

THE TYPES OF ERRORS MADE IN THE PURDUE ENGLISH TEST BY HIGH SCHOOL BOYS.

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This study was made in order to determine some of the more common errors made by high school boys in the various phases of English. It attempted to take the study of deficiencies in English out of the range of conjecture by measuring the condition with a standardized English test, and thus free the results from personal bias. The study went one step further in its effort to determine by an intelligence test, the correlation, if any, between the use of correct English and general intelligence. The results of the mental test indicated only a slight relationship existing between the use of correct English and native ability. Thus showing that good usage in English is a question of careful training and drill.

The data for this study were secured from results obtained by giving the Purdue English test, Form 2, and the Pressey Intelligence Test to a selected group of boys in high schools in Indiana, New York, Ohio, Illinois, Minnesota, Kansas, and California, in cities having less than ten thousand in population.

Approximately 200 tests were used in each of the states with the exception of Indiana where something more than 2,200 were given. In each of these seven states the tests were given to 100 vocational agriculture boys and to an equal number of non-vocational boys in the same grade. The tests were administered by a teacher in the school and with his assistance the boys scored the results. These scores were later checked by the writer in order to secure greater accuracy in the grading. It was not advisable to give both tests in any given school on the same day, but the two tests were given, however, within a period of one week. By selecting at random 500 cases from Indiana and 100 from each of the other states, the results, with the exception of those in punctuation, were based upon 1,100 cases. Because of the enormous labor required to tabulate each type of error made in each of the 20 sentences in punctuation, ten typical sentences were selected from which to secure results in the total 1,100 cases. One finds that 200 cases if taken at random are an adequate number to use as the basis for conclusions, that is, there is very little variation after the first two hundred.

The Purdue English Test is made up of seven parts. It tests for punctuation, for grammar, for choice of words, for literary information, for spelling, for vocabulary, and for reading. The results from the punctuation test show the trends in this subject—one standing for the use of much punctuation is general; the other, the use of as little punctuation as possible. Punctuation is a rather mechanical memory habit, and the accurate use of it is the result of drill and practice.

The Grammar results show that such sentences as "What kind of picture *was* shown?" and "A series of lecture *is* given every winter."

as the type of sentences which causes the greatest difficulty in correct usage. The test for Choice of Words was inadequate since the choice was between two words and the element of "guessing" was 50 per cent.

In the Literary Information test the element of "guessing" had been reduced to 25 per cent from the two foregoing tests: Grammar and Choice of Words—by giving a choice of four words rather than two.

Some of the more outstanding errors were made—that 29 per cent thought that Walt Whitman was an English writer; that 34 per cent thought Tennyson wrote "Sesame and Lilies;" that 26 per cent thought the quotation, "What is so rare as a day in June?" was from "Lady of the Lake;" and 21 per cent thought it was from "Evangeline;" that 21 per cent thought "Ben Hur" a short story; that 24 per cent thought Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote in defense of the Indian; that 34 per cent of those answering thought the quotation, "God's in His Heaven, All's right with world," was from Longfellow, while 18 per cent underlined Browning; that 19 per cent thought Addison a poet, 19.5 per cent thought him a novelist and 18.1 per cent thought him a dramatist; 22 per cent thought "Paradise Lost" a fine allegory; 20 per cent thought "The Taming of the Shrew" was written by Goldsmith.

The Spelling form used in this test was different from the usual spelling tests, in that the method employed was that of detecting the error rather than the aural method to which the student is accustomed. Of the 30 words given in the test 15 were incorrectly written. The words most frequently missed by those taking the test were the misspelled words. This test was a good measure of the accuracy of observation.

The Vocabulary test was the hardest part of the entire test. In this test four words in parenthesis followed the word given. The word in the parenthesis was synonymous with the given word to be underlined. Some of the more outstanding errors made were:

The word "intrinsic" had 21 per cent who regarded it as synonymous with "false" and 25 per cent "fierce;" for "vicissitude," 12 per cent gave the correct synonym while 22 per cent gave "hate" and 19.8 per cent "steadiness" while 36 per cent did not attempt it; 15.9 per cent gave "imitate" as the correct word for "propitious;" 33 per cent thought "frivolity" similar to "cogency;" 34 per cent gave "audience" for "session;" 21 per cent gave "worthy" for "trenchant;" 31 per cent gave "sweet" for "palpable;" 28.6 per cent gave "obvious;" for the word "dissemble" 20.6 per cent gave "produce," 24.4 per cent gave "pick;" for the word "tenaciously" 23.6 per cent gave "correctly;" 23.8 per cent "honesty" for "fallacy;" 23 per cent gave "boldness" for "reticence;" 20.3 per cent gave "relax" for "vie;" 21 per cent of those answering gave "chance" for "purport".

The Reading test, even though not a difficult one, shows that most pupils make errors because of inadequate comprehension and that a high correlation exists between reading and general intelligence.

In comparing Indiana with the other states in each part of the test, this state stood lowest; Illinois, first; New York, second; California, third; Minnesota, fourth; Kansas, fifth; and Ohio, sixth.

This study may be carried further by giving these same boys another standardized English test and by correlation, determine the validity of the foregoing results. Also, similar studies should be made in Mathematics, History, Science, and Foreign Language to find Indiana's proficiency in comparison to the other states in these subjects.

English is fundamentally different from every other subject taught in the public school curriculum. It is a subject where the larger part of the training is received from outside of the classroom. The pupil does not imitate or "pick" up History, Mathematics, or Science. Perhaps English grammar should be taught in the high school; perhaps greater emphasis should be placed upon spelling, vocabulary, or reading; perhaps the main need is for extensive and intensive attention to English in every subject in high school. Various methods should be tried systematically, measured, and comparisons made with the results.

