A Study of the Relationship Between Background Knowledge and the English Listening Proficiency Testing Performance of EFL Undergraduate Students in Thailand

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Abstract

The vast majority of proficiency tests taken in Thailand are generated abroad but increasingly Thai universities and language institutes are seeking to generate tests within the country that adhere to CEFR guidelines. With foreign generated tests, the perception of many test takers is that they suffer from a lack of familiarity with some of the subject matter. This study aimed to assess the relationship between background knowledge and listening proficiency performance within the format of a multiple-choice listening test, in the hope of better informing and preparing CEFR English proficiency test-takers and test writers. The researcher focused on extended listening texts in the form of short talks and multiple-choice question items regarding listening for meaning and specific information, both widely used in listening proficiency testing. The research was conducted with undergraduate English major students from a Thai university. The research instruments adopted were a Likert scale questionnaire to establish topic familiarity, a subsequent listening test with multiple choice question items, and interviews with selected exceptional subjects. Analysis focused on correlations between familiarity scores and test results utilizing mean scores and standard deviation as well as Pearson Correlation to measure the strength of the linear association between the two variables, familiarity and listening test performance.

The research group results revealed that the mean performances for familiar topics were above the total test mean and the mean performances for

unfamiliar topics were below the total test mean. However, the individual subjects' results yielded an unsubstantial correlation between Likert familiarity scores and test performance using Pearson Correlations, due to a number of carefully observed factors that effect listening test performance in proficiency tests.

Key words: Background knowledge, familiarity, CEFR, listening proficiency testing.

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