

INTRODUCTION

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In the overall system of teaching and learning English as a second language there have been a number of new trends in the past several years. In the early years of this century grammar translation method was given up in favour of the direct method and alongwith this, translation as a testing device was also largely discarded. However, essay-type of questions continued to be powerful tools in testing English even as a second language. Around the middle of the century, the structural approach to teaching had become established and discrete-point testing had gained importance. This, too had its own disadvantages, especially as a tool for testing language skills - speaking, listening, reading and writing. In the search for tools for testing overall language ability researchers came upon the cloze procedure. In the beginning, this was used as a test of the measure of readability of texts. Eventually, it was applied in the testing of reading comprehension, knowledge of grammar and lexis and even to some extent as a measure of writing ability.

With the wide-spread use of this cloze technique as a tool for testing overall language ability, a number of problems connected with the technique are being researched into very extensively. Among them, selection of passages, identification

of appropriate items for deletion, the rate of deletion in terms of regular intervals and scoring procedures have received great attention. Among these many have still remained controversial - particularly the kind of passage, the rate of deletion and the identification of appropriate item for deletion. In the case of the rate of deletion, scholars have always felt intuitively that higher rates of deletion produce higher scores and vice versa. However, empirical findings have belied this feeling. In spite of several findings to the contrary, the present researcher felt strongly that higher rate of deletion should produce better results and decided to replicate one recent experiment conducted in the Indian setting (Nihalani 1979).

A comprehensive report of the investigation carried out at the Department of English, Shivaji University, is given in this thesis. The report is divided into three chapters and the materials used in the experiment are appended to it.

The first chapter entitled 'Cloze Procedure' gives a brief account of discrete-point tests versus overall language ability tests and goes on to describe the rationale behind the cloze procedure, the assumptions behind the construction of cloze test and the actual procedures generally followed in constructing a cloze test. Scoring procedures generally used

are discussed and the problem of determining N in preparing a cloze test is stated.

The second chapter, entitled 'Replication of the Experiment' begins with the statement of the objectives and describes in some detail Nihalani's work, which is replicated by the present research. After taking a close look at Nihalani's findings, the methods and materials and administration of the test, used in this experiment are described.

The results of our experiment with two groups of students - one, undergraduate and two, postgraduate are discussed together with Nihalani's findings. Once again our findings also happen to be more or less the same as Nihalani's (and other earlier researchers). Even certain counterintuitive and intriguing findings of Nihalani's, turned out to be true of our findings. This is all the more intriguing. Hence, a third chapter is added to discuss the elusive N in cloze procedure.

In the third chapter on 'The Elusive N in Cloze Procedure', two important factors have been discussed. Empirical findings on the relation between blank-position and difficulty level has been reported in some detail. The obvious connection or lack of connection between the rate of deletion that is N

and the difficulty level of a passage has been noted. Again, empirical findings on sensitivity of cloze items to immediate and remote contextual clues has been discussed as this also is a factor connected with the problem of rate of deletion.

One conclusion which seems to be quite disturbing is that difficulty level of a cloze test is perhaps uniquely determined by the type of the passage or the text and the particular items which are (or happen to be) deleted.

A comprehensive bibliography of all the works used in the course of this investigation is given after the third chapter. All the relevant materials like the original passage used for constructing a cloze test, the different formats used in the investigation, the raw scores of the subjects, statistical figures etc. are given in the Appendix.