

TESTING NEPALI AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Nirmal M. Tuladhar²
and
Sumon K. Tuladhar³

Introduction

This paper is a preliminary attempt at describing the competence in the learning of Nepali at the primary school level, comparing the competence of those who speak Nepali as a first language (NL1) with that of those who speak Nepali as a second language (NL2).

The test was entirely based on the Nepali textbook, Mahendra Mala prescribed for primary schools. It was composed of 37 items, divided into four areas of the Nepali language - vocabulary, spelling, structure and comprehension. It was designed to test the students' skills in writing Nepali.

The Pretest

Approximately 50 percent of the third grade students in Makwanpur and Chitwan district schools were selected for pretesting on the basis of random sampling. The NL2 students and NL1 students were determined on the basis of their caste names. And furthermore they were questioned individually which language they spoke at their homes.

The chief investigator and the research assistant conducted the test; the school teachers did not participate in administering the test. The reason for this was to prevent their providing any assistance to their students during the test, which would have affected the validity of the results. When the questions were distributed the students were instructed to fill out the personal data; a general explanation on the direction of the questions was also given. The time allowed for answering the question in the test was 45 minutes.

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1. This study was carried out while developing and testing the methodology for the second phase of the research project: Testing Nepali as a Second Language. The project was sponsored by CNAS.
 2. Mr. Nirmal Man Tuladhar is a Deputy Research Officer at CNAS.
 3. Ms. Sumon Kamal Tuladhar is a Research Assistant at CNAS.

After the pretest the answer papers were analysed to determine the effectiveness of the items in the test in terms of two criteria - Item Difficulty and Item Discrimination.

Only 5 items out of 37 items in the test were found poor on the basis of Item Difficulty and Item Discrimination, and they were rejected and replaced. The wording and content of some questions were also improved.

The Test

The test consisted of 12 vocabulary items. The first four items were based on illustrations, the second three items on multiple-choice, the third two items on synonymous words, and the last four items on matching items.

The test contained 12 items for testing spelling. Seven items were true-false questions, the others were multiple-choice and correction of misspelt words. The test also had nine items for testing knowledge of grammatical structure. Five items were completing questions and the rest multiple-choice. Finally, the test included a reading comprehension passage of 79 words with 4 questions based on it.

The modified version of the test was administered in schools of Pokhara, Kirtipur and Kathmandu.

The Interpretation of the Data

The data was interpreted at two different stages to present a clear picture of the achievement of NL1 and NL2 students in learning Nepali in the primary level of schooling.

At the first stage the test papers of the students were divided into two groups - NL 1 students and NL2 students. The highest, the lowest, the total and the mean scores of the papers of the two groups were calculated. The achievement of the students was determined on the basis of the mean score difference between the NL1 students and the NL2 students.

At the second stage the scores were divided into the 4 test areas - vocabulary, spelling, structure, and comprehension - in order to collect information on which areas of Nepali the NL1 students are stronger or weaker as compared to the NL2 students. This mean score is the base for plotting the performance.

For interpreting the data two types of tables were designed - one representing the number of the students, their highest, lowest and mean scores and the other representing the mean scores of the NL2 and the NL1 students in vocabulary, spelling, structure, and comprehension.

The Findings of the Study

The data collected in schools of Kirtipur, Kathmandu, and Pokhara will be discussed. Table 1 below represents the highest, lowest and mean score performance of the NL2 as well as the NL1 students in the school at Kirtipur. The highest and lowest scores of the NL2 students are 33 and 9 respectively while those of the NL1 students are 41 and 8. As seen in Table 1, the mean score of the NL2 students is 22.0 whereas that of the Nepali students is 22.5. The mean score difference of 0.5 is not statistically significant.

TABLE 1: THE HIGHEST, LOWEST, AND MEAN SCORE BY TYPE OF STUDENTS
- KIRTIPUR

	TYPE OF STUDENTS	
	NL1	NL2
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	15	15
HIGHEST SCORE	41	33
LOWEST SCORE	8	9
MEAN SCORE	22.5	22.0

Table 2 given below represents the highest, lowest, and mean score performance of the NL2 and the NL1 students in the school in Kathmandu. The highest and lowest of the NL2 students are 42 and 6 respectively while those of the NL1 are 46 and 11.

As seen in Table 2, the mean score of the NL2 students is 26.0 whereas that of the NL1 students is 27.0. The mean score difference of 1.0 is not statistically significant.

TABLE 2: THE HIGHEST, LOWEST, AND MEAN SCORE BY TYPE OF STUDENTS
- KATHMANDU

	TYPE OF STUDENTS	
	NL1	NL2
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	25	25
HIGHEST SCORE	46	42
LOWEST SCORE	11	6
MEAN SCORE	27.0	26.0

Table 3 represents the highest, lowest and mean score performance of the non-Nepali-speaking and the Nepali-speaking students in the school in Pokhara. The highest score and lowest score of

the NL2 students are 36 and 8 respectively while those of the NL1 students are 40 and 6.

As seen in Table 3, the mean score of the NL2 students is 19.0 whereas that of the NL1 students is 21.1. The mean score difference of 2.1 is not statistically significant.

TABLE 3: THE HIGHEST, LOWEST, AND MEAN SCORE BY TYPE OF STUDENTS - POKHARA

	TYPE OF STUDENTS	
	NL1	NL2
NUMBER OF STUDENTS	30	30
HIGHEST SCORE	40	36
LOWEST SCORE	6	8
MEAN SCORE	21.1	19.0

Because the NL2 and NL1 students learn the Nepali language from the same textbook in the primary level of schooling, the present study aims at diagnosing the stronger and weaker areas of the language. The data is computed so as to show comparatively the performance in four areas of the Nepali language.

TABLE 4: PERFORMANCE MEAN SCORE BY TYPE OF STUDENTS AND AREAS OF THE LANGUAGE - KIRTIPUR

	TYPE OF STUDENTS	
	NL1	NL2
VOCABULARY	7.5	7.2
SPELLING	4.3	6.0
STRUCTURE	4.7	3.1
COMPREHENSION	6.0	5.7
TOTAL	22.5	22.0
(N)	(15)	(15)

As seen in Table 4, in the school at Kirtipur the mean scores of the NL2 students are comparatively lower in vocabulary, structure and comprehension than those of the NL1 students. The stronger area of the NL2 students is vocabulary, having a mean score of 7.2 while their weaker area is structure, which has a mean score of 3.1. But the NL2 students scored higher in spelling than the NL1 students.

TABLE 5: PERFORMANCE MEAN SCORE BY TYPE OF STUDENTS AND AREAS OF THE LANGUAGE - KATHMANDU

AREAS OF THE LANGUAGE	TYPE OF STUDENTS	
	NL1	NL2
VOCABULARY	8.3	8.5
SPELLING	7.4	7.0
STRUCTURE	5.6	4.1
COMPREHENSION	5.7	6.4
TOTAL	27.0	26.0
(N)	(25)	(25)

As seen in Table 5, in the Kathmandu school the stronger area of the NL2 students is vocabulary, which has a mean score of 8.5 and their weaker area is structure, having a mean score of 4.1. Their mean scores are comparatively lower in all areas of the language than that of the NL1 students, except for comprehension in which the NL2 scored higher than the NL1 students.

TABLE 6: PERFORMANCE MEAN SCORE BY TYPE OF STUDENTS AND AREAS OF THE LANGUAGE - POKHARA

AREAS OF THE LANGUAGE	TYPE OF STUDENTS	
	NL1	NL2
VOCABULARY	7.9	7.2
SPELLING	5.4	5.1
STRUCTURE	3.3	2.7
COMPREHENSION	3.1	3.3
TOTAL	21.1	19.0
(N)	(30)	(30)

As seen in Table 6, in the Pokhara school the stronger area of the NL2 students is vocabulary, having a mean score of 7.2 and their weaker area is structure, having a mean score of 2.7. The NL1 students scored higher in all areas of the language except comprehension.

Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest that there is no significant difference between the learning of Nepali as a second language by the NL2 students of the third grade and the learning of the language by the NL1 students of the third grade. The performance by the NL2 students in vocabulary, spelling, structure and comprehension is as equally competent as that of the NL1 students in the test based on the Nepali textbook, Mahendra Mala.

Therefore this study concludes that the NL2 students can accomplish skills in writing Nepali without difficulties as the NL1 students can by the time they complete the third grade of their schooling.

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