis (correlation analysis). The level of statistical significance is  $p < .05$ . The result is shown below.

Regression Statistics	
Correlation Coefficient (R)	0.8277
R Square	0.685087
Adjusted R Square	0.684313
Standard Error	8.708406
Observations	409
P-value	3.6E-104

The result of this analysis is more clearly represented by the following graph.



#### 4. The Result

As the above analysis shows, there turned out to be a strong correlation between the scores of the MET and the scores of the WT. ( $r = .83$ ,  $p < .05$ , and  $n = 409$ ). This in turn suggests that the writing proficiency has a positive association with the sum of the listening and reading proficiency. Thus, the answer to the research question in (1) is (2).

(1) Research Question

What relationship does the writing proficiency have to the sum of the listening and reading proficiency?

(2) Answer to the Research Question

The writing proficiency has a positive association with the sum of the listening and reading proficiency.

Therefore, the present research suggests that the writing proficiency is not completely independent of the other types of proficiency. This finding will give hints to the traditional question as to whether or not the four types of language proficiency are independent of each other.

Let us then consider what this result will suggest for English education. Brown (1994), among others, states that success of the acquisition of a second language, crucially relies on an objective and convenient test to evaluate the learner's language proficiency at any given learning point. The WT and the MET are objective tests, and time-wise, they are very convenient. It takes only about 20 minutes to administer and grade the WT, and only about 10 minutes to administer and grade the MET. The present



research has shown that the WT and MET, although they test different areas, show virtually the same results in terms of the English language proficiency. This implies that either one of them would be sufficient for the purpose of measuring the writing proficiency or the sum of the listening and reading proficiency, and that a particular choice between them would depend on the given situation. For example, if the test taker is hard of hearing, the MET should be avoided, and the WT could be used instead. Otherwise, the MET would likely be sufficient.

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, we have found that the scores of the Minimal English Test (MET) had a statistically significant, and strong correlation with the scores of the Writing Test (WT). Therefore, the writing proficiency has turned out to have a positive association with the sum of the listening and reading proficiency.

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## Note

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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
$0.0 \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