Language Testing: Some Problems and Solutions[2]

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Introduction

As many language instructors and test creators can readily understand, it is often quite difficult to make appropriate foreign language tests for our students. This article will address some of the fundamental concepts of language testing such as reliability and validity. The main principles to consider for improving testing reliability and validity will be illustrated. In addition the article includes several practical considerations test creators need to keep in mind when going through the process of exam creation. There will also be a discussion of the important relationship between teachers and test writers in order to create more effective language exams. Finally the article will provide some examples of listening test items which were used for advanced English learners at the Language School of the University of Guanajuato.

An Overview of Validity and Reliability in Foreign Language Tests

There are many factors that influence the design of a foreign language test. In order to understand what happens with the language tests that are applied to our learners we first need to understand the two fundamental terms: reliability and validity. Reliability is a test-measuring instrument which attempts to determine if a particular test is given to the same respondent on a second occasion the results would be equal to those of the first occasion (Cohen, 1994). There are three sets of factors which influence the reliability of a test. They are: *test factors* (ambiguity, clarity of instructions, layout of the test, length and the familiarity the respondent has with the test's format), *situational factors* (qualities of the physical space, lighting, acoustics) and *individual factors* (the physical health and psychological state of the respondents, their cognitive abilities and motivation) (Cohen, 1994). Logically it is desirable for language tests to have a high reliability rate, but this is often difficult to measure because the reliability of a test depends on so many factors: for example, the type and length of the test, the similarity of the test items to each other and the ability level of the students who will take the test (Alderson, Clapham &Wall, 1995). Similarly, if the test questions are meant to test the same skill in the same way each of the test items should correlate highly and the test reliability should be high. One way of testing the reliability of a test is to use *parallel-form reliability* wherein the scores from two very similar tests that have been applied to the same students are compared (Alderson, Clapham &Wall, 1995). In order to determine their parallel-form reliability both tests should include identical instructions, the same

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[2] This is a refereed article

response type and number of questions and the tests should be based on the same content.

Validity on the other hand, refers to how well the assessment instrument has, in fact, measured the original objectives of the test (Cohen, 1994). There are several terms often associated with validity: face validity (if the test looks legitimate to the respondent), criterion validity (verification of the functionality of the test in comparison with another language test of equal value), and construct validity (how a respondent's performance correlates on two different tests which are testing the same abilities) (Cohen, 1994). There are also several other issues related to validity that we must consider: the content validity (how well the test correlates with the objectives of the course being evaluated), the systematic validity (evidence of progress in the respondent's skills after the test is applied), the internal validity (the perceived content of the test by the respondents) and the external validity (comparison of a respondent's test results with their general language ability) (Cohen, 1994).

In theory, a successful test writer always attempts to produce a test which is reliable and valid; however, as previously mentioned, it can be quite difficult to achieve both in equal measure. We can never be completely confident that the tests we create are in fact, both reliable and valid (Genesee & Upshur, 1996). It has been suggested that in any language testing situation there will most likely be more than one measurement error or discrepancy (Bachman, 1990). For example, there could be a problem with the sound quality of the listening material, or perhaps the content of the test isn't as familiar to the test takers as we had thought. Nevertheless, we must strive to write exams which make a diligent effort to fulfill all of the aspects of reliability and validity mentioned above. If our tests have low reliability or validity rates they must be revised or discarded as they do not yield adequate results.

Validity and Reliability Concerns

There are a number of problems that can arise while attempting to write tests that are high in both reliability and validity. It has been my experience as a test writer that the following issues are significant in understanding potential testing complications. It is important to recognize that a test can only be as valid or invalid as the standards that are designated by the institution giving the test, prior to its application permit (Cohen, 1994). Thus a test that is considered valid in one situation may not be valid in another setting (Hughes, 1989).

There are several questions that the test writer needs to ask:

- Is the test measuring the intended purposes?
- Is the test consistent in the measurement format?
- Is the test unbiased (i.e. not favoring any specific group)?

(Garcia & Pearson, 1991 cited in Huerta-Macias 1995)

- Are the test instructions clear and concise?

- Is the task realistic? (Tasks that are too long or too short will not give accurate results.)

- Is the task of proper difficulty for the level of the students? (The questions should not be too difficult or too easy.)

- Is the task assessing only the skill being evaluated? (For example, if listening is being assessed there should be relatively little reading in the test.)

- Is the topic realistic or as authentic as possible? (Unrealistic testing topics may result in unrealistic answers from respondents.)

- Are all the questions based on the task and not on the learner's prior or common knowledge?

- Are the *distracters* (responses that are not the correct answer) of the same length or of the same grammatical arrangement as the correct option?

- Are the *distracters* uniformly challenging and realistic?

- Is there only one correct response possible to each question?

- Can the answer be found from only one source and not from the previous questions or from those that follow?
  (Genesee & Upshur, 1996).

Designing More Valid and Reliable Language Tests

The answers to the questions posed in the previous section will be of great assistance to a test writer. In addition, a test writer should perhaps also consider several other general concepts. First, it is highly recommended that test writers try to view the test they are creating through the eyes of the test taker (Bormuth, 1970 cited in Cohen, 1994). This may help to avoid possible test problems and may contribute to making a test that is fairer. Second, the test writer needs to determine who the test takers are, what their language level is, the purpose of the test in relation to the institution, the use to which the results of the test will be put, and the time constraints of the test (Alderson, Clapham and Wall, 1995). It is therefore essential that a test writer understand the institutional objectives and the intended purpose of the specific test being created (Genesee & Upshur, 1996). Once all of these factors have been specified, the test writer should determine what language skills will be tested and by what means. Then the source of the exam material must be chosen: that is, whether the material will be taken from a textbook or from an authentic source (Alderson,

Clapham and Wall, 1995). A test writer must also consider whether the test will be discrete-point (focusing on one specific aspect of language) or integrative (focusing on a number of sub-skills for a holistic approach). Also, the test writer should consider the criteria for determining the test results (the grading per item and how the passing grade is determined) and how this information will be used or evaluated (Alderson, Clapham and Wall, 1995). In other words what (percentage) value the test has in the grading scheme for the course.

Factors to Consider after a Test has been Applied

In addition to considering all of these concepts regarding test reliability and validity, it is imperative to analyze the test after it has been applied. It is important to review the results of the test in order to be able to reflect on both the positive and negative aspects of the test. As a test writer I found that the careful revision of the various forms of feedback from a test is extremely useful in avoiding possible problems in future testing. I consider the following five points important sources of test feedback:

1. Item analysis of the test (using statistical support and raw data)

2. Evaluation/questionnaires applied to the students immediately after taking the test (making use of more qualitative data)

3. Evaluation/questionnaires given to the teachers of those students after they have taken the test and after the teachers have seen and analyzed the test scores (through the use of qualitative data)

4. Observation of any changes in teaching procedures after the test has been applied (both short term—immediate with the same group—and long term—the next generation of students)

5. Reflection by the test writer and/or group of teachers involved
Therefore, part of the process of reviewing the feedback of a test relates to the reactions of the students who took the test and those of their respective teachers; this is often referred to as *washback, backwash* or *impact* (it will be referred to in this article as washback*).* As Turner (2001) states 'It refers to the role that external tests play (i.e. tests external to the classroom such as provincial exams or standardized tests) in influencing classroom activity' (p. 140). This implies that the language tests that students take have a direct correlation to what occurs in the classroom and to the attitudes of both the students and the teachers involved

Unfortunately for language test writers, there is little factual research on the effects of washback (Turner, 2001 cited in Brown 2001, et. al). However, it does appear that the washback from a test is related to validity. If either test reliability or validity is low, there will probably also be negative washback from the students or possibly from the instructors who teach the particular level of the

test in question (Turner, 2001 cited in Brown, 2001 et. al). Examples of negative washback could be that the students feel de-motivated to continue studying; as a result they may drop the course or they may make complaints to their teachers or the administration regarding unfair aspects of the test. One possible way of preventing negative washback of a language test could be to invite the teachers who are directly involved in teaching the material of the test to provide their input. Indeed having teachers assist in test construction may help to improve the positive washback (the students might be more motivated and thus make general language improvements which may, in turn, improve their intrinsic motivation) of a test because these teachers have direct contact with the students who will be taking the test. In addition, it is advantageous for the test writer to have hands-on experience teaching the level for which the test is created (Turner, 2001 cited in Brown, 2001 et. al).

Consequently, it is important to learn more about the effects the test has on both the students and the teachers directly involved in the language tests we create. We must always reflect on the washback of the tests we produce through assessment regarding the functionality of the test. Reviewing each test individually through item analysis can prove to be extremely useful in improving objective language tests. Item analysis deals with two factors to determine the effectiveness of an exam: the facility value (F.V.) and the discrimination index (D.I.). According to Alderson, Clapham and Wall (1995), 'F.V. measures the level of difficulty of an item, and the discrimination index measures the extent to which the results of an individual item correlate with results from the whole test' (p. 80). The difficulty of individual test items can be determined through the F.V., and the D.I. can be used to discriminate among the different levels of the students' language abilities. Thus the statistical feedback obtained from the item analysis helps us to develop more effective language tests for the future.

Background Information on the Advanced Students and Courses Taught at the Language School

The objective of the English Department of the Language School of the University of Guanajuato is to develop a high level of communicative ability in English in the students. As this goal focuses on a holistic concept of the four language skills, an integrative approach to testing is used. The tests are used to assess general proficiency in order to give an estimate of the communicative language ability of the student. (The term communicative competence at the Language School is used, generally speaking, as the ability to use English in a communicative setting successfully.)

At the time this study was undertaken (from August to December 2002) test creation at the Language School was a joint effort between the advanced level teachers and me. Although I was directly responsible for the creation and production of the tests, the teachers did have a significant influence on the

decisions made regarding the tests. As a test writer I found that this factor of directly involving the teachers in the test writing process helped to create more valid and unbiased tests because the tests were the result of several opinions combined. The diverse experiences and beliefs each teacher contributed during the test creation stage provided useful insights that perhaps would not have otherwise arisen. Including the teachers may also improve the positive washback of the test (Bachman, 2001 cited in Brown, 2001 et. al). Because the teachers that were involved in creating the test were also the instructors of the students who were taking the tests, we were able to receive direct feedback on the kinds of problems their students had. This information led to the search for finding solutions to the problems. This had a positive effect on the students because they felt that, through their teachers, their opinions were taken into consideration in order to improve subsequent tests that utilized similar types of activities. Therefore, this improved the positive washback of these particular tests as it may have helped to increase the students' motivation.

The students for whom we created these exams were advanced learners and they had a relatively high level of communicative competence. The majority were between the ages of 18 and 24. There were also several high school (preparatory school) students and a few non-traditional students (students older than 25). Most of the students were studying English for various extrinsic reasons; to comply with individual degree requirements or in order to be able to study abroad, and for intrinsic (personal) reasons, such as to understand popular culture in English.

The students who took the tests had at least five semesters (450 hours) of English or the equivalent language level as determined through a placement exam prior to enrolling in these advanced levels. The students had seen most of the major grammatical structures of English and had been exposed to a wide range of topics, such as current issues and popular culture. At the time these tests were applied all of the advanced levels promoted classroom activities focusing on both accuracy and fluency. All of the advanced levels included practice in all four skills: speaking, reading, writing and listening and each skill was assessed separately.

The exams in this article address the assessment of listening abilities through the use of video documentaries. These documentaries were taken from authentic television programs intended for native English speakers. There were several reasons why this video option was chosen. It is believed that it may be helpful to have visual paralinguistic aids when listening in a foreign language, as it is more realistic and true to normal conversations (Pratt, Bates, Wickers & Mueller 1980, cited in Anderson & Lynch, 1988). The acoustic sound quality of simple audio cassettes was frequently poor, and it was often difficult to find appropriate material. Furthermore, the teachers and I decided that the listening tests needed to be more authentic than they had been in the past. Also, the previous audio listening exams were often viewed by the students as unfair,

extremely difficult and unrelated to their classroom activities. According to Bachman (2001) cited in Brown, 2001 et. al, tests must have the right balance between usefulness, authenticity, and practicality. In light of these considerations, it was then decided that video listening tests would perhaps be more inspiring and realistic for the students than the more traditional audio method alone.

Listening Test Examples

It is important to mention that prior to the application of the video listening tests the teachers and I created similar classroom video listening activities (with true, false or no-information-given and/or multiple-choice questions). The purpose of this material was to prepare the students for the particular video testing format that would be used on the midterm and final examinations. The purpose was not to teach to the test (i.e. only getting the students to pass the test), but rather to prepare the students for a more realistic type of listening. This specific example could also be considered an example of positive washback as it took into account what was occurring in the classroom activities.

Questionnaires and surveys are believed to be very useful means of receiving feedback on a test (Alderson & Banerjee, 2001 cited in Brown, 2001 et. al). Therefore, in order to receive some additional feedback on the new test format, I asked the students to fill out a questionnaire (see Appendix 1) after the first video test was applied. One of the results of the analysis of the responses was that there were some students who stated that it was difficult to adjust to this new test format. Obviously their familiarity with the test format increased considerably once they had taken more exams and practice activities of this nature. In fact, several of the students mentioned this in subsequent questionnaires given after the following exams. More importantly, however, was that the majority of the students who filled out the questionnaire stated that they found it easier to take the video listening test in comparison to the audio-only test with which they were already familiar. Several students also mentioned that they found the video format much more motivating and less intimidating. A high percentage (78%) of the students who answered the questionnaire stated that they would like to continue using video listening for future tests, and would therefore prefer not to take an audio-only test (see Appendix 1, questions 5 and 6). The majority of the results were quite positive, although the students mentioned that there were some technical difficulties regarding the acoustics in certain rooms that were used for the tests. As a result of these comments we made adjustments regarding the locations of where future tests were applied in order to assure more reliable testing conditions.

In addition to analyzing the results of the student questionnaire, I then examined the actual test scores and answers from the students. As mentioned previously, item analysis of test answers was carried out in order to gain a better

understanding of the results of the test. After reviewing some of these results, it seemed evident that there were some problems which needed to be resolved. For example, the multiple-choice test (see Appendix 2) presented several difficulties. First of all, it was sometimes difficult to create three sufficiently valid distracters for each question, in addition to the correct answer. Because of the lengthy nature of the multiple-choice format, it was problematic to create answers that were not too long for the students to read while listening. The length factor created listening assessment problems because reading was inadvertently being tested as well. Also, some of the possible answers to the questions may not have been really viable options (in Appendix 2 see the distracters for 2d, 3d, 6d and 10c). These distracters may have seemed too comical or strange and therefore could easily be discounted as unrealistic answers by the students. Furthermore, one of the questions (see Appendix 2, question 7 option c) had only one negative option, which perhaps made the correct answer too obvious. Also, one of the answers in one of the options is a little longer than the others, (see Appendix 2, question 9 option b) which may have excluded it as a possible correct answer.

Therefore, as a result of this item analysis of the multiple-choice test, it was decided that we needed to make the test shorter in order to assess listening more efficiently. We then decided to create true, false, or no-information-given questions for the new set of listening tests. Although this second test (see Appendix 3) was used for a different language level than the first test discussed above, this test seemed to be much more effective in evaluating the actual objective of listening. The feedback from the students on the questionnaires for this exam was more positive on this second test, perhaps because they felt more confident with the overall shorter format. The true, false and no-information-given statements also required less reading comprehension on the part of the test taker. Moreover, several of the statements have the same meaning as statements spoken on the video but they are worded differently from the original video (see Appendix 3, questions 2, 3, 5, 7, and 13). This may have helped to test the actual listening skill we were attempting to assess. Other questions (see Appendix 3, questions 4, 11, and 14) may indeed have tested true listening comprehension, as they required the students to listen carefully for inferred details that were not explicitly mentioned on the video. Lastly, there were more questions for the students to answer, which helped to make a fairer exam.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was not to resolve all of the complicated aspects that are involved in language testing, but rather to stimulate an awareness of the complications and possible solutions regarding test creation. As test writers we must diligently reflect on each aspect of each test before it is actually given, and then to observe carefully what happens after the test is applied. Finally, we must analyze the results of the exam and any feedback we

may have obtained from our students and teachers. It is also vitally important to reiterate that there is still much to be learned about language testing, such as the issues of reliability, validity, the washback of a test, and item analysis all of which were mentioned in this article. However, if we are open to the possibility of constant revision of our language exams, then we can surely be more successful in creating exams that are more effective.

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Appendix 1

Student Questionnaire Applied After the First New Listening Exam

Please take a few minutes to answer the following questions regarding listening through video. The English Department greatly appreciates your assistance in helping us create more effective and fairer exams. Thank you.

1. Was the sound quality of the video acceptable? If not, please state what the problem was.

_____

2. Was the visual quality of the video acceptable? If not, please state what the problem was.

_____

3. Was the time sufficient to complete the task?

_____

4. Was the speed of the video in relation to the questions appropriate?

_____

5. Would you like to continue taking video listening exams? Why?

_____

6. Would you rather take a listening exam only using audio? Why?

_____

7. Did you feel the video activities that you did in class prior to the actual test helped you or not? If not, please explain what you think would have helped you.

_____

8. If you have any further comments or suggestions regarding the video listening exam please use the space below.

Appendix 2

Multiple-Choice Video Listening/Midterm Exam September 2002
Level 800 (approximately 630 hours of English)

You are going to watch a video about the singer, Sting. Circle the best answer for each question according to what you hear in the video. You will see the video twice.

1. Sting and his wife originally wanted to buy
    a)   a mansion
    b)   a small house
    c)   a small hotel
    d)   an enormous place
2. Sting says that the hills close to his house look like
    a)   they are coming out of the snow
    b)   a picturesque painting
    c)   an Asian painting
    d)   they are really spooky
3. One of the uses for Sting's studio used to be
    a)   a big patio where they ate olives
    b)   just a big empty industrial room
    c)   an industrial area where they made wine
    d)   a room where they drank a lot of wine
4. The purpose of the studio in his house now is to
    a)   rejuvenate his friends with music
    b)   have parties with his friends
    c)   listen to his friends' new records
    d)   feel like he did when he was young
5. Sting likes to work at home so that his children
    a)   can understand what he does
    b)   will become as creative as him
    c)   will have a good impression of him
    d)   can travel with him on his tours
6. He likes to write songs about love because he wants to
    a)   share other people's experiences
    b)   share his life experiences
    c)   express typical feelings
    d)   show others that he can still love
7. According to Sting songs must
    a)   be complex
    b)   be about issues
    c)   not be complex
    d)   be about journalism

8. Sting thinks writing a song is
      a)   similar to painting on a canvas
      b)   telling a story in a few lines
      c)   similar to writing a novel.
      d)   not influenced by nature
9. This project for Sting is
      a)   to celebrate his fortieth birthday
      b)   an opportunity to sing other people's songs
      c)   an opportunity to sing tango songs
      d)   a time to think about his life
10. Sting
      a)   likes to change his famous old songs
      b)   doesn't like to reinterpret his old songs
      c)   wants his songs to be popular for a short time
      d)   never changes anything in his favorite songs

Video transcript/interview with Sting. Taken from Sting's DVD *All this time* (2001) (Sting is the only person speaking throughout the entire video). Approximate length: 7 minutes.

Trudy and I bought this house about four years ago. We had been in love with Italy for about ten years, then we found this. (camera shows the house) It was kind of funky and broken down, sofas outside… it seemed like us. This is on the route from Milan to Rome. There is a lot of history here.
(pause)

Originally Trudy and I were looking to buy a little house somewhere, something, somewhere to go, you know? We never imagined we'd buy this great enormous place.
(pause, new scene)

Very early in the morning sometimes there is a mist in these hills, (camera shot of hills) they look like they are coming out of the sea. It's like a Japanese painting. Then at this time of night the light on the mountains changes. It is absolutely beautiful. I could just sit here all night. (fade out)
(new scene/piano being played in Sting's studio)

We have this big industrial building across the way where they used to make the wine, dried the grain and um…we built a studio on the top floor. It was just a big empty room really. So, we decided to put my portable studio up there. So, I started working and messing around…bringing a friend to play with me, Dominique or Kipper. So, I wanted to recreate that feeling when I was a kid you know…playing music because I liked the sound of it, because it was fun.
(pause, new scene)

A lot of kids are brought up with Dad doing this mysterious thing in the city. You know? But I like to work at home. If I can work at home that's the best situation for me. But you know, it's important what they see and they believe about what I do. They can also see me doing something I love and that hopefully explains to them why I'm away so much, cause I spend a long time at sea.
(singing in background/new scene)

Most of the best songs are written about love, it's an important thing to write about, particularly in my position and stage in life, the experience I've had as a man , as a boy or there…it's what I want to talk about. (singing in background) Songs have to be simple. Um… they can have a sub-text that you can find, but you shouldn't be singing about an issue, you shouldn't be saying damn with this and damn with that. That's just journalism. (singing) Art is something else, something veiled. I often feel that song writing is something like putting yourself in a state of receptivity or you know… to be more cosmic about it, a state of grace where the song can reveal itself to you. If you can be in a beautiful place, because you know nature is full of stories, it is full of images, powerful images, healing images. (camera shot of nature)
(singing in background/new scene)

It's not like you have a huge canvas to paint on, or a novel length to fill, you know… you've got to tell the story in a…two verses, a bridge and a quota. That's a skill, it's stories in miniature and I like that. Sometimes you have to tell a huge amount of information in one line. You have an idea of what songwriting is and what is right and what seems to be wrong. You just follow that instinct. So, songwriting is a kind of therapy for both the songwriter and the listener. If you choose to use it that way (singing in background). When you see that your music helps other people, great, wonderful. It means you are doing the right thing. That's what music is for.
(pause/new scene)

Well, it's an interesting time in my life to be making this project. You know, I'll be fifty in a month's time and um it's a time of reflection for me, looking back on my life…What have we got here? To revisit songs and breathe new life into rejuvenation for both the songs and myself. You know, it's kind of…yeah I think they are good songs and I want them to have as long of a life as they can. Cause you know, I'm rejuvenating myself through this process. It's a very interesting process to play a song for almost two years and you know it inside out and then suddenly change it and then a whole new song suddenly appears. Sometimes you have to go back to the old way. You know, uh, hopefully even and the place itself will create something new. I don't want to force the issue but if something happens naturally, organically and if it's a different arrangement then that is fine. If it doesn't work..

 (end of transcript)

Appendix 3

T/F/NI Video Listening/Final Exam November 2002
Level 600 (approximately 450 hours of English)

You are going to watch the video "Paris: A Fun Visit" twice. Answer T for True, F for false, or NI for No information according to what you hear in the video.

1. There are well over 2 million people who visit Paris every year.	T	F	NI
2. The Luxembourg Gardens often look and feel overpopulated.	T	F	NI
3. The Palace of Queen Mary di Medici is currently used for governmental purposes.	T	F	NI
4. In the Luxembourg Gardens Tai Chi is practiced everyday from 7 am to 8 am.	T	F	NI
5. The French game Petánque is only played by the elderly.	T	F	NI
6. The money earned from the honey the bees produce does not benefit the Luxembourg Gardens.	T	F	NI
7. There is no charge to enter the Luxembourg Gardens.	T	F	NI
8. Reservations for the Tour d'Argent should be made well in advance.	T	F	NI
9. The owner of the Tour d'Argent is not well known.	T	F	NI
10. Tour d'Argent customers are always welcome to enter the wine cellar that is below the restaurant.	T	F	NI
11. The Tour d'Argent wine cellar is always inspected in June.	T	F	NI
12. The Tour d'Argent was rated a little lower because it is very expensive.	T	F	NI
13. Inline skaters skate the same streets every Friday night.	T	F	NI
14. The skaters must have a skating license in order to participate.	T	F	NI

Video transcript "Paris: A Fun Visit" (2002). Taken from satellite television, The People and Arts Channel. There is only one narrator throughout the video. Approximate length: 8 minutes.

Full of wonderful architecture, great views, open spaces and towering monuments. Paris, with hundreds of fascinating attractions what do you put on your itinerary to make sure you get the very best out of your vacation. We've taken the guesswork and the legwork out of that process. We've narrowed it down to the top ten attractions, the must sees on any visit here. Then, to make sure the countdown really does work for you we judge the countdown against the same strict criteria. First we rated them for the wow, the must see factor, accessibility and value for money. Finally as the climate here can get rainy we asked: Is it still fun in the wet? So watch as we reveal our top ten Paris Hot spots.
(pause)

First up is the place to watch Parisians go by. It scored high on the must see factor but it can be a wash out on a rainy day. Number 10, The Luxembourg Gardens. Paris is a busy city, over two million people live here and over ten times that number come here each year as tourists. So it's little wonder that sometimes it can feel a bit crowded. The elegant boulevards may be wide and lined with a hundred thousands trees but if you do need to find a real oasis of greenery within the city, then you should head for the Parisians' favorite: the Luxembourg Gardens. (scene of the park with background music) The park never seems crowded even though up to a hundred thousand people can visit the 118 acres of the Luxembourg gardens. In the seventeenth century it was the private residence of Queen Mary di Medici. Her palace is now home to the Paris senate. And the gardens have become a haven for lovers.

There are other less sedentary activities going on here as well. People come here to play sports like tennis and basketball, to practice the ancient Chinese art of Tai Chi or to play the equally ancient French game of Petánque. Petánque is a French form of pool, but knowing how to play is the best way of being adopted as an honorary Parisian. Here is what you do…first you need to draw a circle in the center and then keep both of your feet inside of it as you throw the ball. The aim of the game is to get your ball as close as possible to the wooden marker ball at the other end. The closer you get the higher you score. The first player to get thirteen points wins the game. There are over half a million Petánque players in France, aged eight to over eighty. It is the favorite pastime of French film star Gérard Depardieu. It's taken very seriously.
(music playing/new scene)

A team of seventy gardeners keep the grounds mowed but they aren't the only ones who are busy in the gardens, over a million honeybees live in the Luxembourg Garden's apiary. Here you can learn to take care of bees under the watchful eye of beekeeper Gilbert Provére. He's looked after bees for over forty years and is not surprisingly an expert on how to avoid getting stung. Gilbert's honey goes on sale each year on the third weekend of September and contributes over three and a half thousand dollars towards the upkeep of the apiary. Bees aren't the only animals in the park there are also ponies and donkeys. In fact the Luxembourg Gardens has plenty of activities to entertain children. Cost wise the gardens are a great value for the money, in fact entrance is free. We rated The Luxembourg gardens at number ten, as

the park is an oasis of calm in a busy city. But to enjoy it at its best you really need the sun to shine.
(new scene)

Next on our list is one of the oldest restaurants in Paris, which always gets top marks from the critics for its food and service, number 9 on the Tour d'Argent. Dining out is a key part of any vacation and Paris is a gastronomical heaven and a dieter's hell. The streets of Paris are crammed with fabulous cafes and bistros. The only problem you'll have here is choosing where to go. For a real treat we recommend the restaurant known as Tour d'Argent. Its number 9 on our list as it has one of the best views of the city, overlooking the Cathedral of Notre Dam. Try and book at least three weeks ahead to avoid disappointment. The prestigious Tour d'Argent is still the place to be seen and see the celebrities. Claude Térin is almost as famous as his clientele. Equally as famous as the celebrity diners are the Tour d'Argent's special duck dishes. A unique recipe and a meat crusher known as a duck presser make this meal so special. At a hundred dollars a head it is a bit of a squeeze on the wallet. After all you are buying into a century old tradition when you order it. We went behind the scenes into the famous kitchens where fifty thousand high class meals a year are prepared by head chef Jean Françoise, working with him are 22 cooks, 6 pastry chefs and 8 apprentices. Another 10 employees are there just to clean up after them.
(new scene)

Hand in hand with France's love of food goes its love of wine. Hidden deep below the restaurant are the famous and heavily guarded wine cellars. We were privileged, because they don't often let visitors in. In fact as David Ridgeway explained, with 16 million dollars worth of wine down here they are more concerned with keeping people out. There are half a million bottles of wine in the Tour d'Argent's Cellar, vintages range from as far back as 1788 to the present day. With the top of the range setting you back almost $8000 a bottle. They uncork 22 thousand bottles a year here and if the restaurant never restocked again it would take 20 years to drink the cellar dry.
(new scene)

We rated the Tour d'Argent as number nine in our Paris hotspots countdown. Here you can get a taste for what has made French cooking so famous the world over, but with those prices we had to mark the restaurant down on expense but if you can work your vacation budget around it, it is a fantastic dining experience.
(new scene/camera shot of in-line skaters)

In at number 8 is a pastime that will really get your pulse racing by day or by night. If you want to act like a Parisian you have to get your skates on, number 8 is the in-line skating on the streets of Paris. Paris is famous for its nightlife. So when the sun goes down the city comes alive. From the colorful cabaret iconic Moulin Rouge to the trendy Bastille area where more time is spent outside the bars than inside, there is a huge range on offer. Friday night there really is only one place to be and that's in the company of hundreds of other in-line skaters. Friday night fever is the way to kick off the weekend. Up to 20 thousand people of all ages descend on the Plaza Vitale from all over Paris to skate. The route they take is a secret,

changing every week. One thing that doesn't change is that the skaters will bring the Paris traffic to a standstill as they are given right of way. In just 2 hours they cover distances of over 16 miles.

(end of transcript)