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Citation	[ ] no.[33] p.[59]-[64]
Issue Date	2013
Rights	
Version	Faculty of Regional Studies, Gifu University /Japan International Education Center(JIEC) /Osaka University (part time) /Faculty of Regional Studies, Gifu University /Faculty of Regional Studies, Gifu University /DSH-Advanced Course, Language Center at University of Erfurt /Faculty of Regional Studies, Gifu University /Faculty of Regional Studies, Gifu University
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12099/47335

A Preliminary Report on the Minimal English Test for Listening

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1. Introduction

When conducting a research in a field of second language acquisition, measuring participants' language proficiency is something inevitable. Traditional proficiency tests such Paul Nation's Vocabulary Level Test and Oxford Placement Test have been used, however such tests take a long time to administer. This is sometimes a problem since participants show fatigue before proceeding to the main experiment.

A series of studies on the Minimal English Test (MET) has solved the problem. Maki, Wasada, and Hashimoto (2003) originally designed the MET, which can measure learner's English proficiency in approximately five minutes. Since its development, correlations between the MET and traditional proficiency tests have been examined, and high correlations have been found. This enabled us to use the MET not only to measure English proficiency, but also to predict scores on the traditional tests (for more details of the MET, see Kasai, Maki, and Niinuma, 2005, Maki, 2010, and Goto, Maki, and Kasai, 2010).

The current research introduces the Minimal English Test for Listening (M4L), an even shorter proficiency test based on the MET. The M4L consists of two sections. Section 1 is similar to the MET, with gap-fill-type questions. Section 2 checks test takers' comprehension ability with multiple choice and true / false questions.

In this paper correlations between Section 1 and 2 of the M4L, and correlations between the M4L and the MET are reported as a preliminary research.

2. Materials

2.1 The Minimal English Test (MET)

The MET requires test takers to fill an English word of four letters or less into each of 72 gaps in sentences written on a piece of A4 paper, while listening to a CD recording of the full text. The reading materials are based on lessons 1 and 2 of a textbook for first year university students written by Sakamoto, Furuya, and Hubenthal (2001) and the CD that accompanies it. The MET lasts about 5 minutes, and the recording has a speaking speed of 125 words per minute. In advance, test takers are given the following instructions verbally. (1) to write their name, grade and the date of the test taking on the top of the test sheet. (2) to fill an English word into each blank

space 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 instructions are given, the volume of the CD is checked, and then the MET is administered.

The MET used in the current research is an original version and 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.

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

2.2 The Minimal English Test for Listening (M4L)

On a separate day, after administering the MET, the M4L was administered. At

the beginning, following the same procedure taking the MET, test takers filled their information such as name and grade on the top of the test sheet. The M4L consists of two parts. The first section is half the length of the MET (i.e., with 36 gaps in the text and less than 2 minutes of audio), and used lessons 3 through 13 of the same textbook. As with the MET, students were given single listening. The second section consists of three comprehension questions based on the preceding text: one 3-option multiple choice, and two true/false. Question content varied, and ranged from distinguishing near homophones to paraphrases of the text. The comprehension questions appeared below the gap-fill, and were read aloud by a native-speaking English instructor. An example of the M4L is shown below.

The Minimal English Test for Listening (M4L)

Name: _____ Date: Month____Day____Year_____

Please fill an English word with 4 letters or less into each blank spot, while listening to the CD.

1.   Many people (   ) experienced the (   ) of standing on a
2.   moving (   ) and watching a group (   ) dolphins swim alongside.
3.   Dolphins are (   ) only playful animals (   ) they are also highly
4.   intelligent. They (   ) mammals that can be found in (   ) of
5.   the world's oceans (   ) well as (   ) fresh water.
6.   Dolphins (   ) swim at speeds of (   ) to
7.   56 k.p.h., and (   ) can dive (   ) depths of 200 meters
8.   and (   ) under water (   ) 5-8 minutes without resurfacing
9.   for (   ). They are well-known for (   ) unique
10.   clicking sound they (   ) like sonar to locate (   ) as
11.   well (   ) obstacles. Every dolphin (   ) has
12.   its (   ) individual whistling sound (   ) for communication.
13.   (   ) dolphins sleep, they sleep in (   ) semi-alert
14.   state (   ) resting one side of their brain (   ) a time.
15.   They (   ) help sick or injured dolphins as (   ) as
16.   they can, and they (   ) as a team (   ) there is danger.
17.   It (   ) because of these (   ) other human-like
18.   qualities (   ) people have a special feeling (   ) dolphins.

Choose a correct answer.

19. What are dolphins?

A	B	C
Playful fish	Enjoying swimming	Intelligent mammals

20. Dolphins have good eyes to find food under water.

             ◯   ✕

21. Dolphins are helpful and work in teams; that is why people like them.

             ◯   ✕

2.3 Participants

314 first year Japanese high school students participated in this research. They all attend the same municipal high school in Hiroshima prefecture. The students tested included 116 males and 198 females, with an average age of 16.5 years.

3. Results

First, a correlation between the scores of the MET and the scores of Section 1 of the M4L was examined. A statistical analysis revealed that there was a strong correlation between them (N = 314, r = .72, p. < .00). Figure 3.1 visualises score distributions of the two tests, and Table 3.1 shows correlation coefficiency between them.

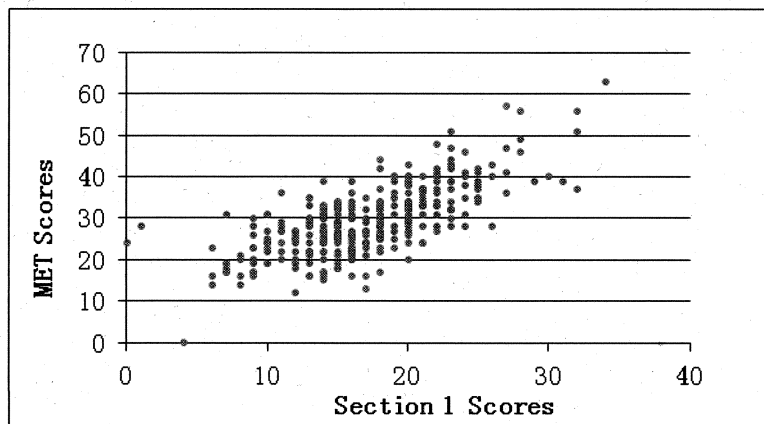Figure 3.1 Distribution of the MET and Section 1 of the M4L scores

Table 3.1 Correlation Coefficiency between the MET and Section 1 of the M4L

| N	Correlation Coefficiency	Significance Level
314	.717	.000

Second, statistical investigation of the results of Section 2 were carried out. Table 3.2 below shows the results of the statistical analyses among the MET, the Section 1, and the Section 2.

Table 3.2 The statistical analyses among the MET, the Section 1, and the Section 2

|	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval		t-Score	Degree of Freedom	Significance Level (two-tailed)
				Lower	Upper			
Sec2 Groups & MET Raw Score	-27.69	8.332	.470	-28.8	-26.77	-58.89	313	.000
Sec2 Groups & Sec1 Raw Score	-15.08	5.311	.300	-15.7	-14.49	-50.3	313	.000

All four groups which were formed on the basis of the Section 2 scores were then examined in accordance with the MET. There was a statistically significant difference between Group 0 and 3 (Tukey's HSD p. = .03, Group 0 consists of the participants who scored 0 point for the Section 2 test and Group 3 is formed with the participants who scored 3 points). Figure 3.2 shows the performance of the four subgroups.

Figure 3.2 Comparison of the MET scores among the Section 2 subgroups
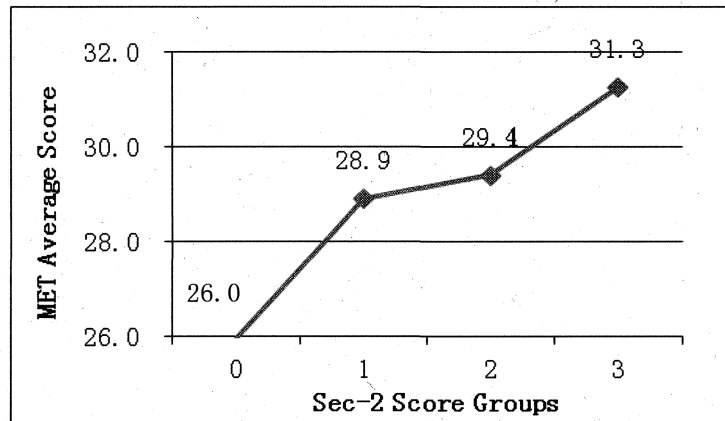
Third, Section 1 test scores were compared among the four Section 2 groups based on the scores of the Section 2 points. Results showed statistically significant differences with the Group 3 compared against the groups 2, 1, and 0 (Tukey's HSD p.= .012, p. = .007, and p. = .004, respectively).

Figure 3.3 Comparison between Section 1 and Section 2
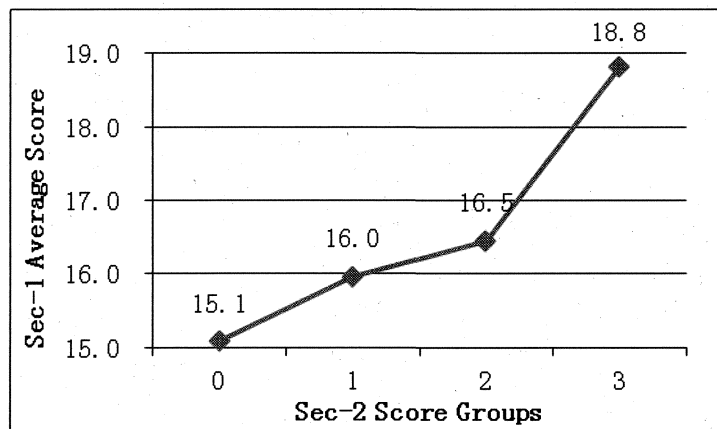
4. Conclusion

From the current research the following three findings can be reported. Firstly, there are statistically significant correlations between the MET and the M4L. Secondly, having divided the participants into 4 groups according to the scores of Section 2, there

is a statistically significant difference between Group 0 and Group 3 when comparing their performance for the MET. Lastly, comparing the participants' performance on Section 1 and 2, Group 3 showed significant differences from the other sub-groups (Group 0, 1 and 2).

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Notes

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
$0 \leq r < |.2|$	almost no correlation
$|.2| \leq r < |.4|$	weak correlation
$|.4| \leq r < |.7|$	moderate correlation
$|.7| \leq r < |.9|$	strong correlation
$|.9| \leq r < |1|$	extremely strong correlation

2.   The version of the MET and the M4L are the original version of the MET, and Lesson 2 of the M4L.