

A Study of the Influence of Gender on Second Language Acquisition (A Field Based Study on the Nepali Language)

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ABSTRACT

Language acquisition has turned out to be a popular field of research. In this field the process of first language acquisition and second language acquisition are studied. Various factors have influenced the process of second language acquisition. The main purpose of the study is to evaluate the influence of gender difference in the process of second language acquisition. Data for this study has been collected through questionnaires and interviews. The sources of data is both primary and secondary. It is a Quantitative Study. The primary source of data has been acquired through questionnaires. The secondary source of data has been acquired from the journals, articles and the other works. The outcome of this study would help in the process of teaching of second languages. It would also help to nullify the effect of gender difference if there has been any in language teaching and learning process.

KEYWORDS: Language acquisition, first language, second language, factors, gender difference

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INTRODUCTION

The 20th century laid the foundation of the modern linguistic as a result of the contribution of eminent linguistics Ferdinand de Saussure. Modern linguistics opened new perspective in the field of the study of language and encompassed various subjects of research in its sphere. Among the spheres encompassed by constructive linguistics, one of the most popular has been the study of the acquisition of language. The modern linguistics have been deeply studying the process of acquisition of language by birth and the acquisition of different languages in the later part of life based on need and circumstances. Moreover it has also studied how one develop expertise in this process. The language which has been acquired by a child by birth is known as the First Language. This Language is generally acquired in the household environment and gain a considerable expertise within the age of 2-3 years. On the other hand, the acquisition of any other language after the acquisition of the first language is known as the second language. The Encyclopedia Britannica has described the first and second language as mentioned below-

"A first language or native language or mother tongue is a language that a person has been exposed to since birth or within the critical period. By the contrast, a second language is any language that one speaks other than the first language."

In the present times, studies on second language acquisition has gained a lot of attention in the field of modern linguistic study. In the course of time, it has attained the recognition of a crucial field of study in the sphere of research. Normally it can be noticed that most of the people fail in acquiring fluency or expertise like that of first language. Only a few people succeed in gaining near native fluency. Due to the presence and influence of various factors, people fail in gaining that level of expertise. In study of second language acquisition, these factors have gained importance. Gender is one of such kind of factors. This study aims to evaluate the influence of gender difference in the process of second language acquisition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Till now many studies have been conducted on the influence of gender difference in the process of second language acquisition. Jocolin Van wyk and Maria Louse Mostert jointly (Van Wyk & Mostert, 2016) coordinated a study in a school at Namibia on African English and in their report 'The Influence of Mother Tongue and Gender on the Acquisition of English (L2)' they have mentioned that the girls can acquire African English more fluently than the boys. Another scholar Wang Quian of University of Toronto has also ended up his research with same kind of findings. In his dissertation 'A Study of the Influence of Gender Difference on English Learning of Senior Higher School Students' he has concluded

with the outcome that girls can acquire second language much earlier and effectively than boys (Qian, 2015). Moreover, in his paper 'Current Perspective on the Role of Gender in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)', Karen Freedy has also received same kind of result (Feery, 2008). In a similar study, Ehrman and Oxford who looked at the strategies used by 1200 university students came to this conclusion that gender differences made a profound influence. (Ehrman & Oxford, 1995)

On the other hand, a scholar Areen Ahmed Muhammad has conducted a study on Kurdish English and prepared a dissertation name 'The Role of Age and Gender Differences in Language Learning: A Case Study on Kurdish EFL Learners'. Here he has received different outcome than the previously mentioned scholars. He has concluded with the findings that boys can learn Kurdish English more handsomely than girls can. It is noteworthy that the researcher has given a statement at the end of his dissertation, which is - "The result of this research question may differ and will alter from one society to another." (Ahmed Muhammed, 2017). According to Ellias (1994), "Sex (or gender) is, of course, likely to interact with other variables in determining L2 proficiency. It will not always be the case, therefore, that females outperform males. Asian men in Britain generally attain higher levels of proficiency in L2 English than do Asian women for the simple reason that their job bring them into contact with the majority English-speaking group, while women are often 'enclosed' in the homes.

Based on these outcomes, we can form a hypothesis (H_0) that the gender difference has a significant impact on the process of second language acquisition. This hypothesis will be tested in this study.

METHODOLOGY

One of the subject which is frequently studied in Psychology and Biology is the difference between male (or boy) and female (or girl) in obtaining maturity. Various theories explain that girl obtains maturity before boys. Even girl has entered the stage of puberty before boys. Hence, they receive physical and mental change much earlier than the boys do. It may be because of this reason that in India the minimum age for marriage is 18 years for girls and 21 years for boys respectively. Just because girl obtains maturity much earlier than boys, so it can be assumed that girls can acquire second language much faster than boys. In order to gain concrete evidence, this study has been conducted.

In this study, Nepali language is selected as second language. To conduct the proposed study six students have been nominated randomly as sample. Three of them are boys and three are girls. The age of these students are almost same. All of them fall between 22 years to 24 years. There is also a special reason to select the samples from the almost same age group. The studies reveal that age difference is a major factor which plays a significant role in second language acquisition. According to these researchers people generally acquire a language faster before puberty. This is so because, at this point the brain remains very much active. But after puberty the capability of acquiring knowledge slows down. That is in order to nullify the influence of age difference that samples from same age group have been selected. Secondly, the mother tongue of all the samples is Assamese and they

have been learning Nepali as second language from 2017 in the Department of Modern Indian Languages and Literary studies of Gauhati University. Each of these samples has been learning Nepali for the exact same period. In the later part of this study, the male samples will be indicated with X, Y and Z and the female samples will be indicated with A, B and C.

It is impossible to study minutely if we consider each and every aspects of Nepali language. Hence, in order to conduct a minute study, only one aspect which is 'interrelationship of Noun with Adjective and Verb in the Nepali Language' has been selected. In this study the efficiency of the samples will be tested only on the basis of this aspect.

PRESENTATION OF COLLECTED DATA

Interrelationship of the Gender of Noun with Adjective and Verb in Assamese and Nepali Language: An Introductory Note

1.1. In the morphology of Sanskrit language, Gender is an important aspect. The process of determining the Gender of Noun in Sanskrit language is unique. In this language gender is finalized on the basis of meaning or form or sometimes a suffix. Hence, Gender is predetermined in Grammar. In Sanskrit, the gender of the Adjective changes as per the gender of the Noun. For Example-

masculine gender - Sundrōrḥo Balbkrōrḥo (Eng.- Handsome boy)

feminine gender - Sundrī Balika (Eng.-Beautiful girl)

neuter gender - Sundrōm Fōlōm (Eng.-Beautiful fruit) (Sashtri, Khagendranath, 1969)

1.2. But in Assamese, apart from a few instances, the gender of the Adjective never changes as per the Gender of the Noun. It should be noted that in Assamese, in most cases, Adjective does not demand any interrelationship of gender with the Noun. Example-

Masculine gender	Feminine gender
Val lōra* (Good boy)	Val suwali* (Good girl)
Beya lōra* (Bad boy)	Beya suwali* (Bad girl) (Goswami, Golokchandra, 2003)

*Here 'val' and 'beya' are Adjectives and 'lōra' and 'suwali' are Nouns

1.3. Like Sanskrit in Nepali language too, the Adjective can express the gender. In this language, Adjectives generally demand interrelationship of gender with the Noun. On the basis of the gender of the Noun, the gender of Adjective changes its forms. This can be marked as a major difference between Assamese and Nepali morphology. For instance-

Masculine gender	Feminine gender
Boulaha burha# (Mad old man)	Boulahi burhi# (Mad old woman)
Lute keto\$ (Slim boy)	Luti keti\$ (Slimgirl) (Nepal, Khemraaj, 2016)

#Here, 'boulaha' and 'boulahi' are Adjectives (meaning 'mad') and 'burha' and 'burhi' are Nouns (meaning 'old man' and 'old woman' respectively)

\$Here, 'lute' and 'luti' are Adjectives (meaning 'slim') and 'keto' and 'keti' are Nouns (meaning 'boy' and 'girl' respectively)

#Here, 'U' is noun and it means he/she. 'gpyo' and 'gpyi' are verbs where separate suffix are used depending on the gender of the Noun.

1.4. If we throw light on the interrelationship of gender of Nouns with the Verbs, it can be easily traced that there is no such kind of relationship in Assamese language. The form of the Verbs remain same even if the gender of the Nouns changes. For example-

Masculine gender	Feminine gender
Rame khai&	Sitai khai&
(Ram eats)	(Sita eats)
Xi jikile@	Tai jikile@
(He has won)	(She has won)
	(Goswami, Golok chandra, 2014)

&Here, 'Ram' and 'Sita' are nouns, 'ε' and 'i' are suffix and 'khai' is verb which means 'to eat'

@ Here, 'Xi' and 'Tai' are pronouns (meaning 'he' and 'she' respectively) and 'jikile' means 'has won' where 'jik' is the verb root, '-il' and 'ε' are the suffix.

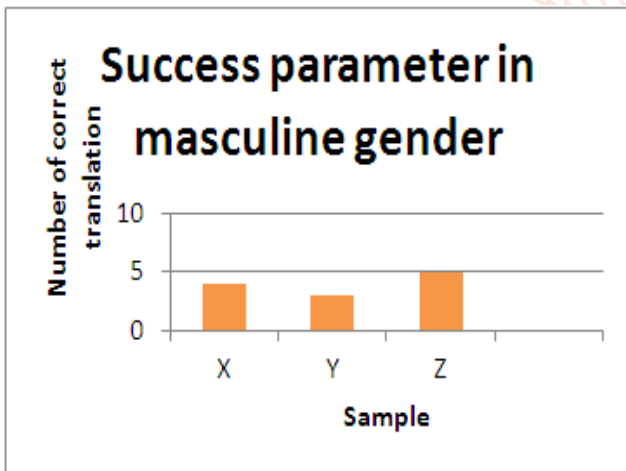
1.5. Unlike Assamese, in Nepali, there is an interrelationship of gender of Nouns with the Verbs. Generally this relationship takes place in 3rd person singular number. Example can be sited as below-

Masculine gender	Feminine gender
Rample jityo	Sitale jityi
(Ram has won)	(Sita has won)
U gpyo#	U gpi#
(He has gone)	(She has gone)
	(Nepal, Khemraaj, 2016)

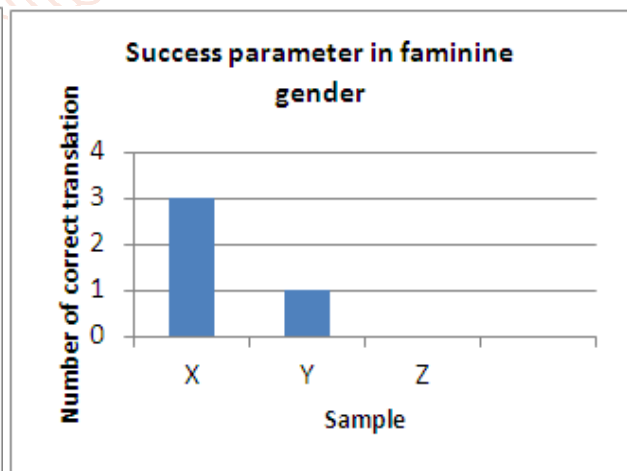
1.6. Collected data based on the Interrelation between Noun and Adjective in the Nepali language

Based on the grammatical characteristics of Assamese and Nepali language, which are mentioned with example earlier, the collected data will be analyzed. Depending on these characteristics, a questionnaire has been prepared. The questionnaire carries seventeen questions. Through the first part of the questionnaire, the researcher has tried to collect the personal data of the samples. Especially data like name, age, gender, mobile number, educational qualification and mother tongue of the samples are collected. Along with this, in the questionnaire, they are also asked to explain the reason behind their selection of Nepali as second language. Each sample has a specific goal for selecting Nepali as their second language. Notably, all of them have a common reason i.e. to bring convenience in communication. Noticing this common reason, later, students have been communicated verbally. This process reveals that **X** sample of boys, and **B** and **C** samples of girls live in a society surrounded by Nepali people. Hence, in order to understand their language and various cultural aspects, they have decided to learn Nepali as second language. It should be noted that the acquisition of second language is always goal oriented. But children learn the mother tongue or first language without any specific goal. The questionnaire also contains a total number of fourteen Assamese sentences meant for translation into Nepali. The sentence reflects the above mentioned grammatical characteristics. Moreover, as the samples are still in the amateur stage of learning, that is why the Assamese sentences are easy so that they do not find any difficulty or hindrance during translation.

The study reveals that the three boys (X, Y and Z) have successfully translated the sentences that contains masculine Noun. They do not commit any mistake in establishing the relation between masculine Nouns and Adjectives. On the other hand when they are asked to translate same kind of sentences containing female Noun, they fail to successfully establish the relation between them. Especially Y and Z committed more mistakes than X. Notably A, B and C does not commit that much of mistakes in this regard. Their success parameter can be presented in bar diagram-



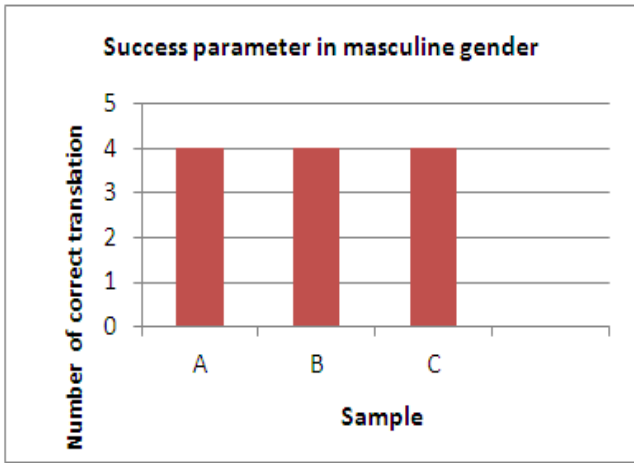
Bar Diagram-1



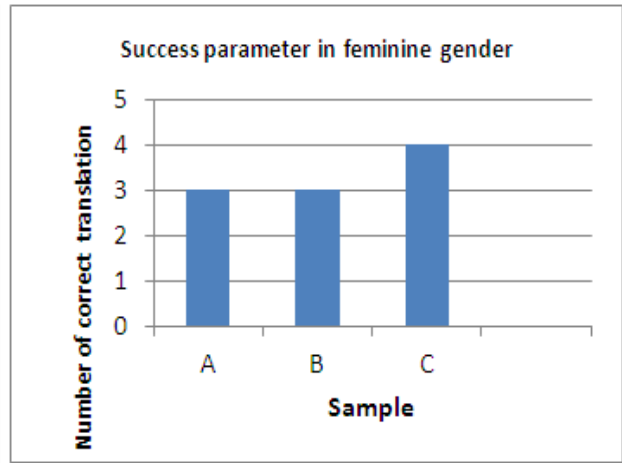
Bar Diagram-2

From the above diagram, it is clearly understood that sample X has come up with highest number of correct translations i.e.7 (4+3) followed by Y with 4 (3+1) numbers of correct translation and Z with 5 (5+0) numbers of correct translations.

The three female samples (which are A, B and C) are also evaluated with the same questionnaire. They have shown a totally different result that the boys have. They have turned out to be successful in establishing the relation between Nouns and Adjectives. Their performance can be presented in the bar diagram as shown below-



Bar Diagram-3

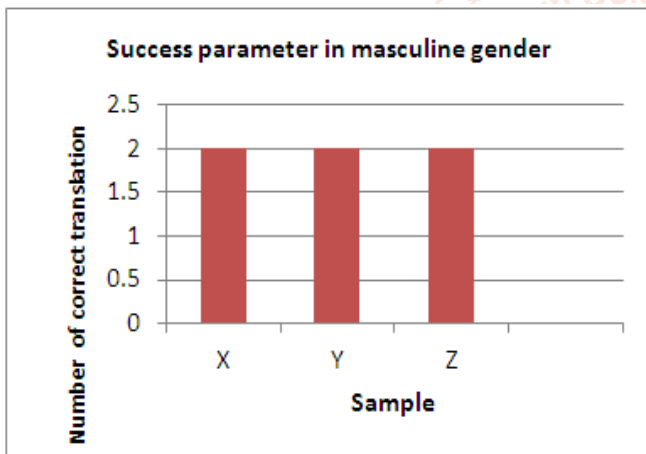


Bar Diagram-4

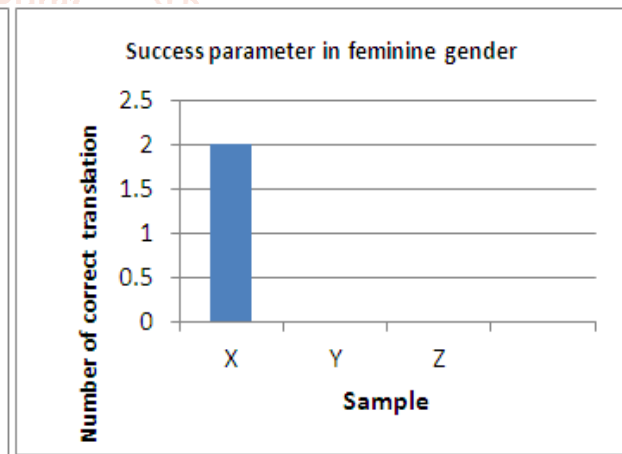
It can be seen that both A and B have correctly translated 7 sentences (4+3). C turns out to be most successful with 8 (4+4) correct translations. In this regard, the rate of success of the female samples is much higher than that of male samples.

1.7. Collected data based on the Interrelation between Noun and Verb in the Nepali language

Further, the samples are evaluated to know whether there is any impact of gender difference in the process of acquiring the interrelation between the Nouns and Verbs of Nepali language. In order to study this aspect, more simple Assamese sentences have been included in the questionnaire and the samples asked to translate them into Nepali. The performance of the male samples can be cited in bar diagram as below -

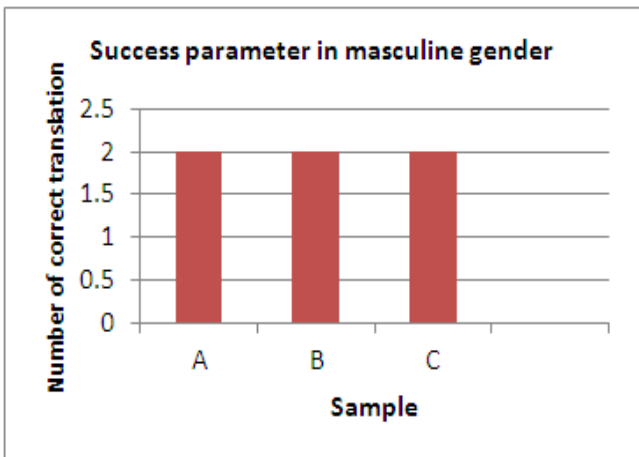


Bar Diagram-5

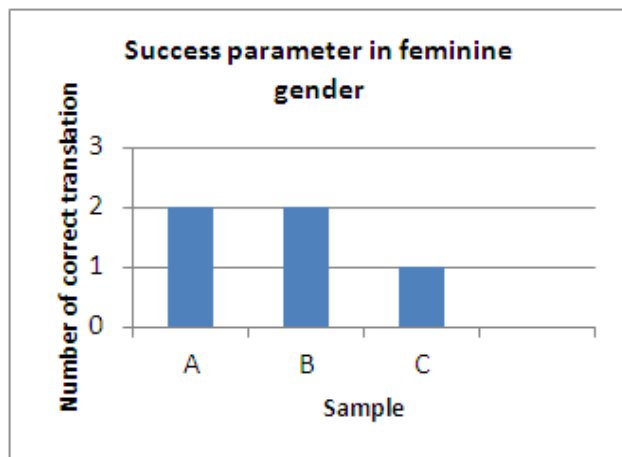


Bar Diagram-6

Here, it can be noticed that only X has turned out to be successful with 4 (2+2) correct translations. On the other hand, Y and Z are successful in establishing relation between masculine Noun and Verb but turn out to be unsuccessful during feminine Noun. In this aspects too girls have shown upper hand than boys. Their performance is highlighted below-



Bar Diagram-7

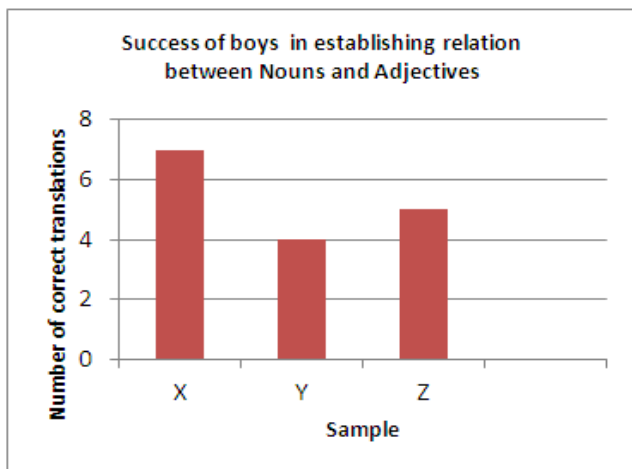


Bar Diagram-8

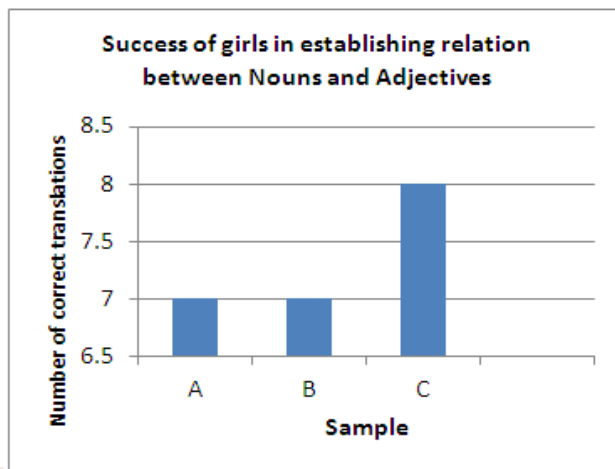
So, as shown in diagram, the success rate of the girls are higher than boys. A and B both have correctly translated 4 (2+2) sentences and C has correctly translated 3(2+1) sentences.

DATA ANALYSIS

In the questionnaire there are 14 simple sentences included in their first language which Assamese and asked the six students to translate them into the second language i.e. Nepali. If we analyze the above mentioned bar diagrams, then we can easily determine the role played by gender in the process of second language acquisition. Let us start with the first aspect i.e. the interrelation between Noun and Adjective in Nepali language. To study this aspect, each of the samples are asked to translate 10 simple sentences. Male samples X,Y and Z have correctly translated 7 (4+3), 4 (3+1) and 5(5+0) sentences respectively. On the other hand female samples A,B and C have proved out to be more successful with 7(4+3), 7(4+3) and 8(4+4) correct translations respectively. Their performance can be presented in the bar diagram as below-



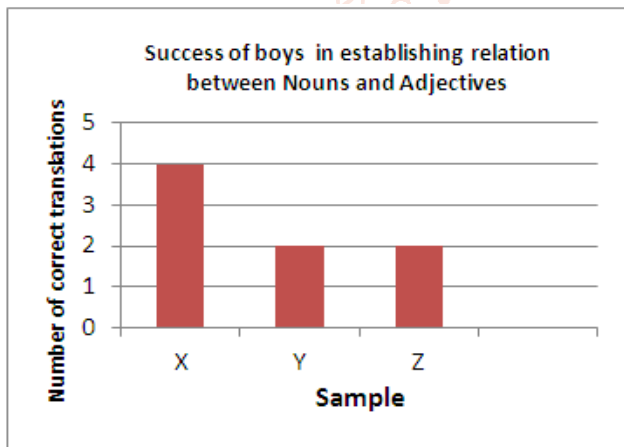
Bar Diagram-9



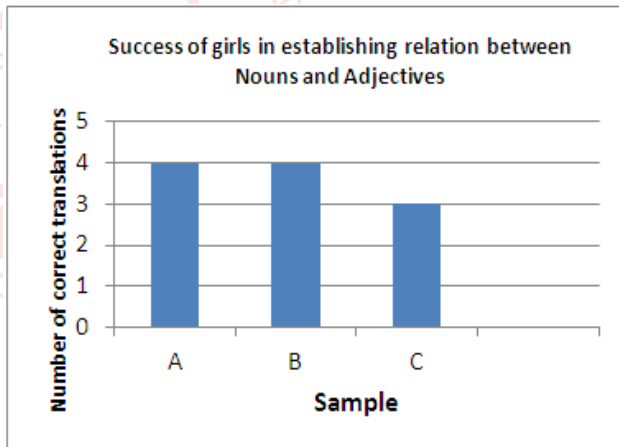
Bar Diagram-10

It is clearly visible that the girl samples have shown more success with total number of 22 correct translations comparison to the 16 of boys.

With the aim to study the second aspect which is the interrelation between Noun and Verb in Nepali language, the student were asked to translate 4 sentences from Assamese to Nepali. In this aspect also the girls have shown a promising result. Sample A and B have correctly translated the entire 4 (2+2) sentences and C is able to translate 3 sentences (2+1). On the other hand the Male samples X,Y and Z have correctly translated 4(2+2), 2 (2+0) and 2(2+0) sentences respectively-



Bar Diagram-11



Bar Diagram-12

Based on the collected data, the 't-test' or 't-student's test' has been conducted in order to test the hypothesis. There was a significant difference in the scores for male (M= 4, SD=1.89) and female (M=5.5, SD= 2.07) learners; $t(10) = -1.31, p = .22$. Since, $t(10) = -1.31$ is smaller than $p = .22$, I would fail to reject H_0 . It means that the gender difference has a significant impact on the process of second language acquisition

CONCLUSION

In the process of second language acquisition, gender difference plays a vital role. The outcome of the above field-based study indicates this. The analysis clearly shows that the girl students can acquire second language much earlier than boys can. But it should be noted that the study was conducted based on only two morphological aspects of Nepali language. If we increase the area, the result may be different. Hence, much broader research is needed to study the impact of gender difference in the process of second language acquisition.

LIMITATION AND STUDY FORWARD

No study cover all aspect of the research problem. Each and every study has its own limitations. The first limitation of this study is that this study only covers one factor which play a significant role in the process of second language acquisition and that factor is gender. This study neglects the other important factors like age, environment, motivation, support of home, prior linguistic knowledge, teaching strategies, student personality etc. Secondly, the study covers only the students between 22 and 24 years. Other students, who are also learning second language, are not

included in this study due to the scope of the study. Lastly, this study only covers one language i.e Nepali. The area of Second Language acquisition carries huge potentiality of research. Hence, other researcher can take forward this study to a new level by including the other factors and widen the scope.

However, despite these limitations, the outcome of this study will help in the process of teaching of second languages. It will also help to nullify the effect of gender difference if there is any in language teaching and learning process. The teacher or the trainers of second language can adopt convenient method to reduce the impact of the gender difference and thus they can make the whole learning process faster.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire used in field study

1. Name-
2. Sex- Male Female
3. Age-
4. Mobile No.-
5. e.mail-
6. Marital Status- Married Unmarried
7. Educational qualification
 - A. HSLC
 - B. Higher Secondary
 - C. Graduation
 - D. Post Graduation
8. Institution where you are pursuing your study/ from where you have passed out-
9. Occupation
 - A. Student
 - B. Employee
10. Mother tongue -
11. Languages known apart from the mother tongue-
12. Language which is being acquired at present-
13. Reason behind selecting this language-
14. From when have you been learning the language? (please mention the year)
15. Efficiency acquired in this language
 - A. Reading
 - B. Writing
 - C. Speaking
16. Does knowledge of your mother tongue help you in acquiring this language? If yes, please write in details_____
17. Translate these Assamese Sentences into Nepali
 - A. Mor lɔrajɔn xɔkɔt. (My boy is fat)
 - B. Mor sowalijɔni sɔkɔt. (My girl is fat)
 - C. Xɔru bhayɛk. (Younger brother)
 - D. Xɔru bhaniɛk. (Younger sister)
 - E. Ram khin. (Ram is thin)
 - F. Sita Khin. (Sita is thin)
 - G. Mor deuta bɔr xɔrɔl. (My father is very simple)
 - H. Mor ma bɔr mɔrɔmial. (My mother is very affectionate)
 - I. Mor bhaihɔt xɔkɔt. (My brothers are fat)
 - J. Mor bhɔnihɔt xɔkɔt nɔhɔi. (My sisters are not fat)
 - K. Xi ghɔrɔloi gɔl. (He went home)
 - L. Tai ghɔrɔloi gɔl. (She went home)
 - M. Jɔyɔntɔi gan gale. (Jayanta has sung a song)
 - N. Jɔyɔntiɛ gan gale. (Jayanti has sung asong)