

# Oral Proficiency

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## 1 Introduction

While teaching Japanese to non-native speakers of Japanese, we have noticed that those who can reiterate phrases spoken by native speakers of Japanese can speak the language well. The same should be true to any language, when we imagine the situation where we reiterate phrases in Navajo, which we have not learned yet. It would be highly unlikely that we can speak Navajo fluently without being able to repeat phrases spoken by native speakers of Navajo. Thus, it seems that there is a certain correlation between the repetition ability and the speaking ability. In this paper, then, we address the question as to what relationship the repetition ability has with the speaking ability.

The organization of this paper is as follows. Section 2 gives a brief summary of the research question. Section 3 provides the procedures of the research. Section 4 presents the finding of the research, and Section 5 provides concluding remarks.

## 2 Research Question

While teaching Japanese to non-native speakers of Japanese, we have observed that those who can reiterate phrases spoken by Japanese well can speak the language well. Our research question is thus, what relationship the repetition ability has with the speaking ability, as shown in (1).

- (1) Research Question  
What relationship does the repetition ability have with the speaking ability?

## 3 Procedures

The procedures of this research are as follows. First, we made the Repetition Test (R-Test) and the Speaking Test (S-Test) based on the textbook Yookoso! by Tohsaku (1994) in the form of a videotape. Section 3.1 gives a brief description of the R-Test, and Section 3.2 the S-Test. Second, we administered the R-Test and the S-Test in this order to 32 Japanese learners at two universities in the States, namely, Salem-Teikyo University and Wake Forest University. Third, and finally, we analyzed the data by Pearson's correlation analysis. These procedures are summarized in (2).

- (2) Procedures
- a. Creation of the Repletion Test (R-Test) and the Speaking Test (S-Test)
  - b. Administration of the R-Test and the S-Test
  - c. Pearson's Correlation Analysis

### 3.1 The Repetition Test (R-Test)

There has been no official repetition test in Japanese invented so far. Thus, we created one for the sake of this project. We made the R-Test based on the textbook Yookoso! by Tohsaku (1994), since it is one of the few textbooks most commonly used in Japanese instruction in the States. There are 46 grammar items to be learned in the textbook, and we randomly picked out 20 grammar items to make sentences to be repeated. Each sentence is short enough in order to avoid problems caused by memory capacity. Thus, the longest sentence has 20 morae, and the rest have less. The R-Test is shown in Chart 1.

### Chart 1: The Repetition Test

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Score: \_\_\_\_\_ /20 \_\_\_\_\_ %

これは、日本語の繰り返しテストです。私の後について、繰り返してください。例えば、私が、「とうきょう」と言ったら、あなたも、「とうきょう」と言って下さい。文は、全てで、20あります。文と文の間は、だいたい、3秒くらいです。

This is a Japanese repetition test. Please repeat after me. For example, after I say "Tokyo", you say "Tokyo". There are a total of 20 sentences. There is about a 3 second interval between each sentence.

- 1 これは、山田さんの本です。
- 2 あの町は、静かです。
- 3 机の上に、電話があります。
- 4 日本の人口は、何人くらいですか？
- 5 先週、映画を見ました。
- 6 ここで昼御飯を食べましょう。
- 7 東京は、大阪より大きいです。
- 8 ちょっと、風邪をひいたんです。
- 9 六時に起きて、顔を洗いました。
- 10 明日は、ここに来ないかもしれません。
- 11 料理をするのが、大好きです。
- 12 昨日も、今日も、雨が降りました。
- 13 佐藤さんは、フランス語が話せます。
- 14 吉田さんが書いた本は、おもしろいです。
- 15 まだ、お酒を飲んだことがありません。
- 16 加藤さんは、もう、帰ったと思います。
- 17 妹は、もう、寝てしまいました。
- 18 天気のいい時は、運動します。
- 19 東京の地下鉄は、便利だそうです。
- 20 来年、日本に行くかどうか、わかりません。

これで終わりです。ありがとうございました。

We then recorded the R-Test in a videotape. One of the authors, who is a male native speaker of Japanese, read the 20 sentences. The test lasts about 3 minutes. The instruction to the test was also recorded, and was provided both in Japanese and English before the test. The instruction is shown above the 20 sentences.

#### The Instruction to the R-Test

This is a Japanese repetition test. Please repeat after me. For example, after I say "Tokyo," you say "Tokyo." There are a total of 20 sentences. There is about a 3 second interval between each sentence.

The test was provided after the testee completely understood what he/she was supposed to do.

Comments are in order on evaluation of the R-Test. In principle, if the given sentence cannot be literally reiterated, it is worth zero points. However, there is one exception: pronunciation of proper names, such as family names. Slight deviation in pronouncing proper names does not affect the score of the test, since it does not directly indicate that the testee cannot repeat them.

### 3.2 The Speaking Test (S-Test)

Let us then turn to the S-Test. In contrast to the R-Test, there is an official speaking test called the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview (ACTFL OPI). We could have used the ACTFL OPI for the sake of this project. However, as it costs \$115 per person, it was not easy to collect data on oral proficiency. Thus, we created a speaking test for the sake of this project, again, based on the textbook Yookoso! by Tohsaku (1994). We used vocabularies and grammar items in the textbook, and made 20 conversational questions. The questions are not independent of each other, but as a whole they make a possible natural story with appropriate answers from the testee. The S-Test is shown in Chart 2.

#### Chart 2: The Speaking Test

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Score: \_\_\_\_\_ /20 \_\_\_\_\_ %

これは、日本語の口述テストです。このビデオを見ながら、ビデオの中の質問に、日本語で答えて下さい。質問は、20あります。質問と質問の間は、だいたい、3秒くらいです。

This is a Japanese speaking test. While watching this video, please answer the questions in the video in Japanese. There are 20 questions. There is about a 3 second interval between each question.

- 1 あの一、私、牧と申しますが、お名前は？
- 2 あーそうですか。今、何年生ですか？
- 3 もう、何年くらい、日本語を勉強していますか？
- 4 あーそうですか。日本に行ったことがありますか？
- 5 あーそうですか。ところで、今朝は、何時に、起きましたか？
- 6 あーそうですか。じゃあ、朝から、今まで、何をしたか教えてください。

- 7 この週末は、何をするつもりですか？
- 8 あーそうですか。では、この大学について、どう思いますか？
- 9 あーそうですか。では、日本人について、どう思いますか？
- 10 あーそうですか。では、あなたは、なぜ、日本語を勉強しようと思ったんですか？
- 11 あーそうですか。では、日本の車とアメリカの車では、どちらの方が、デザインが好きですか？
- 12 あーそうですか。じゃあ、日本の食べ物の中で、何が一番好きですか？
- 13 あーそうですか。じゃあ、ちょっと、明日の天気について、教えてください。
- 14 あーそうですか。じゃあ、暇なときは、誰とよく話しますか？
- 15 じゃあ、その人は、どこに住んでますか？
- 16 ええ、これから、ちょっと、銀行に行きたいんですが、ここから一番近い銀行は、どこにありますか？
- 17 あーそうですか。じゃあ、ここから、その銀行まで、歩いて行けますか？
- 18 じゃあ、その銀行の近くには、どんな店がありますか？
- 19 あ、わかりました。では、あなたの誕生日は、いつですか？
- 20 あーそうですか。では、最後に、大学を卒業したら、どんな仕事がしたいですか？

ありがとうございました。

We then recorded the S-Test in a videotape. One of the authors, who is a male native speaker of Japanese, read the 20 questions. The test lasts about 3 minutes. The instruction to the test was also recorded, and was provided both in Japanese and English before the test. The instruction is shown above the 20 questions.

#### The Instruction to the S-Test

This is a Japanese speaking test. While watching this video, please answer the questions in the video in Japanese. There are 20 questions. There is about a 3 second interval between each question.

The test was provided after the testee completely understood what he/she was supposed to do.

When evaluating the S-Test, there are two things, which if violated, will lead to a question being worth zero points. These are relevance of the answer to the question and consistency between the question and the answer, as shown in (3).

- (3) Cannot be violated
- a. relevance of the answer to the question
  - b. consistency between the question and the answer

For instance, to the question 1, onamae wa 'What is your name?', answers such as hatachi desu 'I am 20 years old' are considered irrelevant to the question, and are not given a point. Also, to the question 10 starting with naze 'why,' any answer that does not end with kara 'because' is considered inconsistent with the question, and is not given a point.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

Let us now go into the data analysis. We examined the correlation of the score of the R-Test with that of the S-Test through Pearson's correlation analysis. The correlations coefficient between the score of the R-Test and that of the S-Test was .87, as shown in (4). The p-value was less than .001.

- (4) Correlation Between the Score of the R-Test and the Score of the S-Test  
 $r = .87$   
 $r\text{-square} = .75$   
 $p < .001$   
 $n = 32$

The result is more clearly shown in Chart 3 at the end of this paper.

#### 4 The Finding

Thus, we found that the R-Test had a positive association with the S-Test. This in turn suggests that the repetition ability has a positive association with the speaking ability. Thus, the answer to the research question in (1) is (5).

- (1) Research Question  
 What relationship does the repetition ability have with the speaking ability?
- (5) Answer to the Research Question  
 The repetition ability has a positive association with the speaking ability.

#### 5 Concluding Remarks

To conclude, this research has shown that the repetition ability is closely correlated with the speaking ability. This suggests that the speaking ability or oral proficiency can be predicted by a repetition test. Thus far, oral proficiency has only been measured by the ACTFL OPI, since it is the only official oral proficiency test. However, the ACTFL OPI has two inconvenient aspects. First, it costs \$115 per person, which makes it difficult to obtain data on oral proficiency. Second, interviews are conducted telephonically and in person, and each recorded interview is evaluated and rated by two certified testers. Thus, it takes time to obtain data.

However, given the present research, it may be possible to overcome the inconvenience of the ACTFL OPI. Suppose that we let the objects take the ACTFL OPI and a repetition test at the same time, and analyze the data through a correlation analysis. If it turned out that they have a positive association, we can use the repetition test as an alternative to the ACTFL OPI. We can continue to revise the repetition test until it has the highest correlations coefficient with the score of the ACTFL OPI. Note that the repetition test is objective, since it has been video-taped, and all the test takers are exposed to the same material. Also, as it does not need any certified tester, it does not cost at all. Any Japanese language instructor then can use the repetition test at his/her own institution. Thus, the present research has opened up a way to make an objective, time-saving, and cost free oral proficiency test.

Before closing this paper, let us mention the areas of further investigation. Maki, Dunton, Obringer, and Price (1999) show that writing proficiency has a positive association with the sum of listening and reading proficiency, and argue that the production ability and the perception ability are closely correlated. If their conclusion is correct, it would predict that oral proficiency, which is a production ability, should

have a positive association with the sum of listening and reading proficiency. Thus, the first task is to investigate the relationship between them, which will be done by analyzing the score of the R-Test and that of the M-Test through a correlation analysis.

The second issue is the relationship between oral proficiency and writing proficiency. These two are considered production abilities. However, no research has been done on the relationship between the two. Thus, the second task is to investigate the relationship between them, which will be done by analyzing the score of the R-Test and that of the K-Test through a correlation analysis.

### References

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