The Word Part Levels Test

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It has been generally agreed that knowledge of English word parts plays an important role in learning English words. Research has shown that knowledge of word parts facilitates vocabulary learning; for example, if one knows the meaning of the English word 'happy' and the affix 'un-', it should be easy to learn the meaning of the word 'unhappy'. However, little is known as to how word part knowledge develops partly due to lack of measurement tools for L2 learners' overall knowledge of word parts. In the present research, the Word Part Levels Test (WPLT) was designed to measure multiple aspects of knowledge of word parts based on previous studies of what is involved in knowing word parts. In so doing, 118 affixes were selected based on frequency data in the British National Corpus. The WPLT consisted of the following three sections: form (recognition of written word parts), meaning (knowledge of their meanings), and use (knowledge of their syntactic properties). Measuring these three aspects of word part knowledge is of great practical value because the test can provide learners with diagnostic information that can be used to improve on their weaknesses. For example, a learner who got a low score on the use section might be able to improve his or her knowledge by learning the part of speech that an affix can make. The WPLT is also expected to be useful in investigating how the three aspects of word part knowledge develop and determining the difficulty level of different word parts. The WPLT was validated using a Rasch analysis through data from 440 Japanese learners of English and 1,348 people with various native languages. This paper reports on the procedure for creating the WPLT and provides its preliminary validity evidence.

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