Correctness Scales in Evaluating Learners’ English:

Why is an error an error?

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1. Introduction

Error = deviation from a STANDARD

- Grammaticality
  - The grammar

- Acceptability
  - The judges’ intuition

- Intelligibility
  - The linguistic meaning

- Understandability
  - The intended meaning
2-1. Grammaticality

Chomsky (2004)

“a measure of the remoteness of an utterance from the generated set of perfectly well-formed sentences”

(1a) colorless green ideas sleep furiously
(1b) furiously sleep ideas green colorless
(1c) revolutionary new ideas appear infrequently

Figure 1: Degrees and extremes of grammaticality.
2-2. Acceptability

Haegeman (1994)

“the term which characterizes the native speaker’s intuitions about the linguistic data”

(2a) Once that it was clear that Bill had left, we gave up.

(2b) Once that that Bill had left was clear, we gave up.

(2c) Am. English is different than Br. English.

Figure 2: Degrees and extremes of acceptability.
2-3. Intelligibility

McKay (2002)

- intelligibility --- "recognizing an expression"
- comprehensibility---“knowing the meaning of the expression”
- (interpretability --- “knowing what the expression signifies”)

(3a) She kena sabo by them.

(3b) Do you have any salt?

Figure 3: Degrees and extremes of intelligibility.
2-4. Understandability

A scale to evaluate the perception of intended meaning expressed or implied in an utterance.

⇒ Interpretability (McKay)

(4a) Do you have something to drink?
(4b) Are you have ... Uh... I am thirst.
(4c) Mr. Arimoto will be in 505, too.

Completely non-understandable

Completely understandable

Figure 4: Degrees and extremes of understandability.
3. Features of each scale

- **Linguistic**
  - grammaticality
  - intelligibility

- **Cognitive**
  - acceptability
  - understandability

- **Theoretical**
- **Practical**
4. Conclusion

- Grammaticality
  - Grammatical competence

- Acceptability
  - Sociolinguistic competence

- Intelligibility
  - To communicate linguistic meaning

- Understandability
  - To communicate intentions

Canale and Swain (1980) Communicative Competence