

**IMPROVING THE CONTENT AND THE PRESENTATION  
OF MULTIPLE - CHOICE ITEMS IN TESTING  
READING COMPREHENSION**



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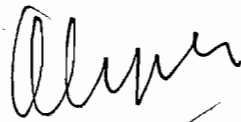
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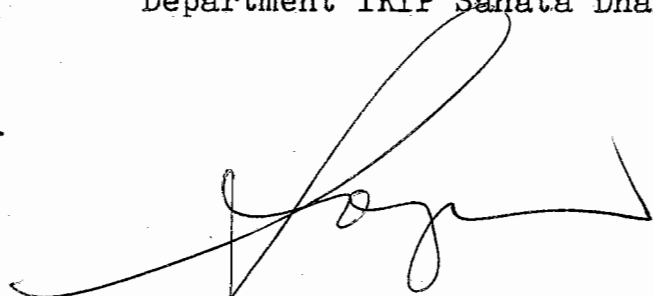
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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. The Goal of Teaching English in SMA

There is realignment in the language teaching approach of our curriculum today since the standard achievement of the audio-lingual approach in the previous curriculum (1975) is far from satisfactory. It has failed to assure the attainment of students' ability in communicating a language both orally and in writing. The audio-lingual approach considers listening and speaking as the first and central task in language learning; by no means it implies that reading and writing have secondary importance. Curriculum 1984, therefore, follows the idea that language teaching should be communicative by launching a 'communicative approach'. Hopefully, this new approach can ground students in all the basic language skills to communicate both receptively (reading and listening) and productively (writing and speaking).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Dept. P & K, 1984: 28

The application of this new approach becomes very apparent in the time division of the English teaching programme per semester. The totally effective contact hours are distributed to reading comprehension including vocabulary building  $\pm$  60%; structure  $\pm$  30%; and dialogue  $\pm$  10%.<sup>2</sup> Accordingly, most of the time is devoted to reading comprehension alone which amounts to reading comprehension as the general objective of English language teaching in SMA. Students are expected to have the ability to read scientific texts in their field which is the so-called 'working knowledge of English' when they continue their study.<sup>3</sup>

Reading comprehension seems to be worth a great deal in language learning and there are strong arguments put forward by some experts as follows:

1. Krashen (1982) assumes that acquisition is the central point in language learning. In addition to listening, reading as the other type of input competence also gives a direct contribution to language acquisition in which people acquire spoken language fluency not by practicing talking but by understanding input via listening and reading.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Aryanto, EDAS, IKIP Sanata Dharma

<sup>3</sup> Dept. P & K, 1982: 4

<sup>4</sup> Krashen, 1982: 57-58



2. O.K. Moore (?) finds that the primary motivation of a child learning something is his or her natural curiosity and desire to learn to read. Reading supports learning much since reading is basic to the improvement of other language skills and the expansion of knowledge.<sup>5</sup>
3. Considering the fact that most of our SMA graduates neither intend to go abroad nor meet English speaking people, we can say that to continue their study students need to have reading ability as provision for their future needs. Moreover, Chastain (1976) states that by its very nature, reading is, unlike listening or speaking, a more solitary experience, in which one may read alone without the help of others. Anywhere and anytime she or he can keep on reading, since reading is autonomous.<sup>6</sup>

Bearing in mind the essence and the nature of reading illustrated above, it is not exaggerated if curriculum 1984 gives more emphasis on reading comprehension (ESP) as the terminal goal of learning English in SMA.

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<sup>5</sup>Gibson, pp. 264-267.

Since the need for language learning implies the need for tests to determine to what extent the objectives and content of the syllabus have been attained by individual learners, it is imperative that teachers check students' reading comprehension at all stages to know how much students really understand what they have read. The most popular way of checking reading comprehension is by using a multiple-choice format. It is internationally accepted because it has its own power to test students' ability to read a passage with attention to detail and to comprehend the main idea of a passage. Though a multiple-choice format is not the only means to test reading comprehension Thorndike and Hagen (1977) advocate the superiority of this format, as follows:<sup>7</sup>

Multiple-choice items can be used to appraise a wide variety of educational objectives. They are efficient and minute for minute, yield scores that are more dependable than those from free response questions. However, the advantages of objective items can be achieved only if they are well-constructed.

#### B. The Background

In practice, it is unfortunate that many teacher-made tests as well as ready-made tests do not serve as an effective means to fulfill the achievement of the

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<sup>7</sup>Thorndike, 1977: 217.

main goal stated above. Most of the test items performance seem to miss the essence and nature of reading since the construction of the items is merely based on the test writers' intuition or superficial experience. Many of them do not even realize that there are a lot of handbooks on testing written by leading experts which the test writers are supposed to consult.

Since the Government has recently proposed that it should be teachers themselves who have the right to construct test items, and it has published 'Kisi-kisi TPB SMA Tengah Semester Ganjil 1985/1986, Kelas I, II, III' (A Manual for Constructing the Achievement Tests of The First, Second and Third Grades of SMA 1985/1986),<sup>8</sup> the writer considers necessary to identify the underlying problems and the solutions to those problems in this thesis. Teachers' participation in composing test items now becomes apparent and it is teachers who have the flexibility needed for successful teaching as well as testing, for it must be taken into account that the contents of the lesson should influence the nature of the examinations and not the other way round.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Dept. P & K, 1985.

<sup>9</sup>Gerwitz, 1977: 240.

In order to increase both the effectiveness and the efficiency of multiple-choice items to test reading comprehension, a thorough investigation concerning the two major problems, i.e. problems of content and presentation of the items connected with the essence of testing in the educational achievement may be in line with the purpose to construct better items. It is hoped that knowledge about the elements needed to compose good multiple-choice items can help teachers either to revise and alter the previous ready-made tests or, if there is enough time, teachers can also compose new items based on new passages. The end-product will, however, not only realize reading objective more effectively but also restore the positive effect of testing on the totality of learning-teaching behaviour.

### C. The Aim of the Study

This thesis is meant to identify the two kinds of problems that impede the understanding of the text and the essence of testing, namely:

- a. The problems of content and presentation of the items.
- b. The seriousness of the problem to the achievement of reading objective.
- c. The solutions to those problems by discussing some suggestions.

#### D. The Scope of the Study

Not all of the problems met in the test items are analyzed in this present discussion. The topic is limited to some considerations, namely:

- a. How much students have acquired the content of the text by means of their structural and lexical knowledge and knowledge about the outside world. This point will be discussed under the heading 'The Content of The Test Items'.
- b. In what way students get to the correct answers; this is put under the heading 'The Presentation of The Items'.
- c. The quality of the items as a whole in facilitating students to check their understanding of the text.

#### E. Theoretical Framework

The identification of those two major problems is obtained by comparing the items performance with the objective of reading comprehension, including the process of comprehending itself. By no means, when the items are in accordance with the purpose of reading comprehension and they have any potentialities to meet the general objective of English teaching programme in SMA such items create no problems. Then, it is assumed that the following item does not follow the very idea of reading comprehension since it has nothing to do with

understanding the text. For example:<sup>10</sup>

Text : Now it seems that there are encouraging prospects of further development of the livestock industry in the plains and valleys.

Question: The word 'encouraging' in this passage means

- A. various            C. obvious  
B. hopeful            D. limited

Similarly, the next item has no value as a test of comprehension since students take the advantage from the weakness of its presentation in answering the item. They will directly distract option (D), for it is grammatically wrong when put in the stem. For example:<sup>11</sup>

Text : I had nearly reached the town, when the young man suddenly said, very slowly, 'Do you speak English?' As I soon learnt, he was English himself!

Question: Was the young man English or French?

- A. He was English  
B. He was neither English nor French  
C. He was French  
D. Yes, he was.

As a conclusion, it can be said that the two kinds of the items do not reflect the true understanding

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<sup>10</sup>Burton, 1978: 16.

<sup>11</sup>Kumpulan 2000 soal, Stencil, (?): 130.

of the text since each item has its own weakness in the content and presentation. So, the hypothesis is that in order to be valid test items as a whole must truly realize the comprehension reflected both in the content and the presentation of the items.

In analyzing the problems of content the writer considers the idea that constitutes reading based on what King (1976)<sup>12</sup> termed as a 'total response' and Goodman (1970)<sup>13</sup> summarized concerning the process of reading. While some ideas from Heaton (1975),<sup>14</sup> Harris (1969)<sup>15</sup>, Ebel (?)<sup>16</sup> and Karmel (?)<sup>17</sup> are borrowed in analyzing the problems of presentation. Finally, some of the suggestions follow Otto's and Chester's (1976)<sup>18</sup> ideas concerning the elements of comprehension.

#### F. Source of the Data

The data is obtained from the nine test papers which have already been tested among the SMA students scattered in Garut and Bandung regency. The test data are categorised into three types, namely:

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<sup>12</sup>King, 1976: 40  
<sup>13</sup>Goodman, 1970: 120  
<sup>14</sup>Heaton, 1975: 115  
<sup>15</sup>Harris, 1969: 62  
<sup>16</sup>Ebel, 1979: 154-155

<sup>17</sup>Karmel, 1970: 405-408  
 Murcia, 1974: 260  
<sup>18</sup>Otto & Chester, 1976:  
 117

1. The Well-Constructed Test Items are take from:
  - a. The achievement test of The First Semester 1984/  
1985
    - Status: Ready-made test
    - Date : Thursday, September 27, 1984
  - b. The Achievement Test of The Third Semester 1983/  
1984
    - Status: Ready-made test
    - Date : Wednesday, December 14, 1983
  - c. The Achievement Test of The Fifth Semester 1984/  
1985
    - Status: Ready-made test
    - Date : Tuesday, November 27, 1984
2. The Fairly-Well-Constructed Test Items are taken from:
  - a. The Achievement Test of The First Semester 1985/  
1986
    - Status: Teacher-made test
    - Date : Friday, October 25, 1985
  - b. The Achievement Test of The Third Semester 1984/  
1985
    - Status: Ready-made test
    - Date : Thursday, September 27, 1984
  - c. The Achievement Test of The Fifth Semester 1984/  
    - Status: Ready-made test
    - Date : Tuesday, October 2, 1984
3. The Poorly-Constructed Test Items are taken from:



- a. The Achievement Test of The First Semester 1985/  
1986
  - Status: Teacher-made test
  - Date : Friday, October 25, 1985
- b. The Achievement Test of The Third Semester 1982/  
1983
  - Status: Ready-made test
  - Date : Monday, November 1, 1982
- c. The Final Examination 1981/1982
  - Status: Ready-made test
  - Date : Thursday, April 15, 1982

G. Methodology

The ways taken in accumulating the data are as follows:

- a. Assembling all the test data with a special reference on reading comprehension items.
- b. Ordering all the data into the three levels of study, i.e. the first, second and third grades.
- c. Analyzing the general problems met in the test items performance.
- d. Selecting the representative ones which are in line with the aim of the study.
- e. Grouping those representative data into three categories namely: the well, fairly well and poor-constructed items.

- f. Choosing the three samples of the data in each category according to the levels of study.

The difficulty arises in the process of classifying a certain group of items into one of the categories above since there is no fixed rules in determining the criteria. Thus the classification is quite relative and subjective. It only relies on the intensity of seriousness of the problems towards the achievement of the goal, as well as the purpose of evaluation. In addition, another obstacle is found in searching for the representative test items which are relevant to the aim of the study. Most of the test data have the overlapping problems either in content or in presentation.

#### H. The Analysis of the Data

The following steps are carried out successively to analyze the selected samples of the test data:

- a. The selected samples from each category are analyzed into:
- knowledge obtained by answering the items correctly; this is meant to identify various kinds of either communicative or linguistic competence students achieved from the items.
  - the reflection of comprehending the text in the choice of the correct answers; this is meant to

reveal whether the acquisition of certain knowledge is quite relevant to the business of understanding the text or not.

- the realization of the reading objective through items performance; if the second step is in agreement with the acquisition of the content, then the items really reflect reading objective.

b. Nevertheless, those samples are also analyzed into:

- the wording of the stem questions; it aims to detect if there are any ambiguities which will cause confusion on the part of the students.
- the visibility of the correct answer; it means to find out any weaknesses which facilitate student to answer the item without having a look at the text.
- the plausibility of the distractors; it intends to see whether the distractors are weak or not so that students are likely to cast them off directly.

c. The classification of point (a) is made under the heading 'The Content of The Items' while that of point (b) is grouped under the heading 'The Presentation of the Items!.

## Chapter II

### THE IMPORTANCE OF TESTING IN EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

#### A. The General Function of Testing

A part from imparting specific knowledge, skills, and attitudes, the purpose of education is to ensure the attainment of specific knowledge, skills and attitudes.<sup>1</sup> First of all the objective of what we expect the learner to do must be clearly defined before developing the tests. Reading comprehension as one of the skills to be tested also has its own general instructional goals, that is students are able to understand and interpret the content of a given text according to their own fields (ESP).<sup>2</sup>

Testing seems to be of great importance in the educational system. The test findings are interpreted in order to measure the extent to which the objectives have been reached. Since education is built for one purpose: learning, instruction is the process rather than the purpose. Learning-oriented system is the main business in education and a reading comprehension course demands students to be more active than their

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<sup>1</sup>Banathy, 1976: 14.

<sup>2</sup>Dept. P & K, 1984:

teacher. This is likely to happen because reading with understanding implies reading silently in which a student's mind is working actively during the process of comprehending. Tests, therefore, serve as a best means to measure continually in achieving the objective of a reading course.

Although learning should be in focus, the function of instruction cannot be taken for granted. In reading course the role of a teacher is important in identifying the actual learning tasks. A teacher, in this role, acts as a motivator to encourage students to do the tasks; and the results of the tests function as feedback.

As a matter of fact, evaluations give a contribution to problem-solving in our educational environment. Thorndike and Hagen (1977) propose the role of testing in decision making by saying that tests as a formal evaluative instrument can at most provide information that is relevant to a decision. Test results can be used as a standard to decide what students have learnt to do. Even tests are also a matter of considerable importance for a teacher to make instructional decision which is aimed either at the whole class or at students as individuals.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Thorndike & Hagen, 1977: 3

Regardless of the usefulness of testing stated above, several claims are made to criticize the harmful effects of testing. The critics of testing add to the concern by such statements as, 'Tests penalize the creative child', or 'Tests invade the privacy of the individual. 'In short, they say that tests threaten and upset pupils especially if pupils get a low score on a test, they will become discouraged and quit trying. Afterward, tests are sometimes characterized as a 'necessary evil'.<sup>4</sup> Teachers often hear or see their students are cheating on examination as a way-out of their apprehension towards tests. Nevertheless, those who do less well than they had expected can easily find some basis for regarding tests as being unfair.

It is admitted, however, that language tests in the past had exerted a harmful influence on students in which they were tested about the language; concentration on usage gets its priority with the emphasis in a mastery of sentence pattern coupled with inability to use them in day-to-day communication, for example:<sup>5</sup>

Analyze into clauses, stating the kind and function of each clause:

We cannot go until we have finished these exercises.

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<sup>4</sup>Ebel, 1979: 29

<sup>5</sup>Heaton, 1975: 1

In line with the current ideas about the role of language in communication and, in particular, by the implementations of those ideas for the teaching and testing of languages for specific purpose (LSP)<sup>6</sup> testing about the language (the usage) is substituted by testing how the language is used (the uses); this is concerned with communicative function. So now, the uses of a language is the objective, and the mastery of the formal patterns, or usage of that language is a means to achieve this objective. Later Carroll (1980) continues that a test cannot be based on linguistic grounds alone. The criterion for success lies not in formal correctness but in communicative effectiveness. Therefore, today testing should focus more on practice in using the language for example:<sup>7</sup>

Rewrite each of the following sentences in another way but do not change the meaning. Begin each new sentence with the words given.  
We cannot go until we have finished these exercises.  
When ...

It is also shown that tests, if they are well-constructed, and geared to the objective of a language as a means of communication; if they meet the criteria of a good test, i.e. validity, reliability, they can give better a result to students' learning. Lado (1961)

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<sup>6</sup>Carrol, 1980: 7-8.

<sup>7</sup>Heaton, 1975: 1.

says that a test is valid if it measures what is intended to measure. Validity is not general but specific. If a test of reading comprehension measures the understanding of a text, it is a valid test of reading comprehension. Later, he continues that a test is reliable if the test yields dependable scores in the sense that they will not fluctuate very much so that we may know that the score obtained by a student is pretty close to the score he would obtain if we gave the test again. Reliability, however, is general rather than specific. If the scores on a test are steady, that is reliable, they are reliable regardless of what we test. And no assessment can be valid if it is not reliable, because a test with scores which fluctuate very much does not test anything.<sup>8</sup> Besides, objectivity in scoring as the main characteristic of the multiple-choice items must also be included. Every item contains only one correct answer; no matter who scores it will give the same score.

To be equal of this, reading comprehension as one of the communicative skills must also be tested in way of what is suggested as a latter type of test. Instead of testing either about the linguistic knowledge or knowledge about the meaning of words in isolation,

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<sup>8</sup>Lado, 1981: 30-31.



reading comprehension tests must always reflect its function as a tool of communication. Thus, students are encouraged to infer the gist of what they have read and later to interpret by themselves the meaning of the text. Rather than giving a harmful effect on student's future learning such tests are able to promote student's learning to read.

Since multiple-choice items are the main topic of this discussion, the following two examples of test items will be presented in multiple-choice format to show the way of asking a question. The bad item does not reflect reading as a means of communication by asking the meaning of a word in isolation while the other shows clearly the involvement of inferring a new word in the context of the passage. For example:<sup>9</sup>

Bad item: The word 'hazardous' means

- A. clever
- B. risky
- C. sensible
- D. stupid

Better item: The writer thought that Mike's action had been

- A. clever
- B. risky
- C. sensible
- D. stupid

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<sup>9</sup>Archer, 1975: 36.

Above all, the usefulness of tests for both student and teacher is finally summarized by Ministry of Education into four categories, namely:<sup>10</sup>

Pertama, untuk memberikan umpan balik (feedback) kepada guru sebagai dasar untuk memperbaiki proses belajar-mengajar dan mengadakan remedial program bagi siswa.

Kedua, untuk menentukan angka kemajuan/hasil belajar masing-masing siswa yang antara lain diperlukan untuk pemberian laporan kepada orang tua, penentuan lulus tidaknya siswa.

Ketiga, untuk menempatkan siswa dalam situasi belajar-mengajar yang tepat (misal dalam penentuan jurusan) sesuai dengan tingkat kemampuan/karakteristik lainnya yang dimiliki siswa.

Keempat, untuk mengenal latar belakang (psikologis fisik dan lingkungan) siswa yang mengalami kesulitan belajar, yang hasilnya dapat digunakan sebagai dasar dalam memecahkan kesulitan-kesulitan tersebut.

Realizing the multiple use of testing for both student and teacher, the following part will discuss why testing is considered to be worth a great deal that it is inseparable to the language learning and language teaching programme as a whole.

#### B. The Role of Testing in Language Learning

Educational assessment is as old as education itself. The central concept in all assessment is that of validity: when a test measures what is supposed to measure and nothing else. And Lado adds; 'What the

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<sup>10</sup> Dept. P & K, 1984: 5.

student has to learn constitutes the corpus of what the teacher has to test.<sup>11</sup> From those premise a conclusion can be drawn that a description of output competence may also identify the tasks which consist of whatever learning is to be undertaken by the learner to enable him to demonstrate the performance described. A learning task is not explicit in a statement of performance; it must be uncovered, deduced by an examination and analysis of the task itself. Thus, learning is inseparable from testing; learning without testing is useless, for its is unobservable. Meanwhile, testing must be based on the material students have already mastered or learnt.

The test as a means of checking student's progress toward the goals of learning can be characterized as follows:

- to provide the student with an opportunity to show his ability to recognize and produce correct forms of the language
- to measure the extent of students' achievement of the instructional goals
- to show how well students can handle specific elements of the target language

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<sup>11</sup>Lado, 1981: 20.

- to serve as a kind of self-examination and re-learning process as the student asks himself why certain answers are incorrect
- to help students, under a teacher's guidance, better methods of organization and preparation

Course objectives demand students to realize their output competence through testing, so it is easier to identify that students start at zero and progress until they become fluent. Yet, tests do not only function as the assessment of cognitive outcomes of education; what is more they are extremely significant to motivate and direct student's learning. If tests were abandoned, learning could not be promoted effectively.

As an incentive, test results can reveal areas of strength and weakness of individual students<sup>12</sup> and act as motivating devices for future study.

In this case, tests are having to do with extrinsic motivation in which the interest comes from outside the learner. Students feel that they must learn in order to pass a test, to avoid punishment or to please their parents and teacher. Most students, like most human beings, enjoy praise. Hopefully, classroom tests which students make use of should make learning to be its own reward.

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<sup>12</sup>Karmel, 1970: 6.

The desire to do well on an examination or in a class recitation, will generally become intrinsic when the learner experiences a feeling of security and achievement as a result of successful performance.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, students are moving forward continuously and are increasingly able to perceive and to integrate the experiences to which they are exposed. Energetic students neither want to be static nor to be in boredom, is the enemy of learning. However, it should also be noted that fairness in testing is urgently needed. Unless teacher tests everything he has announced that he is going to test, students' motivation to do the next test will be decreasing.

### C. The Role of Testing in Language Teaching

Teaching and testing are so closely related that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other. It is seldom suggested that learning can be promoted effectively by teachers and students who pay no attention to the results of their efforts.

Good teaching and good testing are closely related. The teacher has an obligation to his students not only to teach them well, but also to measure as accurately as possible their achievement and the rates at which they progress in developing the desired knowledge and skills.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Finochiaro, 1979: 13.

<sup>14</sup>Lowe, 1975: 327.

Needless to say, evaluation must be used in the first place to measure how successful the instruction is. If tests were prohibited, there is no other dependable and beneficial means to the process of education has yet been discovered.

To teach well means to test well. Through frequent testing, the teacher can determine which aspects of the program present difficulties for individual students and for the class as a whole. By analyzing the mistakes made on a given test, a teacher can decide where to concentrate extra class drill and how best to assist each student. In testing students, a teacher puts a strict control towards their learning behaviour.

To assess from moment to moment the progress of each individual in the class, and how to manage the classroom activity so that the fastest and most able learners are not depressed by being held back, while the slowest learners are not depressed by being left behind. (Strevens 1974)

By and large, a good test has advantages to the teacher as what Lowe (1975) proposes:<sup>15</sup>

- Good testing reveals how well the students have learned what their teacher has tried to teach them, and points out where they require more help.

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<sup>15</sup>Lowe, 1975: 327.



- It feeds back to the teacher information concerning the effectiveness of his teaching method. This information gives the teacher a valuable starting point for consolidating the methods that have been most helpful and for revising those that have not given good results.
- It gives a reliable measurement of individual differences, enabling the teacher to classify his students, with considerable accuracy, as good, average, or weak.
- It enables the teacher to give a more accurate evaluation of the student's ability, or grade, or rank, to the administration, to the student himself, and to his parent or sponsor.

It is quite clear that to test students means to test teacher himself so that he can improve his teaching in case of necessary after having seen the test results. Often teacher delivers a test beyond student's level of difficulty as an invulnerable weapon to take a revenge to some students he hates. As a consequence, the result of that unfair test will become something that backfires a teacher as what Oller puts in his words:<sup>16</sup>

For classroom purposes there are at least two ways of viewing language tests. We normally think of them in terms of what they tell us about the learner. But they also tell us a great deal about the effectiveness of the teacher who says with a

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<sup>16</sup>Oller, 1976: 27.

grin on his face, '... and I flunked half of my students on that test', has not understood the flip side of learner evaluation which is teacher evaluation.

#### D. The Meaning of Items Performance

Heaton presents the results obtained from objective tests can be used to provide valuable information concerning:<sup>17</sup>

- a. the performance of the students as a group, informing the teacher about the effectiveness of his teaching
- b. the performance of individual students, and
- c. the performance of each of the items comprising the test

The first two points are not accounted in the present discussion since they have been talked in the previous sections. It is obvious that testing, if only it is fair, provides positive effect both on learning and teaching activities. Apart from this, testing also gives a feedback to make better test items performance.

The great merit of objective tests as well as multiple-choice items arises from the fact that they can provide an insight into the mental processes of the students by showing very clearly what choices have been

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<sup>17</sup>Heaton, 1975: 172.



made. A teacher does not stop investigating students' achievement merely after the marking but rather he keeps on exploring deeper on the result of the test.

To do this activity, teacher needs a kind of analysis by identifying the success and the failure of students' achievement in answering the test items. Then a teacher tries to find out the underlying reason which causes such achievement with a close examination on the items performance. Kinds of items that more able students answer them correctly while less able students fail are then recovered. The knowledge about certain difficult items and the easy ones acts as a basis for a teacher to make a critical opinion concerning the value of those items to the two group of students. The following two questions should always be remembered, 'Are the difficult items proper enough for the clever students to answer?' or 'Are the easy ones within the reach of the less able students?' This investigation, however, does not stop in this stage. A teacher's knowledge about the psychological process in selecting one correct answer from the four alternatives available together with his knowledge about the principles in constructing good multiple-choice items serve as a basis to decide whether a revision or an alteration is needed.

Evaluating the performance of test items is as essential as evaluating a teacher's effectiveness in his

teaching and students' motivation in learning. Good test items are important to make a valid judgement on both a teacher's and students' achievement in the totality of educational programme.

## Chapter III

### THE APPLICATION OF MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEMS IN TESTING READING COMPREHENSION

It is a common practice to test reading comprehension with appended comprehension questions; a multiple-choice question type is the most widely used among the other types of questions. Arguments have been put forward for preferring multiple-choice questions to other types of objective testing.

Our concern with what form questions should take and what form of answer the learner should be expected to provide seems to create no problems to carry on. But thinking about questions in relation to what kind of understanding the learner is expected to demonstrate to which we are concerned with what function they have causes problems to solve. Decisions about what functions multiple-choice questions in testing reading comprehension should depend on what one thinks constitutes the understanding itself.

#### A. The Purpose and Process of Reading Comprehension

Reading for thorough comprehension is the primary concern of most reading classes. This means reading in

order to master the total message of the writer, both main points and supporting details. The comprehension of a written language, thus, involves a large number of factors, namely: lexical, grammatical and cultural meanings, and connections between sentences (connected discourse). Those factors are interrelated with one another and work together in the comprehension activity. Reading word by word is not really reading, for knowing words in isolation does not guarantee the understanding of the sense of the sentence and a reader will certainly be unable to unite sentences into a full understanding of paragraph meaning. Words derive their meanings from the context in which they occur. The goal, then, is to get information from the printed page efficiently, rapidly, and with full understanding. But, it goes without saying that the reader must know the language he is reading before he is able to read for meaning. Structural patterns in which the 'meat' of the message lays should be at the step with his knowledge about the linguistic skills. Otherwise, a reader will not have any motivation to read and enjoy reading, for one never enjoys what one does not understand.

It has already been stated that the goal of reading is to comprehend rapidly by pursuing as much information in the text as possible. To do this a reader must be able to demonstrate better in obtaining a specific fact, or piece of information (scanning) and

obtaining the general idea of the author (skimming).

There is much more to come, however. The intention may be not merely information, not even in its more intensified form, but rather what may be termed a 'total response'.<sup>1</sup> According to King (1976) this kind of totality is that what I.A. Richards (1972) divides of into sense, feeling, tone, and intention. Besides understanding the literal meaning of the writer, a reader needs to recognize the writer's feeling or mood, comprehend the writer's tone and attitude towards the reader.

Reading is, then, a language activity which comprises a variety of skills; both actual skills and potential skills. Actual skills involve the ability to discover specific facts, to see the writer's point of view, to infer the meaning of unknown words from context, to note the significance of such 'logical' expressions as however, thus, and so, this, in this way, finally, etc. In short, anything to do with discovering actual information which is clearly stated in the text; either by the help of semantical clues or syntactical clues is categorized into the actual skills. However, an efficient reader will not rely on these skills only in order to understand the text fully. The mastery of

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<sup>1</sup>King, 1976: 40.

these skills only results no more than the surface understanding of the text. More importantly, the overtones must be discovered and understood by a reader. A writer says more than the text he writes. To understand the additional meaning to what is actually written one will need what is called the potential skills. These cover the ability to read between the lines, to identify the writer's purpose, to discover the writer's opinion and judgement concerning the topic. Both kinds of skills are important to work together in grasping the meaning of what one has read.

The purpose of reading comprehension, as well as the skills needed to achieve that purpose, have already been defined. To correlate those skills one to another a process is demanded. Goodman (1970) summarizes the psycholinguistic perspective of reading as follows:

Reading is a selective process. It involves partial use of available minimal cues selected from perceptual input on the basis of the reader's expectation. As this partial information is processed, tentative decisions are made to be confirmed, rejected or defined as reading progresses.

From Goodman's definition we can infer that it is wrong to judge a reader as having no knowledge at all about the information in question. A reader's mind is not 'blank' before he is facing a text. The question about how much knowledge a reader stores in his

mind is difficult to solve since it is very subjective and relative. The intensity of one's knowledge about the world depends greatly on one's intellectual background. Knowledge about the 'real world' serves as a supply to make comprehension easier. One's knowledge before reading the text can either be confirmed and defined or rejected after the act of comprehending the text takes place.

The definition also assumes that reading is an active process. After forming a preliminary expectation about the material, then a reader selects the most productive and useful cues which are necessary in confirming or rejecting that expectation. Therefore, not all information has the same crucial events to every readers. The reader takes advantage of his knowledge of vocabulary, syntax, discourse combined with his knowledge about the 'real world' to make a selection of information stated and implied in the text. So, skills in reading depend on the efficient interaction between linguistic knowledge and knowledge about the world.

For reading to be efficient, the use of prior knowledge must be enriched to gain a positive result in future learning. The existing knowledge in students' brain facilitates his learning to read. As what Chastain (1976) states that meaningful learning is

learning that is understood by the student and that he can relate to his previous knowledge.<sup>2</sup> In case of reading, student's past knowledge about the world determines his new understanding of a total response in a text.

Later Chastain presents the studies by Slock (1975) and Young (1975) who found that students studying with materials containing advance organizers were superior in achievement and retention to students without advance organizers.<sup>3</sup>

It is very clear that to produce meaningful learning past knowledge should be related to the new one. Seeing the benefits stated above, Curriculum 1984 concerning reading instruction follows this idea.

#### Latar Belakang Pengetahuan

Agar siswa mempunyai pengetahuan/latar belakang yang dalam bahasa Inggris disebut Advance Organizer, tentang masalah yang dibicarakan dalam bacaan, siswa perlu diberi penjelasan pendahuluan seperlunya tentang topik bacaan itu.<sup>4</sup>

#### B. The Characteristics of Multiple-Choice Items

Multiple-choice items as one type of objective tests turned up in language testing as the reaction towards the drawbacks of an essay type examination.

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<sup>2</sup>Chastain, 1976: 77.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>4</sup>Dept. P & K, 1984: 29.



The objection to an essay test was set off by people who assumed that an essay test lacks the concept of reliability. And no assessment can be valid if it is not reliable.<sup>5</sup>

This type of tests is so-called objective tests because the scoring procedure is determined when the test item is written. That is, the correct answer, usually only one, is completely stated before testing, not when it is graded. The score, therefore, will be the same no matter who scores it.

Unlike the essay question, multiple-choice items are being completely structured and must be answered by a prescribed manner. They have nothing to do with organization of ideas or responses.

Multiple-choice items require students to recognize, not recall, the correct answer by selecting from the given alternatives. Based on his experiment, Fowler (1975) finds that in the case of learning it is a recognition that distinguishes the good from the bad students, and not the ability to produce the correct forms in isolation.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Allen & Alan Davies, 1977: 11.

<sup>6</sup>Fowler, 1975: 143.

C. Guidelines for Writing and Evaluating Effective  
Test Items

According to Heaton (1975) an effective multiple-choice item consists of two parts:<sup>7</sup>

a. The stem as an initial part, which states the problem. It may take the following forms.

- an incomplete statement

He accused me of ... lies.

A. speaking                      C. telling

B. saying                         D. talking

- a complete statement

Everything he wanted was to hand.

A. under control                C. well-cared for

B. within reach                 D. being prepared

- a question

According to the writer, what did Tom immediately do?

A. He ran home                 C. He began to shout

B. He met Bob                 D. He phoned the police

b. A list of options, one of which is to be selected as the answer; while the other options are called distractors.

The explanation below is provided to clarify the practical ways in making the two elements meaningful to

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<sup>7</sup>Heaton, 1975: 17.

the purpose of testing reading comprehension. Based on the conception of Celce Murcia cs. (1974), Harris (1969), Heaton (1975), Ebel (1979) and Karmel (1970) the discussion can be divided into three categories, namely:<sup>8</sup>

a. The Item as a Whole

- It is advocated to test only one point i.e. material to be included in the items is somehow related to the business of understanding the text.
- Vocabulary and syntax of the items should be kept as simple as possible so that the real problem is the interpretation of the passage not of the questions that are asked about them.

b. The Stem

- The stem should pose a clear question or problem. It should not be a series of unrelated ideas some of which are true and others false.
- The stem should include as many of the items as possible. The testee can obtain from the stem a very general idea of the problem and the answer required. At the same time, the stem should not contain extraneous information or irrelevant clues, thereby confusing the problem being tested.

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<sup>8</sup>Heaton, 1975: 115.      Karmel, 1970: 405-408.  
 Harris, 1969: 62-63.    Murcia, 1974: 260.  
 Ebel, 1979: 154-155.

- The stem should usually contain those words or phrases which are repeated in each option.
- If a negative word is used in the stem, it should be set off from the sentence by capitalization or underlining.

c. Alternatives

- The optimum number of alternatives for each multiple-choice item is five. Indeed, since it is often very difficult to construct items with even five options, four options are recommended.
- The length of the options should be roughly the same to avoid students' awareness of the fact that the long options are correct or vice versa.
- Each option should belong to the same word class as the word in the stem, particularly when the word appears in the context of a sentence.
- Selections of the correct answers should involve interpretation of the passage, not merely matching the words in the choices with the same words in the paragraph.
- The choice of the correct option in each multiple-choice item must depend on students' comprehension of the reading text rather than on his general knowledge or intelligence.
- Care must be taken to avoid setting distractors which may be true, even though they may not have been explicitly stated by the writer.

- Distractors must be plausible enough to distract, yet not so plausible as to be arguable alternatives to the desired answer. Here are some tactics to develop good distractors:

1) Define the class of things to which all the alternative answers must belong. For example: Schizophrenia is a term used in psychology to characterize a group of ....

- A. neurotic reactions
- B. organic disturbances
- C. psychotic reactions
- D. manic-depressive reactions

2) Think of things that have some association with terms used in the question.

A person who receives and pays out money in a bank is called:

- A. a broker
- B. an accountant
- C. a creditor
- D. a cashier

3) Phrase the question so that it calls for a 'yes' or 'no' answer plus an explanation.

- Avoid trapping students by giving too difficult distractors which demand a higher proficiency in the language than the correct option. These kind of distractors will only succeed in penalizing clever students who know too much, for they will think that the easiest option is a trap.

- A useful device in multiple-choice items of reading comprehension is the option ALL OF THESE or NONE OF THESE. It is advisable to have it as the correct answer in at least one of the items. The testee should not be encouraged to think that it has been included simply to make up the required number of options.

#### D. The Uses of Multiple-Choice Items

It has been claimed that the benefit of employing multiple-choice items in testing reading comprehension is not dubious since this type of question has its relevance with the objectives of reading comprehension itself. After having read a text, a reader will not be asked to write down everything he gets from the text but rather he checks how far he has understood the content of the text. The benefits of this type of questions are as follows:<sup>9</sup>

- Since the demands made on the pupil in term of the production of complex structure patterns is nil. i.e. the response of the answer may be a tick in a box, a circle round a letter or at most a letter or number written down, all his attention may be devoted to the business of understanding the black marks on the text.

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<sup>9</sup>Corbluth, 1975: 168.  
Broughton Cs., 1978: 105.

- Framing multiple-choice questions is meant rather to help pupil develop strategies by means of which he may better be able to understand other texts than to find out how much of the particular text in question the reader has understood.
- The value of the most niggling multiple-choice questions is greatest to those who need to develop reading skills for academic purposes.
- Testing time is limited. The testee requires much more time to work through a reading comprehension test since he first has to read the text carefully once or twice before he can begin to answer the questions without being handicapped by the demand to produce structural complexity.
- Good Multiple-choice items do not permit a correct response on the basis of simple recognition, sheer rote memory or meaningless verbal association. In deciding the best choice, the pupils must continually refer to the text.
- Multiple-choice items support and extend psychologically oriented comprehensions of the truth assessment-type.
- Multiple-choice items have very much psychological validity with respect to discrimination which involves filtering the general from the particular, selecting from propositions not on a basis of their truth or

falseness but on a basis of their relative significance.

- Multiple-choice items can be understood as representing formulation of propositions in the mind rather than actual utterances and so can be dealt with as mental abstraction; while student's skill in composing the required sentence has no necessary connection with his ability to understand the passage.

The suitability of this type of questions is confirmed in Petunjuk Pelaksanaan Materi Pengajaran as follows:<sup>10</sup>

#### Pengecekan Pengertian

Untuk mencek pengertian siswa mengenai isi bacaan, perlu diberikan pertanyaan-pertanyaan dalam bahasa Indonesia atau dalam bahasa Inggris sederhana. Pertanyaan agar dibuat demikian rupa sehingga dalam menjawab siswa tidak hanya akan mengutip jawaban dari bacaan. Pertanyaan yang jawabnya memerlukan pemikiran akan lebih baik.

#### E. The Drawbacks of Multiple-Choice Items

Multiple-choice items do not, however, escape from the disadvantages. But, the following disadvantages appear to outweigh the advantages stated in the previous section.

The drawbacks are:

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<sup>10</sup>Dept. P & K, 1984: 30.



- The multiple-choice items probably require more skill and more time to construct than do the other objective-type items.
- Developing plausible incorrect options taxes the ingenuity of the teacher.
- Multiple-choice items have no instructional value for it is nowhere else in the curriculum that recommends educators to make deliberate confusion of the learner. Four of five alternatives illustrate dilemmas that enable the weaker learners come into misconceptions, half-truths, etc. (Oller, 1979, p. 256).
- They are superficial, ambiguous and conducive to guessing. The choice of the correct answer is on the basis of simple recognition, sheer rote memory.
- Since there is no need to organize ideas in responding to the questions, the answers are usually obtained by cheating.
- Students may sometimes arrive at the correct answer through the process of elimination.
- The scoring system does not tolerate students' mistakes. Unlike an essay examination, there is no mean score for this type of questions.

Some ways to overcome the drawbacks will be clarified in Chapter V.

## Chapter IV

### THE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

This chapter deals with the analysis of the data taken from reading comprehension test items of the first, second and third grades. Appendix I points out the well-constructed test items which meet the criteria of validity as well as objectivity. Appendix II shows the fairly well-constructed test items which do not utilize either students' actual or potential skills fully to get the content of the text, though the criterion of objectivity still exists. Both the validity and objectivity are lacking in the poorly-constructed test items revealed in Appendix III.

To bear in mind that learning is the core of the attention in reading programme, the analysis of the data available is directed to the apparent problems resulting from the test items performance which impede the attainment of the mastery of reading skills. In order to make the discussion systematical there will be some groupings concerning the analysis of the content and the presentation of the items.

## A. The Well-Constructed Test Items

### 1. The Content of The Test Items

#### a. Knowledge Obtained by Answering The Items Correctly

##### Text I:

When students choose option (B) as the correct answer it implies their understanding that phrases of means are the best answer to the question 'How ...?' The clause element containing the Q-word 'how' comes first in the sentence and operates in a process clause function,<sup>1</sup> so students decide the answer should be 'making a trip to Madura'.

By choosing option (E) in item number two, students perform well in calculating the time. Students keep in their mind a sentence in the second paragraph which says, 'It is ten past six and we shall arrive in Surabaya in ten minutes', then they add ten minutes to ten past six in order to yield 'twenty past six in the afternoon'.

To choose option (A) as the correct answer in item number three students must firstly make the interference of their mother tongue disappear in interpreting the relationship between Arif and Rani.

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<sup>1</sup>Quirk & Sidney Greenbaum, 1979: 323.

They must not translate Indonesian term for their relationship into English. Afterward, they should pay attention to the first sentence in the last paragraph i.e. Arif, four years younger than his sister ... and they show their knowledge of syntax concerning the comparative form of adjective in order to paraphrase that sentence. Besides, students know the antonym of the word 'young' to yield the complete and correct response.

To put a cross on option (D) in item number four, students accomplish their ability in investigating the specific facts in the text through careful reading.

Text II:

To choose option (A) in item number one students simply match the correct option with the first sentence in the text. But, in order to match correctly students must have knowledge about the restrictive relative clause with a relative pronoun 'who' as a personal reference. The restrictive clause 'who have to jump out of aeroplaned in the air' is closely connected with its head prosodically and it denotes a limitation on the reference of the antecedent (soldiers).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 214.

By crossing out option (A) in item number two students do not merely match the correct answer with the phrases in the text either. They must understand the continuation of the restrictive relative clause 'that open and let the men fall gently to the ground' which refers to the antecedent (parachutes). In this case students find the logical relationship between the two restrictive relative clauses to answer items number one and two.

Students show their ability in predicting the outcomes by choosing option (C) in item number three and in interpreting the soldier's question to choose option (D) in item number four. Whereas, students develop their interpretation to the sergeant's answer in choosing option (B) of the last item.

#### Test III:

By choosing option (B) in item number one students understand a possessive adjective 'a merchant's wife' to show personal belongings.<sup>3</sup> This possessive adjective is perceived as a reference to the possessor and not to the thing possessed. So, instead of saying 'a merchant's wife', they say 'the wife of the merchant' (the possessor). Besides, students also have the ability to paraphrase the first sentence in the text.

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<sup>3</sup>Thompson & A.V. Martinet, 1970: 25.

Students are able to identify a demonstrative pronoun 'this' (line 10) with the general meaning 'near' reference by choosing option (B) in item number two. They soon define that a demonstrative pronoun 'this' in the text refers to 'a thousand pieces of silver.'<sup>4</sup>

In item number three students choose option (C) as the correct answer. This proves their knowledge about the function of the conjunction 'although' to combine two opposing or contrasting statements.<sup>5</sup> Later, they also know that the main clause 'she was very ill' gives them the general truth of a merchant's wife condition. So, students draw a conclusion that is is no use to give her medicine.

To choose option (E) in item number four students paraphrase the clause 'he was asked for money'.

Students make an inference from a dialogue between the merchant and the doctor after the doctor's job was finished to choose option (A) in item number five.

By choosing option (A) in item number six students concentrate on the implication of the sentence

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<sup>4</sup>op.cit., p. 217.

<sup>5</sup>op.cit., p. 53.

containing a conjunction 'though' (line 13) with a close look at the real condition of the merchant's wife.

Students define a logical relationship between the merchant's promise to give a thousand pieces of silver and the doctor's reaction to that promise (line 11) by choosing option (A) in item number seven.

In choosing option (B) in item number eight students do some reasoning from the condition of the merchant's wife illness.

In choosing option (D) in item number nine students make an inference from the merchant's promise and predict the outcome if the merchant does not keep his promise.

The last item with option (C) as the correct answer enables students to make a prediction about what they will be said in such situation. They also recognize the expression to say, 'I'm sorry' in another way.

b. The Reflection of Comprehending the Text in The  
Choice of The Correct Answers

Text I:



The whole items neither give students an opportunity to match the correct answer with the phrases in the text nor to read superficially. Otherwise, they will be trapped by the plausible distractors provided. Deep and careful reading are urgently needed to answer these items.

Besides understanding the meaning of the stem question, students must also summarize what is stated in the first paragraph and take the significant detail in accordance with the answer required in item number one. Concentration on the second paragraph with a special reference to the statement containing the information of time is demanded to answer item number two. While item number three requires students to make a close reading of the third paragraph with the emphasis is on the first sentence. Item number four, however, wants students to do some scanning concerning the whole text to obtain specific facts or details and look for the one in the options. Likewise, this text yields items that do not ask for students' potential skills in thinking about the answers.

#### Text II:

With a supply of knowledge about the restrictive relative clauses students choose options (A) in both items number one and two. Those correct answers are not



obtained by merely matching them with the first sentence in the text but rather students perceive the sentence as having two restrictive relative clauses by which students are able to see the connection between the two clauses. So whatever questions are delivered, as far as they relate to that sentence, students can answer them correctly.

In answering item number three students rely not only on their general knowledge but more importantly, they get the answer by having a look at the whole dialogue between the soldier and the sergeant. Students, then, try to find out by themselves what will actually happen to the soldier through making an inference from the unserious dialogue. In this case, they predict the outcomes from the situation probably faced by the soldier.

In answering item number four students use their prediction of outcomes concerning the sergeant's answer as the basis to judge the soldier's question.

The last item demands students to determine the right conclusion based on what they have answered in item number three and four. Students store the possibility of the soldier's death and the foolishness of his question in their mind and see the connection with what is said by the sergeant.

## Text III:

Knowledge about grammatical functions, i.e. a possessive adjective, a demonstrative pronoun, and a conjunction that students possess are used as a means to understand the content of the whole text. As a matter of fact, item number one asks students for whom a merchant calls for a doctor; it asks nothing about the possessive adjective itself. But, by knowing this structural item students are able to get the idea of what the first sentence says.

Similarly, item number two does not directly ask about a demonstrative pronoun 'this'; it rather gives students a useful clue to identify the thing the merchant promised. To be equal to this, item number three does not ask about the conjunction 'although'. Supplying with knowledge about this structural item together with the information of the merchant's wife in the preceding sentence students get to the real meaning of what is being asked.

Students take the advantage from the information stated in line 8-16 to answer item number four. Their process of thinking begins successively from the idea about the merchant's promise to pay the doctor, the critical condition of the merchant's wife, the end of the doctor's effort to the doctor's claim of the merchant's promise.

The information students get to answer item number four with a special reference to the merchant's promise (line 8) and the doctor's effort in healing the merchant's wife (line 11) serves as a basis to follow the idea in the following dialogue. In this way, students are able to infer whether the promise is fulfilled or not.

Item number six and eight require students to do some reasoning in which students take the information stated concerning the condition of the merchant's wife. While in item number eight students find the reason of the death of the merchant's wife.

After answering item number four correctly students will find it easier in answering item number seven. Item number seven has the same basis of thinking as that of item number four in which item number four asks about the end result while item number seven asks about the first reaction of the doctor.

Students pay much attention to the merchant's promise (line 8) in answering item number nine. Later, they adjust that promise to the effort the doctor made in healing the merchant's wife (line 11).

The last item involves the application of cultural value concerning the way of expressing their regret in Indonesian. Then, they try to translate it into English expression.

c. The Realization of Reading Objective Through Items  
Performance

Text I:

All the four items are oriented to the reading objective. In answering item number one students merely take from what is clearly said in the text i.e. from the first paragraph students have already known that the story takes place in the plane. Item number two calls for a logical process of thinking in which students make a little calculation concerning the time informed in the second paragraph.

Students will soon reveal the relationship between Rani and Arif after reading the first sentence in the last paragraph and their understanding is checked by item number three. After having read the whole text carefully, they will keep in their mind some details stated in the text. In this case they read textually by finding everything the author says what he does say. So, it is easy to detect things which are not said in the text; and item number four provides students with this irrelevance.

By seeing how students answer all the items, it is concluded that those items train students in pursuing as much information in the text as possible.

## Text II:

The test items with a special reference to item number three, four and five involve students' interpretation of facts and prediction of outcomes. Items number one and two ask about the factual details that students can answer by making use of their knowledge about syntax.

Items number three, four and five encourage students to make use of their advance organizers which is working together with knowledge they get from the printed text. Students' prediction of outcomes in item number three comes from their knowledge about the indication of a dangerous action. This knowledge is confirmed by inferring the illogical dialogue of the soldier and the sergeant. Whereas items number four and five involve students' interpretation of the illogicality of the dialogue. Being equipped with knowledge about ways of saying something ironically, students then detect a phenomenon of a real dialogue in the text.

Those items, thus, lend themselves to the application of both students' actual and potential skills in answering them in order to get the content of the total message.

### Text III:

The text reveals human foolishness. All the items lend themselves to the process of understanding this 'human foolishness'. Since there are two persons involved in the text the items ask students to discover the doctor's stupidity, i.e. in items number three, four, and six; while items number two and five require students to reveal the merchant making a fool of the doctor. The rest of the items, however, are made ready for students to perceive the specific facts stated in the text. Once they perceive these factual events, students are able to sequence the details which help them to comprehend the main idea.

As a conclusion, all the items facilitate much in understanding the main idea of the text.

## 2. The Presentation of The Test Items

### a. The Wording of the Stem Questions

#### Text I:

The four stem questions are so well-written that they give a clear direction to students what they are supposed to do. However, a stem question in item number four is rather confusing and it will trap students. A negative word (not) which might have been a determining factor seems to lose its prominence.

Therefore, the negative word (not) used in the stem should be set off from the sentence by capitalization (NOT) or underlining 'not'.

Text II:

All the items, with the exception item number five, pose a clear problem and train students' total understanding of the text. A stem question in item number five only requires students to answer with 'yes' or 'no', but the options provided do not mean so. They require more than 'yes' or 'no' response. It seems that the stem question contains a series of unrelated ideas to the options provided. For the stem question not to be confusing, it should not ask for an explanation.

The stem question in item number two seems to be in contradiction with the options. The options do not match grammatically to the stem question. So, it is suggested to revise the stem question into 'They need parachutes in order to...'

Text III:

All the stem questions give a clear direction of what students are supposed to do. Each stem question contains adequate items from which students can obtain a general idea of the answers required.

b. The Visibility of The Correct Answer

Text I:

Students obtain all the correct options not because of their prominence among the distractors but rather they (students) have been working hard in comprehending the text. The result of their understanding is proved in selecting the correct choices. All the distractors alone do not help students much in determining the correct choices since the alternatives have the same surface structure and they are written more or less in the same length.

Text II:

Again option (B) in item number five draws students' attention to cross it out as the correct answer. This happens because it is longer than the others.

Text III:

Generally, the correct options have more or less the same visibility with the distractors so that students cannot choose them without referring all the time to the text as well as understanding the text fully. Despite their similarity in both form and length with the other options, students will choose either option



(A) or (C) in item number five. Both have the same correctness and they are sensible to be the correct answer. The more able students may choose option (C) since they have the ability to read, think and interpret deeply. Thus, the two 'correct' options tend to trap clever students.

Besides, option (D) in item number nine gives students a clue to cross it as the correct answer since it demands a higher proficiency in their knowledge about vocabulary. The word 'mean' as an adjective seems to be unpopular to their knowledge of vocabulary. Some students may think that the most difficult word must be the correct answer. It could also be students choose that option without knowing the word because they think the others are wrong.

### c. The Plausibility of The Distractors

#### Text I:

One glance at the distractors inform no disagreement to the correct answers. Each distractor in the items has its own correctness since it belongs to the text. The test writer has tried his best by providing the presumable students' common mistakes as distractors. These are clearly presented in item number two in which the possibility of students wrong way of thinking concerning the expression of time in English

are there to choose. Finally, item number three also contains distractors in the form of students' interference of their mother tongue in connection with siblings. Unless they read carefully and know some English expressions, they will choose what they think as 'right' and it happens to be written in the options.

Text II:

Students will immediately discard option (C) in item number five, for it is the most unlikely as the correct answer. The weak option is caused by the wording of the stem question.

Text III:

Distractors (C) and (E) in item number one seem to be illogical and students will eliminate them soon. Thus, students' search of the correct choice will be limited to only three options.

## B. The Fairly Well-Constructed Test Items

### 1. The Content of The Test Items

#### a. Knowledge Obtained by Answering the Items Correctly

Text I:

In choosing option (A) as the correct answer in item number one students show their reasoning ability. Based on the information concerning the distance from Pinhurst to Silbury students are able to develop another way of reasoning to why he has not got a telephone.

Similarly, the choice of option (C) in item number two proves students' ability in keeping their first answer as a basis of their reasoning. Students infer from their first reason to answer the second item.

Students perform their knowledge about the synonym of 'so' as a conjunction which means 'with the result that' to choose option (A) as the correct answer in item number three.

By choosing option (C) in item number four students only perform their knowledge about grammar that in case of interrogative sentence they must use bare infinitive after the subject.

Students have knowledge about the meaning of the possessive pronoun 'his' to show part of personal belongings (a garage) by choosing option (D) in item number five.

In choosing option (A) in item number six students already have knowledge about the ordinal 'another' as having the same meaning as 'second'. The less clever

students may choose this option by matching the same word in the text.

By choosing option (D) in item number seven, students show their ability in determining the appropriate word to match the item. In this case, they can detect the semantic properties of each word in each option.

Text II:

Students match option (B) with the last sentence of the first paragraph in answering item number one. They also do the same by choosing option (D) in item number two. In this item, they match option (D) with the second paragraph in line 8.

By choosing option (D) in item number three students show their knowledge about a singular demonstrative pronoun 'this' which refers to the relative immediacy (pond).<sup>1</sup>

Again, to answer item number four students are encouraged to match option (C) with the last sentence of the second paragraph.

In item number five students infer from the information about the total number of crocodiles

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<sup>1</sup>Quirk & Sidney Greenbaum, 1979: 107.

(paragraph one, line 3) and the production of their skins (paragraph two). Afterwards, they find one best term to call that kind of success. In this activity, students prove well in making an inference as well as in showing their knowledge of vocabulary.

When students choose option (A) as the correct answer in item number six they deeply interpret the meaning of the adverb 'about' in the sentence 'When the crocodiles are about six years old'. It can be interpreted as 'a little more or less than six years old'.<sup>2</sup> From this definition some students may add one more year to that age in answering item number six. Others may cross option (C) as the correct answer. By doing the second alternative to answer the same item students perform their ability in associating 'a six-year-old crocodile' with their knowledge about common animals of that age. Students may come to the conclusion that animals in general are considered old of that age.

By choosing option (C) as the correct answer in item number seven students understand the construction of the sentence in paragraph two line six 'This contains water and a large area filled with soft sand where the crocodiles can lay their eggs.' They show their

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<sup>2</sup>Procter, 1978: 3.

linguistic knowledge that the adjunct form of place, i.e. 'where' substitutes the relative pronouns. The adjunct form of place 'where' refers to the preceding noun phrase (soft sand).

Students show their ability in paraphrasing the adverbial of time '100 days' into 'three months' (the last sentence of paragraph two).

Text III:

By choosing option (C) in item number one students are able to find out the synonym of the word 'to cultivate' and they know the meaning of the structural word 'learned' in the first sentence of paragraph one.

Students show their ability in paraphrasing the second sentence of the first paragraph by choosing option (D) as the correct answer in item number two.

The choice of option (A) in item number three involves students' interpretation concerning the simple subordinator 'once' in the adverbial clause of time 'But once he knew how to plant grain ...'. In that choice students also grasp the implied logical devices of result (therefore) and amplification (and) in the fifth and sixth sentences of paragraph one. However, students who merely rely on their low interpretation of

the sentence containing the adverbial clause of time 'But once he knew how to plant grain ...' may also choose option (E) as the correct answer. They relate the logical device of contrast 'but' to the preceding sentence.

Students are matching the clause in the choice with the same clause in the paragraph by choosing option (C) as the correct answer in item number four.

By choosing option (A) in item number five students show their ability in identifying the logical connector of contrast (instead of) in the third sentence of paragraph two. Then they relate it to the implied logical connector of cause (because) in '(Because) their people became farmers'.

b. The Reflection of Comprehending the Text in The  
Choice of The Correct Answers

Text I:

Students do some reasoning and inference based on the information stated in the text only in answering items number one, two, seven, nine, and ten. The selection of the correct answers in those items involve students' interpretation of the text. While students do not read and comprehend the text at all in answering items number three, four, five, six and eight. Knowledge about the language tested in those items seem to function

as an end rather than as a means to facilitate the comprehension itself.

Text II:

Since students do some matching in answering items number one, two, and four, there is no proof that they read and comprehend the text wholly. It happens that some items which are similar to the options catch students' eyes so they easily detect the correct answers.

In answering items number three and seven students must recognize the logical, lexical and structural relationship of the fourth sentence in the second paragraph. These relationships are needed, for students will fail to get the meaning of 'this' when they read it word by word. Before coming to this word students must see the preceding sentence to find the relationship of that sentence with 'this' in the following one. Afterward, students determine 'this' as a demonstrative pronoun not as a determiner. Similarly, item number seven demands students to identify the word 'where' by having a look at its lexical and structural relationships of the other clause.

To answer item number five students read the whole text with a stress on the result of Iwan Kayamis!



effort in taking care of the crocodiles. However, students can also guess the appropriate word from the context of the stem. Supplying with knowledge about the function of present perfect tense and the information stated in the second clause students choose the most suitable word to call that kind of success. In the latter case, students do not involve their understanding of the text.

In item number six students look for another phrase which is having a near meaning to the adjective phrase 'about six years old'. In this case, students pay attention to the third sentence in the first paragraph. The last item also tests students' understanding on the adverbial phrase of time 'about 100 days' in the last sentence of the second paragraph.

#### Text III:

In order to answer items number three and five correctly students have to sense the relationships between sentences. Although most sentences in the text are considered to be simple, they contain the implied logical connectors such as and, therefore and but. These should be perceived and identified by students themselves since they can determine the meaning greatly.

In answering item number one students use their knowledge about vocabulary to understand the meaning of the first sentence.

Students paraphrase the third sentence to show their understanding of that sentence.

Item number four does not reflect students' understanding of the text since they merely match the clause of the option with that clause in the second paragraph.

c. The Realization of The Reading Objective Through  
Items Performance

Text I:

Items number three, four, five, six and eight have nothing to do with understanding the text. Once students are equipped with knowledge about grammar they can easily answer them without referring to the text.

However, the rest of the items, i.e. items number one, two, seven, nine, ten reflect students' understanding of the text in answering them. Without having a look at the text all the time students are not able to determine the correct answers.

The items as a whole, therefore, do not show the valid evaluation of reading comprehension. Not all of them consult to even one aspect of reading objective, i.e. understanding the actual information or implicit information of the text. Only five out of ten items test students' understanding about the actual information

stated in the text. In this case, the items violate the principle to test only one point in a time, i.e. the material to be included in the items must be somehow related to the business of understanding the text. The irrelevant items should not have been mixed with the rest of the items.

Text II:

Three out of eight items, i.e. items number one, two, and four have failed to realize the mastery of the writer's total message in the text. Even students who do not read the text at all will succeed in answering these items correctly.

The rest of the items ask about the actual information in the text. Item number three requires students to prove that they understand the sense of the sentence through word-by-word definition; while item number seven asks students to come to the meaning of the seventh sentence in the second paragraph by means of knowledge about grammatical function.

However, items number six and eight state too many facts concerning the age and the time which have little to do with the comprehension of the text.

Though asking about the actual information which also realizes the objective of reading, generally the items asks about insignificant details which do not

impede the understanding of the whole text.

Text III:

The passage reveals a connection of cultivating grasses and bringing about human civilization. Most information in the text can be perceived by identifying logical relationships between sentences; and once students are successful to answer items number three and five, they are guided to have the advanced reading by identifying the implied logical connectors.

Unfortunately not all of the items permit students to practice their way of comprehending the actual information stated in the text, for item number four does not ask students to refer to the text. Thus, it does not test reading comprehension at all.

Because of the weaknesses of the options, items number two, three and four do not encourage students to maximize the use of their actual skills in comprehending the text.

## 2. The Presentation of The Test Items

### a. The Wording of the Stem Questions

Text I:

All the stem questions give clear problems of what to do.

## Text II:

The stem question in item number five encourages students to guess what they think suitable to the situation which is stated clearly in that stem question. It would be better if the stem question is written as 'According to the passage his crocodile-farming has been ...'

The stem question in item number six does not pose a clear question or problem of what to do. Moreover, it does not ask a question at all, it is merely a statement. Another weakness is that this stem is inefficient, for it does not include phrases repeated in each option. This stem question, then, will be better revised into 'The crocodiles are usually killed when they are ...' Similarly, to avoid the repetition of a word in the options the stem question in item number one and seven are written into 'Who is Iwan Kayamis? He is a ...' and 'The female crocodiles lay their eggs in ...'

## Text III:

The stem question of item number five poses a clear problem about what to do but the response to that question does not indicate a grammatical answer. The word 'because' as an initial part of a dependent clause i.e. because it didn't spoil when it was kept dry and this clause cannot stand by itself. It depends on the

main clause i.e. they stopped wandering in search for food. In this case, the stem question already has an ungrammatical construction in itself. As a consequence, however right their choices are the answers will be considered wrong. Besides, for the sake of efficiency the repeated words in the options must be stated in the stem question. The stem question as a whole, then, is as follows 'They stopped wandering in search for food because they ...'

b. The Visibility of The Correct Answer

Text I:

Option (A) in item number one is the longest and the most complete. This gives students a clue to cross it out.

Text II:

Options (A) and (C) in item number six are somewhat confusing since both are arguable as the correct answers. Problems of scoring will rise in which both are likely to be the correct answers.

Selections of the correct answers in item number one, two and four do not involve students' interpretation of the passage, but merely they obtain them by matching the words and phrases in the choices with the same words and phrases in the paragraph.

Text III:

Option (C) in item number four look to be more prominent than others. Students are aware of the fact that the long options are correct. So, even without understanding the text they seem to succeed in answering the items correctly.

There is an ambiguity in determining the correct choice in item number three. Students can choose either option (A) or (E). If they refer to the last sentence of paragraph one, they will choose option (A). Whereas, they will choose option (E) if they refer to the fourth sentence in the same paragraph. As a matter of fact, double correct answers in one item are not recommended. Otherwise, multiple-choice items will not give objective and reliable scoring.

c. The Plausibility of The Distractors

Text I:

Option (E) in item number three and option (B), (C), (D) and (E) in item number six are grammatically wrong when they are placed in the stem. Students will immediately eliminate those options.

Finally, option (E) as a distractor in item number eight is somewhat weak. The addition of the adverb 'calmly' to the adverb 'slowly' will give students

an impression that this is included simply to make up the required number of options.

Text II:

Option (A) in item number one and option (C) in item number three are very unlikely. They seem to be included simply to make up the required number of options.

Options (A) and (C) in item number eight have the same meaning. One month can consist of five weeks; therefore two months means nine weeks. Critical students will immediately throw away these two options because they think it is unusual for an item to have more than one correct answers.

Instead of reading the whole text carefully, students take the advantage from the weaknesses of the presentation of the items in answering them.

Text III:

Students will soon discard option (E) in item number two since it is grammatically wrong when placed in the stem.

Option (B) in item number two is very illogical and it does not match to the meaning of the stem question. Students find that the reason stated in





option (B) is very irrelevant with the effect in the sub clause of the stem. By seeing this irrelevance, students will not pay any attention to that option.

### C. The Poorly-Constructed Test Items

#### 1. The Content of The Test Items

##### a. Knowledge Obtained by Answering the Items Correctly

Text I:

In item number one students only match the statement in option (B) with the third sentence in the first paragraph. While in item number two they also match the statement in option (A) with the second sentence in paragraph two.

Students infer from the situation stated in the third sentence of paragraph two to answer item number three. The situation of being afraid is connected with the adverbial clause of reason that follows, i.e. ...., because it was my first ride in an aeroplane ... 'and then they paraphrase the idea into another statement in option (B). Similarly, the choice of option (A) in item number four is the result of students' inference of the last two clauses in the same paragraph.

Students perceive the relationship of sentence in the last paragraph and infer from that relationships to choose option (B) in the last item.

## Text II:

By crossing out option (C) in item number one, option (B) in item number two and option (A) in item number four students copy the correct answers from the phrases in the text.

Students infer from what they have read in the fourth and fifth sentences to answer item number three. They perceive the relationship between those sentences.

The last item does not allow students to rely on their comprehension of the reading text in choosing the correct answer. It asks about students' general knowledge or intelligence, instead.

## Text III:

By crossing out option (C) in item number one students show their ability in identifying the relationship of the adverbs of time i.e., 'the nineteenth century' (line 3), 'by 1884' (line 10) and 'by the end of October 1886' (line 13).

Students combine their linguistic knowledge about the construction of the passive voice in the non-restrictive relative clause' ..., which was designed by the sculptor August Bartoldi ...' (line 3-4) with the construction of another passive voice in the clause' ... it was officially presented to the American people

by Bartoldi' (line 14-15) to answer item number two. From the two grammatical constructions students infer that it was the sculptor Bartoldi who did the action.

In order to answer item number three students know the construction of a passive voice whose agentive (the people of France) can be expressed by a 'by' phrase.<sup>1</sup>

Students are able to paraphrase the first statement into another statement with a similar meaning by crossing out option (A) in item number four and option (C) in item number seven.

The choice of option (C) in item number five proves students' ability in memorizing the prepositional phrase 'to make of' to signify the material of the whole thing.<sup>2</sup>

The choice of option (C) in item number six shows students' linguistic knowledge about the functions and interrelations of the relative pronouns with the relative clauses.

Students show their general knowledge about copper by choosing option (D) in item number eight. While students show their knowledge about the synonym of the

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<sup>1</sup> Quirk & Sidney Greenbaum, 1979: 160.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

adverb 'especially' by crossing out option (B) in item number nine. In the last item students are able to associate words through context.

b. The Reflection of Comprehending The Text in The  
Choice of The Correct Answers

Text I:

It is obvious that students do not comprehend the text at all in answering the first two items. They merely match the correct options with the same statements in the text.

To answer items number three and four students comprehend the last sentence in paragraph two in order to make a precise inference. The condition of 'being afraid' attacking the writer serves as a basis to make a further reasoning with the clauses that follow. In this case, students perceive the clause of reason 'because it was my first ride in an aeroplane' as the answer to the problem of 'being afraid'. Later, from the semantic implication of coordination by 'but' students get an impression that the contrasted situation of 'being happy again' is a result of the presence of the air-hostess.

Furthermore, students recognize the logical relationship between the third and fourth sentences of

paragraph four to answer item number five. First of all, they must understand the function of the logical connector of cause 'because' as the answer to the question of the first clause in the third sentence. Students identify the implied compound subordinator (in order to) between the two sentences. So, they have the combined sentence 'In order to begin to come down, we must go through the clouds'. Provided with the idea of the two clauses as having a connecting function students are, then, able to see the cause and effect relationship.

Text II:

Students do not comprehend the text in answering items number one, two, four and five. The choice of option (C) in item number one, option (B) in item number two, and option (A) in item number four are obtained by matching them with the phrases available in the text. While the choice of option (D) in item number five is acquired by relying on their general knowledge about the real world. Strictly speaking, the choice of the correct answers do not reflect students' understanding of the text, but the choice of option (B) in item number three involves students' inference concerning the relationship of the fourth and fifth sentences. In comprehending the fifth sentence students must refer to the situation stated in the fourth sentence.

Later, students draw a conclusion from the idea they have got.

Text III:

Students make use of the information stated in the reading text only to answer items number one, two, four, seven and ten. In answering item number one students must really perceive the description about when the statue was presented to the United States of America, what happened before it was presented, and when it was first erected. Students read carefully the text with a special reference to the adverbs of time in order to know the real problem. The information concerning the time helps students understand the idea of what they have read. In item number two students utilize their knowledge about passive voice in combining the two clauses (line 3-4 and line 14-15) into one idea that is the sculptor Bartoldi who designed and presented the statue to the American people. To answer the last item students infer the meaning from the text. While in answering items number four and seven students need the skill of interpretation to solve the problem of unlocking meanings by adding together a number of associations.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Kreidler, 1975: 178.

However, the rest of the items have nothing to do with understanding the text. Those items have lost their validity in testing reading comprehension. Items number three and five test about the prepositional phrases; item number six asks about grammar; item number nine tests on vocabulary and item number eight tests students' general knowledge.

c. The Realization of The Reading Objective Through  
Items Performance

Text I:

Since the items do not have the initial parts to introduce the problems, they do not qualify for good multiple-choice items. Students know nothing about the real problems which give them directions to check their understanding of the text. Students can not present a general idea of the desired answers to the problems being asked. Instead, they must examine each option in every single item to identify their knowledge about the content of the text.

The items performance, thus, make the reading objective undefined. After comprehending the text from which they obtain the information, readers need a means to ensure that comprehension and not the reverse.

## Text II:

Generally, the items performance do not support the realization of reading objective since there is no active process involved in finding out the useful and crucial information in text. To arrive at the content of the text students needn't make any effort in dislocating the information stated in the text. They merely match the phrases in the options with the phrases in the text. Besides, the presence of the reading text seems to be of no use in which the choice of option (D) has no reference to the text. This is, of course, in contradiction with the purpose and process of reading comprehension. Still, the presence of the item number three which reflect students' active process of comprehending the text does not help much to realize the reading objective.

## Text III:

Half of the total number of items do not involve students' comprehension of the text (see items number three, five, six, eight and nine). They test about grammar and vocabulary which are not related to the business of understanding the text. Moreover, both semantical and syntactical items serve as an end rather than a means to comprehend a larger unit of the text. In answering those items students do not need to make



use of their active process in selecting the information in the text.

## 2. The Presentation of The Items

### a. The Wording of The Stem Questions

Text I:

The absence of the stem questions confuses students in obtaining the general idea of the problems and the answers required. Supposing that the stem questions are formulated, the alternations to the options should be carried out first. Otherwise, the test writer will be blocked in writing the vivid stem questions. Most of the options contain the unrelated ideas. To keep the brevity, one example out of the five items is drawn to show this unrelatedness. Option (A) and (B) in item number one lend themselves to the question asking about the adverb of time 'When did you buy your ticket?' and option (D) answers to the question 'Who bought your ticket?'

However, one stem question will share with each option in item number five. All the options answer to the factual question which needs an explanation i.e. 'The aeroplane went through the clouds because ...'

## Text II:

All the stem questions are well-written, for they pose clear problems of what to do. They do not create any ambiguity to students. Yet, the way of asking questions impedes the involvement of students' mentally active process in comprehending the text.

## Text III:

The stem question in item number one does not present the problem clearly. Since option (A) constitutes an adverbial phrase of time (when); while options (B), (C), and (D) contain the adverbial phrases of place (where) it is difficult to formulate the specific stem question for that item.

Both stem questions in items number seven and ten are also misleading students. They make students keep on wondering of what to do. They are ill-formulated by not following the rule of the intricacies of English syntax. The stem in item number seven may be better revised into 'A site had to be found for it' (line 7). This statement has a similar meaning to 'it was necessary ...'; and the one in item number ten can be reconsidered as follows 'Before it could be transported to the United States ... had to be found for it' (line 6).

b. The Visibility of The Correct Answer

Text I:

Students obtain the correct answers in items number one and two by matching since options (B) and (A) in those items contain the precisely similar statements in the text.

Text II:

Students can identify the correct options with great ease. They take the advantages from the weaknesses of constructing the whole items. The correct options in items number one, two and four are very visible since they also exist in the text. Likewise, students will directly catch their eyes on the longest option in the last item, i.e. option (D).

Text III:

Students directly choose option (D) in item number eight because they have already known what copper is in daily life. Option (B) in item number nine is very visible since it has the same word class with that in the stem.

c. The Plausibility of The Distractors

Text I:

All the distractors in items number one, two, three and four are not plausible since each has the irrelevant problem to what is being asked.

Text II:

The distractors in items number one, two, four and five are not plausible anymore because students' attention have already been focused on the prominent correct options.

Text III:

Since the length of the options should be roughly the same, the options (B) and (D) in item number one should not have been written in such great length. Besides, the distractor (A) which seems to be more prominent than the others can trap some students who think that the right answer must be the different one.

The distractors in item number four are arguable alternatives to the desired answer in which they are grammatically wrong when placed in the stem. The distractors in item number seven have the corresponding effect to those in item number four. Students will directly consider them as the wrong answers so they do not count them anymore.

Item number nine contains distractors which did not belong to the same word class as the word in the stem as well as in the correct answer. From their physical appearance students soon realize that it is not necessary to regard them as to be important.

The distractors (A) and (B) in the last item are somewhat weak and they lose their plausibility. They are arranged synonymously with the insertion of additional determiner 'a plot of'. Again, students will immediately eliminate them.

It can be concluded from the analysis above that problems of constructing good multiple-choice items in testing reading comprehension become evident. All of the test data especially the last two types of test items have their own deficiencies in replying to the requirements of validity, reliability and objectivity. These deficiencies can be summarized into four categories namely:

- 1) A miss of the course objective is revealed in the content of the items in which
  - the items tend to test about the language (usage).
  - the items tend to test the element i.e. vocabulary that constitutes reading skill.
  - the items often test general knowledge rather than the understanding of the text and
  - the items often ask about the trivial information from the text.

- 2) The items as a whole are not challenging in which
  - students straightly choose the correct option by matching it with the text.
  - one of the alternatives does not belong to the same word class with the others.
  - the options are not parallel in length.
  - the options become ungrammatical when put in the stem.
  - a certain option has its prominence in its level of difficulty.
- 3) The stem questions are incomprehensible because they contain inadequate items or they are not stated at all.
- 4) The existence of the double correct answers in one item can trap some students.

Unless these deficiencies are improved, the traditionally harmful effects of testing will come true and testing has no importance to the learning-teaching activities stated in chapter II. Thus, it would be hard enough to ensure the valid judgement of students' achievement and to motivate students' future learning to read based on those items performance. Moreover, a reliable feedback to teacher is very unlikely to attain. The next chapter will discuss the strategies to construct the items which can reflect the essence of testing to the total educational programme.

Chapter V  
SOME SUGGESTIONS TO CONSTRUCT GOOD  
MULTIPLE-CHOICE ITEMS IN TESTING  
READING COMPREHENSION

Both the nature of the content and the physical appearance of the test items are indispensable to yield a valid judgement on the achievement of reading programme in schools. Even if the nature of the content is submitted to the reading objective, it does not necessarily mean that the whole item is pondered as valid, reliable and objective; unless the physical appearance of the items follows the guidelines advocated in Chapter III. While writing the items, the test writer should always keep in his mind the questions of what is tested (the content) and how students get the correct answers (the presentation) to make those items successful.

After revealing the problems of content and presentation of the items in the analysis of the data, this chapter deals with some suggestions to construct good multiple-choice items.

A. Material to Be Tested

1. The Acquisition of The Content

Since the demand in acquiring the content of a passage has been a neglected part in testing reading comprehension, it has become necessary to discuss what should be tested in line with the objective of reading comprehension itself. Students, by answering the items correctly, must really perform themselves as having acquired the gist of what they read. The items, therefore, should permit students to do the tasks in this acquisition of the content. The tasks can be categorized into four, namely:

a. To Find the Main Idea

In this stage the item deals primarily with the students' ability to recall or infer the main thought or central idea expressed in the information given.<sup>1</sup> Thus, students use their actual skills to identify the topic of the passage. The main idea can be found in the first, middle or last part of the passage. For example:<sup>2</sup>

Text: My plan was to study insects, but the professor told me to take a fish out of a bottle of alcohol and look at it. Before leaving me alone with the dead fish, he said that from time to time I should keep the fish wet with alcohol from the bottle.  
 . . . . .

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<sup>1</sup>Otto and Robert D. Chester, 1976: 117.

<sup>2</sup>Kumpulan 2000 soal, stencil (?): 308.



Question: The main idea of this passage is ....

- A. to study insects
- B. to study a dead fish
- C. about a professor
- D. about a bottle of alcohol
- E. about how to operate a microscope

Here students must read the whole text carefully in order to detect the main idea stated in the first part of the text; and then they choose option (B) as the correct answer.

b. To Identify the Meaning of a Word through Context

It stresses the use of context in deriving unfamiliar meanings of familiar words which students frequently meet. The use of context clues often involves inference. This task can be associated with vocabulary development, though this development is not an end.

The point in this task is on the process of finding out the meaning of a word in context. For example:<sup>3</sup>

Text: However, the defence lawyers asked a university professor to test the material, and he said in court that it definitely was not hemp. What is the meaning of 'definitely'?

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<sup>3</sup>Etherton, 1973: 93.

- A. possibility            D. certainly  
 B. unlikely               E. eventually  
 C. probably

To choose option (D) as the correct answer, students infer the meaning from contextual clues.

It can also ask students to mention the word in a paragraph by the help of contextual clues, for example:<sup>4</sup>

Text: There is no record that any prince ever plucked up the courage to try the justice of this harsh test on himself.

Question: Which word suggest that the test was an unjust one?

- A. record                C. justice            E. test  
 B. plucked              D. harsh

#### c. To Do Some Reasoning

Probably the most important and difficult comprehension are the reasoning skills, for they involve the use of students' potential skills to do this task. As what has been stated in chapter III that reading is a selective process so students must understand not only the surface structure of what is

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<sup>4</sup>Methold, 1973: 32.

stated in the text but also they must perceive the deep intention of the writer in order to confirm, reject or define what they have already known. A comprehension question should demand for an answer, the implied meaning, because the fluent reader has read directly for meaning.<sup>5</sup>

This task constitutes the synthesis of information and prediction of outcomes; and the identification of cause-and-effect relationship. For example:<sup>6</sup>

Text: Two Indian sailors were recently arrested in Yokohama and charged with possessing hemp, contrary to Japanese law. A police witness said that he visited their ship in the harbour and found five kilograms of what he thought was hemp.

Question: As far as you can tell from the passage, what was the nationality of the police witness mentioned in line 3?

- A. Yokohama      C. English      E. Japanese  
B. Chinese      D. Indian

Before predicting the outcome students must first synthesize the relevant data available, namely: two Indian sailors, arrested in Yokohama and contrary to Japanese law. Then, students make inference to predict

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<sup>5</sup>Rufai, 1976: 240.

<sup>6</sup>Etherton, 1968: 93.

the outcome that the arrest took place in Yokohama, so the police witness must be a Japanese too. The following examples show the involvement of the cause-effect relationship in the process of comprehending. For example:<sup>7</sup>

Text I: Advertisement

Save ... don't waste your money. It's easy to spend when it's in your pocket and you'll have little to show for it. And don't try to save at home. The chances are you will be robbed one day. Many people lose their life's savings that way.

Keep your savings in The Hongkong Bank where they will be safe and will earn you  $3\frac{1}{2}$  per annum.

Question: The advertisement tell us to put our money in the bank instead of keeping it at home because

- A. we can easily withdraw it when we need it
- B. banks are never robbed
- C. deposits can be made at any branch of the bank
- D. our homes are likely to be robbed.

Students make a deductive reasoning in which their process of thinking moves from general to specific facts in choosing option (D) as the correct answer. In this case, students must be able to draw a conclusion by

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<sup>7</sup>Sharpe, 1980: 125.

ignoring the irrelevant information accompanying the argument. A careless student may think that saving money at home is insecure. People are invited to save their money in The Hongkong Bank because it is safer. Thus, it is impossible for a bank to be robbed. Actually, the right way of thinking is that it is not that reason which make the bank invite people to save their money but people's homes are likely to be robbed.

Text II: Dosage

Adults twelve years old and over take two teaspoonfuls as needed, not to exceed fifteen teaspoonfuls per day. Children six years old to twelve years old take half of the adult dosage, not to exceed seven teaspoonfuls per day.<sup>8</sup>

Question: A ten-year-old child should

- A. not take this preparation
- B. take two teaspoonfuls of this preparation
- C. take one teaspoonfuls of this preparation
- D. take one-half teaspoonfuls of this preparation

The previous item asks students to identify the specific from the general argument. On the contrary, this item requires students to make an inductive

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<sup>8</sup>Sharpe, 1980: 125.  
Methold, 1973: 32.

reasoning in which the process of thinking moves from specific to general facts. They should draw a conclusion correctly follows from a given argument by choosing option (C) as the correct answer.

d. To Read for Details

It deals with testing the techniques of the development of a central theme. By asking about the minor points, the questions must always facilitate the understanding of the central point. In other words, the items should be pertinent to the central theme. In this stage it is not recommended to ask about insignificant details. It is through this process of asking questions which enable students to develop their ability to detect clues to the mood of characters, to see the relationship between events, to draw inferences and thus to recreate the author's world in their own mind.<sup>8</sup> For example:<sup>9</sup>

Text: Sailors, and fishermen in particular, have always been extremely superstitious. This is hardly surprising when one considers the changeable nature of the sea where, even today without sophisticated weather forecasting techniques, a sudden storm can blow up quite unexpectedly . . . . One way of pleasing these gods was to make an annual offering. This custom survives in the

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<sup>8</sup>Kobayashi, 1975: 195.

<sup>9</sup>Archer, 1975: 37.

ceremony of blessing the sea, which can still be seen once a year in some fishing ports. Next to pleasing the sea-gods, the most important thing for the sailor is to know that his boat is free from evil influences. The time to make sure of this is at the launching ceremony. It is clear that the well-known custom of launching a ship by breaking a bottle of champagne against the side goes back a very long way.

Question:

- 1) How did the fishermen hope to please the sea-gods?
  - A. by going to church
  - B. by prying to them
  - C. by fishing once a year
  - D. by giving them a present
2. Why do sailors break a bottle against the side of the boat?
  - A. to protect it from bad spirits
  - B. so they can start drinking and celebrating
  - C. to bless the sea gods
  - D. the ship can't start until they do

These two items are directed to the main theme of the text i.e. it is the unreliable nature of the sea that makes sailors and fishermen superstitious. Besides, by choosing option (D) in the first item and option (A) in the second item students will detect the relationship between events and create the author's world in their mind.

By accomplishing those communicative tasks, it does not mean to place vocabulary and grammar in an inferior position but rather to use them more efficiently to supply the main objective of acquiring the content. The following section will show how those elements are integrated to support the objective.

## 2. The Function of Vocabulary and Grammar

In comprehending the text vocabulary and grammar function as a vehicle to reach the destination; they serve more as a process rather than a purpose of testing reading comprehension. Yet, they are of the utmost importance to be understood in the reading process. The function of structure items is to simplify a complicated sentences and the function of vocabulary items is to check that certain words are interpreted correctly. Besides the acquisition of the content the expansion of language competence must also feature very largely in comprehension work in which specific new words and expressions work together with grammatical elements to understand the text fully.<sup>10</sup> Thus, vocabulary and grammar are tested when they really impede the comprehension. For example:<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Carver, 1978: 195.

<sup>11</sup>Archer, 1975: 5.  
Sharpe, 1980: 25,47,204.



Text I: When at last Madeleine Adder reached the inn, her palms were sweating. She saw the lights in the windows of the bar and grew suddenly timid, finding that she had not the courage to march into that crowded room.

Question: How did Madeleine Adder feel when she was in the room?

- |                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| A. apprehensive | C. unafraid  |
| B. hesitant     | D. reassured |

Text II : Directions

10 - 14 years . . .	4 teaspoonfuls
6 - 10 years . . .	2 teaspoonfuls
. . . Shake well before using	

Question: Most likely, this medication is ....

- |                 |              |
|-----------------|--------------|
| A. a pill       | C. a lozenge |
| B. an injection | D. a liquid  |

Instead of asking the meaning of a word in isolation the two items above require students to synthesize the descriptions available in the text and to infer the meaning from those descriptions in order to get the option (B) in the first item and option (D) in the second item. It is clear that the items check more on students' process of looking for the required words through comprehending the text than through memorization of the meaning of the words.



Text III: 'I weigh eight stone,' Mrs. Johnson said in her bright way.

'I would have thought less,' Mr. Armitage said.

That was the nearest he came to an approval.

Question: Mr. Armitage thought that Mrs. Johnson

- A. should weigh less
- B. didn't weigh as much as she did
- C. didn't weigh enough
- D. weighed eight stone

Text IV : Tom Sponson, at fifty-three, was a very successful man. He had worked up at a first class business, married a charming woman and built himself a good house in the London suburbs, that was neither so modern as to be vulgar, nor so conventional to be dull.

Question: From the passage we understand that Mr. Sponson was

- A. a successful businessman who lived in a vulgar house
- B. not very successful but lived in a nice house
- C. was a builder who lived in the suburbs
- D. was a successful man who had built his own house

Structure is not tested mechanically in the last two items. The items actually require students to perceive the connection of the sentences by means of their knowledge of grammar. To choose option (B) in the first item students apply their linguistic competence of the unreal conditional sentence to understand larger unit of the text. Similarly, by choosing option (D) in the last item students make use of their grammatical knowledge about the joining word 'neither ... nor'.

By giving such tests, students are encouraged to use the language in which they can transfer what they have learnt from abstract rules of structural items to the understanding of a text. So, the items must not overtax students with complicated grammatical questions that are irrelevant with the understanding of the passage. Those items enable students to perform not only their knowledge about lexical words and grammatical functions but more importantly they train students to apply their knowledge about the elements of the language into a meaningful way in gaining full understanding from their reading.

#### B. An Improvement in the Presentation

As what has been stated in the previous section that both the content and the presentation of the items

go hand in hand as a determining factor to evaluate the achievement of learning-teaching activities in the reading course in general and to promote students' motivation to read effectively in particular.

Guidelines concerning the presentation of the items have already been advocated in chapter III. This section concerns with how to accomplish those guidelines into practice based on the problems of presentation identified in chapter IV. Since the objective of reading comprehension test items is to check students' understanding of the text and not at all to test their understanding of the test items themselves, the test items performance should neither facilitate students to answer them correctly without referring to the text nor fail students because they (test items) trap some students. Here are some suggestions concerning the improvement of the presentation.

a. The Item as a Whole

- The rubric of the instruction can sound as 'Choose the best answer' to train students in their true ability in comprehending the text. As what Nelson Brooks (1964) stated in order that the objective test may perform properly not only must the right answer be wholly right and the wrong ones wholly wrong, all must truly reflect the working of a student's mind and present the same degree of

plausibility even when the reply is incorrect.<sup>12</sup>

For example:

Text : After the man had decided to clean his bicycle he took it out of the shed and into the garden, where there was more room.

Question: The man took his bicycle into the garden because

- A. There was more room there
- B. He wanted to clean it
- C. The shed was there
- D. It had been in the shed

Intelligent reading will show that option (B) is the best choice since it explains what the man wanted to do to his bicycle; while option (A) is only partly correct since it does not say fully why the man took his bicycle into the garden.

- The number of the options can be either four or five at the most. However, it is better to set four options which are reasonable than five implausible ones. For example:<sup>13</sup>

Text : I had an amusing experience last year. After I had left a small village in the south of French, I drove on the next town. On the way, a young man waved to

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<sup>12</sup>Nelson, 1964: 207.

<sup>13</sup>2000 soal, stencil (?)

me I stopped and he asked me for a lift.

Question: The writer gave a lift to a young man

....

- A. after the journey
- B. before the journey
- C. during the journey
- D. at the end of the journey
- E. before and after the journey

The item will have its own power of checking students' comprehension if option (E) is eliminated. The last option has no relevance at all with the total meaning of the text as well as the item; it is obviously added to fulfill the required number of options.

- In order to have more or less similarly discriminating power all the options must have their own correctness as they exist in the text, but there is only one required answer to what is being asked. For example:<sup>14</sup>

Text : Useful Telephone Numbers

Campus Information	. . .	886 - 2791
Health Centre	. . .	886 - 3499
Housing Office	. . .	886 - 1265
International Office	. . .	886 - 5835
Police	. . .	886 - 6666

Question: Which number would one call in order to make an appointment with a doctor?

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<sup>14</sup>Sharpe, 1980: 126.

- A. 886 - 2791                      C. 886 - 9210  
B. 886 - 5835                      D. 886 - 3499

Unless students read the text wholly, they can fail to choose the right answer to the question since all the options exist in the text.

b. The Correct Answers

- It is better to paraphrase the correct option to avoid matching it with the phrases or clauses stated in the text. For example:<sup>15</sup>

Text : Andrew Lang was tall but inclined to stoop, with a rather slight figure. He was very active for his years. In my mind's eye I see him slouching easily along with his hands in his pockets and his head bent, but I think his attitude was to get a better view of things as he walked along.

Question: The writer thought that Andrew Lang walked in a particular way because he

A. didn't want people to notice him  
B. liked to observe the ground  
C. didn't want to see other people  
D. could see better that way

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<sup>15</sup>Archer, 1985: 19.

Unless students really comprehend the text they will not be aware that option (D) is actually the correct answer. Here the wording of the original 'to get a better view of things as he walked along' though the meaning is very similar.

- To reduce the visibility of the correct answer all of the options should demand the same level of students' proficiency in comprehending either the ideas and incidents or words in the passage. For example:<sup>16</sup>

Text : My lawyer, Mr. Turner, is the only man I know who has seen a ghost. He is a quiet, even-tempered man whose life is spent in dealing with facts. He is the last person in the world to give way to fantasy.

Question: What kind of person was Mr. Turner? He was ...

- |                |                |
|----------------|----------------|
| A. imaginative | C. sensible    |
| B. fantastic   | D. insensitive |

None of the options above looks more prominent than others, for they demand no higher students' proficiency in understanding the inferential words from the passage. Besides, all of them are written in the same word class. Students choose option (A) as the correct answer not because of its prominence but because of their understanding of a text.

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<sup>16</sup>Archer, 1978: 16.



- Adding redundancy in a pure linguistic medium to keep the length of the options parallel. Apart from removing the tendency to think that the longest and the most complete option is always the right answer redundancy also gives students ways to search for meaning in what they read.<sup>17</sup> For example:<sup>18</sup>

Text : We had both our children taught to drive by a professional teacher when they reached seventeen, and assumed they were reasonably safe. But no teenager these days can get far out of line with their own generation.

Question: According to the passage we understand that young people today.

- A. always take advice from older people
- B. like to have their own way
- C. like to behave as their friends do
- D. never take advice from older people

The word 'always' in option (A) and 'never' in option (D) are redundancies. The performance of the options does not affect students much in deciding the correct answer since they have the same length. Students choose option (C) as the correct answer because they have succeeded in searching for meaning through linguistic redundancy.

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<sup>17</sup>Gebhard, 1985: 18.

<sup>18</sup>Archer, 1975: 35.

### c. The Distractors

Heaton (1975) suggests that plausible distractors are best based on (a) mistakes in the students' own written work, (b) their answers in previous tests, (c) the teacher's experience and (d) a contrastive analysis between the native and the target language.<sup>19</sup> Some analyses are then needed to construct good distractors. However, in order to be more applicable and practicable Robert L. Ebel ( ? ) has advocated some ways to obtain good distractors specified somewhere in chapter III and the following part will discuss some additional approaches concerning how to set plausible distractors. Though they are more easily said than done, we can at least begin by means of teacher's experience and prediction on students' process of thinking.

- Most of the distractors constitute the correct possibilities but not as complete as the required answer. Thus, students must choose by eliminating the less correct ones. For example:<sup>20</sup>

Text : Then, calling the others together, French instructed them in their parts. Satisfied at last that everything was ready, he flashed his torch three times in the direction of the gate.

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<sup>19</sup>Heaton, 1975: 19.

<sup>20</sup>Stone, 1974: 201.

Question: When did French flash his torch?

- A. After placing four men round the house
- B. After giving instructions about the criminals
- C. When he had told everyone what to do
- D. As soon as he had a signal from the gate

Option (A) and (B) are only partly correct, option (C) is completely correct. Option (D) is completely incorrect.

- A teacher, as a test constructor, can construct distractors based on his experience about the interference of students' native language to the target language. For example:<sup>21</sup>

Text : Arif, four years younger than his sister (Rani) was sitting next to the window.

Question: Who were Arif and Rani?

- A. Rani was Arif's older sister
- B. Arif was Rani's older brother
- C. Arif and Rani were brothers
- D. Rani and Arif were sisters

Option (C) and (D) are taken from the possible interference of students' native language in determining an appropriate English expression about siblings which in Indonesian such relationship is

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<sup>21</sup>The Achievement Test Paper of the First Semester, 1984: 2.

called as 'kagak-beradik'. Then, the Indonesian term is translated into English as distractors.

- Distractors can be provided based on the general prediction of students' common mistakes in interpreting a certain part of a text. In this case, students' common mistakes in comprehending the text are furnished as the distractors. For example:<sup>22</sup>

Text : The main function of toys is to suggest, encourage and assist play. To succeed in this they must be good toys, which children will play with constantly, and will come back to again and again. Therefore it is important to choose suitable toys for different stages of a child's development.

Question: The writer suggests that the most successful toys are those which

- A. the child chooses himself
- B. are mainly functional
- C. are frequently used
- D. the child can frequently change

The correct answer is option (C) since the second statement of the text says so. However, students will think option (B) as 'correct' when they have failed to detect the cause-and-effect relationship in which they

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<sup>22</sup>Archer, 1981: 42.

interpret the first sentence wrongly. Likewise option (A). They will think it 'right' if they only read the last sentence without looking at the relationship with the others.

### C. Time Allocation

It is also relevant to talk about how many multiple-choice items should be set on one text in this section. The content, the presentation as well as the number of items act as determining factors to guarantee the reliability, validity and objectivity of the test items. The decision about how many items to be tested depends on the complexity of the reading material itself. A complicated passage allows less number of items than those required for the easy ones. However, the time allocated serves as an important basis for a test constructor to select the appropriate reading material and to settle the suitable number of items.

In most classroom tests reading comprehension is tested together with vocabulary and grammar as an integrative test, so the total time needed to do the test must be arranged. The Ministry of Education lately launched a guidance about how to construct this integrative test. It contains the important elements of the test which is directed for the first, second and third grades, namely: the material to be tested, time

allocation and the suggested number of items for each subject area.<sup>23</sup> The main point of this discussion is to reveal the time needed for testing reading comprehension alone by comparing the total time allowed as well as the number of items given. The following two tables will present the description needed to identify the residual time to do reading comprehension test items. Hopefully, a clear step can be defined concerning what to do with the time available and the number of items advocated to yield effective test items .

Table I

The Number of Items According to the  
Subject Areas

Grade	Structure	Vocabulary	R.C.	Z	Time
I	30	5	5	40	60'
II	44	6	10	60	90'
III	48	2	10	60	90'

Table II

The Number of Items According to the  
Three Levels of Knowledge

<sup>23</sup>Dept. P & K, 1985/1986.

Grade	Memorization	Comprehension		Application	Time
		Str.	R.C.		
I	9	17	5	9	60'
II	18	20	10	12	90'
III	7	20	10	23	90'

Note: R.C.: Reading Comprehension

Str.: Structure

It can be concluded from table I that time allowed for reading comprehension tests alone is very limited. Yet, students require much more time to work through a reading comprehension test since they first has to read the text carefully once or twice before they begin to answer the items based on it. While less time can be allowed to do the tests on grammar and vocabulary.<sup>24</sup>

Table II gives a clearer description about the time division in which items in each of the three levels of knowledge demand a different amount of time. Memorization is the most trivial knowledge among the three, so time devoted to answer the items in this category is more or less little in amoun. Application is, however, considered the most difficult and important knowledge in this case. The items in this category need much more time to carry on. By excluding reading comprehension test items from the total number of items,

it is assumed that each item in the group of memorization takes less than one minute to answer and one single item in the group of comprehension needs one minute to answer. While more than one minute is required to answer each item in the group of application. So, altogether the time needed for grade I is 35 minutes; for grade II is 50 minutes and for grade III is 50 minutes. Thus, the residual time available for grade I, i.e. 25 minutes is divided into 20 minutes for answering the reading comprehension items and 5 minutes for checking the answers wholly at the end of the test. The time left in grade II is devoted to answer reading comprehension items 30 minutes and 10 minutes to check the answers wholly. Finally, grade III has the same time division as that in grade II, i.e. 30 minutes for answering the reading comprehension items and 10 minutes for checking the whole answers.

From the rough illustration above it is obvious that time available to do reading comprehension tests are far from enough. Regardless of this limited time a test constructor must be wise in making use of the time available as effectively and efficiently as possible without neglecting the valid, reliable and objective characteristics of the items. If the choice is too restricted in either number or scope then multiple-choice items may not demonstrate better comprehension of a written passage than the traditional written tests.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Smithies, 1976: 145.



Then, the twenty five items of reading comprehension ranging from the first to the third grades with three to four minutes needed to answer each item (if the time required to read the text is taken into account) must really reflect the checking of students' understanding of the text both in the content and the presentation of the items. Testing too much on vocabulary and grammar which do not impede the comprehension of the text are only a waste of time.

#### D. Some Ways to Overcome the Drawbacks

As what has been stated in chapter III that multiple-choice items also have their own disadvantages. Despite the disadvantages, multiple-choice items cannot be abandoned. Students are asked to show that they comprehend certain ideas, incidents and words in the passages. To answer some of the questions on ideas and words they may be asked not to write down their answers, but be given a choice of answers to pick the correct one(s) from.<sup>26</sup> In order not to hinder the numerous advantages multiple-choice items in testing reading comprehension (see also the uses of multiple-choice items in chapter III) it is important to talk about some ways to overcome these drawbacks in this occasion.

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<sup>26</sup>Stone, 1974: 196.

- Multiple-choice items can be constructed in team-work in which more than one writers are working together to produce good multiple-choice items. Besides giving a better result, writing items in a team-effort can reduce the demanding task of producing these items.
- Four of five alternatives provided in each item do not illustrate a dilemma that makes students confused of what to choose. They rather help students to sharpen their understanding of the text if the content as well as the presentation of the items do not have ambiguous elements, i.e. the content must be valid and only one correct or best answer is put among the options.
- The items are not conducive to guessing if only the item as a whole is well-constructed in its presentation for example by making the options parallel in length and by paraphrasing the correct answer.
- As what Shaulson (1979) suggests that it would be a good idea to prepare two 'identical tests', thus limiting the possibility of cheating and more importantly creating an impressive atmosphere of testing.<sup>27</sup> This time the 'Two identical tests' are labelled on the right hand top as 'right' and 'left'. Students sitting on the right hand receive the 'right'

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<sup>27</sup>Shaulson, 1976: 130.

test papers while those who sit on the left hand take the 'left' test papers. These two 'identical tests' can be taken from the previous classroom tests which have been revised or altered.

- It is very unlikely for students to merely eliminate the distractors in finding out the correct answers if the options are reasonable. However, this problem need not be regarded as a serious one since there is an involvement of comparative judgments among the options in the process of eliminations.
- Since the main purpose of this type of questions is to check students' understanding of the text, there are only two alternatives in the end result of their answers namely 'right answers' and 'wrong answers'. Unlike an essay test, this time students do not need to express their ideas linguistically; so there is no 'half right' answers when their ideas are right but the way of expressing their ideas are grammatically wrong. This fact influences the scoring procedure in which the right answer deserves one score while the wrong one deserves a nil.

Admittedly, what advocated above are not always easy to devise. A teacher, as a test constructor, may spend much time and energy to produce qualified test items. Developing plausible incorrect options taxes the ingenuity of the teacher. Anyhow, these difficulties should not discourage teachers from making an effort

through a lot of practice. Teachers must keep on making an attempt to promote students' future learning to read any text.

Moreover, after having been tried out the test items must always be investigated to achieve the better ones as what is advocated in the last section of chapter II. Hopefully, by doing so the test items can provide a useful means to evaluate both learning and teaching.

## CONCLUSION

Finally, this last part summarizes the major points have already been discussed in the previous chapters. They are as follows:

1. All the three categories of test items have a different quality in their own weaknesses in which the fairly well and poorly-constructed test items have more serious weaknesses than the well-constructed ones.
2. All of the weaknesses including the minor weaknesses in the presentation of the items (see the well-constructed items) need some revisions or alterations to yield an invulnerable means in evaluating:
  - a. the achievement of the general goal of English teaching programme in SMA.
  - b. the authentic proof that reading skills are essential to the expansion of knowledge.
  - c. the realization of reading objective through the items performance.
3. It should be noted that the stress is on testing communicative performance and not at all on structural and syntactical grounds although it is acknowledged that knowledge of structure and vocabulary vocabulary is essentially required in reading. The two elements would only be the service of getting at meaning.

4. The items as a whole should not be stained by including irrelevant things or neglecting the suggested guidelines, so they hinder the effectiveness and efficiency of multiple-choice format in testing reading comprehension.
5. All in all, the items performance should really reveal that testing is extremely significant to motivate and direct students' learning as well as to evaluate teaching effectiveness.

Proficiency in writing and evaluating Multiple-choice English language tests in general and a reading comprehension test in particular come as a result of proper guidance and an appropriate amount of practice.

## APPENDIXES

### Criteria for the Appendixes

The three subgroups of the appendixes are discriminated according to their potentialities for representing the contribution of testing to learning-teaching activities as well as for realizing the reading objective itself. Anyhow, the following criteria determine to which a certain group of test items belongs:

1. How far the realization of the reading objective has been achieved through the items performance.
2. The function of vocabulary and grammar in the acquisition of the content
3. The grammatical quality and the wording of the items.
4. The quality of the presentation of the options in each item
5. The clarity of each item

The Well-Constructed Test Items in Appendix I realize the reading objective in their performance, although there are minor problems met in their presentation. While, the Fairly Well-Constructed Test Items in Appendix II really miss the objective, misuse the second criterion with less than a half of

the numbers reflect the third, fourth and fifth criteria mentioned above. The same problems are repeated in The Poorly-Constructed test Items in Appendix III which are greater in quantity.



## APPENDIX I

### Well Constructed Test Items of the First, Second, and Third Grades

#### Text I:

The big plane was flying above the beautiful blue sea. Some of the people in the plane were asleep, but Arif and his seventeen year old sister Rani found everything new and interesting. They were tired, but they were happy, because they were going to Madura for a two-week holiday with their father.

Then they heard the Captain on the loud-speaker of the plane. He said, "Good afternoon, ladies and gentleman. We are flying now at 20,000 feet, and at 500 miles an hour. It is ten past six and we shall arrive in Surabaya in ten minutes. If you look to your left in a few minutes you can see the island of Madura. I hope that you have enjoyed your journey and will fly again in this plane". Then the Captain turned off the loud-speaker, and they heard the noise of the four big engines again.

Arif, four years younger than his sister, was sitting next to the window. He soon saw below them the

island of Madura. He pointed it out to Rani, who was sitting beside him. "It's beautiful," said Rani. She was looking down at the green land and at the yellow beaches round it. "The villages and the boats look very small from here."

("The Secret of Bangkalan Fort" by J. 3A. Tedman and I. Siswoyo)

1. How were Arif and Rani spending their two-week vacation?
  - A. They were flying high in a plane.
  - B. They were watching the deep, blue sea
  - C. They were making a trip to Madura.
  - D. They were looking for new, interesting things.
  - E. They spent it tired, but happy.
2. What time would the plane reach Surabaya?

It would reach Surabaya about ....

  - A. twenty to six in the morning.
  - B. half past six in the morning.
  - C. a quarter to six in the morning.
  - D. twenty-five past six in the afternoon.
  - E. twenty past six in the afternoon.
3. Who were Arif and Rani?
  - A. Rani was Arif's older sister.
  - B. Arif was Rani's older brother.
  - C. Rani was Arif's brother.

- D. Arif and Rani were brothers.
- E. Rani and Arif were sisters.
4. Which of these sentences is not mentioned in the paragraph:
- A. Rani and Arif were interested in their journey.
- B. Some people were sleeping in the plane.
- C. They heard the Captain's voice from the loud-speaker.
- D. The passengers were enjoying the food in the plane.
- E. Arif and Rani saw a beautiful view below them.

Taken from: TPB Semester Ganjil 1984/1985

Date : September 27, 1984

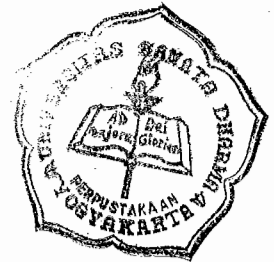
Text II:

Soldiers who have to jump out of aeroplanes in the air are provided with parachutes that open and let the men fall gently to the ground. A sergeant was instructing a class of parachutists. A soldier put his hand and asked, "What happens if parachute does not open sergeant, when I jump out?". "Oh, that's all right, Don't you worry. You just bring it back and we'll give you another one", was the sergeant's answer. (New words: to provide = melengkapi; to put up = mengacungkan).

1. When are the soldiers provided with parachutes?
  - A. they jump out of aeroplanes
  - B. they are going to jump out
  - C. they were instructing
  - D. they are going to take off
2. Why do they need parachutes?
  - A. to fall gently to the ground
  - B. to obey the instruction
  - C. to open the parachutes
  - D. to put their hands up
3. What will happen to the soldier if the parachutes does not open?
  - A. he can change it with another one
  - B. he'll get another one
  - C. he will probably die
  - D. he can bring it back to the sergeant
4. What do you think about the soldier's question?

I think the soldier question is ....

  - A. very good
  - B. funny
  - C. very clear
  - D. foolish
5. Do you think the sergeant's answer was serious?
  - A. Yes, it was serious
  - B. No, the sergeant just wanted to make fun of him
  - C. Yes, I do
  - D. No, it was what the soldier wanted



Taken from: TPB Semester Ganjil 1983/1984

Date : December 14, 1983

Text III:

One day a merchant's wife fell ill and he went to get a doctor. The doctor willingly came to see the woman and to do what he could for her, but before he went into the house he paused. He knew that the merchant was famous for not paying his bills when they were due. He therefore said to the man, "But if I do cure your wife I am affraid you may not pay me." "Sir," replied the merchant, "here I have a thousand pieces of silver. Whether you cure my wife or whether you kill her I will give you all this." The doctor was satisfied and went into the house. When he reached the woman's bedside it was soon clear to him that he could do little. She was very ill, and, though he gave her medicine, she soon died. He told the merchant that he was very sorry and asked for the money which he had been promised. "Did you kill my wife?" asked the man. "Certainly not," said the doctor. "Did you cure my wife?" asked the man. "I am afraid that was impossible," replied the doctor. "Well, since you have neither killed her nor cured her I have nothing to pay you."

1. One day, the doctor was sent to cure ....
  - A. a merchant
  - B. the wife of a merchant
  - C. a country woman
  - D. the servant of the merchant
  - E. a farmer's wife
2. What did the merchant promise to give to the doctor?
  - A. medicine
  - B. a thousand pieces of silver
  - C. nothing
  - D. a bag of gold pieces
  - E. his wife
3. As soon as the doctor reached the woman, he gave her ....
  - A. an injection
  - B. medicine
  - C. nothing
  - D. some money
  - E. some silver
4. After his job was finished, the doctor ....
  - A. gave the merchant some money
  - B. went home right away
  - C. stayed at the merchant's
  - D. produced a bag of silver
  - E. asked the merchant for payment
5. What did the merchant give to the doctor for his job?

- A. nothing
  - B. some bills
  - C. a promise
  - D. a thousand pieces of silver
  - E. a bank note
6. The doctor hesitated to cure the merchant's wife because
- A. the woman was helpless
  - B. the woman was going to die
  - C. he was afraid that he will not be paid
  - D. the merchant did not have any money
  - E. he did not like the merchant
7. The doctor was willing to cure the merchant's wife after the man promised ....
- A. that he will pay him
  - B. that he will show the bag of silver
  - C. to enter the house with the doctor
  - D. that he will get some medicine
  - E. that he will kill his wife
8. The merchant's wife died because ....
- A. the doctor gave her medicine
  - B. she was seriously ill
  - C. the doctor killed her
  - D. the merchant killed her
  - E. the doctor did not cure her
9. The merchant did not pay the doctor because ....
- A. his wife died

- B. the doctor did not kill his wife
  - C. he was very sad
  - D. he was mean
  - E. the doctor did not cure his wife
10. When the doctor was sure that the woman was dead, he might say to the merchant, " . . . "
- A. I'm happy to see your wife dead
  - B. Wonderful. Now, she has gone to heaven
  - C. I'm very sorry that her life could not be saved
  - D. You're lucky. Now, you can look for another wife
  - E. Don't worry. I'll make her alive soon.

Taken from: TPB Semester Ganjil 1984/1985

Date : November 27, 1984.



## APPENDIX II

### Fairly Well-Constructed Test Items of the First, Second, and Third Grades

#### Text I:

Mr James Scott has a garage in Silbury and now he has just bought another garage in Pinhurst. Pinhurst is only five miles from Silbury, but Mr Scott cannot get a telephone for his new garage, so he has just bought twelve pigeons. Yesterday a pigeon carried the first message from Pinhurst to Silbury. The bird covered the distance in three minutes. Up to now, Mr Scott has sent a great many requests for spare parts and other urgent messages from one garage to the other. In this way, he has begun his own private 'telephone' service.

1. Mr Scott has'nt got a telephone in his new garage because
  - A. It isn't far from a his old garage, so he doesn't need one.
  - B. he has twelve pigeons
  - C. he can't get one
  - D. It's too expensive
  - E. telephone cannot carry messages

2. Mr Scott keeps pigeons because ....
- A. he uses them to send messages
  - B. it's his hobby
  - C. he has two garages
  - D. he likes them
  - E. pigeons are beautiful
3. Mr Scott cannot get a telephone for his garage ....  
he has just bought twelve pigeons.
- A. so
  - B. That's why
  - C. because
  - D. for
  - E. from
4. He has just bought ten pigeons.  
When did he ... them?
- A. bought
  - B. buy
  - C. buying
  - D. buying
  - E. buyed
5. Mr Scott has a garage. The garage is .....
- A. to him
  - B. of him
  - C. of his
  - D. his
  - E. him

6. Mr Scott has a garage in Silbury.

His ... garage is in Pinhurst.

- A. another
- B. other
- C. else
- D. different
- E. the other

7. Mr Scott can't get a telephone.

Telephone are hard to ....

- A. take
- B. receive
- C. obtain
- D. find
- E. carry

8. Urgent messages are important, so they must be

sent ....

- A. slowly
- B. by hand
- C. largely
- D. quicly
- E. slowly and calmly

9. Mr Scott's "telephone service" is private. It

isn't ....

- A. general
- B. national
- C. public
- D. international
- E. local

10. He has sent many requests for spare parts.

He has ... many spare parts.

- A. asked
- B. begged
- C. asked for
- D. pleased
- E. asked to

Taken from: TPB Tengah Semester Ganjil 1985/1986

Date : October 25, 1985

Text II:

Iwan Kayamis is a farmer, but his farm is different from other farms. Instead of cown, chickens and other animal, Iwan owns 600 crocodiles. He is a crocodile farmer.

The crocodiles are kept in cement ponds which contain about 30 cms of water. There are four different ponds. One is for the very young crocodiles, another is for the bigger crocodiles between one and six years old, the third is for six crocodiles. When a crocodile is pregnant, she is taken out and put in the mother's pond. This contains water and a large area filled with soft sand where the crocodiles can lay their eggs. The eggs remain in the sand to hatch on their own, and after about 100 days the baby crocodiles are given prawns and fish to eat.

When the crocodiles are about six years old, they are killed for their skins. By this time, they weigh between thirty to sixty kilogrammes and they measure one and a half to two and a half metres long. Their skin are used to make bags and belts. The skin of younger crocodiles is softer and more beautiful but because they are smaller only one bag can be made from the skin of a younger crocodile. An older crocodile provides enough skin for two large bags. The skin is washed with special chemicals, dyed into various colours and the polished. Finally it is cut and sewn into bags. A bag with a beautiful skin can cost as much as 200,000 rupiahs.

And what happens to the crocodile meat? Some of it is sold to restaurant where it is popular with a few people. Some of it is used for animals food, and some of it is dried and exported to countries like Hongkong.

Taken from: "Creative English" Book 2)

1. Who is Iwan Kayamis? He is....
  - A. a children farmer
  - B. a crocodile farmer
  - C. a sailor
  - D. a fisherman
  - E. a hermit

2. After she had laid her eggs the mother crocodile ....
- A. sits on her eggs until they hatch
  - B. buries the eggs in the sand
  - C. eats her eggs
  - D. leaves her eggs to hatch on their own
  - E. throws her eggs away
3. 'This' contains water and a large area filled with soft sand where the crocodiles can lay their eggs. 'This' in the sentence refers to:
- A. soft sand
  - B. water
  - C. water and pond
  - D. pond
  - E. a large area
4. Baby crocodile eat .....
- A. fruit and meat
  - B. vegetable
  - C. fish
  - D. meat
  - E. vegetable and meat
5. His crocodile farming has been ... and he now has a successful business.
- A. fruitful
  - B. rightful
  - C. restful
  - D. wasteful
  - E. powerful

6. The crocodiles are usually killed:
  - A. when they are seven
  - B. when they are ten
  - C. when they are old
  - D. when they are three
  - E. when they are more than seven
7. The female crocodiles lay their eggs
  - A. in water
  - B. in a pond
  - C. in sand
  - D. in a fish pond
  - E. in the grass
8. After about ... the baby crocodiles are born.
  - A. two months
  - B. four months
  - C. nine weeks
  - D. three months
  - E. a hundred hours

Taken from: TPB Tengah Semester Ganjil 1984/1985

Date : September 27, 1984

Text III:

### Grasses and Civilization

When man first learned to cultivate grain grasses, his way of life changed. Before the he was mainly a wanderer. When there was no more food to be found in

one place, he moved on to another place. But once he knew how to plant grain, he was more certain of his food supply. He did not have to hunt for food. He could grow it himself.

Grain was especially useful as food, because it did not spoil for a long time if it was kept dry. Man was able to store some of his grain for the winter. Now instead of wandering in search for food, many tribes settled down. Their people became farmers.

A new way of life began when man lived in farming settlements. He had time for other things besides finding food. He began to make new and better tools. And he started to become civilized. You might say cultivation of the grain grasses helped bring civilization.

1. Man's way of life began to change when ....
  - A. he first knew how to build houses
  - B. he first knew how to keep some of the grain
  - C. he first knew how to grow grain grasses
  - D. there was no more food in the wood
  - E. there was no food in his house
2. Before he settled in one place, he ....
  - A. became a farmer
  - B. grew grain grasses
  - C. looked for food
  - D. moved from one place to another
  - E. there was much food



3. Now he didn't hunt for food, because ....
- A. he planted grain himself
  - B. there was no food
  - C. grain grasses grew
  - D. he had much food
  - E. there was enough food
4. He could keep grain for a long time, because ....
- A. he could plant it
  - B. it was easy to cook
  - C. it didn't spoil when it was kept dry
  - D. it was useful as food
  - E. it was dry, and useful
5. Why did he stop wandering in search for food?  
Because .....
- A. he became a farmer
  - B. he had a house
  - C. he made a new tool
  - D. he had grass
  - E. he bought rice
6. Instead of wandering now he lived ....
- A. in the wood
  - B. in the search
  - C. in a new way of live
  - D. in a house
  - E. in farming settlements

Taken from: TPB Tengah Semester Ganjil 1984/1985

Date : October 2, 1984

## APPENDIX III

### Poorly-Constructed Test Items of the First, Second, and Third Grades

#### Text I:

#### Aeroplanes

Singapore

Wednesday, 28th September

Have you ever been in an aeroplane? I have. Last Monday I flew to Singapore. Twelve days ago I went to the office in Kuala Lumpur and bought my ticket. Then, very early on Monday morning, I went to the office again with my luggage and got into the bus with the other passagers.

The bus took us to the airport. There people took our luggage and put it in the aeroplane, and then, after, after about twenty minutes, we got in too. I was a little afraid at first, because it was my first ride in an aeroplane, but a kind lady (she was the air-hostess) bought us some sweets and spoke to me, and soon I was quite happy again.

Then the captain of the aeroplane came and spoke to me too. That made me afraid again. 'Is nobody driving the aeroplane?' I asked. The captain laughed kindly and said, 'Another officer is there. Don't be afraid.'

We flew through some clouds. There were very white, like cottonwool, and beautiful. Then we began to come down because we were near Singapore. We went through the clouds and flew over Singapore. It was very interesting. When we get out of the aeroplane, I said, 'I like flying!'

cottonwool = kapas

1. A. I bought my ticket on Monday morning.  
 B. I bought my ticket twelve days ago.  
 C. The office bought my ticket.  
 D. I bought the ticket in Singapore.
2. A. We put our luggage in the aeroplane.  
 B. Others put our luggage in the aeroplane.  
 C. The other passengers put my luggage in the aeroplane.  
 D. Our luggage was not in the aeroplane.
3. A. I have often been in an aeroplane.  
 B. I have never been in an aeroplane.  
 C. I have been in an aeroplane once.  
 D. I usually travel by aeroplane.

4. A. The air-hostess made me feel happy.  
B. The air-hostess frightened me.  
C. I did not see the air-hostess.  
D. The air-hostess was not kind.
5. A. The aeroplane went through the clouds because they were beautiful  
B. The aeroplane went through the clouds because it was near Singapore.  
C. The aeroplane went through the clouds because Singapore was very interesting.  
D. The aeroplane went through the clouds because I like flying.

Taken from: TPB Tengah Semester 1985/1986

Date : October 25, 1985

Text II:

The Earth's Rotations

The earth spins in space rather like a top. It rotates on its axis. At the same time it revolves round the sun. There is always a part of the earth facing the sun. It is then day for that part of the earth and night for the other part. We measure our days and nights by these rotations of the earth. One rotation of the earth takes twenty-four hours which is one day, One revolution of the earth round the sun takes 365 days. These revolutions are our years.

1. What kind of movement does the earth do?

It rotates on .....

- A. the sun
- B. the earth
- C. its axis
- D. the other part

2. How long does one rotation of the earth take?

One rotation of the earth takes .....

- A. one night
- B. one day
- C. 365 days
- D. 12 hours

3. When is it night on any part of the earth?

- A. It is night on any part of the earth when the other part is behind the sun.
- B. It is night on any part of the earth when the sun is shining on the other part of the earth.
- C. It is night on any part of the earth when it is dark on the other part of the earth.
- D. It is night on any part of the earth when the sun is not shining on the other part of the earth.

4. How many days does one revolution of the earth round the sun take?

One revolution of the earth round the sun takes .....

- A. 365 days
- B. only one day
- C. 24 days
- D. 12 days

5. What do we call each period of days?

- A. A year
- B. A night
- C. An hour
- D. A day and a night

Taken from: TPB 1982/1983

Date : November 1, 1982

Text III:

One of the famous monuments in the world, the Statue of Liberty, was presented to the United States of America in the nineteenth century by the people of France. The great statue, which was designed by the sculptor Auguste Bartoldi, took ten years to complete. The actual figure was made of copper supported by a metal framework which had been especially constructed by Eiffel. Before it could be transported to the United States, a site had to be found for it and a pedestal had to be built. The site chosen was an island at the entrance of New York Harbour. By 1884, a statue which was 151 feet tall, had been erected in Paris. The following year, it was taken to pieces and sent to America. By the end of October 1886, the statue had been put together again and it was officially presented to the American people by Bartoldi. Ever since then, the great monument has been a symbol of liberty for the

million of people who have passed through New York Harbour to make their homes in America.

1. The Statue of Liberty was first put up
  - A. in 1886
  - B. at the entrance of New York Harbour
  - C. in Paris
  - D. on a pedestal at the entrance of New York Harbour
2. The Statue of Liberty was presented to the American people
  - A. by Eiffel who was sculptor
  - B. by Bartoldi who made the metal framework
  - C. by the French Premier
  - D. by the sculptor Bartoldi
3. Who was the statue presented ...?  
The people of France.
  - A. from
  - B. by
  - C. to
  - D. at
4. It took him ten years to complete it. That's how long ... to do it.
  - A. he took
  - B. him took
  - C. took him
  - D. he was taken

5. It was made ... copper.
- A. by
  - B. from
  - C. of
  - D. in
6. It was Eiffel ... constructed the metal framework.
- A. whom
  - B. which
  - C. who
  - D. whose
7. A site had to be found for it was necessary ... for it.
- A. a site to be found
  - B. for to be found a site
  - C. for a site to be found
  - D. to be found a site
8. Copper is a kind of ...
- A. stone
  - B. marble
  - C. wood
  - D. metal
9. It was especially constructed by Eiffel.  
It was constructed ...
- A. in particular
  - B. particularly
  - C. for a special purpose
  - D. on purpose



10. A site had to be found for it ... had to be found.

- A. A land
- B. A plot of land
- C. A property
- D. An estate

Taken from: EBTA SMA Jurusan IPA 1981/1982

Date : April 15, 1982

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