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Research Note 52-114

ANALYSIS OF THE SPANISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TEST
AGAINST INTERNAL CRITERION

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BACKGROUND

The Spanish Language Proficiency Test (PRT 1585) is one of the tests designed cooperatively by the Personnel Research Section and the Army Language School. More detailed information about the background of the test and the operational problems involved is given in PRS Report No. 926, Summary Report on Eight Language Proficiency Tests.

POPULATION STUDIED

Seven thousand Spanish Language Proficiency Test answer sheets were returned to the Personnel Research Section between 6 April 1950 and 12 February 1951. Approximately one thousand answer sheets were useless for study since these papers were almost completely void of responses. This group was probably composed of Spanish-speaking individuals who knew little or no English and of persons whose knowledge of Spanish was extremely poor. Since these men could not feasibly be used operationally, the resulting usable cases were considered representative of the population claiming knowledge of the language. A sample of 542 subjects was selected from the total number of usable answer sheets. The representativeness of the sample distribution for the parent population was checked by the chi-square technique. A probability between .80 and .90 that differences as large or larger than those existing between the sample and population distributions could have occurred by chance was found. The sample for any one part, however, included only those individuals' results who attempted at least a maximum number of items in each part to be included in the sample for the particular part. Thus, 542 claimants examined met this standard on Parts I and II, 486 on Part III, and 473 on Part IV. For additional information on sampling see PRS Report No. 926.

Since the manner in which facility in Spanish is acquired in the United States varies from learning on the street level to learning in the highest educational level, it may be expected that a wide range of proficiency in ability to "understand," "read," and "write" the language would be observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviations (S.D.) of the various parts of the Spanish Language Proficiency Test. The mean-part scores of

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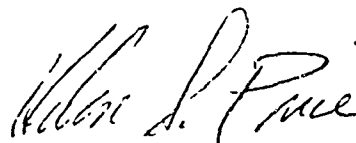
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13.2 and 11.1 for facility in understanding (Parts I and II) and facility in writing (Part IV) respectively, show that these parts were somewhat difficult for the group tested. The mean score (7.7) of the group on Part III, however, indicates this part was of average difficulty for them. As in the other languages, no statement can be made as to whether the resulting mean-part scores are product of the inherent difficulty of the test, or of the nature of the sample.

The percentages of test population rated Fluent, Fair, or Poor on the basis of a common conversion table are presented in Table 3. The percentages of the population rated as Fluent are 7.2% in Parts I and II, 43.3% in Part III and 16.3% in Part IV. The relatively high proportion of individuals rated Fluent in Part III (facility in reading) may be due to any one or all of the following factors:

- (1) The group rated Fluent in facility to understand actually possesses the required Fluency.
- (2) Part III is too easy and does not adequately represent the true levels of proficiency required.
- (3) The cutting score is too low.

No evidence favoring any one of these explanations is presently available.

There appears to be some overlap in what the different parts of the test measures. Table 2 shows the same pattern of intercorrelations between parts as is seen for all other language tests. As in other tests analyzed, it would appear that this is due more to the functional relationship between "understanding," "reading," and "writing" than inept test making. No statement can be made about what is measured by each part of the test.

Biserial correlation coefficients between each part and its component items were computed; one exception was that the combined scores of Parts I and II served as the part score with which items in Part I and Part II were correlated. The highest and lowest twenty percent of the biserial distributions are indicated in Table 3. It must be noted, that all but items 8, 12, 19, 21, and 25 in Parts I and II, and item 104 in Part IV are significantly related beyond the .001 level of confidence to their component parts. Entries in Table 3 for Part III of the test have been omitted. Since the timed nature of the test with the resulting omission of items tends to increase the magnitude of the biserial correlations, it was felt that any comparison between these values would be misleading. All the obtained biserial values for the items in Part III of this test were found to be statistically different from zero at the .001 level of confidence.

In an effort to determine which items appear to be "easy" or "hard" for this sample, reasonable standards for the proportion of individuals answering each item correctly were sought.

It was decided that all items correctly answered by 20 percent of the sample or less will be considered "hard." All items correctly answered by 80 percent of the sample or more will be considered "easy." The items which were found to be "easy" or "hard" by these standards are indicated in Table 4.

Since speed is an important factor in various parts of the test, no measures of reliability could be obtained from a single test administration.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUMMARY OF RESULTS

1. The Spanish language claimants appeared to find Parts I and II and Part III below medium difficulty while Part IV was of average difficulty for the group.
2. There is some overlap in what the various parts of the test measure.
3. No statement can be made about the validity or reliability of the test.

TABLE 1

DIFFICULTY IN TERMS OF AVERAGE VALUES ON THE SPANISH LANGUAGE
PROFICIENCY TEST

Parts of Test	No. of Subjects	Maximum Possible Score	Mean Score	S. D.
Parts I and II Score (Understanding)	342	44	13.2	11.1
Part III Score (Reading)	486	15	7.7	4.6
Part IV Score (Writing)	473	30	11.1	7.5