

TESTING ESL STUDENTS AND CERTIFYING ESL TEACHERS

Speakers: Justus Homburg, *University of Washington*
Stephen B. Ross, *California State University, Long Beach*

Introducer/Recorder: June Rumery McKay, *University of California, Berkeley*

Justus Homburg reported on a study he had conducted to find out what relationship there was, if any, between holistic evaluations of essays and three objective essay variables: length, syntactic complexity, and error. For his corpus, he chose compositions written by foreign applicants to colleges in the U.S. who sat for the *Michigan Test of English Proficiency*. Restricting himself to three intermediate strata—5, 6, and 7 (out of 10)—he chose ten papers from each stratum which had been given the same grade by two trained readers. The objective measures employed included 1) length, 2) subordination and relativization, 3) sentence connectors, and 4) number and types of errors. The T-unit was used as a measure of length and as a measure of standardizing other measures, e.g., number of errors.

A stepwise discriminate analysis of the data showed there were five measures that differentiated among the three strata and accounted for 84% of the variance among the three. In order of degree of differentiation they were: second degree errors (lexical, grammatical, or spelling errors which are interpretable but only with the aid of context), dependent clauses per composition, words per sentence, coordinating conjunctions per composition, and the number of error-free T-units.

Homburg believes that to a large extent these measures capture what trained ESL composition graders look for when holistically evaluating ESL compositions written at the strata 5 to 7 levels of proficiency. Being able to point out these salient features of a composition to readers, therefore, may help them

know what to look for. He also suggested that readers grossly categorize ESL compositions on the basis of one feature and then further categorize on the basis of other features or combinations of features.

Stephen Ross talked about the examination required for California's new Language Development Specialist (LDS) certificate. Ross is the primary developer of the test. He noted that the LDS certificate is the first of its kind. Despite the fact that slightly under 500,000 of the 1,000,000 ESL students in the state's schools are in grades K-12, California has no history of ESL certification or credentialing.

The certificate is an augmentation of and alternative to the bilingual credential. Teachers holding the latter do not need an LDS certificate, and the use of LDS teachers is permitted only where a bilingual class is not possible. To take the LDS examination, a teacher must 1) hold a basic California teacher's credential and 2) either have completed an approved LDS certificate program or have had experience teaching Limited English Proficient (LEP) students.

The examination assesses nine competencies involved in the teaching of Limited English Proficient students and consists of three components: a written test, an oral interview, and an evaluation of a teaching situation. The test Ross and his associates have devised contains both an objective and an integrative section. The objective section consists of multiple-choice questions covering all nine competencies. The integrative part includes both an oral interview designed to assess the three competencies dealing with cultural sensitivity and a 50-minute essay based on the other competencies. The essay is evaluated holistically on a six-point scale, first for content and then for communicative skills. The oral interviews will be taped and the tapes will be evaluated holistically by several listeners. However, Ross commented that it is likely that this part of the test will be eliminated by a spot bill in the legislature due, in part, to its expense.