When One is Not Enough: Translation Rating and the Assessment of Partial Word Knowledge

ABSTRACT

An important requirement in foreign language incidental vocabulary acquisition research is accurate assessment of partial word knowledge. Open-format L1 translation tests are increasingly used for this purpose. What level of precision is appropriate in the translation rating procedure? To answer this question, we analyze experimental data from a read-and-test study. We rate the pretest and posttest translations on an eleven-level scale. Through an approximation process, we derive equivalent binary, three-level, and six-level data. The Mann-Whitney U Test is applied to each of the four data sets (eleven-level, binary, three-level, and six-level) to identify the words for which subject knowledge improvement reached significance. By using the original, eleven-level data as a standard, it is shown that binary and three-level rating lead to false positives and false negatives. Two conclusions are drawn: 1. Not all partially correct translations deserve equal credit; and 2. Multi-level rating is a more precise measure of translation accuracy than binary and three-level rating. Practical rating issues and the advantages of using a pretest and posttest as opposed to a posttest only are also discussed.

Keywords: incidental vocabulary acquisition, English for specific purposes, partial word knowledge, translation rating, vocabulary assessment

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uses of we leave your readers to determine to whom you are referring; instead substitute an appropriate noun or clarify your usage.” *(Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, 5th Ed., p. 39)*

Since this abstract does not show the name(s) of the author(s), it is impossible for this reader to know how many there are. However, repeated usage of “we” by multiple authors soon becomes tediously redundant. The best way to avoid using “we” is to use the passive voice of the verbs. Although this practice is not universally recommended, it is supported in textbooks such as *Academic Writing for Graduate Students: A Course for Nonnative Speakers of English* (John M. Swales & Christine Feak, Michigan Series in English for Academic & Professional Purposes, The University of Michigan Press, 1994) and *Writing Up Research: Experimental Research Report Writing for Students of English* (Robert Weissberg & Suzanne Buker, Prentice Hall Regents, 1990).

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