DOES FRESHMAN ENGLISH IMPROVE ENGLISH USAGE?†

ROLAND L. BECK,* Edmond

ABSTRACT

The question as to how much freshman English courses improve the habitual English of students in Central State College was presented at the beginning of the 1938-1939 school year. The plan selected was to include a test in the fall and a similar test in the spring of the same school year. Dates were arranged to give one test in September and another in April. "The Rinsland-Beck Natural Test of English Usage," which had been given to freshmen at entrance of the 1937-1938 school year, was selected as a means of measuring the improvement made in English usage during the school year. Form A of this test was given in September and Form B in April.

The plan for the study included, in addition to the gain on the test, data as to the correlation of first and second semester grades in English courses and test scores, correlation between first and second semester English grades, and correlation between the first and second test scores of the English usage tests (Forms A and B) used for measuring the amount of gain. An analysis of the gain or loss as measured by the two tests was also indicated as a part of the procedure for the study.

The correlation between first and second semester grades in English courses ($.623 \pm .0313$), the correlations between first semester grades in English courses and scores on Form A of the English usage test given in September ($.573 \pm .0988$ to $.718 \pm .0317$ for individual teachers and $.609 \pm .0262$ for all teachers combined), the correlations between second semester grades in English courses, and scores on Form B of the English usage test given in April ($.490 \pm .0841$ to $.610 \pm .0485$ for individual teachers and $.485 \pm .0321$ for all teachers combined), and the correlations between scores on Forms A and B ($.853 \pm .0122$) justify the assumption that the test does measure something which teachers of freshman English classes in this college consider important in assigning their semester grades in English.

The difference in the average scores for the test given in September and the one given in April for two hundred thirteen students reported to the Deans of the College was found to be 8.779. The P. E. av. for the first test (Form A) is 1.051 and the second test (Form B) is 1.006. By the use of the formula** D/o-D the chances are 99.9 in 100 that the true difference in averages is greater than zero. The quotient of this formula is 9.306 and a quotient of 3.00 indicates the previously quoted chances in one hundred.

The greatest gain made in English usage by any student as measured by the test was 47 points. The greatest loss was 18 points. Frequently when students omitted parts of the test given in April, such omissions were sufficient to cause lower scores on the second test. One should be permitted to assume that no student really became less able to use good English composition by his courses in college freshman English. If one student can gain 47 points on a test when the average score is about 165 points, one could logically assume that all students should average more than 8 or 9

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* Professor of Education, Director of Demonstration School, Central State College.

** Henry E. Garrett, "Statistics in Psychology and Education," Longmans, Green and Co., New York, 1937, pp. 213, 219, and 213.

points gain, especially since one of the principal aims of college freshman English is to teach English composition.

In conclusion the writer recommends that individual diagnostic charts of every student's errors in English usage should be prepared for remedial teaching. English usage is composed of English habits, and habits are formed by frequent and consistent repetition. Each student has his own vocabulary of errors; therefore, diagnostic testing and remedial teaching as a classroom method of procedure would be more efficient than group teaching and general drill procedure which does not take into account the individual needs of the student.