

NeltaChoutari June 2014 Issue

June 2, 2014



Towards Student Friendly Testing System

Editorial

Human life is full of tests. We test our blood pressure or temperature in order to make sure our body is functioning well. If the pressure or temperature is at a normal level, then we think that our life style is fine, whereas if any indicator is above or below an acceptable level, we go for treatment. Thus, testing helps us find out about a situation and work accordingly.

We teach our students and assess how much learning has been achieved. In order to do so, we take the help of tests. The tests help us assess the achievement of our students and ultimately our own achievements. It further helps us diagnose what worked well and what did not, and go for remedial measures after the diagnosis. Moreover, the test result serves basically two functions- forward looking and backward looking. However, in our context the test in the most cases serve only the forward looking function. In

other words, we interpret the result of students and make decision of either promoting or failing them, and the role of test is over. Isn't it necessary to explore the detailed causes of the failure? Isn't there chance of fault in the curriculum itself or in the teaching methodology? But nobody seems to bother. We have rarely heard that School Leaving Certificate (SLC) board or universities doing needful to explore the causes of poor result and improving the tests. The authority seems like a machine to give a tag of either PASS or FAIL. Where is interaction? Where is research? Where is change? and when we do not look back after the result, we never get to correct the faults in the system and keep victimizing students.

Apart from this, major problems are seen in our test administration system. There is problem in the quality of tests. Be that the SLC or universities tests, the condition is rather pathetic. The English language test papers themselves contain deviated language forms- forget about other quality! We know that a test paper goes through a number of phases before going to examinees. After a test is constructed based on a specification grid, it is piloted. Then it is improved and finalized on the basis of feedback of the pilot. However, our test papers are so powerful, whatever faults they contain, they manage to escape from the grip of our skillful experts! If we compare our so-called standardized test with teacher made test, in the many respects, the latter stands out. Such poorly constructed paper-pencil test of few hours makes decision about a student's life- a strong decision that determines career and future of the student. In this regard, the test is very serious and critical thing. However, it is taken very lightly in our context. A test of few hours is set randomly and marked impressionistically to make judgement about students' life. Is the ability of students only what they can fill in the paper in few hours? If not, the test does not have right to make decision about anybody's life. A test is supposed to test abilities, knowledge, understanding and attitudes of students. However, our test is testing something absurd. It is testing students' memory (if not memory then cheating skill) and writing speed. This paper pencil test tests mostly students' memory, calligraphy and writing speed. They are not meant for assessing students' originality, innovation and creativity. In fact, it is stupid to talk about testing such abilities of students with a few hours memory- driven calligraphy marathon competition! It is this unscientific test that contributes to develop test anxiety in students. They dislike tests as tests are not doing any justice to them. Their actual abilities are never tested through tests. However, their quality is measured with reference to the certificate of such test in the outer world. In fact, this paper-pencil test is destroying the life of many making them mentally handicapped and how can we expect them to love tests.

The testing has gained a bad impression because of the faulty process. However, the situation is not as hopeless as it seems. We can do something to make tests worth practising and the subject teacher or expert can be a saviour here. The language teachers can devise students' friendly test, which will be a modification of formative assessment. Our students' now need to be assessed based on their classroom performance. Garcia and Pearson (1994) has termed such test as performance assessment. Students' throughout the session/semester do a lot of things in classroom (at least in schools). They read and write plenty of things, get involved in classroom discussions, express their views, and work in peer or group to solve problems. This requires them to perform actual language skills and abilities. Besides that, they get involved in different co-curricular activities in or outside the institution. Moreover, teacher should assign them to do project works, mini-researches and different other tasks that involve language, abilities, knowledge, understanding and attitudes. Meanwhile, the ongoing internal tests/formative assessment will along. In such a way, whatsoever activities are performed by students in or outside the classroom, teachers need to keep record of them in an individual portfolio. Based on such records, students' actual assessment can be made, and such assessment is more valid and reliable than a paper-pencil test. This sort of assessment captures actual performance of students. In addition to that, it also encourages them to keep learning throughout the year, which makes students' learning oriented not merely test-oriented. Furthermore, such assessment makes tests common to students and they no more get scared of tests. However, this kind of assessment demands individual record of students, which maximizes the work pressure of teachers. Therefore, the work pressure of teachers should be balanced.

The performance assessment can replace the traditional paper-pencil test in the days to come. However, at present, we can at least use it as a supplement to the paper-pencil test, which can minimize the dominance of memory- driven calligraphy marathon competition!

What is in this issue?

We have attempted to make this issue language testing special as we thought that it is necessary to create a discourse on language testing in order to change the face of present language testing system. So, let's wonder, ponder, share and care about language testing in this issue. Besides making this issue a language testing special, we have invented a new genre, i.e. 'interactive article'. The idea is to bring together the experts and readers to discuss and interact on a particular theme and to explore more among ourselves the unlimited possibilities.

One of the challenges of the thematic issue is to maintain variety. However, we have attempted to overcome this challenge by raising multiple issues within an issue. In the interactive article, we have brought forward a number of issues of language testing in our context, which include multilingual competence testing, formative assessment, professionalism in testing, quality of test including testing listening and speaking in secondary level, faulty test construction process, and administration and validation. Similarly, in the next entry, Balram Adhikari shares his reflection on his own experiences of marking answer sheets of university. His thought-provoking article reveals the quality of students' writing in university and compels us to ponder upon the impressionistic way of marking the answer sheets. Similarly, it also brings forward the issue of language versus content debate in marking the answer sheets. Not only have we raised the issues but also have attempted to offer some suggestions. Ashok Raj Khati and Manita Karki offer us alternative practice of language testing through classroom assessment based on a lecture delivered by a prominent scholar Prof. Dr. Tirth Raj Khaniya. On the other hand, Umes Shrestha shares his ideas about the faulty system of paper-pencil test in our context and shares his practices of marking the answer sheets in a liberal way. Moreover, he also offers some alternatives to existing testing system. In the same way, in the next entry, on his research based article (Based on his Master's Thesis), Bhupal Sin Bista explores that listening skill is neglected in teaching as well as testing in most of the cases in the secondary schools of our country. He further explores a distinct gap between teachers' theoretical knowledge and its application in classroom. He then suggests ideas to teach and test listening skill effectively. Last but not the least; we have attempted to add a bit black humour by depicting a part of scenario of language testing through pictorial.

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Now, I request you to share what you read and like, drop your comment to encourage writers and join the conversation by writing new entries in the upcoming issues of Choutari.

Lastly, I extend my sincere gratitude to Shyam Sharma and Balram Adhikari for their rigorous support and constructive feedback in every step to make this issue possible. Similarly, I am indebted to Praveen Kumar Yadav, Umes Shrestha and Ushakiran Wagle for their physical and moral support to materialize this issue!
Happy reading!



Jeevan Karki
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Editor
June Issue, 2014

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Testing the Testing System of Nepal: An Interactive Article

June 2, 2014

Choutari Editors

Testing is inevitable although not desirable. It is necessary in order to keep the track of overall progress of language teaching programme. Debates have been going on for and against the testing. However, the important point to note here is that it is the faulty process of testing that is being criticized not the concept of testing itself. In fact, such criticism is necessary as it can help improve the system. The sphere of language testing in Nepal is also not free from criticism. Therefore, we decided to test the testing system of Nepal in this interactive article. We have attempted to explore the existing problems in the field of language testing and possible solutions to them after an interaction with experts and readers. We believe such interactive can play a significant role to reform the system. A thematic question was asked to language experts as well as Choutari readers. The question was 'What is a major problem in language testing system of Nepal and what can be the solution to it?' Among the responses collected, we have presented the opinions of eight respondents here:

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Shyam Sharma:

There are many problems with current language testing regime (as well as some good things). One issue that's come up in our conversations is how testing practices typically ignore multilingual competencies. At first, this may seem like an impossible ideal, but if you look deeper, the question becomes why not. Ours is a multilingual society and students' language proficiencies are not isolated; their English is a part of a complex sociolinguistic tapestry; their other languages don't "hamper" English; languages aren't just mediums but rich epistemological resources; and, humans have always spoken multiple languages without seeking a monolingual standard. So, when we face the task of teaching and testing students' English abilities in isolation, we shouldn't act like helpless slaves of the system; when discussing the roots and stems and branches and bitter fruits of the current regimes, there's no need to surrender to the "reality." The reality includes politics, power, and possibilities beyond their grips, and thus, we must broaden the base of our discussions so we can see testing as a broader phenomenon than, well, testing. Scholarly conversations under the tree here can and should help the community rethink the fundamentals.

Shyam Sharma is an Assistant Professor in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric at Stony Brook University (State University of New York)

Prem Phyak:

I call it an 'issue' rather than a 'problem'; why do we still 'test' monolingual ability (although our students have bi-/multilingual ability)? Another issue embedded within this issue is: How can we test students' multilingual ability? First, we must be clear that 'testing' is not a 'fixing-shop' where you can fix a 'problem' rather it is a complex discipline which needs a critical scrutiny from multiple perspectives for a valid evaluation of students' ability. Our assumption that 'language testing' should only test 'monolingual ability', meaning that multilingual testing is impossible, is the major challenge for reforms in language testing. This dominant assumption decontextualizes language testing from students' cultural, linguistic and educational contexts. So, the major issue is: our tests are not context-sensitive. For example, I still remember that we were often asked to write an essay in SLC (School Leaving Certificate) exam about different highways in Nepal but I had never seen any highways (when I was in school). We were asked to memorize their lengths, construction dates and so on. I could not even conceptualize what a 'highway' was. However, I could write more and better when I had to write about 'my village' or 'my school'.

The issue of contextualization is closely associated with testing multilingual abilities; locally-contextualized test items require students to work with their abilities in more than one language. For example, when I had to write an essay about my village I used to think in Limbu, Nepali and English. I (and my friends) could not think about the topic in only one language – no separation of languages! But the tests did not allow me to use my Limbu and Nepali abilities while writing essays in English. This is the major issue, right? If language tests are meant to test 'language ability', why don't we test students' functional abilities in multiple languages? This applies to Nepali language tests as well. For example, when students speak Nepali they simultaneously use English as well (and/or other local languages if their first language is other than Nepali); one cannot create the fixed boundary of a language. Suppose a bilingual student writes "आजको class मा कस्तो frustrate भएको..." (I had frustration in today's class) for her Nepali essay (it can be more complex than this in the case of Maithili and Newari children, for example), how do we evaluate her Nepali language ability? The first reaction could be 'असुद्ध' (incorrect –literally impure). However, she is expressing her views fluently by using both Nepali and English in her repertoire. She cannot separate one language from another.

This means that monolingual tests do not test students' bilingual or multilingual abilities. Unfortunately, the students who show their bi-/multilingual abilities in language tests are considered 'deficient' and 'poor'. However, the above example represents the use of language in the real-life (authentic) context.

There are ways to test multilingual abilities. For example, an inquiry-based formative assessment, which engages students in doing research and working with teachers to receive qualitative feedback on their work, can be one way to help them fully utilize their multilingual abilities. Such assessments encourage students to translanguage (use multiple languages to perform different tasks) to achieve the goals as specified by the test criteria. However, any kind of so-called 'standardized test', which are guided by the monolingual assumption, cannot test bi-/multilingual abilities. We should say a big 'NO' to the standardized tests if we truly believe in developing equitable language testing.

Prem Phyak is an MA (TESOL), Institute of Education, University of London, UK, M.Ed., Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Tirth Raj Khaniya:

Lack of professionalism is the main problem of English Language Testing in the context of Nepal. Professionalism is known as ability of applying fairness, ethics and standards in exam related issues. While dealing with exam related matters we need to be fair. We assume that we are professional but in reality we are not professional thus the test is not testing what it is supposed to test.

In language testing for teachers' to be professional they require both necessary skills and abilities and application of those skills and abilities in a proper manner. To maintain professionalism it is necessary to have wide discussion among teachers and therefore all those who are involved in exams will have clear understanding.

Tirth Raj Khaniya has a Ph. D. in Language Testing from University of Edinburgh, UK. Currently, a Professor of English Education, he teaches language testing in the Department of English Education, TU.

Ganga Ram Gautam:

The main problem of language testing in Nepal is that the test itself is faulty. It does not test the language skills but test the memory of the text materials given in the textbook.

There are also other several problems that include the issues with the test writers, test item construction, test administration and validation of the tests.

One solution of this problem could be to develop standardized tests and administer them in the various key stages such as primary level, lower secondary level and secondary level. In order to do this, we need to train a team of experts to develop the test and the test should be standardized by going through the reliability and validity testing. Once the tests are developed, they should be administered in a proper way so that the real language proficiency of the students can be obtained.

Ganga Ram Gautam is an Associate Professor at Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tribhuvan University and former president of NELTA.

Laxman Gnawali:

There is no need to reiterate that the aim of the learning a foreign language is to be able to communicate in it. In order to find out whether English language learners in the Nepalese schools have developed communicative skills in this foreign language, there is a provision for the testing of listening and speaking at the SLC level. I feel that this test is not serving the purpose. The lowest marks students get in speaking is 10 out of 15, which is 66%. However, when we communicate with the SLC graduates (let alone who fail the examination), most of them perform very poorly. There are two reasons for this inflated marking: the speaking test includes predictable questions for which the responses can be rehearsed: personal introduction, picture description and one function-based question (which is repeated so often that students can prepare a limited set of responses and be ready of the test). Secondly, there is a kind of extreme leniency in the examiners; they just award marks irrespective of the quality of the responses.

Two interventions could improve the situation. Firstly, the examiners should be trained to ask very simple everyday realistic questions which students cannot respond without knowing the language. Secondly, each test should be video recorded so that inflated marks can be easily scrutinised. Administrative issues should not come in the way of quality testing which has far-reaching consequences.

Laxman Gnawali is an Associate Professor at Kathmandu University and Former Senior Vice President of NELTA

Laxmi Prasad Ojha:

I think we are giving too much priority to examinations and tests in our education system. We do not understand the purpose of testing and evaluation. We don't test the comprehension and understanding of students. This is the main cause of the failure of our education system in many cases, including the language teaching programmes.

Uttam Gaulee:

I think "formative" should be the key word here. Laxmi ji, pointed out an important bottleneck we have experienced due to lack of purpose of testing and evaluation. If we think of a typical Nepali school, we do give more importance on summative tests than the formative ones. What we seriously lack (and that's why we have a tremendous opportunity to work on) is systematic feedback for student.

Uttam Gaulee is Graduate Research Fellow, University of Florida College of Education, Gainesville, Florida

Bal Krishna Sharma:

Yeah, one way would be to introduce and practice more formative type of assessment. This will evaluate and test students' ongoing progress and learning outcomes.

Ph.D. student, University of Hawaii at Manoa

Although the issue was one, the thematic question unbelievably raised so many genuine issues. The respondents highlighted the issue of testing multilingual competencies apart from only testing monolingual ability and also suggested some ideas on how to test students' multilingual abilities. In the same way, the interaction raised the issue of lack of professionalism in language testing. Similarly, the respondents also urged that our memory-driven testing system itself is faulty. Furthermore, there is problem in test construction and administration and suggestion is put forward to develop and practise standardized tests to minimize the problems. In relation to the problem in testing listening and speaking in SLC exam, it emphasized that the test items are predictable and examiners are lenient and award marks irrespective of quality. The solution proposed is to train the examiners properly and introduce the system of video recording

students' performance. On the other hand, overemphasizing exams and not testing what it should test is characterized as a problem. The solution discussed over such problem is to give more importance to formative test rather than summative test, which helps keep the track of students' achievement.

Now the floor is open for you. Share what you think is the problem of testing system in our context and what can be the solution. We believe such interaction contributes in the development of innovative ideas in ELT.

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The Taste of Testing Students' Test Papers

June 2, 2014

Bal Ram Adhikari

"How do you find marking students' answer sheets?" To this question once asked abruptly by a friend of mine, I replied, "It tastes rather awful." "What about teaching?" he asked another question. "Oh, don't you compare teaching with testing!" That was my immediate reply.

As a teacher, my job is not over with the completion of the courses. The another important job that awaits me is testing or marking students' answer sheets of the annual written examination. I enjoy teaching. My passion for teaching has now turned into a necessity rather than a desire. I often find teaching as a process of other-transformation and self-transformation. However, once I sit with my students' answer sheets to rate their written performance in the subject, I find the same charm no more. Sometimes I question myself– What am I doing with these answer sheets?

I find testing itself intrinsically problematic

I find the notion of testing itself intrinsically problematic. The process itself tastes rather bitter. I read their written performance. I try to make sense of what they are trying to

communicate through their words. I end up with a certain impression. I pause for a while. I mentally categorize the impression into such headings as language, content, and organization. Language is further divided into accuracy, brevity, clarity; content into relevance, details and depth. Then I quantify the overall impression. I try to find the appropriate numerical values for the impression. Say, it could be five, six, seven or even eight out of ten full marks. It might be two or three. Then I circle the marks in red ink at the end of the answer. However, the whole process from the first reading through interpretation to quantification of the impression takes me by surprise— What does it mean to present my impression of their answer in the numerical form? What does it mean when I assign six out of ten? How does the impression lend itself to quantification? Impression is intangible while quantification is tangible. It is the very process of converting the intangible into the tangible that puts students into two different bins: the pass and the fail. The passes are again ranked as first, second, third and last creating the notion of comparison and competition. The quantification also functions as a gatekeeper. How I quantify my impression of their answers might be detrimental (if low marks) or beneficial (if high marks) to their future academic as well as professional life. Similarly, the marks can also be detrimental or beneficial to the student's self-esteem throughout their life. Isn't it a funny as well as fatal game to play? Someone else's impression of your performance determines your career and remains that with you throughout your life? Accepting this as part of academic and professional life, I enter into the process of evaluation. However, it tastes even bitter when I begin turning over the pages of the answer sheets.

Why does testing taste bitter?

Most of the answer sheets that I have marked leave the bitter taste behind. First, it is hard to make sense of what most of my students are trying to communicate. Here, I would like to present some sample sentences that I have picked up from the written performance of Masters' second year students:

- Translator should also have bilingual as well as bicultural.
- On the above topic I am going to write argue for
- The main concern of today is only deconstruction. It is always starts with questions and goes beyond the logocentrism.
- I support this sentence by my heart due to culture is a inseparable element at translation process.
- In translating metaphoric expressions, there occurs different problems.
- The distinguish between them can be listed in the following ways. The time makes the clear distinguish between them. Anyway, translation and interpretation are same.

Such expressions abound the answer sheets of the advanced level students specializing in English. These are but few pieces of evidence out of 200 hundred sentences I have collected from students' academic performance. When I run into such pidgin-like English, it strikes me— What did I teach? What did they learn? Or worse, did I teach them at all? Did they learn from my teaching at all? These questions are worth contemplating in terms of subject matter and the language they use to communicate to the prospective readers.

It is really hard to interpret their answer sheets when they are poor in terms of grammatical accuracy and clarity. Despite this, as a teacher, I try to make sense of what they are trying to communicate keeping the language matter aside and bringing the content to the fore. However, they are advanced English students. Subject matter knowledge and accurate writing ability must have the equal weight. Sometimes, the latter may get more priority. Now, it is hard for me to continue reading such answer papers which are hardly intelligible. How many marks should I assign them on what criteria? Should I penalize them for their language? I often grow 'sympathetic' to their poor level of language performance with the thought that development of writing proficiency is a life-long process. At least, they have demonstrated some knowledge in the content area. They will improve their language in course of their professional life. I console myself. However, the difficulty does not end here. My thought of being liberal to their level of language is immediately followed by another problem i.e. the complex interaction between language and content.

Language and content are inviolably interdependent. Is it possible or desirable to assign marks to their writing being 'sympathetic' to their language? Can we make such a separation in practice? Isn't it something like running contrary to McLuhan's famous dictum "the medium is the message"? I find myself in the helpless situation. I have to drop most of the criteria of marking that I happened to mentally outline before setting about the job. It makes my job rather difficult. I cannot fail the majority of the students for their poor performance in writing. Nor can I assign them the pass marks only considering their subject matter knowledge. In either case, I feel guilty. My students' poor performance hints at the quality of my own teaching. Their failure means my failure too. I am testing myself as a teacher while testing them. The tester himself is tested. Nevertheless, I cannot, nor should I assign marks only to pass them. This means the information quantified in the form of marks is not valid. I am giving the invalid information to the concerned authority, and the professional organizations that rely on the marks for the purpose of selection. I have been in such a quandary for years while testing my students' test papers.



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Teaching and Testing Listening at Secondary Level

June 2, 2014

Bhupal Sin Bista

This article discusses the techniques and activities used by the secondary level English teachers while teaching listening. It also sheds lights on the gap between the teachers' theoretical knowledge and its use in classroom teaching, including situation of testing listening in Nepalese schools. For this, data were collected from different secondary level English teachers teaching in Kathmandu district, which helped explore the techniques and activities employed by the teachers in classrooms.

Background

For many years, listening skills did not receive priority in language teaching. Teaching methods emphasized productive skills, and the relationship between receptive and productive skills was poorly understood. (Richards & Renandya, 2010). In fact, among the four language skills, listening is the primary language skill. A child becomes able to speak after getting enough exposure to the language through listening. Researches show that congenitally deaf children are unable to acquire language though they are given enough exposure. Therefore, listening is the most important skill of all.

In the context of our country, teaching listening has been highly focused in the present English curriculum of secondary level. As the curriculum is based on the communicative

approach, teaching listening is a must for the development of communicative competence in students. Taking into account the worth of listening skill, it is taught in the secondary schools of both the community and institutional (private) schools. However, only teaching is not enough. There should be the use of right appropriate methodology. In this context, it is imperative to explore whether listening skill is taught as it should have been or not. Furthermore, it is equally important to find out the gap between the teachers' theoretical knowledge of teaching listening and its application in the classroom. Thus, the research was carried out in order to find out the reality.

Teaching Listening

In this study, teaching listening refers to teaching listening comprehension. Listening is an activity of paying attention to and trying to get meaning from something we hear (Underwood, 1989, p. 1). It involves understanding a speaker's accent and pronunciation, his grammar and vocabulary and grasping his meaning. For successful communication, listening skill is essential, so it should be taught to students. In order to teach listening comprehension effectively, the teacher should be clear about the skill to be developed in students. According to Rivers (1978, p. 142), before the teacher can devise a sequence of activities which will train students in listening comprehension, he must understand the nature of the skill he is setting out to develop. Field in Richards & Renandya (2010, pp. 242-247) examines a commonly used format for teaching listening, one which involves three stages in a listening activity: pre-listening, listening and post-listening.

Listening skill should be taught properly to the students at school. Instead of leaving it to be developed as part of a pupil's general education training, it is to be taught explicitly to them. Students spend half of the classroom time in listening, so it should be developed properly. In this context, Hron (1985, as cited in Rost, 1994, p. 118) suggests that listening should be developed in all school children since it is a vital means of learning that may be as important as reading. In order to teach listening properly and effectively, appropriate approaches should be used. Without employing the appropriate approaches, listening skills cannot be taught well. For the development of appropriate approaches to teaching listening skills, it is essential to understand the nature of listening. In this regard, Nunan in Richards and Renandya (2010) mentions two types of models: the bottom-up and the top-down processing model. The bottom-up processing model asserts that listening is a process of understanding meaning from phonemes to complete texts. The top down processing model, on the other hand, views that listening is a process of understanding meaning on the basis of the listener's shared or prior

knowledge. In this way, these models are to be taken into account while teaching listening.

Stages of Teaching Listening

There are generally three stages of teaching listening, viz. pre-listening, while-listening and post-listening stages. They are also known as listening techniques.

1. The Pre-listening Stage

This is the first stage of teaching listening. At this stage, students are given some background information about the audio. Indeed, this is the preparatory phase of teaching listening in which students are prepared and motivated for listening and performing the tasks. Following Underwood (1989, p. 3), it consists of several activities like giving background information, looking picture, topic discussion, question answer, etc.

2. The While-listening Stage

In this stage, the students listen to audio, perform the activities and do the tasks based on the listening comprehension. This is the actual listening stage whereby students are asked to do exercises based on the audio. The main purpose of this stage is to help the students develop the skill of eliciting messages from spoken language.

3. The Post-listening Stage

This is the final stage where follow-up activities are done. As its name implies, post-listening stage embraces all the activities related to a particular listening activity which are done after the listening is completed. In a way, this stage is the extension of the activities done at pre-and while-listening stages. Problem-solving and decision-making activities, interpreting activities, role-play activities, written work, etc. can be exploited at this stage.

Testing Listening

Listening is one of the crucial language skills. Therefore, like other skills it should be taught and tested properly and regularly. While testing listening, different aspects of language should be tested. These generally encompass grammatical knowledge, discourse knowledge, pragmatic knowledge, sociolinguistic knowledge, etc. In this way, testers have to test the different aspects of listening skill. Listening perception and listening comprehension skills are to be taken into account while testing listening skills. In this regard, Buck (2010, p. 105) says that test developers would choose the following aspects of language competence which met the requirements of their test.

- Knowledge of the sound system

- Understanding local linguistic meanings
- Understanding full linguistic meanings
- Understanding inferred meanings
- Communicative listening ability

Listening Skill in English Curriculum of Secondary Level

The present English curriculum of secondary level is based on the communicative approach to language teaching. It has incorporated four language skills and language functions in its content. Listening skill is also focused in the curriculum. In the examination, 10% of the total marks is allocated to listening skill. For the development of listening skill in students, there is a provision of listening lesson in each unit of the textbook. For the purpose of teaching listening, Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) has developed audio cassettes for classes nine and ten. The curriculum has mentioned the following objectives of teaching listening:

- Listen to spoken text, understand the gist and retrieve specific information from it.
- Record in note or make summary from the main points of spoken messages.
- Respond appropriately to spoken directions or instructions.

Teaching and Testing Listening at Secondary Level

The secondary level curriculum of Nepal aims at developing the communicative competence in students. That is to say, it is based on the communicative approach to language teaching. The teachers teaching at this level, therefore, are expected to teach the listening skill in accordance with the objectives of the curriculum. This skill should be equally focused as other skills of language teaching but in reality, this skill has been neglected. During the research, it was found that listening skill was not taught in the secondary level of Nepal. However, some schools were found giving importance to teaching this skill. The researcher visited different schools and used different tools for the purpose of research. From the theoretical point of view, almost all the teachers were found having sound knowledge of teaching listening. However, this knowledge was not used in the actual classrooms.

Teaching and testing should go simultaneously. Teaching listening should be fostered by testing as testing is an integral part of teaching. Whatever is taught in the classroom should be tested, for the items neglected in the testing are generally neglected in the teaching as well. Therefore, for the effective teaching of listening, it should be tested

seriously in examination. However, in the secondary schools of Nepal, listening skill is not tested properly. There is the provision of testing in the curriculum. However, its implementation is very poor. Testing listening has merely become a matter of formality. It is not tested properly even in School Leaving Certificate (SLC) board examination. Listening is also one of the crucial components of language learning. Without having detailed knowledge of listening, the learners cannot achieve sound communicative competence.

Findings

The major findings of the study are as follows:

- The majority of the teachers were found using only two stages of teaching listening (i.e. pre- and while- listening).
- Although the majority of the teachers were found having sound knowledge of teaching listening, they were found not employing their theoretical knowledge in the classroom teaching. Only a few teachers were found using this knowledge while teaching listening in the classroom. Thus, there is a vast gap between the teachers' theoretical knowledge of teaching listening and its application in the classroom teaching.
- No teachers were found conducting listening as the course prescribes. Most of the teachers were found not conducting listening consistently: sometimes they conducted listening once a week and sometimes even once a month.
- The majority of the teachers were found not giving priority to listening skills. They did not take listening as one of the most important language skills.
- Listening skill was not tested properly in the secondary schools of Nepal.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the findings of the research:

- All the teachers who are teaching listening at secondary schools should use at least the following listening techniques and activities.

a. Pre-listening stage

- Giving background information of the listening text
- Picture discussion
- Discussion on the topic and/or situation
- Reviewing the areas of grammar
- Simplifying the meaning of difficult words given in the text.

b. While-listening stage

- Short answer questions
- True/false items
- Fill in the blank items
- Multiple choice items
- c. Post-listening stage
 - Writing or presenting the summary
 - Parallel writing
 - Dictation
- Most of the teachers were found having sound theoretical knowledge of teaching listening. However, they did not apply the knowledge in the classroom, Therefore, seminars and workshops should be organized to refresh and enhance the skills of the teachers, especially, NCED should develop special training package for teaching listening.
- Most of the teachers were found neglecting and not giving priority to listening in their teaching. Therefore, it should be made an important part of examination and tested properly. As a whole, teachers and other stakeholders should be made aware of the importance of listening via conferences, seminars, workshops, etc.
- Secondary level English course prescribes listening lesson in each unit. However, teachers were found not teaching listening according to the course. Thus, teachers should be encouraged to use enough listening materials in order to give sufficient exposure to students.
- Some schools were found not having appropriate listening materials. Thus, the concerned authority should make the mandatory provision of managing required materials in every school.

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Classroom Assessment: A New Era in Language Testing or An Additional exercise?

June 2, 2014

Presented By: Ashok Raj Khati and Manita Karki

Language testing cannot be separated from the changing understanding of the nature of language, language abilities, and language teaching and learning. Accordingly, what is to be tested in language teaching has drastically been changing in recent times as a result of changes in what is to be taught. In this regard, we have entered a new era in language testing, which is classroom assessment also termed as performance assessment.

In recent years, there has been a growing discussion on whether classroom testing should replace other tests. In this essay, we suggest that it should work as a supplement to paper and pencil tests. The method may not be capable of replacing established methods of testing but there are a number of benefits that make classroom-based language testing more genuine and better attuned to effective language teaching and learning by today's standards.

Let us begin with the central role of teacher in classroom assessment through this real story.

In an award giving ceremony to School Leaving Certificate (SLC) graduates, a teacher stepped forward and asked a particular student whom he had taught for years, "How did you get the first division, you deserve the second division." Though the student passed SLC and got certificate of the first division, the teacher remarked so confidently that he should not have got first division.

It indicates the fact that teacher spend long time with his/her students and are able to evaluate them more or less rightly. In many countries, a teacher is the authority. If a student is unable to sit in the final examination because of certain reasons; the teacher has a right to recommend grades or percentages to examination board based on the students' internal/classroom assessment and the board accepts it. Doing that makes teacher fair and ethical. However, there are many other contexts where teachers have not gained this sort of credibility. The point is it is the teacher who can best judge his or her students and it the classroom tests which allows teachers to do so. Therefore, classroom assessment is accepted as being close to what we are struggling for a long time.

Secondly, in most of the cases, we make a machine type of judgement when we test students through paper and pencil beyond the class but it is a human mind or brain that is involved in making judgement on classroom assessment. It used to be believed that everything can be tested by using a paper and pencil test but now people have started asking how? There are things that we want to test which cannot be tested by paper and pencil based test. The answer to this question is classroom testing. There are so many things that we can do in classroom which cannot be done through a paper and pencil test. We cannot test all types of abilities and skills by paper and pencil test because of expertise, time, and other limitations, but classroom assessment is genuine and it is worth implementing.

Class room assessment or performance assessment is genuine because one cannot test people's actual language ability while they are not actually performing an act by using it. It is the classroom that allows learners to perform. In this regard, classroom assessment captures genuineness. Many scholars have realized that paper and pencil test, whether it is based on communicative approach or something else, cannot authentically test students' performance. Especially a large-scale test cannot be a performance based test. There were classroom tests after 2010 but those tests were used for internal assessment.

Classroom tests are different, they are bound to be different and they are of different designs.

Classroom assessment is collaborative in nature. When students obtain marks in board examination, one common thing they cannot figure out is on what basis was their answers marked and consequently, they think they are given less and what they deserve. However, in classroom assessment, teacher works with students before, during, and after the assessment. The presence of students makes teacher cautious and transparent. Thus, the teacher makes judgement of the students in a collaborative manner. Further, teachers can also assess students' performance by assigning group work that makes classroom testing different from large-scale assessment. That adds one more dimension to collaboration.

The best thing about classroom testing is that it is learning focused. As a result, it has positive wash back. It mainly focuses process and less product. Teachers get enough opportunities to observe the different learning processes of their students in classroom assessment. By contrast, paper and pencil test may not be able to create situations and offer adequate opportunities to demonstrate different abilities and skills, and perform certain tasks on the part of students. It is more product-oriented. It is only classroom test that can make learners perform tasks while being tested.

In the same way, classroom assessment is a social phenomenon. The classroom is a society. A school is run for teaching and learning but at the same time, we manage it in a way that that would be the representation of the society. Thus, the classroom assessment is a social phenomenon where we promote classroom assessment and students learn and practise performance based activities, which they will continue to practise outside the classroom.

In terms of creativity, classroom testing is not an entirely new approach because in some way prior approaches also tried to capture what this approach tries to do. A good example of this is how Bloom's Taxonomy captured a range of simple to complex competencies. It is very difficult to capture the psychological processing of learners in many occasions. We have to be tentative to assess it. Testing cannot be a science; it is different from many other activities. The focus of language testing is: what is the content of the language, where is it, how do we get hold of it? Scholars who are advocating for communicative testing have now realized that what they were trying to accomplish with it is something different. Icons of language testing has different views on communicative testing. Some say that it is not necessary to test communicative abilities through communicative approach. After 2010, testing has moved into assessment,

assessment has moved into performance, and testing tends to be always indirect unless one asks students to perform certain tasks. It is not the test that tests; it is the tasks that test. It may be hard to determine whether or not classroom testing can entirely replace communicative testing. However, classroom-based testing can be a focus of testing because it is very close to reality since teachers will be asking students those tasks in the classroom which they are supposed to do outside the classroom in their real lives.

While talking about classroom-based testing communicative testing, there may arise a question of construct. The construct is the basic characteristics of activities of an event, the psychological and the philosophical aspects of skills and abilities, and the quality of the content. The construct in communicative language testing may be assessed in an indirect way by bringing language performance into the classroom and assessing it. The concept of communicative language teaching and testing in a real sense has been changing. Henry Widdowson, one of the prominent scholars in the field of Applied Linguistics, wrote a book in 1979, "Teaching English as Communication". Once in 2000, he said that if he were to revisit that book, he would call it "Teaching English for Communication". He realized that it is not possible to teach English as communication. He was excited to talk about communication in 1980s but later he found that it was not easy to capture communicative activities and bring them into the classroom and make it happen. In some ways, it has to be indirect, less communicative and difficult to bring communication in the classroom.

In a way, the philosophy behind the communicative language teaching (CLT) is the continuity of what we have been doing for the last 70 years. Somehow, CLT is also based on a paper and pencil test. At the end of the day, teachers give test to students to perform where they may not authentically perform language use. Based on the change from CLT to language teaching and testing, teachers and scholars began to realize that classroom assessment should be an additional learning exercise. Therefore, a genuine assessment must be a performance assessment and an inherent part of the whole process and that is the next era of language testing. It does not mean that communicative language testing has nothing to do with language teaching and testing in the days to come. We are still using 1960s' multiple choice items. All previous methods of language testing have made lots of contributions to language testing but we are moving toward something new. Communicative approach in testing will also continue because it has strengths and potentialities but at the same time, the thrust of classroom assessment needs to lead classroom teaching and learning activities. In sum, classroom assessment is an important approach to language testing. It appears to be very close to what we have been trying to find out. It may take time to make a

strong ground to be a prominent approach. So for now, classroom assessment is an additional option- not a replacement. It will contribute to make assessment more authentic and better attuned to current understanding of language learning. It will be a good instrument for us to improve teaching and testing in the classroom.

(The piece is based on a lecture delivered by Prof. Dr. Tirth Raj Khaniya at the School of Education, Kathmandu University)







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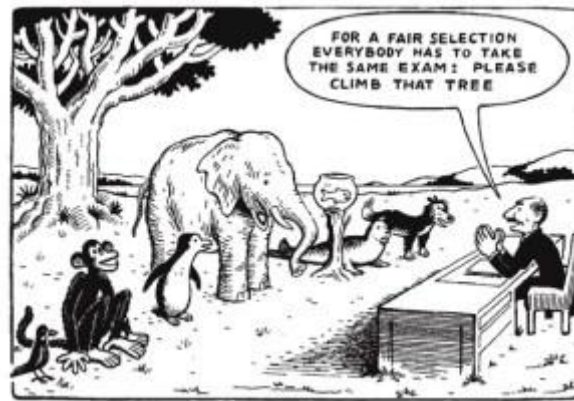
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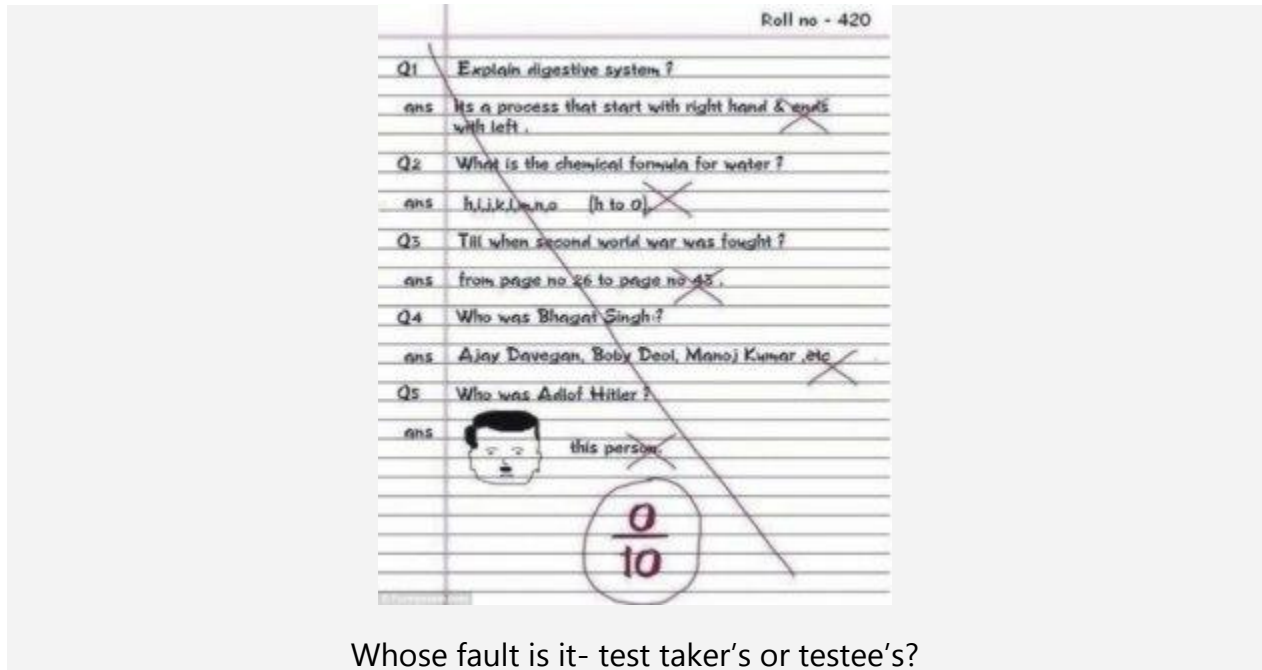
June 2, 2014



All in one basket!!

**I study
I take the test
I pass it
I forget what I learned.**

Isn't it true?



Whose fault is it- test taker's or testee's?





A route to THESIS!!



After-effect of test!!!

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