

# The Minimal English Test as a Placement Test : A Preliminary Study

Asako Otomo, Fumikazu Niinuma and Hideki Maki

## 1. Introduction

This paper investigates the correlation between the scores on the Minimal English Test (MET) developed by Maki, Wasada, and Hashimoto (2003), and the scores on the reading comprehension test which was one of the placement tests for freshmen of the Department of English Language and Culture at the University of Morioka.

Since Maki, Wasada, and Hashimoto's (2003) work on the statistic correlation between the scores of the MET and the scores of the Center Test in 2002 ( $r=.68$ ,  $p<.05$ , and  $n=154$ )<sup>1</sup>, the Maki group have conducted various researches on the correlations between the MET and other English tests such as Paul Nation English Proficiency Test (Kasai, Maki and Niinuma (2005), writing proficiency (Maki, Kasai, Morita, Goto, Miyamoto, Niinuma, Sawasaki, Ueda, Date and Tagawa (2006), TOEIC Bridge (Maki, Ito, von Fragsein, Ito, Hirota, Yamato (2005)). Further the group also shows the interesting correlation between the scores on the MET and the 100 square calculation test (Maki, Kasai, Hasebe, Goto and Niinuma (2009)), and Kanji Test (Maki, Niinuma, Kasai, Goto, Imamaki, and Dunton (2008)). One of the significant results is that there is a statistically significant relatively strong correlation between the scores on the MET and the scores on the Center Test. The Maki group have continued the research program between the scores on the MET and the scores on the Cente Test since 2002 to 2009, and conclude that the MET measures a more general English proficiency, including reading comprehension and listening comprehension (see Maki (2010) for the results of the analysis of the scores of on the MET and the scores on the Center Test from 2002 to 2009).

The purpose of this paper is to investigate whether there is a statistically significant correlation between the scores on the MET and the scores on the reading comprehension test which was used as a placement test. In this research, we administered the MET and the reading comprehension test to freshman college students, and found that there was a statistically strong correlation between the scores of the MET and the scores of the reading comprehension test ( $r = .53$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $n = 90$ ).

The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 gives an overview of the materials (the Minimal English Test (MET) and the reading comprehension test). Section 3 analyzes the data, and Section 4 reports the results. Section 5 concludes the paper.

## 2. Materials

Section 2.1 gives a brief overview of the Minimal English Test developed by Maki, Wasada, and Hashimoto (2003), and Section 2.2 gives an overview of the reading comprehension test for a placement test.

## 2. 1. The Minimal English Test (MET): 5 letter version

The MET is a very simple test which requires the test taker to fill a correct English word with 5 letters or less into each of the 72 blank spaces of the given sentences written on one A4 paper sheet, while listening to the CD which produces the sentences. The MET we created for this research is based on Lessons 1 and 2 of the textbook for college freshmen written by Kuwana and Walker (2002) 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 the speed of 125 words per minute. The MET is shown below.

### The Minimal English Test : 5 letter version

Please fill an English word with 5 letters or fewer into each blank space, while listening to the CD.

1. The majority of people have at ( ) one pet at some time in their ( ).
2. Sometimes the relationship between a pet ( ) or cat and its ( ) is so close
3. that they ( ) to resemble each other ( ) their appearance and behavior.
4. On the ( ) hand, owners of unusual pets ( ) as tigers or snakes
5. sometimes ( ) to protect themselves from their ( ) pets.
6. Thirty years ago the ( ) of an inanimate pet first ( ).
7. This was the pet ( ), which became a craze ( ) the United States and
8. spread ( ) other countries as ( ).
9. People paid large sums of ( ) for ordinary rocks and assigned them ( ).
10. They ( ) a leash around the rock and pulled it ( ) the street
11. just like a ( ). The rock owners ( ) talked to their pet rocks.
12. Now ( ) we have entered the computer ( ),
13. we have virtual ( ). The Japanese Tamagotchi-- ( ) imaginary chicken egg--
14. ( ) the precursor of ( ) virtual pets.
15. Now there ( ) an ever-increasing number ( ) such virtual pets
16. which mostly ( ) people are adopting ( ) their own.
17. And if ( ) virtual pet dies, you ( ) reserve a permanent resting place
18. ( ) the Internet in ( ) virtual pet cemetery.
19. Sports are ( ) business. Whereas Babe Ruth, the ( ) famous athlete
20. of his ( ), was well-known for earning as ( ) as the President of the United States,
21. the average salary ( ) today' s professional baseball players is ten times ( )
22. of the President. And a handful of sports superstars ( ) 100 ( ) more
23. through their contracts ( ) manufacturers of clothing, ( ), and sports equipment.
24. But ( ) generation produces ( ) or two legendary athletes

25. who rewrite the record (            ), and whose ability and achievements (            ) re-  
 membered
26. for generations. (            ) the current generation Tiger Woods (            ) Michael Jordan
27. are (            ) such legendary figures, both of (            ) have achieved almost mythical  
 status.
28. The fact that a (            ) number of professional athletes earn (            ) incomes
29. has (            ) to increased competition throughout the sports (            ).
30. Parents (            ) their children to sports training (            ) at an early age.
31. Such (            ) typically practice (            ) to four hours a day,
32. (            ) weekend and during (            ) school vacations
33. in (            ) to better their chances of eventually obtaining a well- (            ) position
34. on a professional (            ) when they (            ) up.
35. As for the (            ) young aspirants who do (            ) succeed,
36. one wonders (            ) they will regret having (            ) their childhood.

The test taker is verbally given the following 3 instructions in advance.

1. Fill an English word with 5 letters or less into blank spaces, while listening to the CD.
2. The CD lasts about 5 minutes.
3. 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. The Reading Comprehension Test

This reading comprehension test is based on Lesson 5 of the textbook written by Sato, Aiko, Ikeda and Shindou (2002), which is designed for college students at the pre-intermediate level. The test consists of 2 sections with 15 questions in total. Test takers are required to read passages on familiar topics and answer true/false, vocabulary, multiple-choice, and translation questions in approximately 20 minutes. The following is the test that we conducted. The allocation of marks is shown in brackets at the end of each question, and the highest possible score is 28.

### The Reading Comprehension Test

[A] Read the text below and answer the questions.

Most Japanese people visiting America go there for three reasons. The first is that they want to see the famous places there. Many people go there for business. The third group is made up of people who want to learn English (a) better.

The best way to learn English is to actually use (b) it. The best way to use English each and every day is to stay in the home of an American family. Such homestay arrangements have become very popular, and they help (c) both sides. The Japanese can learn the habits

and customs of America, and the Americans can learn a lot about Japan.

Many Japanese worry that they will not be able to communicate with their host family in English. (a) This is not such a big problem. If you are hungry or tired, you can learn to talk about these things very quickly when you really need to.

1. Mark the following sentences true (T) or false (F) according to the information in the passage. [1x5=5]

- (1) To meet famous people is one of the main reasons why most Japanese people go to America.
- (2) To learn English is one of the main reasons why most Japanese people go to America.
- (3) You can learn how to speak English very quickly when you really need to.
- (4) Homestay programs do not help the Japanese learn the habits and customs of America.
- (5) American host families can learn about Japan from a Japanese person they are hosting.

2. What is the opposite word for the word (a)? [2]

3. What do the phrases (b), (c) and (d) refer to respectively? Answer in Japanese. [2x3=6]

[B] Read the text below and answer the questions.

August 10, 2009

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Brown,

I can't believe that it has been three months since I left England. Time passes so quickly. I hope you are getting along well. Thank you very much for all your kindness during my stay in England. Thanks to you, I really had a wonderful time.

It was only one year, but I became much better at speaking English and learned a lot about English life. I think I am especially lucky because I was able to stay with such a nice family as yours. When I returned to Japan, I missed you and all the great things in your country very much. I also experienced culture shock, but I'm getting used to life in Japan again.

I have enclosed some photos of my pleasant memories in England. I have also sent you by separate mail a Japanese folding fan, called a Sensu, to express my gratitude. I hope you will like it. I want to return some of your kindness when you come to Japan next time. I am looking forward to seeing you in Japan soon. Please say hello to your daughter Mary.

Gratefully yours,  
*Hanako Tanaka*  
Hanako Tanaka

P.S. I now have an e-mail address, so you can write to me by e-mail. The address is hana-ko@japan.ne.jp.

1. Choose the best answer to each question. [2x5=10]

(1) How long did Hanako stay in England?

- (A) One month. (B) One year.  
(C) Half a year. (D) Last year.

(2) What happened to Hanako when she returned to Japan?

- (A) She had a wonderful time. (B) She was lucky.  
(C) She missed her parents. (D) She went through culture shock.

(3) What did Hanako send Mr. and Mrs. Brown with this letter?

- (A) Some photos. (B) Separate mail.  
(C) A Japanese folding fan. (D) E-mail.

(4) What is this letter for?

- (A) To apologize to Mr. and Mrs. Brown about her new e-mail address.  
(B) To tell Mr. and Mrs. Brown about her new e-mail address.  
(C) To express her thanks.  
(D) To say hello.

(5) Which of the following statements is true?

- (A) Hanako left England four months ago.  
(B) Hanako does not want to see Mr. and Mrs. Brown again.  
(C) Hanako explained that a Japanese folding fan is called a Sensu.  
(D) Mr. and Mrs. Brown sent an e-mail to Hanako.

2. Translate the underlined sentences into Japanese. [5]

### 3. Data and Analysis

#### 3.1. Data

The MET was administered on April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2010, and the total number of the data was 90.

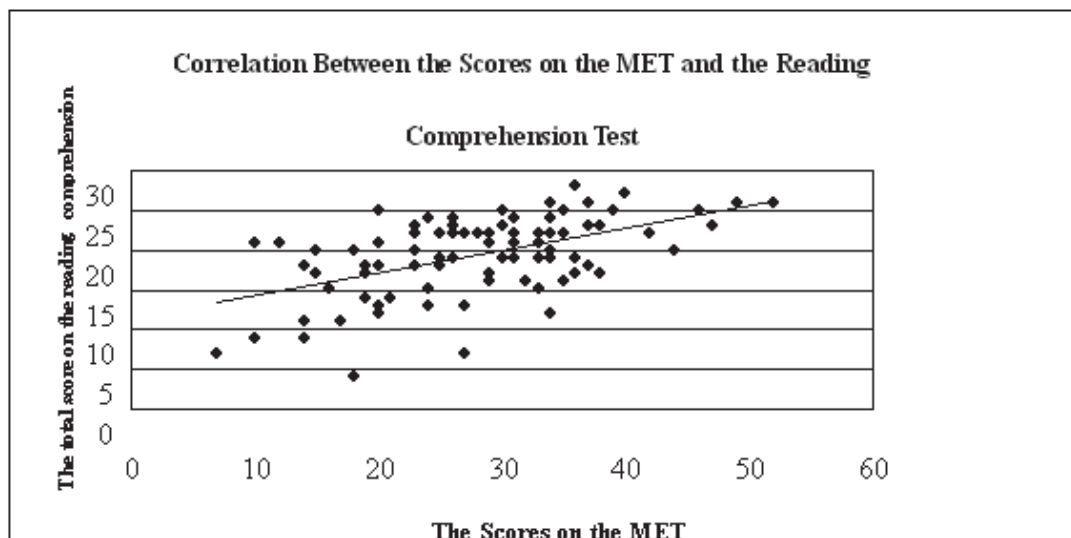
#### 3.2. Analysis

We analyzed the data (the scores on the MET : 5 letters version and the scores on the reading comprehension test) by a simple regression analysis (correlation analysis). The results are shown below :

Correlation between the Scores on the MET : 5 letter version and the Scores on the reading test

Regression Statistics	
Correlation Coefficient (R)	0.531
R Square	0.281
Adjusted R Square	0.274
Standard Error	22.26
Observations	90
P-Value	7.28E-08

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



The regression line is  $y = 0.28x + 11.39$ .

### 4. Results

As the above analyses show, it turned out that the scores on the MET and the score on the reading comprehension test had a moderate correlation ( $r=.531$ ,  $p<0.5$ , and  $n=90$ ).

## 5. Conclusion

The present research has shown that there was a statistically significant correlation between the scores on the MET and the scores on the reading comprehension test. We have found that there was a statistically significant correlation between one's ability to read an English story correctly and his/her English proficiency. Therefore, we believe that the MET could be a useful tool to measure the English proficiency of university students in the future, but will conduct further research to confirm its reliability. Also, the fact that there is a statistical significant correlation between the different types of English tests suggests that this research may enable us to find out what English proficiency really is in the future.

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1. We follow Yanai (1998) in interpreting values of correlation coefficients. She assumes the fol-

lowing correspondence between correlation coefficients and their characteristics.

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