

LANGUAGE IN INDIA

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow

Volume 9 : 12 December 2009

ISSN 1930-2940

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Conversational Cloze as a Measure of Ability in English in Indian Schools

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Introduction

This study aims to bridge the gap between English language teaching and mother tongue teaching (Bengali).

The main focus of the present study was to measure the comprehension level of the informants in English Conversational Cloze tests in both English and Bengali medium schools to identify the level of command they have for the second language (English) in Standards XI and XII.

In addition to this primary focus, the study also looked into the way a cloze differentiates among levels of proficiency as well as the practicality of the technique as a language testing tool. We earnestly hope that the findings of the present study will help in redesigning the curriculum of English language teaching and mother tongue teaching in the schools of West Bengal.

The experiment is presented here in the following format: first, the paper deals with describing the materials and methods followed for this study and then it presents and discusses the results. Finally, the paper summarizes the findings and concludes with some general remarks.

Materials and Methods

In the following section we shall discuss the research tools and procedures adopted mainly in English cloze tests for both English and Bengali medium schools.

The Texts

For this study, the researchers prepared a test with a total of 4 conversations from different situations, namely, one about the conversation between two friends while they were traveling by train to go to Kolkata, another one was based on the conversation between a book-seller and the customer while purchasing a dictionary, the third one was a conversation that took place in a crowded *Sabzi* market (Vegetable Market). And the final one was the conversation between two friends while they were talking about their aim in life.

Data were collected through ethnographic consultation (face to face communication) and questionnaire. Firstly, authors recorded these conversations in Bengali language. After that the first author translated the texts from Bengali to English language.

Deletion Rate and Number

For preparing the conversational text in English, we selected words that are essential in a sentence. These included items such as parts of speech, active and passive, articles, prepositions, and so on. At the time of choosing and deleting these items from the test sentences of the text, we ensured that students did not feel any difficulty in guessing the missing items. In other words, context of sentences could aid students in indentifying the missing words and filling up the blanks suitably.

Every passage had approximately 120 to 150 words, and a total of about 20 words or items were deleted (left blank in the sentences) from the original text to reach this level.

Participants

Forty students representing a homogenous proficiency level participated in the study. The students who were on top or nearly on top of the classes were enrolled from Classes XI and XII. They were selected from 4 schools; Domkal Bhabataran High School, Modhurkul High School (Bengali medium) and Domkal Model School, Betai Senior Secondary High School (English medium).

Testing Procedure

The conversational texts without the deleted words were recorded on tape and the tape was played to the students. Students were asked to guess the missing words.

Scoring Procedure

For both English and Bengali medium schools we used both Exact Word (**EW**) and the Semantically Acceptable Word Method (**SEMAC**).

Data Analysis

This study followed the statistical analysis for overall results of conversational cloze tests in both English and Bengali medium schools. First, the authors made an analysis of the average percentages of all English cloze tests individually, and then prepared the average percentages.

Results and Discussion

School 1: Domkal Model School (English Medium) Percentage of English Cloze Tests in the Performance of Individual Students

After analyzing data, authors observed that in the first test conversational cloze test, 90 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and only 10 percent students' scored between 61 to 80 percent. In the second test, 70 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and only 30

percent students scored between 61 to 80 percent. In the third test, 90 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and 10 percent students scored between 61 to 80 percent. In the fourth test, all the students (100%) scored above 80 percent.

The table given below presents a detailed account of the score scored by the participants.

Table 1: Individual Result Distribution

No. of Cloze Tests	English Medium School-1				
	% of Students Scoring Marks				
	Total Informants	Above 80%	61%-80%	41%-60%	Below 40%
1	10	90%	10%	_____	_____
2	10	70%	30%	_____	_____
3	10	90%	10%	_____	_____
4	10	100%	_____	_____	_____

Source: Based on the field survey May, 2009

Average Percentage of All English Cloze Tests

In the case of first English medium school, after analyzing the data it was observed that 87.50 percent students scored above 80 percent, 10 percent students scored 61 to 80 percent and only 2.50 percent students scored between 41 to 60 percent.

The result is presented diagrammatically as follows:

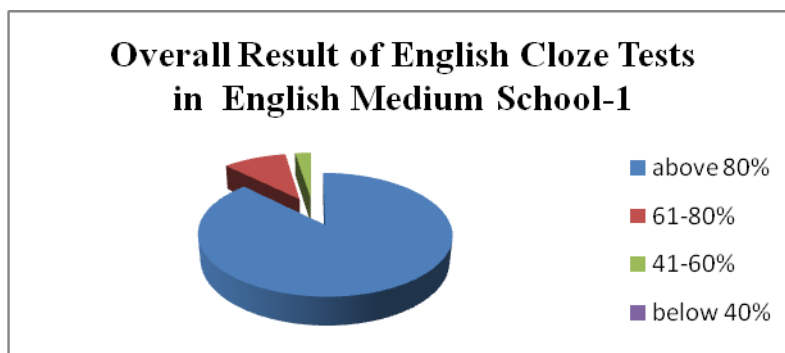


Fig. 1. Overall Result Distribution

School 2: Betai Senior Secondary High School (English Medium)

Percentage of English cloze tests individually:

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

9 : 12 December 2009

Md. Sohel Rana, Ph.D. Candidate

Conversational Cloze as a Measure of Ability in English

Through the analysis of the data of the second school, authors observed that in the first English conversational cloze test, 50 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and only 50 percent of the students scored between 61 to 80 percent. However, in the second cloze test, 60 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and only 40 percent of the students scored between 61 to 80 percent. In the third test, 90 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and no one scored between 61 to 80 percent. Only 10 per cent of the students scored between 41-60 percent. In the fourth test, 80 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and 20 per cent of the students scored between 61-80 percent.

The score of the English medium school-2 is presented below in a tabular form:

Table 2: Individual Result Distribution

No. of Cloze Tests	English Medium School-2				
	% of Students Scoring Marks				
	Total Informants	Above 80%	61%-80%	41%-60%	Below 40%
1	10	50%	50%	_____	_____
2	10	60%	40%	_____	_____
3	10	90%	_____	10%	_____
4	10	80%	20%	_____	_____

Source: Based on the field survey May, 2009

Average Percentage of All English Cloze Tests

In the case of the second English medium school, after analyzing the data it is observed that 70 percent of the students scored above 80 percent, 27.5 percent of the students scored 61 to 80 percent and only 2.50 percent of the students scored between 41 to 60 percent.

The result is also presented diagrammatically as follows:

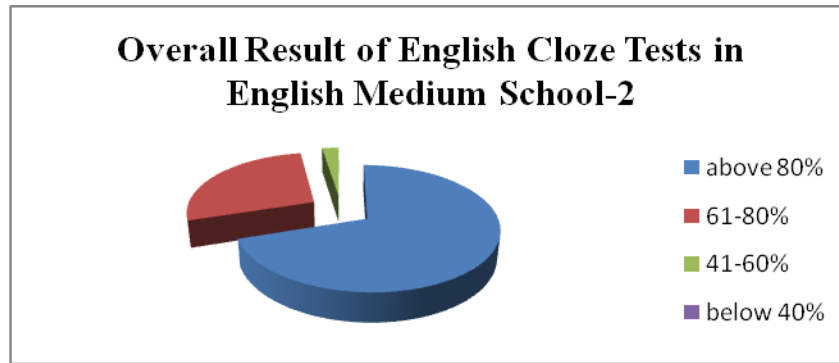


Fig. 2. Overall Result Distribution

Result for Both the English Medium Schools

Table 3: Showing the Value of Average Scores in both English Medium Schools for English Conversational Cloze Test.

Medium	Avg. of Cloze -1	Avg. of Cloze -2	Avg. of Cloze -3	Avg. of Cloze -4	Total Avg.
English Medium-1	18.8	18.2	18.2	19.4	18.65
English Medium-2	16.6	17.1	18.3	17.9	17.48
Total average:			18.07		

Source: Based on the field survey May, 2009

A comparison of the total average result for the conversational cloze test in both the English medium schools is given in the bar chart given below.

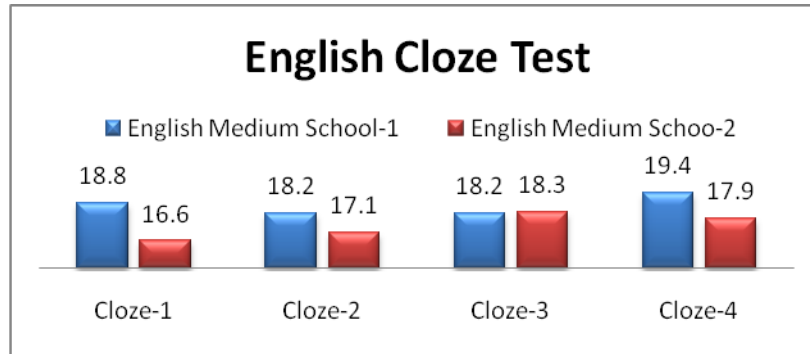


Fig.3. Showing Total Average of both English Medium Schools (English Cloze Test)

School-3 Domkal Bhabataran High School (Bengali Medium)

Percentage of English Cloze Tests

Through an analysis of the data, authors observed that in the first English conversational cloze test, 60 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and 40 percent of the students' scored between 61 to 80 percent.

In the second test, 50 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and 40 percent of the students scored between 61 to 80 percent and 10 percent of the nstudents scored between 41-60 percent.

In third test, 70 percent of the students scored above 80 percent, 20 percent of the students scored between 61 to 80 percent and only 10 percent of the students scored between 41 to 60 percent.

In the fourth test, 70 percent of the students scored above 80 percent, and 30 percent of the students scored between 61 to 8 percent. The result is presented below in a tabular form:

Table 4: Individual Result Distribution

No. of Cloze Tests	Bengali Medium School-1				
	% of Students scoring Marks				
	Total Informants	Above 80%	61%-80%	41%-60%	Below 40%
1	10	60%	40%	_____	_____
2	10	50%	40%	10%	_____
3	10	70%	20%	10%	_____
4	10	70%	30%	_____	_____

Source: Based on the field survey May, 2009

Average Percentage of All English Cloze Tests

In case of the first Bengali medium school, after analyzing the data it is observed that 62.50 percent of the students have scored above 80 percent, 32.50 percent of the students scored 61 to 80 percent and only 5 percent of the students scored between 41 to 60 percent.

The result is presented diagrammatically as follows:

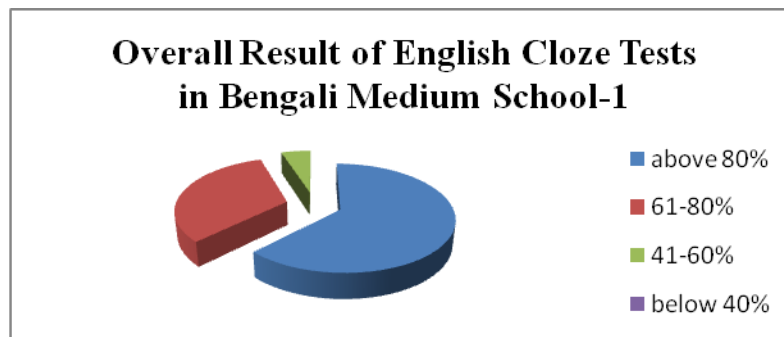


Fig. 4. Overall Result Distribution

School-4 Modhurkul High School (Bengali Medium) Percentage of English Cloze Tests

After analyzing data, authors found out that the results of English Conversational cloze test in this school showed that 30 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and 60 percent of the students scored between 61 to 80 percent. 10 percent of the students scored 41 to 60 percent.

In the second cloze test, 40 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and only 50 percent of the students scored between 61 to 80 percent, while only 10 percent of the students scored below 40 percent.

In the third cloze test, 60 percent of the students scored above 80 percent, 30 percent of the students scored between 61 to 80 percent and only 10 percent of the students scored between 41 to 60 percent.

In the fourth cloze test, 50 percent of the students scored above 80 percent and 50 percent of the students scored between 61 to 80 percent.

In the case of this School, the results are shown in the table given below:

Table 5: Individual Result Distribution

No.of Cloze Tests	Bengali Medium School-2				
	% of Students Scoring Marks				
	Total Informants	Above 80%	61%-80%	41%-60%	Below 40%
1	10	30%	60%	10%	_____
2	10	40%	50%	_____	10%
3	10	60%	30%	10%	_____
4	10	50%	50%	_____	_____

Source: Based on the field survey May, 2009

Average Percentage of All English Cloze Tests in Bengali Medium Schools

In the case of the second Bengali medium school, after analyzing the data, it was observed that 45 percent of the students have scored above 80 percent, 47.50 percent of the students scored 61 to 80 percent and only 5 percent of the students scored between 41 to 60 percent. And only 2.50 percent of the students scored below 40 percent.

The result is presented diagrammatically as follows:

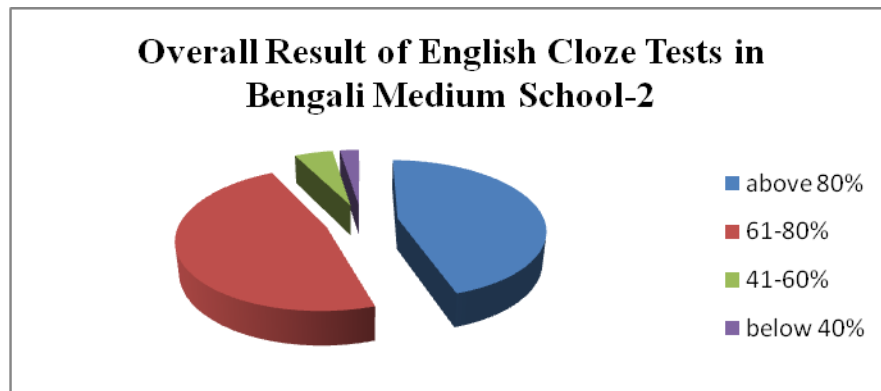


Fig.5. Overall Result Distribution

Result for Both Bengali Medium Schools Relating to English Conversational Cloze Tests

After analysing the score of English conversational cloze tests individually for both Bengali medium schools is presented in the table below:

Table 6: Showing the value of average score for both Bengali medium schools for English conversational cloze test.

Medium	Avg. of Cloze -1	Avg. of Cloze -2	Avg. of Cloze -3	Avg. of Cloze -4	Total Avg.
Bengali Medium-1	17.1	15.6	16.2	17.6	16.63
Bengali Medium-2	15.1	15.2	16.5	16.5	15.82
Total average:			16.22		

Source: Based on the field survey May, 2009

After investigating the total average results for the both Bengali medium schools the results were compared for further analysis.

The comparison is presented diagrammatically below.

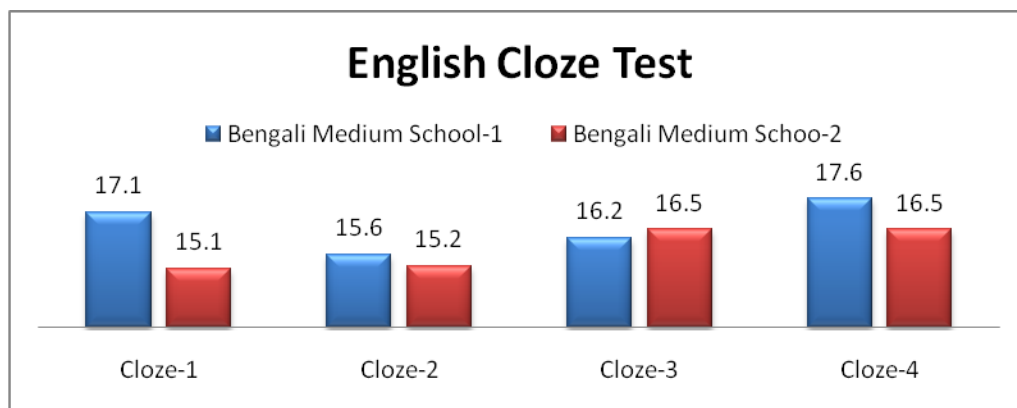


Fig.6. Showing Total Average of both Bengali Medium Schools (English Cloze Test)

Discussion

The analysis of the scores of English conversational cloze tests suggests that in the first cloze test the students scored very high in comparison with the second cloze test. In the third and fourth cloze tests the result was very satisfactory because after giving the first and second test the students felt more comfortable with conversational cloze test.

MEAN COMPARISON OF FOUR ENGLISH CLOZE TESTS IN BOTH ENGLISH AND BENGALI SCHOOLS

Two tables are given below, which show the total mean for English conversational cloze tests in both English medium school-1 (EMS -1) and English medium school-2 (EMS-2); and also in both Bengali medium-1 (BMS-1) and Bengali medium-2 (BMS-2).

Table 7: Comparison of English cloze mean in EMS-1 and EMS-2

English Cloze Test					
Medium	Mean				Total
	Cloze-1	Cloze-2	Cloze-3	Cloze-4	
English Medium School-1	18.8	18.2	18.2	19.4	74.60
English Medium School-2	16.6	17.1	18.3	17.9	69.90
Total Mean	144.50				

Table 8: Comparison of English cloze mean in BMS-1 and BMS-2

English Cloze Test					
Medium	Mean				Total
	Cloze-1	Cloze-2	Cloze-3	Cloze-4	
Bengali Medium School-1	17.1	15.6	16.2	17.6	66.50
Bengali Medium School-2	15.1	15.2	16.5	16.5	63.30
Total Mean	129.80				

After comparing the data from table 7 and 8, it is noticed that the total mean for the both English medium school-1 and English medium school-2 is 144.50. And from the second table it is observed that in Bengali medium school-1 and Bengali medium school-2 the total mean is 129.80.

Conclusion

The results show that the English conversational cloze test (2nd L) had received a higher mean level in the English medium schools as compared to the Bengali medium schools, thus suggesting that, on the whole, the students who are studying all subjects of the curriculum using English medium have shown a higher command over English language as compared to the students studying in Bengali medium school.

Now a question remains why the students of Bengali medium schools have lower scores when compared with the students of the English medium schools. The answer to this question probably revolves around the quantum of exposure to English in both the media schools. Students studying in Bengali medium schools study English only as a subject (only one paper in English in the examination system) in their syllabus, whereas in the English medium school, students are required to use English to study every subject offered in the curriculum and to write their examinations using on English.

Colophon:

My grateful thanks are due to Prof. A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D. under whose guidance and supervision this article was written.

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