

## Chapter 5 Testing Vocabulary (J. B. Heaton)

### 5.1 Selection of items

The test constructor of a vocabulary test carefully determines the degree to which he or she wishes to concentrate on testing the students' active or passive vocabulary. Then he or she decides whether the lexical items in the test should be taken from the spoken or the written language. According to four major language skills the following divisions can be made in selecting vocabulary items.

Listening : passive/spoken

Reading : passive/written

Speaking : active/spoken

Writing : active/written

All divisions can be included in a single test of vocabulary, of course, but with careful weighting of each skill according to what skills have been concentrated on in teaching. For example, at the elementary level, a greater number of lexical items should be associated with the spoken language.

Lexical items can be selected from:

- **the syllabus** (including a word frequency list if possible)
- **the students' textbook** (those used in natural speech situations)
- **the students' reading materials** (e.g. simplified readers of literary texts)
- **lexical errors taken from students' free writing** (or from students' incorrect answers in a cloze test)

Tests of vocabulary should avoid grammatical structures which the students may find difficult to comprehend. Similarly, tests of grammar should contain only those lexical items which present no difficulty to the students.

## 5.2 Multiple-choice items (A)

There are two major types of multiple-choice vocabulary items.

**Group A:** *Choose the letter of the word which is the nearest in meaning to the word in italics.*

He's been very *feeble* since his illness.

- A. unwell      B. thin      C. foolish      D. weak

**Group B:** *Choose the letter of the correct or best word to complete each sentence.*

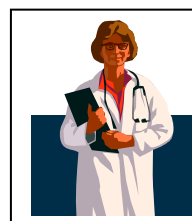
Have you heard the planning committee's ..... for solving the city's traffic problems?

- A. theory      B. design      C. proposal      D. purpose

**Group A** items have the following **four types of recognition items**.

**Type 1.** In this type of recognition item the stem is replaced by a picture.

- A. running  
B. jumping  
C. standing  
D. kicking



**Type 2.** Here the stem consists of a definition: the test takers have to select the correct option to which the definition refers.

a person who receives and pays out money in a bank.

A. broker      B. accountant      C. creditor      D. cashier

**Type 3.** The stem consists of a lexical item: the test takers have to select the best synonym or definition.

advocate

A. support      B. advise      C. contradict      D. damage

**Type 4.** The stem consists of a sentence which serves as a context for the problem word.

It's rained *continuously* for two whole days.

A. without stopping      C. regularly  
B. heavily      D. at odd moments

### ***Guidelines for writing items***

1. If the problem area being tested is located in the options, the stem should be kept simple.
2. Each option should belong to the same word class as the word in the stem, particularly when the word appears in the context of a sentence.

contemptuous

A. deep in thought      C. self-satisfied  
B. without a sense of humor      D. scornful

Ian was **contemptuous** of the efforts of his friends to raise some money for the charity.

- A. deep in thought                      C. self-satisfied  
B. without a sense of humor      D. scornful

\* Problem with options A, B and C which would be grammatically incorrect when put into the context.

3. The correct option and the distractors should be at approximately the same level of difficulty. If the correct option is more difficult than the distractors, the test takers will arrive at the correct answer by process of elimination.

theatrical

- A. angry              B. histrionic              C. proud              D. foolish

The converse also holds good. If the distractors are more difficult than the correct option, the item may be equally unreliable. The students think that the correct option is too easy and therefore wrong. So they are tricked into selecting one of the more difficult options.

suffice

- A. be adequate      B. harass      C. acquiesce      D. be contrite

4. The options should be related to the same general topic or area, but some test writers prefer as wide a range of associations as possible.

**Item 1**

apparition

- A. skeleton  
B. ghost  
C. nightmare  
D. corpse

**Item 2**

apparition

- A. scenery  
B. ghost  
C. magician  
D. castle

5. All the options should be approximately the same length.

a hitch-hiker

- A. a man who makes ropes
- B. a person who travels about by asking motorists to give him free rides
- C. an old-fashioned sailor
- D. a boy who walks long distances

The old woman was always ***courteous*** when anyone spoke to her.

- A. polite
- B. glad
- C. kind
- D. pleased

What is the problem with the above item?

***ascend***

- A. go up
- B. talk
- C. come down
- D. fetch

What is the problem with the above item?

### 5.3 Multiple-choice items (B)

Group B items are more difficult to construct than Group A items. The problem is related to context: too little context is insufficient to establish any meaningful situation, while too much context may provide too many clues both grammatical and semantic.

I'm ..... of getting a new job: I don't like my present one.

- A. contemplating
- B. thinking
- C. desiring
- D. hoping

What is the grammatical clue in the above item?

Study items in your textbook (pp. 56-57).

## 5.4 Sets (associated words)

Many of the difficulties arising from the testing of collocations are avoided by the testing of word sets. In such tests the students' familiarity with a range of associations is measured.

### Type 1: Recognition

*Read each of the following lists of four words. One word does not belong in each list. Put a circle round the odd word in each list.*

son	happy	arrive
father	married	depart
boy	engaged	go away
brother	single	leave

### Type 2: Production

Each group of words is related to a particular subject. Write down the particular subject which is connected with each group of words.

hand	theatre	volume	nursery
wrist	sister	track	lift
dial	bed	head	slope
face	ward	spool	snow
(.....)	(.....)	(.....)	(.....)

## 5.5 Matching items

Study examples for item types 1, 2, 3, and 4 in your textbook (pp. 58-60).

## 5.6 More objective items

### Type 1. Word formation test items

*Write a word in each blank. The word you write must be the correct form of the word on the left.*

- (i) CARE                      Be ..... when you cross the road.
- (ii) CRUEL                  To mistreat animals is a form of .....
- (iii) INTEREST          Do you think this book is .....

### Type 2. Items involving synonyms

*Write in each space the best word to replace the words underlined in each sentence.*

- (i) Tom went at once to the doctor's. ....
- (ii) All of a sudden there was loud cry. ....

### Type 3. Rearrangement items

Rearrange the following letters to make words. Then use each word in a sentence of your own so as to show the meaning of the word.

PLEAP    ROLRY    CELPA    SUHOE    IRACH    EGURA

### Type 4. Definitions

- (a) Use each of the following words in a sentence so as to show the meaning of each word.

economy    politics    industrious    etc.

- (b) Explain the meaning of the underlined words in the following phrases.

an archaic word                      a fortuitous event

## 5.7 Completion items

Study examples in your textbook (pp. 62-63)