

## **A Reaction to Ito's "Japanese EFL Learners' Test-Type Related Interlanguage Variability"**

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The article by Akihiro Ito (Volume 19, No. 1, May 1997, pp. 89-105) reported on a survey as to the effect of different three test-types—Cloze Procedure, Grammaticality Judgment, and Sentence Combining—on the accuracy rates in interlanguage performance of Japanese EFL learners and examined the reliability and validity of the Grammatical Judgment test. He concluded: 1) the accuracy rate changes according to the expected order-Cloze Procedure > Grammaticality Judgment > Sentence Combining; and 2) unexpectedly, the Grammaticality Judgment test had fairly high reliability, showing moderate correlation with the other two test-types; however, since its discriminative ability seems limited, it should be used with extreme care (p. 98).

As Matsukawa (1987) says, any test serves as a "hidden curriculum" and has much influence on the way students learn English as well as the way teachers teach English. In Japan, entrance examinations serve as the hidden curriculum, especially at the senior high school level. I think the primary reason for this is that most students learn English (especially reading, writing, and grammar) in order to pass the entrance examinations for senior high schools or universities. If English were taught as a second language, entrance examinations would not serve as a hidden curriculum. It is not an exaggeration to say that the types of tests universities give determine what the students learn and how they learn English. Nowadays, test types given by universities are changing, but, many poorly designed tests still exist. In order to better English education in Japan, we have to improve the quality of test types used in entrance examinations. The most fundamental thing in test design is for tests to have a positive backwash. Ito's research may aid in this. However, I would like to raise the following concerns.

First, according to the study's results, the accuracy rate changes according to the expected order (Cloze Procedure > Grammaticality Judgment > Sentence Combining). This means, I think, that the higher accuracy rate a test type shows the easier the task. In relation to this, I'd like to ask: 1) What happened to the relative order of each subject? If the

purpose to give a test is to know the relative order of each student, as in entrance examinations, change in each test's accuracy rate doesn't matter unless the relative order for each student changes. 2) How can these results be applied to English language teaching?

Second, it is often said that showing students incorrect sentences is not educational. This is because incorrect sentences in the test can serve as intake for students, as all tests can also be *i+1* input (Krashen, 1985). However high the reliability of the Grammaticality Judgment test is, I think this type of test should be avoided. What is the justification for using incorrect sentences within a test?

Third, in the last part of the article (p. 99), the author posed three general research questions, and in question number one said he planned to reexamine the data to investigate the effects of proficiency level on accuracy rates in participants' inter-language performance based on the results of a multiple choice test. If this analysis is done, please report the results.

The number of English teachers who have an interest in language testing is increasing. However, in reality, there seem to be few reliable test methods available to measure learners' real English ability. Accordingly, I hope researchers will design valid and reliable language test methods as rapidly as possible.

#### References

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