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The C-Test: A Language Testing Device as a Screening Test for German Language Education in Thailand

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Abstract

This pilot study aims to investigate the use of the online C-Test as a language testing device for German language education in Thailand. In this regard, the C-Test was used based on the screening process by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) to assess general language proficiency of students for the scholarship grant. The purposes of this study are studying the results of the online C-Test employed in this study and providing some recommendations for language educators in terms of language testing. Based on the purposive sampling, nineteen students majoring in German (Academic year 2017) at Khon Kaen University in Thailand participated in this study. The online C-Test consisting of altogether eight short reading texts was employed as a research instrument. Each reading text has 20 gaps to fill in. So, the total points are 160 points. In terms of data collection and analysis, the students' scores from the online C-Test were collected and analyzed according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). When compared with other test-takers of this study, it was found that only four students (n=19) achieved the range of the highest scores, namely the B1+ level. It can be concluded and discussed that the findings of this study demonstrate the language proficiency of Thai students to a certain extent. In addition, the online C-Test in this study was powerful in providing sufficient discrimination among the test-takers as research participants of this study. It was also reliable and valid enough to be used as a screening test for the scholarship grant.

Keywords: C-Test, Language Testing Device, Screening Test, German Language Education

Introduction

The teaching approaches and methodologies will have to be turned to the new development to serve the educational policy. Language teaching itself would require motivated teachers, new teaching tool as well as new evaluation method that are most efficient for students at large. The Ministry of Education has laid down relevant policies and procedures with framework of the government's policy concerning social and educational matters. In particular, the policy on teaching and learning process. Curriculum development will be undertaken with special emphasis on laying foundations for the following: language skills, mathematics, science, morality, ethics and democracy. The learner will be enabled to analyze and synthesize which will serve as a learning tool in the future. The testing and selecting systems will be reformed to ensure that accumulated educational achievement is more important than examinations. Assessment mechanism is to be improved while educational standards are raised at every level (see <http://www.moe.go.th/main2/part3.htm>). When considering the situation of foreign language teaching in Thailand, it is an experienced reality that language teachers do make the differences in language education. In addition, students are

not learning to learn, but learning to pass exams and forget what they learn. The outstanding case is the situation of the National University Entrance Examination which can be considered as Washback, the effect a test has on teaching and learning (Bailey, 1998, p. 249).

Why the C-Test

In terms of historical overview of language testing, Spolsky (2000) states that for the early years, before specialized journals appeared, it gives an excellent picture of the history of the field language testing in the United States. Later, it continued to appear the number of important articles especially on topics like prognosis and aptitude tests, the cloze test, oral testing etc.

As the new evaluation methods have been improving and developing from time to time, Raatz & Klein-Braley (1981) proposed the c-test based on the concept of the cloze test with these criteria:

1. The new test should use several different texts.
2. It should have at least 100 deletions.
3. Educated native speakers should obtain virtually perfect scores.
4. The deletion should affect a representative sample of the text.
5. Only exact-word scoring should be possible. The test should have high reliability and validity.

C-tests utilize redundancy within natural language. This is achieved in the test tasks by the removal of word parts. Verbal and written statements or sentences usually contain more information than the recipient needs to understand them. These redundancies are to be found at both the individual character and word level as well as at the sentence and clause level. In the case of an interruption in communication, for example, by noise during an announcement or illegible handwriting, understanding is impaired. Recipients with a high level of language proficiency understand what is being said (or written) even if parts of the message are incomplete or missing.

The gaps in a C-test are usually created according to the principle "rule of two". Starting with the second sentence, the second part of every second word is deleted. This means that different types of words have to be completed in different positions and functions.

Example:

Many univer_____ have cant_____. There, stud_____ and emplo_____ have lun_____, drink cof_____ or simply ta_____.

Key:

Many universities have canteens. There, students and employees have lunch, drink coffee or simply talk.

(Adapted from www.onset.de)

From the example, the finding of the solution is facilitated through knowing the context from the title, the beginnings of the words and the first and last sentence. The more advanced the language learner, the easier it is for him or her to use existing text parts to fill in the gaps. In order to complete a C-test properly, participants need sophisticated language knowledge and must be able to access those different areas of knowledge. This applies to knowledge of spelling, vocabulary, morphology, syntax and the semantics of the target language as well as contextual aspects.

Scope of the Study

As a matter of fact that the scholarships by the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) are annually granted for Thai students to take the German summer courses at several universities in Germany, the online C-Test test is employed as a screening test for the candidates. As a result, this study is based on the results of this online testing system in which Thai students at Khon Kaen University in Thailand had to participate for their scholarship grant in the academic year 2017.

Purposes of the Study

- 1) To study the results based of online C-Test in which students majoring in German at Khon Kaen University in Thailand (academic year 2017) had to participate
- 2) To provide some recommendations for language educators in terms of language testing and teaching

Definition of Term

The C-Test refers to a new format of cloze-test procedure developed to resolve the problem of the conventional cloze. In the C-Test, the second half of every second word is deleted, beginning from the second sentence.

Research Procedures

Participants

Seven students in the second academic year, eight students in the third academic year, and six students in fourth academic year (n=19) majoring in German at Khon Kaen university in Thailand of the academic year 2017 were purposively selected as research participants in this study based on the purposive sampling.

Instrument

The data of this research comprised the C-Test consisting of altogether eight short reading texts, each reading text has 20 gaps to fill in. Students have only five minutes to complete all the deleted words of each text. So, the total points are 160 points.

Data Collection

The students' points from the online C-Test were collected.

Data Analysis

The total points of students were analyzed according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and according to the differentiation of the CEFR levels.

For this reason of scholarship grant, the total score is assigned to one of the following CEFR levels: A2, B1, B2 or C1 or higher. In this regard, the basic tentative criteria are set as follows:

A2 / 46-51 points

B1 / 74-79 points

B2 / 106-111 points

C1 / 135-140 points

Note: If an application needs more refinement in terms of classification, such as B1.1 or B1.2, then this is possible within the core areas (see www.onset.de).

Results

Out of the total points, 160 points, students received the following points according to their academic year.

		Points	Level
<i>Second year</i>	S1	45	A2
	S2	44	A2
	S3	43	A2
	S4	33	under A2
	S5	30	under A2
	S6	29	under A2
<i>Third year</i>	S8	76	B1+
	S9	76	B1+
	S10	74	B1
	S11	70	B1
	S12	65	B1
	S13	60	A2
<i>Fourth Year</i>	S16	88	B1+
	S17	86	B1+
	S18	66	B1
	S19	65	B1
	S20	61	B1
	S21	60	A2

In this part, the results of the online C-Test as the requirement for the German scholarship are shown. Those who wish to apply for this scholarship must possess at least the B1 level.

It was found that four students could achieve the highest level, the level B1+. Seven students have the language proficiency at B1-level. It also indicates that there are six students at the A2-level, and three students are at the level under A2. One student received 24 points as the lowest points at the level A1.

Discussion

The results in the previous part lead to the discussion that one students in the fourth academic year received 60 points and her competence is still at the A2 level whereas five students in the third academic year are at the B1+ and B1 level. This leads to further discussion that the German department at Khon Kaen University in Thailand should improve the level of language competence of students to a greater extent. In this regard, the c-test may be applied in the following teaching aspects: 1) The C-Test may be used as a supplementary learning material for promoting vocabulary growth and for the development of vocabulary acquisition of students; 2) The C-Test may be used to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the students in class; and 3) The C-Test may be used as a part of the final examination to investigate the general language proficiency of the students.

The use of the online c-test for assessing the general language proficiency of students in this study can be viewed as a follow-up research study to expand the field of language testing in Thailand and the findings of this study demonstrate the language proficiency of the learners

to a certain extent. However, it has left the researcher with some questions for further study and subsequent investigations as the following:

Due to the limitation of time in this study, how can the proficiency of students in one university be compared with that of students in the other university? The level of language proficiency of students throughout the country may have discrepancy to a certain extent.

The results found in this study are from the academic year 2017. To further discuss, this study can be more meaningful if the results in the next academic year 2018 can be compared to investigate the trend of the language competence of students.

Apart from this, it may be possible to use the C-Test for measuring language proficiency in terms of teaching foreign languages for specific purposes based on the notion of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). According to Dudley-Evans and St John (1998), English for Specific Purposes has become a vital and innovative activity within the Teaching of English as a foreign language movement (TEFL/TESL). For much of its early life, ESP was dominated by the teaching of English for academic purposes (EAP); most of the materials produced, the course descriptions written and the research carried out were in the area of EAP. English for occupational purposes (EOP) played an important but nevertheless smaller role. In recent years, however, the massive expansion of international business has led to a huge growth in the area of English for Business Purposes or EBP (cited in Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998).

They also state that it is important that instructors should consider social, economic, cultural and linguistic consequences of the global spread of English. English language educators also need to be aware of this inequality and to consider how they can challenge it by promoting curricula concerning Business English that allows all learners the opportunity to critically think about their environment, express their own views and identity in addition to the specific language patterns necessary for business communication. Class instructor, as researcher or evaluator, may use the c-test in class if he or she wishes to test the skills of learners. In relation to ESP practitioner as teacher and materials provider, class instructor may use it as teaching material.

In addition, Lafond, Vine & Welch (2010) place an emphasis on Negotiating and International Negotiations when teaching foreign languages for business communication.

After considering these statements, the situation of teaching German for specific purposes is also crucial when compared to English for specific purposes. Furthermore, designing the c-test for teaching a foreign language in the business context can be challenging, purposive and meaningful for language educators.

Additionally, the C-Test may be used as a Language Dominant Test to assess the potentially bilingual children in the both languages they have been exposed to in order to see which their stronger or dominant language is.

For those who can speak both German and English, the C-Test can be used to conduct a study on language transfer. According to Hufeisen (2010), English as L2 can affect L3 learning. Learners may transfer the previously gained knowledge and relate their learning styles, experience, obstacles or problems to their L3 Learning to acquire the third language effectively and efficiently.

To support this notion, Watcharakaweesilp (2016) conducts a pilot study using the tests in both languages (Test of English for Negotiation and Test of German for Negotiation) to investigate the competence of Thai learners. The researcher purposively selected the topic Language for Negotiation, specifically Negotiating English and German, and designed the tests in both languages (Test of English for Negotiation and Test of German for Negotiation) to investigate the competence of Thai learners. In his study, the research participants were Twenty German Majors in the last academic year (2016) at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Khon Kaen University in Thailand.

Based on this kind of comparative study between the two languages in terms of qualitative data, students may correctly compare words, collocations, and expressions of English with German. Or they could relate their syntactical knowledge of L2 to L3. Hence, the C-Test may measure competencies of language, such as morphology, lexicon, syntax etc. As a result, it may be employed as an integrative Test.

Finally, the C-Test may be used with students on the purpose of screening tests or the high stakes tests; for example, those who are applying for a scholarship in other fields apart from language education.

Conclusion

From the historical overview of language testing, the development of language testing has its own long tradition. The new evaluation methods have been improving and developing. Based on the conventional procedures, a great deal of test formats have been validated and proposed for the new education policy and for the benefit of language testing itself as proposed by Raatz & Klein-Braley (1981) that the c-test was introduced based on the concept of the cloze test. It was found that the c-test used in this study is a reliable and effective testing device for language education. This study demonstrates the use of the online c-test among Thai students majoring in German to assess their general language proficiency.

In terms of follow-up studies, it can lead to more valuable findings if the proficiency of students in one university be compared with that of students in the other university. The level of language proficiency of students throughout the country may have discrepancy to a certain extent. Or the results found in this study from the academic year 2017, this study can be compared to the next academic year investigate the trend of the language competence of students.

In terms of language teaching, the C-Test may be used as a supplementary learning material for promoting vocabulary growth and for the development of vocabulary acquisition of students; used to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the students in class; and used as a part of the final examination to investigate the general language proficiency of the students. Additionally, the researcher discusses the possibilities in terms of the application of the C-Test in various aspects, such as in the aspect of teaching language for specific purposes according to Dudley-Evans and ST John (1998) as well as Lafond, Vine & Welch (2010) in the aspect of teaching foreign languages for Negotiating.

To assess the potentially bilingual children in the both languages they have been exposed to in order to see which their stronger or dominant language is, the C-Test may be used as a Language Dominant Test or in relation to a test for language transfer, Hufeisen (2010) explains that English as L2 can affect L3 learning. Learners may transfer the previously gained knowledge and relate their learning styles, experience, obstacles or problems to their L3 Learning to acquire the third language effectively and efficiently.

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