

REACTION: PRELIMINARY DEVELOPMENT OF A SCREENING INSTRUMENT FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES

JOAN B. ELLIOTT

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

Since very little research has been completed in diagnosing college-level students with learning disabilities, this study appears to be one with potential. Although today many more students with learning disabilities are diagnosed at the elementary level, there are students entering college classes, including foreign language classes, with undiagnosed learning problems.

Cloer's title, "The Development of a Screening Instrument . . ." does not exactly match the purpose given within the paper, i.e. "to determine whether or not the visual and auditory skills as measured by a short screening instrument were significantly related to foreign language achievement at the college level." Using grades as a dependent variable seems to allow for considerable variation in the results. The foreign languages to be learned may vary in difficulty. Likewise, professors grading students may utilize varying criteria in determining their grades.

In the review of literature, Cloer cited references related only to auditory and visual discrimination at the pre-reading or readiness stage as they related to reading achievement. Questions might be raised such as the following: are auditory and visual discrimination at the reading readiness stage related to achievement in a foreign language at the college level? Are there any studies available comparing reading skills achievement?

The screening device appears to be valid, however, no information was reported on the validity. The reliability coefficients were included, however, little background was given as to the establishment of the reliability scores.

There appears to be a high correlation between the auditory discrimination and achievement in some of the languages, but not in all. Perhaps this is due to the nature of the foreign language being studied. The assumption is made that learning to read English and learning to read a new language involves the same types of skills. In a foreign language, however, there is no prior listening base upon which students can build their understanding. More information is needed regarding the relationship between auditory and visual discrimination and language achievement.

Although these brief auditory and visual discrimination tests represent a good beginning in devising screening instruments, there is a concern regarding the correct responses to items in the auditory test. For example, in item 1, the correct answer for the short "i" sound in "flif" is to be *mirror*. According to Durkin (1981) and Wilson and Hall (1979) the "i" in *mirror* represents an r-controlled vowel. Also, in item 7, the "a" sound is not best represented by *arrow*. This too is r-controlled. The instrument would need to be varied in word choices depending upon the regional dialect.

As Cloer states "Only a small percentage of the variance in language achievement is accounted for by a very brief screening of perception. There are so many other variables . . ." These screening instruments, if refined, show potential

as one means for predicting those students with possible learning problems in a foreign language. Perhaps a different dependent variable, besides grades, might be used. In future studies, one might try to establish groups of students with similar backgrounds before evaluating the results of the tests. In replication studies, it might also be helpful to concentrate on studying three or four specific variables which are believed to have accounted for large amounts of variance. The diagnosing of students with learning disabilities at the college level is one of importance and perhaps this study is the beginning of a series of much needed studies.

REFERENCES

- Durkin, D. *Strategies for Identifying Words*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1981.
- Wilson, R. and Hall, M.A. *Programmed Word Attack for Teachers*. Columbus: Merrill Publishing Co., 1979.