



The prediction of English proficiency of teaching candidates at Montana State College  
by Robert Norman Noyes

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Montana State University

© Copyright by Robert Norman Noyes (1962)

Abstract:

The purpose of this investigation was to develop a method of predicting the English proficiency of teaching candidates at Montana State College. The sample population was 142 student teachers of the 1959-1960 school year at Montana State College; of these, complete data were gathered on 92 subjects. The procedure consisted of four steps: (1) review of the literature on English proficiency, (2) selection of a criterion of English proficiency, (3) selection of factors to predict English proficiency and statistical treatment of them to determine their predictive value, and (4) a validation study of the method of prediction using the autumn 1960 student teachers at Montana State College.

The success criterion of English proficiency selected was a composite of three scores: (1) freshman English grade-point average, (2) Hew Purdue Placement Test in English score, and (3) supervising teacher's rating of student teacher's English proficiency. Nine factors from the high school and college records of the subjects were selected and programmed for a computer to obtain a multiple regression equation which would predict English proficiency of future students. Multiple regression equations for predicting the composite score and the Purdue Test score had correlations of .717 and .696, respectively. Four of the nine factors selected to predict English proficiency met tests of significance more often than the other factors: (1) high school English mark, (2) mathematics test score, (3) college freshman year grade-point average, and (4) ACE total score. In the validation study using 58 autumn 1960 student teachers, the predicted composite and Purdue Test scores correlated with the actual scores .795 and .783, respectively.

The main conclusion based on the findings of this study was that the English proficiency of teaching candidates can be predicted. A second conclusion was that the Hew Purdue Placement Test in English can be used to determine the English proficiency of a student if a single instrument is desired.

THE PREDICTION OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF TEACHING  
CANDIDATES AT MONTANA STATE COLLEGE

by

ROBERT NORMAN NOYES 1929-

A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree

of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Approved:

Wilford Franks  
Head, Major Department

Wilford Franks  
Chairman, Examining Committee

Leon H. Johnson  
Dean, Graduate Division

MONTANA STATE COLLEGE  
Bozeman, Montana

August, 1962

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Many persons cooperated and assisted in the completion of this study. The investigator wishes to thank the student teachers who participated in this investigation for the time and consideration they have given in taking tests and granting interviews. He is also grateful to the supervising teachers throughout Montana who contributed time and thought in filling out questionnaires.

The writer is appreciative of the guidance, encouragement, and assistance received from the faculty and services of Montana State College. Special appreciation should be given to Martha L. Hawksworth, Registrar of the College who allowed the investigator to use official transcripts; the Testing and Counseling Service, which provided test scores and did test scoring; and to Dr. Milford Franks, adviser to the writer, who gave guidance and encouragement.

R.N.N.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
The Problem . . . . .	3
The Procedures . . . . .	3
II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON ENGLISH PROFICIENCY . . . . .	6
Views on Proficiency in English . . . . .	6
Proficiency Tests in English for Credentials Candidates Used in College . . . . .	14
Summary . . . . .	16
III. DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPOSITE SCORE OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY . . . . .	18
Achievement in Freshman English as a Criterion of English Proficiency . . . . .	19
The New Purdue Placement Test in English as a Criterion of English Proficiency . . . . .	20
Questionnaire Results of Supervising Teacher's Rating of Student Teacher as a Criterion of English Proficiency . . . . .	22
Computation of Composite Score of English Proficiency . . . . .	37
Summary . . . . .	38
IV. PREDICTIVE VALUE OF FACTORS SELECTED TO INDICATE ENGLISH PROFICIENCY . . . . .	40
Selected Factors Used as Predictive Criteria of English Proficiency . . . . .	40
Definition of Statistical Instruments Used to Determine Predictive Value of the Criteria of English Proficiency . . . . .	44
Computation of Multiple Regression Equation to Predict English Proficiency . . . . .	46
Results of the Computation of the Multiple Regression Equation to Predict English Proficiency . . . . .	47
Comparison of the Four Multiple Regression Equations . . . . .	57
Summary . . . . .	58

Chapter	Page
V. VALIDATION OF THE REGRESSION EQUATIONS FOR PREDICTION OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY . . . . .	61
Procedures Used in the Validation of the Multiple Regression Equations Using 1960 Autumn Quarter Student Teachers . . . . .	62
Results of the Validation Procedures . . . . .	64
Summary . . . . .	66
VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS . . . . .	67
Summary . . . . .	67
Conclusions . . . . .	70
Recommendations . . . . .	71
APPENDIX . . . . .	73
Appendix A: English Proficiency Questionnaire Sent to Supervising Teachers . . . . .	74
Appendix B: Interview Form for Validation of the Ques- tionnaire Results . . . . .	76
LITERATURE CONSULTED . . . . .	78

## LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
I. Relation of English Proficiency of Teaching Candidates to Factors in the Home Background . . . . .	28
II. Relation of English Proficiency of Teaching Candidates to Selected Factors . . . . .	30
III. Supervising Teachers' Ratings on Questionnaire Items: Grammar . . . . .	32
IV. Supervising Teachers' Ratings on Questionnaire Items: Speech . . . . .	33
V. Supervising Teachers' Ratings on Questionnaire Items: Organization and Presentation of Material in a Coherent Manner . . . . .	34
VI. Supervising Teachers' Responses to Questionnaire Items: Desirability of an Additional English Course for Teaching Candidates . . . . .	36
VII. Results of the Computation of Multiple Regression Equations . . . . .	49
VIII. Example of the Derivation of a Student's Composite Score of English Proficiency . . . . .	51

## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this investigation was to develop a method of predicting the English proficiency of teaching candidates at Montana State College. The sample population was 142 student teachers of the 1959-1960 school year at Montana State College; of these, complete data were gathered on 92 subjects. The procedure consisted of four steps: (1) review of the literature on English proficiency, (2) selection of a criterion of English proficiency, (3) selection of factors to predict English proficiency and statistical treatment of them to determine their predictive value, and (4) a validation study of the method of prediction using the autumn 1960 student teachers at Montana State College.

The success criterion of English proficiency selected was a composite of three scores: (1) freshman English grade-point average, (2) New Purdue Placement Test in English score, and (3) supervising teacher's rating of student teacher's English proficiency. Nine factors from the high school and college records of the subjects were selected and programmed for a computer to obtain a multiple regression equation which would predict English proficiency of future students. Multiple regression equations for predicting the composite score and the Purdue Test score had correlations of .717 and .696, respectively. Four of the nine factors selected to predict English proficiency met tests of significance more often than the other factors: (1) high school English mark, (2) mathematics test score, (3) college freshman year grade-point average, and (4) ACE total score. In the validation study using 58 autumn 1960 student teachers, the predicted composite and Purdue Test scores correlated with the actual scores .795 and .783, respectively.

The main conclusion based on the findings of this study was that the English proficiency of teaching candidates can be predicted. A second conclusion was that the New Purdue Placement Test in English can be used to determine the English proficiency of a student if a single instrument is desired.

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

The importance of effective communication is such a well-known fact that quoting authorities to support it would be laboring the point. The main obligation of school systems should be to teach effective use of the language to the pupils. The importance of language in schools can be realized by noting that in addition to being the content of courses offered in the curriculum, it is the medium through which much knowledge is dispensed. If the schools fail in the area of the language arts, they ultimately fail in many areas. A committee of the Commission on Secondary School Curriculum substantiated the importance of English in the schools by stating: "Language is the instrument above all others by which most persons are enabled at once to develop and participate in their own culture."<sup>1</sup>

If it is accepted that proficiency in the use of language is the most important duty of schools, it follows that developing proficiency in English becomes the duty of all teachers in all areas. It follows further that people entering the teaching profession should have a good command of the language in order to develop proficiency in the pupils. This need is gaining official notice as shown by the following excerpt from the Great Falls Tribune concerning state board action:

Informal discussion Monday brought suggestions that teachers, regardless of what fields they major in, should use good English and

---

<sup>1</sup>The Committee on the Function of English in General Education for the Commission on Secondary School Curriculum, Language in General Education, p. 3.

this deserves consideration when applications for certification are presented by graduates of colleges and universities.<sup>2</sup>

The English proficiency of candidates for teaching certificates at Montana State College has been determined in the past by the rating scale which the supervising teacher fills out after the student teacher has completed his assignment. This one to five rating scale has some shortcomings. The one and two ratings, which are the lowest, are rarely used, thus resulting in a three-point scale which fails to discriminate in English proficiency among the candidates to a satisfactory degree. Furthermore, the rating is made at an advanced stage in the student's education, usually the senior year, when it is too late to provide remedial work. The grades in English courses are also available, but there has been no systematic or statistical study to find predictive criteria of English proficiency. It was hoped that this type of study would provide information that would be helpful in advising students in the teacher preparatory curriculum and also in improving the English proficiency of Montana State College student teachers.

The national prominence given to English proficiency and the importance placed on English proficiency in the classroom by state authorities led to the desire to investigate the problem of early identification of English proficiency of candidates for teaching certificates at Montana State College.

---

<sup>2</sup>"Board of Education Serious About Better English," Great Falls Tribune, December 13, 1955, p. 1.

### The Problem

The problem was to investigate English proficiency of teaching candidates by looking at errors made while student teaching, while taking objective tests and to examine the high school and college freshman records to see if there were any factors related to proficiency in English. The problem involved statistical treatment of the data to derive the predictive value of these factors and a multiple regression equation for the actual prediction of a student's proficiency in English. The methods used in this study are listed in the next section.

### The Procedures

The first step in the investigation was to review the literature on English proficiency to furnish information for the next procedure--determining the success criteria or measurement of English proficiency for the sample population of the study. Three factors were selected as success criteria: the New Purdue Placement Test in English,<sup>3</sup> an objective, machine-scored examination; grades obtained in college freshman English; and a questionnaire filled out by the supervising teachers and validated by interviews.

The third step was to select factors which could be used for predictive criteria to predetermine English proficiency. The following nine

---

<sup>3</sup>Wykoff, G. F.; McKee, J. H.; and Remmers, H. H., The New Purdue Placement Test in English, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1955. In future references this test will be referred to as the Purdue Test.

factors were chosen on the bases of availability and relation to English proficiency:

1. High school English mark
2. High school mark in field of major interest
3. American Council on Education Psychological Examination for College Freshmen quantitative score<sup>4</sup>
4. ACE language score
5. ACE total score
6. Freshmen Week mathematics test score
7. College freshmen year grade-point average
8. College grade-point average in field of major interest
9. College grade-point average in field of minor interest

Next, the predictive criteria and success criteria were programmed on a computer in order to determine the predictive value of each of the nine factors and also to determine a multiple regression equation for prediction of each individual student's English proficiency. The sample population used in this study was 142 student teachers at Montana State College during the 1959-1960 school year. Complete data were gathered on 92 (64.8%) of the 142 subjects.

The final step involved the validation of the method by predicting the English proficiency of 58 autumn 1960 Montana State College student teachers by means of a multiple regression equation and then comparing

---

<sup>4</sup>The abbreviation ACE will be used for the American Council on Education Psychological Examination for College Freshmen in subsequent references.

the results with the actual score of each student teacher as determined from the three success criteria named above.

Chapter 2 contains the review of the literature, the first step in the investigation.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Because this study was concerned with the English proficiency of candidates for teaching certificates, a review of the literature on English proficiency was made to determine what authorities have had to say about proficiency in English. The importance of the problem, already stressed in the first chapter, is re-emphasized in the following statement from a survey on teacher training: "Certainly no school board should employ any teacher who cannot speak clearly, agreeably, and fluently."<sup>1</sup> In this chapter different views on proficiency in English are discussed, followed by a section on English proficiency tests for teachers.

#### Views on Proficiency in English

With the advent of study and interest in linguistics in the twentieth century, a major controversy about the standards of English usage developed. On the one hand, traditionalists defended the rules devised by eighteenth century grammarians such as Lowth and Murray as standards to determine whether construction and usage were correct or incorrect. Thus any particular usage could be declared right or wrong by referring to rules. On the other hand, linguists studying language and language change stated that change was, is, and will always be inherent in language, and

---

<sup>1</sup>Report of a Joint Committee of the Faculty of Harvard College and of the Graduate School of Education, The Training of Secondary School Teachers, p. 65.

the current usage of any society determines the acceptability. "Right" and "wrong" cannot be applied to usage; instead, "acceptable," "preferred," or "poor" are to be used. Social setting determines acceptability: a specific usage such as ain't may be poor in one setting, acceptable in another. Most people are at neither extreme, but critics and teachers tend to lean toward one or the other extreme. The traditional and linguistic approaches are treated in the following sections.

The traditional approach. The traditional approach to English proficiency is that there are certain standards or minimum essentials that can and should be taught through the medium of rules. This approach is opposed to the linguistic approach which is based on usage and spontaneity. The following passage states the danger of the latter view:

On the one hand, the demand is universal that high school graduates shall be trained to write "grammatically" and clearly in the popular sense of "grammar" and an acceptable sense of "clarity." To write correctly does not in itself imply the acquisition of "literary" virtues. On the other hand, a large and articulate body of educational theorists and of high school English teachers seems to be of the opinion that the primary purpose of "writing" is the release of "creative activity," arguing that training in correctness follows upon the release of this activity, and not the other way around. This theory has a certain value, but its supporters sometimes appear so convinced of the value of creative activity per se that they grow impatient with the dull drill of syntax, "grammar," punctuation, mastery of paragraph structure and the like.<sup>2</sup>

A more forceful defending statement is made by Ward:

All teachers still value spontaneity, and we secure quite a bit of it; but we have learned that it is not a curriculum subject,

---

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

that we cannot require it. What we can require, what it is honest not to require, is accuracy. It is wrong to leave pupils so ignorant of mechanics that their letters prove them to be uneducated.<sup>3</sup>

He continues by stating that "With one common judgment the world insists on at least a modicum of ability to make clear sentences."<sup>4</sup>

A method frequently employed by defenders of the traditional approach is illustrated in the following excerpt from Clapp. He lists examples of usage which are now accepted by some authority but which grate the ear. The following are selected examples he uses from a handbook printed by the Iowa Department of Public Instruction:

- 7. Have father or Jim called me?
- 9. A great heap of books are on my table.
- 13. These kind of letters are scarce.
- 20. Having looked at our watches, no time was lost . . .
- 30. The reason we moved is because we were annoyed.
- 33. Due to the flood they moved in a hurry.<sup>5</sup>

These are constructions that the booklet tells teachers of English IX-X not to correct as they are considered acceptable.

An excellent defense of the traditional view is offered by Bloomfield.<sup>6</sup> He compares the idea that since all language changes, we should

<sup>3</sup>Ward, C. H., What Is English? p. 25.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>5</sup>Clapp, H. S., "The Prose That Depresses," Journal of Higher Education 26:433-435, November, 1955.

<sup>6</sup>Bloomfield, M. W., "The Problem of Fact and Value in the Teaching of English," College English 15:33-37, October, 1953.

not stop it, to the thought that since we all die, we should not utilize doctors. The change in language should be slowed down by prescriptive grammar for four reasons:

1. Social utility--there is a belief in our culture that a correct grammar exists; therefore it is the duty of English teachers to teach it.
2. An aid to understanding the past--if language changes too rapidly, ability to comprehend the language of the past decreases.
3. Aesthetics--sloppy language leads to a loss in the beauty of the language.
4. Intellectual breadth--sloppy language limits the vocabulary which is important to the broad understanding of things.

He maintains that usage is important and the study of linguistics is important but reasons that man determines usage and therefore can control it.

A survey by Pooley<sup>7</sup> led him to conclude that the majority of high school English teachers taught formal, traditional English, the state courses of study expected considerable analytical and structural grammar in the grades, and textbooks dwelt on formal aspects of structural grammar. Evidence of Pooley's conclusion is found in the following statement:

Evidence from several contributing sources supports the conclusion that faith in the efficacy of formal grammar to develop successful writers and speakers is held by a very large number, perhaps the majority, of current teachers of English.

Thus, command of formal rules is held to be English proficiency by many experts in the field.

---

<sup>7</sup>Pooley, R. C., Teaching English Grammar, pp. 34-51.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

The traditionalists include supporters of minimum essentials in English as is seen in the following statement in which an argument for the teaching of essentials revealed by research in spoken and written errors is presented:

Because research has shown which essentials are causing the greatest number of errors in speech and in writing, pupils and teachers are armed with the technique for mastering these essentials through habit forming practice at the specific point where the individual pupil's<sup>9</sup> language falls below the level of acceptable colloquial English.

Mirrielees, too, advocates the stressing of minimum essentials as shown in her statement:

After years of blundering, one of the most sensible conclusions reached is this: In each term there should be a few decencies in form and written expression that must be acquired by every pupil before he can be passed to a higher grade. These decencies in form and written expression have been termed "The Minimum Essentials in the Mechanics of Composition." A belief in the establishment of such a minimum requirement grew out of the discovery that on the whole boys and girls will do what they have to do.<sup>10</sup>

The defenders of traditional usage as proficiency in English are numerous and influential. Their arguments as listed are solid; however, their stand is being attacked by supporters of the linguistic approach as described in the following section.

The linguistic approach. The extreme linguist would say that if the verbal sounds communicate, they are acceptable; however, the more careful

<sup>9</sup>Broening, A. M., and others, Conducting Experiences in English, p. 344.

<sup>10</sup>Mirrielees, L. B., Teaching Composition and Literature, p. 62.

and studious linguists examine the way in which language changes and attempt to bring the standards of acceptability in line with this change.

The following statement from an accepted college handbook of English presents the linguistic argument that right and wrong are not applicable to good English; instead a value judgment of effectiveness in communication should be used:

Good English is something more than writing "complete" sentences, using certain verb forms, making verbs agree with their subjects, and pronouns match their antecedents. Good English is language that is effective and appropriate for its specific purpose. . . . It is not so much a question of "right or wrong" as of "more or less effective." It is, therefore, a matter of selection and judgment more than of rules.<sup>11</sup>

The chapter continues with the statement that there are different levels of usage and that some statements not acceptable at a formal level are acceptable as good English at other levels.

The Commission on the English Curriculum of the National Council of Teachers of English in commenting on standards in English states that "minimum essentials, objective standards, . . . imply a uniformity of ability and attainment which does not exist among human beings."<sup>12</sup> As a result, "Efforts to set a floor, a ceiling, or a norm for a class are as futile as they are injurious to the individual learner."<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup>Perrin, P. G., and Smith, G. H., The Perrin-Smith Handbook of English, p. 20.

<sup>12</sup>The Commission on the English Curriculum of the National Council of Teachers of English, The English Language Arts, p. 189.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

Hill<sup>14</sup> attacks the logic of formal grammar with examples similar to the following: I see him involves no action; therefore the objective case is not logical. He states that any form is correct if it is current in dialect. By analyzing the reasons for the change from correct forms of formal grammar, he justifies such usages as "He couldn't of had . . . ," "Rooms for tourist," and "Youse had better." The article concludes with the advice that teachers should find and teach the facts rather than rely on myth.

Another attacker<sup>15</sup> of the fundamentals set up by grammarians says that skills cannot be isolated as they are interdependent. Many of the skills are also merely conventions. What the English teachers should concentrate on is the thinking and habits, not the skills. The difference between habits and skills is not made clear in this article.

A typical statement of the linguists about standards is as follows: "The standards of correct English in America shall be determined by the usage of the best speakers and writers of the current generation."<sup>16</sup> This quote and others similar to it by supporters of the linguistic approach do not answer crucial questions concerning the selection of the best speakers and writers, the standards to be taught, the duration that the standards shall remain valid, and so on.

---

<sup>14</sup>Hill, Archibald A., "Correctness and Style in English Composition," College English 12:280-285, February, 1951.

<sup>15</sup>Osenburg, F. C., "'Tests' of 'English Fundamentals,'" College English 11:277-281, February, 1950.

<sup>16</sup>"The Responsibility for Language Usage," Journal of Higher Education 23:154, March, 1952.

However, some of the attackers of the formal grammatical approach to English proficiency who defend the linguistic approach stress the point that mastery of grammar is nonetheless extremely important. Parker takes this stand in the following statement:

Yet every teacher of English knows that tests of ability to spell and to write grammatical, properly punctuated sentences do not test the ability to engage successfully in expressional activities. The mastery of the elements of expression is essential, but their mastery does not assure effective communication.<sup>17</sup>

The Committee on the Function of English in General Education for the Commission on Secondary School Curriculum states that the grammar and rhetoric once valuable as a basis for classical study are now empty shells.<sup>18</sup> The report continues by saying that "Correctness in grammar must be judged by spoken practice not merely by formal rules derived from literary texts."<sup>19</sup> The student should work from the facts of language to the general, an inductive rather than deductive approach, but this should be done under the guidance of a teacher thoroughly grounded in grammar.<sup>20</sup>

The linguists have contributed much information about language and the process of language change; however, in doing this they have attacked

<sup>17</sup>Parker, Roscoe E., The Principles and Practices of Teaching English, p. 217.

<sup>18</sup>The Committee on the Function of English in General Education for the Commission on Secondary School Curriculum, Language in General Education, pp. 65-66.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 81.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

the standards of English proficiency set up by traditional grammarians and have offered no substitute standards to replace them. In deriving a measure of English proficiency, the findings of the linguists must be weighed and synthesized with the minimum essentials of the older grammarians. In Chapter 3 this was attempted in the formation of criteria of English proficiency for candidates for teaching certificates.

Proficiency Tests in English for Credentials  
Candidates Used in Colleges

In order to sample what was being done in colleges to test the English proficiency of teaching candidates, the investigator asked the National Council of Teachers of English for information. In response, the Council provided information on colleges and universities experimenting with English proficiency tests for teaching candidates.<sup>21</sup> The Council also stated that the college level tests being widely used were the Cooperative English Test, the New Purdue Placement Test in English, the Essentials of English Tests, the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress-Writing, and the Cooperative Literary Comprehension and Appreciation Test.

Three return letters were received from requests sent out to colleges experimenting in English proficiency tests. The Test Officer of San Jose State College, San Jose, California, reported that no test was actually being used although it was being considered and that teaching candidates, along with the rest of the entering freshmen, were placed according

---

<sup>21</sup>Letter from the National Council of Teachers of English dated October 28, 1959.

to the verbal part of the College Qualification Test, the Cooperative Reading Examination, and a 90 minute essay examination. The Education Division of San Jose State College is considering the use of an English proficiency examination for students before they go into practice teaching. One test discussed was the Teacher Education Program administered by the Educational Testing Office.<sup>22</sup>

The Dean of Graduate Studies at Fresno State College, Fresno, California, stated that the college is using the American Council on Education Mechanics of Expression Test for screening teaching candidates. The cutting point is the 50th percentile for sophomores in liberal arts colleges. As the result of an informal study conducted at the college in 1949 it was found that a marked degree of consistency between performance in writing and the Mechanics of Expression Test existed, and as a result, the composition was dropped. Fresno State College is not certain the composition should have been dropped, but it has not been reinstated because of the correcting time involved. The college indicated that it was not thoroughly satisfied with the instrument now being used for two reasons. First, ability to pass the test apparently does not ensure the use of Standard English in the classroom. Furthermore, it was felt that the tests included some items that scholars in linguistics would dispute. It is the Dean's belief that work needs to be done on item analysis of the test and correlation between use of English in the classroom and test performance.

---

<sup>22</sup>Letter from John C. Woodward, Test Office at San Jose State College, San Jose, California, dated November 6, 1959.

A subcommittee of the California Council on Teacher Education, of which the Dean is a member, is consulting with the Educational Testing Service to develop a special test for the screening of teacher candidates.<sup>23</sup>

The School of Education at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, sent a copy of the English Proficiency Examination given to all candidates for degrees in the College and in the Schools of Education, Journalism, Fine Arts, and Medicine. It may be taken during the junior or senior year, and if it is failed twice, the student enters a special composition course and attempts the examination again after completing the course. The examination is a composition written on topics on which university juniors and seniors should be able to write. It is graded on content, organization, paragraph and sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. The test is to indicate mastery rather than be used for placement.<sup>24</sup>

#### Summary

A review of literature on English proficiency and a limited investigation of English Proficiency tests for teaching candidates in colleges were undertaken in order to gain a better understanding of what authorities had to say about English proficiency and to see what was being done with

---

<sup>23</sup>Letter from Phyllis W. Watts, Dean of Graduate Studies at Fresno State College, Fresno, California, dated November 30, 1959.

<sup>24</sup>Letter from Oscar M. Haugh, Professor of Education at the University of Kansas, Lawrence, Kansas, dated October 21, 1959.

the English proficiency of teaching candidates.

The literature on English proficiency fell into two main groups: the traditionalist and the linguistic. The traditional approach is that there are fixed standards of correct grammar which can be identified as minimum essentials and that these standards should be taught. On the other hand, the linguistic approach is that standards of proficiency in English change as language is a changing thing. Thus, the student of language should describe this change in terms of what language is actually being used by people to communicate rather than prescribe fixed standards.

Letters from selected colleges using and experimenting with English proficiency tests for teaching candidates indicated that there is concern and substantial interest in tests of this sort. The information received from these colleges and the review of the literature were helpful in selecting criteria of English proficiency used in this study and described in detail in Chapter 3.

### CHAPTER III

#### DEVELOPMENT OF A COMPOSITE SCORE OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

A criterion of English proficiency in teaching was devised after consulting with faculty members of Montana State College and giving the question of proficiency much consideration. The review of the literature was helpful in the selection of the criterion used, a composite of three scores:

1. Freshman English grade-point average
2. Total score on the New Purdue Placement Test in English
3. Score derived from supervising teacher's rating of student teacher's English proficiency

It was felt that a composite of these three factors would be more accurate than any single one because each represents a score that is derived differently from the others. The grade-point average in freshman English is given by an instructor professionally educated in English and is based on written and oral work. The Purdue Test is an objective test in English mechanics that renders a score free from many of the subjective influences that may effect the evaluation of the English instructor or the supervising teacher. The questionnaire was scored by the supervising teacher who had a chance to observe the student before a class as a prospective teacher. Chapter 3 deals with these three factors as measurements of English proficiency in teaching and concludes with a subsection on the composite of these scores.

Achievement in Freshman English as a  
Criterion of English Proficiency

One of the factors used in determining English proficiency of the 142 student teachers used in this study was the grade-point average of the first year<sup>2</sup> sequence in basic English. The freshman grade-point average in English was figured from the permanent records in the Registrar's Office of Montana State College. It was based on the three-quarter sequence of English taken in the freshman year of college. Letter grades were converted to numerical values to figure grade-point average as follows: four points for an A, three points for a B, two points for a C, and one point for a D. In the majority of cases the freshman sequence was either English 101-102-103 or English 111-112-113 at Montana State College.

English 101-102-103 is a nine credit sequence entitled English Composition and bears the following catalogue description:

A writing course giving special attention to the elements of effective modern style; including organization of ideas into sentences, paragraphs and longer units, and current usage in grammar and phrasing. Wide reading in contemporary prose, and constant emphasis on improvement in vocabulary and spelling.<sup>1</sup>

English 111-112-113 is a twelve credit sequence called Oral and Written Communication. It is described as follows: "A course in writing, reading, speaking, and listening aimed at developing recognition of the principles and skill in the techniques which apply to all communication situations."<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Montana State College Bulletin, XIII, 3, March, 1958, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

In the case of students who transferred to Montana State College from other institutions, the grades obtained in the freshman course at that particular institution were used.

The grade-point average in freshman English is important in determining the proficiency score in English as it is based on the opinion of an instructor professionally educated in English. The grade-point average is based on a year's observation by members of the English Department faculty of work in class and written work out of class. This was considered a valuable complement to the other two factors, one of which, the Purdue Test, is discussed next.

#### The New Purdue Placement Test in English as a Criterion of English Proficiency

The Purdue Test is an objective test of 65 minutes duration which critics feel is a measure of English proficiency through its measure of the following: recognition of grammatical errors, punctuation, sentence clearness and effectiveness, reading, vocabulary, and spelling. In the examiner's manual, the authors of the test state the primary purpose of it is "to sample the knowledge possessed by high school seniors or college freshman of what is called 'good English.'"<sup>3</sup> They add, however, that the test may be used for higher and lower levels and has been used with university graduate students. The authors of the test clarify what they mean by

---

<sup>3</sup>Wykoff, G. S.; McKee, J. H.; and Remmers, H. H., Examiner's Manual; The New Purdue Placement Test in English, p. 5.

"good English" in the following words:

In relation to what "good English" is, the writers hope and feel that they are not too doctrinaire in attitude, that they are neither too liberal nor too conservative. They have tried to avoid using questions concerning which dispute might arise between the "schools."<sup>4</sup>

The authors also state that although it was not devised as a predictive device, it has been found to be useful in the predicting of grade-point averages for freshmen at Purdue.<sup>5</sup>

The Purdue Test was selected as a criterion of English proficiency because the items in the test are relatively free from controversy and the test has been successfully used as a predictive instrument. The following reviews by Wantman and Lannholm substantiate these views:

The New Purdue Placement Test in English is a good test for measuring the "fundamentals of English." Even though there are still a few items for which the answers are probably controversial, the authors seem to have succeeded in not being "too doctrinaire in attitude, neither too liberal nor too conservative." The evidence for validity for English placement and for predicting success in first year performance at Purdue is strong enough to warrant universities' using this test for these purposes at their institutions provided they establish their own norms and determine evidence of validity based on their own students.<sup>6</sup>

The evidence presented indicates that the test has a high degree of effectiveness for the placement of college Freshmen in

---

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Wantman, M. J., reviewer, in The Fifth Mental Measurements Year-book, p. 200.

English courses.<sup>7</sup>

The Purdue Test score was included in the composite score of English proficiency because it is a more objective measure of the student's proficiency in English than the evaluations by the college instructor and the supervising teacher.

Only the total score on the Purdue Test was used in this study. The results from testing the candidates for teaching certificates at Montana State College yielded a score range of 81 to 196, a mean of 138.82, and a standard deviation of 21.3. Although national norms for the Purdue Test are being devised, there are relatively few as yet. The Examiner's Manual gives norms for 2744 students in the first year of college. The mean is 127.50 and the standard deviation is 28.51 for this group.

In addition to the freshman English grade-point average and the Purdue Test score, a score derived from a questionnaire on English proficiency filled out by the supervising teacher of each student teacher was used in the composite score of English proficiency. A copy of the questionnaire is in Appendix A.

Questionnaire Results of Supervising Teacher's  
Rating of Student Teacher as a Criterion  
of English Proficiency

It was felt by the investigator that the opinion of the supervising

---

<sup>7</sup>Lannholm, G. W., reviewer, in The Fifth Mental Measurements Yearbook, pp. 199-200.

teacher on the use of English by the student in the practice teaching situation would be a valuable contribution in an evaluation of English proficiency in teaching. The freshman grade-point average is based on the proficiency of the individual as a student judged by an expert in the field, and the objective test renders a score based on the individual's ability to read, analyze, and indicate correct usage on an answer sheet. The supervising teacher, however, has an opportunity to see the individual perform in front of a class and apply his English ability in a teaching situation. Questionnaires on student teachers' English proficiency were sent to the supervising teachers of all of the 1959-1960 student teachers in both the secondary and elementary levels. Of the 224 questionnaires sent out, 161 (72%) were returned. The construction of the questionnaire, the scoring, the results, and the interview used to validate it are discussed in the following sections.

Construction of the questionnaire on English proficiency. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first section contained 20 statements about English proficiency selected from a list which the investigator compiled from experience in the teaching of English. It was criticized and amended by selected faculty members of Montana State College. The second section requested opinions on the advisability of an additional formal English course and the content of the course. Spaces were left for remarks under each part, and many helpful suggestions and comments were supplied by the supervising teachers.

Statements 1 through 20 in the first part of the questionnaire are a mixture of positive and negative statements concerning English proficiency. Numbers 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 16, 18, and 19 are negative, and the remaining seven are positive. Some of the items such as 2 "Speaks in a monotone often" pertain to speech, and others such as 1 "Uses pronouns incorrectly" are concerned with grammatical errors. Items such as 17 "Pupils are attentive and seem interested" were devised to determine if the student teacher could organize material clearly and logically and present it coherently.

Scoring the questionnaires on English proficiency. The questionnaires were scored by giving one point for each positive item checked and subtracting one point for each negative item checked. This method is a standard one in scoring questionnaires of this type and was chosen after consultation with two experts on statistics. If questionnaires were returned by more than one supervising teacher for any one student, the scores were averaged. The scores ranged from -6 to +7 with a mean of 1.84 and a standard deviation of 2.86.

The second part of the questionnaire was added to obtain the supervising teachers' opinion on the advisability of an additional English course. If an additional course in English was indicated as desirable, the teacher was asked to check the type of course thought to be most advantageous to remedy the lack of proficiency.

The interview for validation of the questionnaire results. Interviews were conducted with the student teachers by the investigator to

determine the validity of the questionnaire returns. The interview served two purposes: it was scored by the investigator in order to validate the questionnaire, and questions about the background of the students were asked in order to determine the difference, if any, between students rated high in English proficiency and students rated low. The first part of this section contains a discussion of the limitations of the questionnaire which led to the validation study. The procedures used in the interview and in the validation of the questionnaire by the interview are next. A discussion of the responses of the students about their backgrounds concludes the section.

English grammar itself is not subject to absolute standards. Some traditional grammarians insist upon right or wrong usage while many modern linguists allow various levels of usage and tend to label whatever becomes common usage "acceptable." Thus there is a conservative-liberal stratum of grammatical usage. This is a serious problem in the construction of any English grammar test. The answers which are wrong to one person are acceptable to another. Thus in interpreting the items on the questionnaire, the supervising teacher might not consider some negative points important enough to check while others might feel strongly about standards and check every applicable negative item.

Another problem is the English proficiency of the supervising teacher. It is possible that a teacher with a liberal linguistic background may not be aware of some usages condemned by more traditional grammarians. This may explain the fact that only two checks were made on

item 6 "Uses infirm reference."

The subjectivity in judging the English proficiency of the student teachers can be determined to a degree by examining the results where two or more questionnaires were returned by different supervising teachers on the same student teacher. Generally the results were similar, but in some cases there was a great difference.

Forty-six of the 92 students for which complete data were gathered were interviewed. The interviews lasted from 20 to 30 minutes and were conducted according to a definite plan. A copy of the interview form may be found in Appendix B. In addition to recording answers to questions, the investigator noted the speech, grammar, diction, and organization of the responses. Immediately after the interview each of these points was scored on a five point basis with five being the highest rating and one the lowest. An average of the four ratings was used as an English proficiency rating by the investigator and was compared to the questionnaire score. The correlation between the questionnaire ratings and the interview ratings was .843. Most authorities would consider this a high correlation which indicates a strong relationship.<sup>8</sup>

In order to further utilize the interview, a related and interesting study was made of the relationship between English proficiency and the background of the students interviewed. The 46 student interview forms were divided into three divisions according to total scores on the

---

<sup>8</sup>For example, in Warters, Jane, Techniques of Counseling, p. 31, a correlation of .80 and up is labelled a very high correlation for two sets of data similar to those under discussion.

Purdue Test. The dividing points were arbitrarily selected to divide the results into three groups--upper, middle, and lower. The middle group consisted of those students scoring between 130 and 149, about half a standard deviation above and below the mean of 138.82. The upper and lower groups were those scoring above and below these limits respectively.

The frequencies of students' responses in each of the three categories to various questions about their home background are contained in Table I. It is interesting to note that about 50 percent of upper and middle division students come from towns above 5,000 population and 50 percent from below 5,000 population. There is also a marked distinction between these groups on the location of the home in the community. Over 70 percent of the upper and middle division students stated that they lived in town as opposed to on a farm; while the proportions were practically opposite with the lower group.

The upper group has slightly more college educated parents (43%) than the middle group (29%), but there is a sharp drop with the lower group (10%). The two higher divisions of students reported a similar pattern of parental employment with about 55 percent in the farmer-skilled labor class and 45 percent in the white collar-professional class; the upper division reported slightly more in the professions. The percentages for the lower divisions are 80 percent and 20 percent respectively. In the higher divisions, fewer siblings were found, with the sharpest division again between the middle group and the lower group.

In response to questioning on the number of periodicals taken in the

TABLE I. RELATION OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF TEACHING CANDIDATES TO FACTORS IN THE HOME BACKGROUND

Interview item	Responses by English proficiency group					
	Upper		Middle		Lower	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Population of town:						
Below 2,500	5	33	5	24	6	60
2,500-5,000	2	13	6	29	3	30
5,000-10,000	4	27	0		1	10
Above 10,000	4	27	10	48	0	
Location of home:						
Farm	4	27	4	19	7	70
Town	11	73	17	81	3	30
Education of parents:						
High school	16	53	29	69	18	90
One year college	1	3	2	5	0	
Two years college	6	20	4	10	1	5
College degree	5	17	6	14	1	5
Graduate work	1	3	0		0	
Employment of parents:						
Farming	4	27	5	24	6	60
Skilled labor	4	27	7	33	2	20
White collar	5	33	8	38	2	20
Professional	2	13	1	5	0	
Average number of siblings:	2.13		2.67		3.80	
Number of magazines in home:						
None	0		1	5	1	10
One	1	7	1	5	0	
Two	1	7	3	14	1	10
Three	2	13	7	33	4	40
Four	3	20	3	14	4	40
Five or more	8	53	6	29	0	
Foreign language spoken in home:						
Yes	3	20	6	29	5	50
No	12	80	15	71	5	50

home, no lower division student reported five or more; 29 percent of the middle group and 53 percent of the upper group did. The tabulation of homes in which a foreign language is spoken continues the pattern of upper and middle division similarity with a marked difference in the lower group. About four-fifths of the former division reported no foreign language spoken in the home as opposed to one-half of the lower group.

The interviewee's responses to questions about his activities and attitudes are found in Table II. The extracurricular activities reported in the three divisions fail to reveal any marked difference. More participation on the school paper was found in the higher groups. The fact that the lower group indicated more participation in dramatics than the others may be explained by the fact that the lower group attended smaller schools. However, this should also mean a higher participation in music which is not the case. The upper group reported less participation in sports, but this is probably not significant as the next item on the table shows that there are more girls in that group. In response to a query as to whether they considered themselves above-average, average, or below-average readers, the subjects responded as one would expect; that is, more responses in the below-average category occurred in the lower groups. It is interesting to note, however, that a higher percentage (38%) of the middle group indicated above average ability in reading than in the upper group (33%). None of the lower group responded in this category. The higher groups indicated more periodicals read and greater variety of periodicals read. The higher the group, the more favorable and less

TABLE II. RELATION OF ENGLISH PROFICIENCY OF TEACHING CANDIDATES TO  
SELECTED FACTORS

Interview item	Responses by English proficiency group					
	Upper		Middle		Lower	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
<b>Activities:</b>						
Extracurricula activity						
School paper	8	53	6	29	2	20
Dramatics	9	60	11	52	8	80
Music	8	53	8	38	2	20
Sports	4	27	13	62	6	60
Amount of reading						
Below average	1	7	4	19	6	60
Average	9	60	9	43	4	40
Above average	5	33	8	38	0	
Number of different magazines mentioned	19		16		9	
Average number of magazines read	3.33		2.67		1.60	
<b>Attitudes:</b>						
Attitude toward high school						
English						
Poor	0		11	52	7	70
Neutral	8	53	2	10	1	10
Good	7	47	8	38	2	20
Attitude toward college						
English						
Poor	1	7	4	19	4	40
Neutral	6	40	10	48	4	40
Good	8	53	7	33	2	20
<b>Sex:</b>						
Male	7	47	16	76	6	60
Female	8	53	5	24	4	40

unfavorable responses to attitude toward English courses in high school and college were given.

The interview results when divided into three groups on the basis of the Purdue Test indicated that there is a marked difference in types of responses between the lower groups and the two higher groups. The differences between the middle and upper groups are evident in a few categories, but for the most part the two groups responded similarly.

Supervising teachers' rating of student teachers' English proficiency by the checking of questionnaire items. The results of the supervising teachers' rating of the student teachers' English proficiency by checking questionnaire items were divided into four groups: grammar, speech, organization, and general. This division was made to make the discussion of the results clearer.

Nine items (1, 3, 5, 6, 10, 13, 15, 16, and 19) on the questionnaire pertained to grammar. In general, these were the least checked items by the supervising teachers. This could be explained in a number of ways: (1) the grammar of the student teachers was less objectionable than speech and organization, (2) the grammatical errors of the student teachers were not noticed and checked by the supervising teachers for some reason, or (3) the fact that eight of the nine items on grammar were phrased negatively. The latter was not done by design but probably because grammatical errors are usually discussed in a negative fashion. Nevertheless, it is human nature to check positive items over negative items in an evaluation.

The responses of the supervising teachers to the items on grammar

are found in Table III. Items 1, 6, 13, 15, and 16 were checked on less than 10 percent of the questionnaire.

TABLE III. SUPERVISING TEACHERS' RATINGS ON QUESTIONNAIRE ITEMS: GRAMMAR

Grammatical constructions	Supervising teachers checking item	
	Frequency	Percent
1. Uses pronouns incorrectly (Fred and me did it)	10	6
3. Avoids using unnecessary words (Where is it at?)	58	36
5. Uses incorrect verb forms (I seen)	19	12
6. Uses infirm reference (Sam and John took his (?) car home)	2	1
10. Misspells words on blackboard occasionally.	43	27
13. Uses double subjects occa- sionally (The man he . . . )	12	7
15. Uses expressions not acceptable in proper speech (ain't)	1	1
16. Uses double negatives (haven't no)	7	4
19. Does not always make his verbs agree with his subjects	18	11

Misspelling, in addition to receiving the most checks (27%) of the negative items, was mentioned as a special weakness in eight remarks. The two items on verbs, 5 and 19, received checks on 12 percent and 11 percent respectively of the returns and were the subject of remarks. One supervising teacher said that as a teacher he was guilty of not making verbs agree with subjects, and another said that he knew of teachers who used expressions such as "I seen,"

































































































