

Comparing ESL and EFL Test-takers' Performance on “Actual” and “Authenticated” GEPT Listening Tasks

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Abstract

“Communicative competence” has been the dominant theme in SLA for decades, yet creating L2 listening tests that truly assess test-takers’ ability to comprehend real-world language remains a challenge for test developers. L2 listening test frequently use spoken texts that are written, revised, edited, and polished, and then read aloud. These scripted spoken texts often differ dramatically from unplanned real-world spoken language.

This study examined the feasibility of creating spoken texts for L2 listening tests that have many of the characteristics of real-world, unscripted spoken language (including hesitation phenomena, connected speech, listener response features, and oral grammatical and discourse norms), by using trained L1 English speakers to create what we term authenticated spoken texts based on the spoken texts used on Task 2 (two-person conversations) of the GEPT High-Intermediate Level Listening Test. The study also examined how test-takers performed on these authenticated GEPT tasks in comparison to test-takers’ performance on the actual GEPT tasks.

This study involved 111 participants: 63 ESL participants in the United States and 48 EFL participants in Taiwan. For each language group, participants were randomly assigned to either the “Actual” group, or the “Authenticated” group. All of the participants took two tests consisting of two versions of the GEPT High-Intermediate Level Task 2. Test-takers in the “Actual” group listened to the actual spoken texts used in the GEPT listening tests for both tests, while test-takers in the “Authenticated” group took one actual GEPT test, and one authenticated GEPT test.

Text analysis was first used to examine the differences between the actual and authenticated spoken texts. A two-way ANCOVA was then employed to examine if the two groups’ (“Actual” vs. “Authenticated”; ESL vs. EFL) mean scores differed on the listening tests. The results indicated that it was possible to create more authentic versions of spoken texts based on the scripted and edited spoken texts currently in use, although these authenticated texts still lacked many of the characteristics of real-world, unscripted spoken language. The results of the group comparisons on the two versions of the test showed that the scores for the ESL group and EFL group did not differ significantly, but the “Actual” group in both language groups scored higher than the “Authenticated” group.