Issues in Testing the Proficiency of Learners of Indigenous Languages: An Example Relating to Young Learners of Maori

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Abstract

In 1999 the New Zealand Ministry of Education commissioned the authors to develop and trial a Maori language proficiency test. The test was to be appropriate for students in Year 5 of schooling (aged 9/10) who were being educated wholly, or in part, through the medium of Maori language. In this paper, we discuss the development and trialling of that proficiency test, focusing on the problems we experienced as well as on the test itself and on the ways in which it can be further developed. We also consider the implications of this project for the development of proficiency tests for other indigenous languages.

Introduction

Over the last few years, there have been substantial increases in the number of students enrolled in Maori-medium education in New Zealand. In 1993, there were 19,329 students enrolled in Maori-medium programmes in New Zealand schools; by 1997, that number had risen to 32,067. Of these, 85% identified as Maori. This means that in 1997, 19% of all Maori students in New Zealand schools were involved in some form of Maori-medium education as compared with 14% in 1993. Of the 19% involved in Maori-medium education, 14% were studying in *kura kaupapa Māori*, that is, in schools that aim to provide a holistic Maori spiritual, cultural and educational environment. *Kura kaupapa Māori* schools were formally established as a form of state schooling through the Education Act 1989. There are now 59 such schools and close to 4,000 students are enrolled in them (Ministry of Education Report, pp. 97 - 98).

Students studying in Maori-medium educational settings may be involved in anything from 31% to 100% tuition in, or through the medium of, Maori. In addition to those students who are studying wholly, or in part, through the medium of Maori, there are others who are studying Maori as a school subject. In 1997, 18% of Maori students in schools were learning Maori as a school subject (Ministry of Education Report, pp. 97 - 98).

These figures indicate the importance of being able to determine students' progress in Maori. Developing Maori language assessment measures is, therefore, an important part of the New Zealand Government's Maori Language Strategy. The work reported on here relates to that overall Strategy.

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Task Outline

Our primary task was to develop and pilot, within a three month period, a Maori language proficiency test suitable for students in Year 5 (generally aged nine or ten) of Maori-medium schooling in New Zealand. Throughout the development of the test, we were asked to bear in mind the relevance of each of the following:

- the specific needs, concerns and values of Maori students, teachers and parents and, in particular, the importance of information, consultation and culturally appropriate procedures and outcomes;
- the importance of reflecting national and international research on testing and assessment and, in particular, the need to bear in mind literature on communicative language testing and on the interaction between cognitive and linguistic development;
- the need to relate the test to the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* and, in particular, to take account of the current curriculum statement for Maori and of possible future developments of that statement;
- the need to ensure that the test was as cost-effective as possible and as simple as possible to administer and score, disrupted day-to-day teaching as little as possible, was likely to have a positive impact on teaching practice, and provided students, even those who had, as yet, very limited competencies in the language, with a positive and interesting experience;
- the need to relate the test to an appropriate pedagogic description of the Maori language, a description that accommodated discourse considerations;
- the need to design the test in a way that fully acknowledged that different language skills were likely to develop at different rates.

In addition to these requirements, we were asked to make suggestions about how the Ministry of Education might manage a test of this type, with particular reference to questions of privacy and confidentiality.

Strategic Planning

The limited time available to us meant that (a) we had to plan very carefully, and (b) we had to accept that the outcome would be little more than indicative of some of the directions that would need to be pursued in the future.

We began by contacting stakeholders to inform them about the planned research and development. We also set up an advisory panel whose members we could consult as the work proceeded. Our next task was to design and distribute two questionnaires, one relating to the language backgrounds of Year 5 students in Maori-medium schooling, the other relating to the language backgrounds and professional development interests of their teachers. In parallel with this, we established contact with a number of potential project consultants. These were people who could help with various aspects of the project such as conducting background research, analysing relevant New Zealand curriculum documents, helping to design the test, conducting the pilot, devising scoring procedures, preparing spreadsheets for data entry relating to questionnaire responses and test results, conducting the limited statistical analyses that

would be possible in the timeframe available, and organizing a range of stakeholder meetings throughout the country. All of the tasks had to be carefully timed and coordinated so that we could be sure of meeting the Ministry's deadlines for reporting on various aspects of the project, and so that the final report could be as inclusive as possible.

Problems and Opportunities

It was decided at the beginning of the project that it would be a co-operative one, that all relevant expertise would be welcomed. Although most of those involved would be fluent speakers of Maori, some would not. This meant that although some meetings were conducted exclusively in Maori, and although some of the documentation was produced in Maori only, many discussions, and much of the documentation, involved both English and Maori. Although there were some disadvantages, particularly in relation to the additional time required, the main advantages were (a) being able to draw on as wide a knowledge-base as possible at this initial development stage, (b) providing access to non-Maori to the results of the work. We considered the second of these advantages to be particularly important for a number of reasons. First, the work was commissioned by the Ministry of Education and we felt that any member of Ministry staff who had an interest in the project had the right to full information about it. Secondly, we felt that the work might assist others in New Zealand and elsewhere who wished to conduct a pilot project relating to the eventual design of proficiency tests for indigenous and community languages. Finally, we wished to ensure that contact was maintained with the international community and that we could learn from others who were involved in similar work elsewhere in the world.

Within New Zealand educational circles, the term 'second language' is often used to refer to "a language other than the language of instruction" (Ministry of Education Report, pp. 97 - 98). This means that Maori is generally considered to be the first language of those students who are studying through the medium of Maori even where they have been involved in Maori-medium education for a relatively short time, where they have not attended *kohanga reo* (Maori language pre-school programmes), and where they do not have parents or caregivers who are fluent speakers of the language. Although there are certain social and political advantages in defining first and second languages in this way, there are also potential disadvantages. These relate, in part, to expectations. In assessing how successful schools are in producing competent users of Maori, careful consideration needs to be given to the length of time each student has actually spent in a Maori-medium educational setting, to the range of Maori language domains available to the child in the community, and to the child's language experiences at home.

There is a further area of potential difficulty to which reference should be made at this point. The language spoken by children, however competent, will not necessarily reflect, in all respects, the expectations of their elders. Like all other languages, Maori is subject to change. Thus, quite apart from developmental considerations, there are issues relating to language change that need to be addressed. The dearth of research evidence in this area meant that there would inevitably be some uncertainty in relation to how certain usages should be judged. However, transcriptions of test

responses would themselves provide a valuable research resource which could be used in later developments that grew out of this pilot project. Thus, we could, on the basis of pilot test responses, provide analysed exemplars of performance which would alert test developers and teachers to characteristic usages.

Designing the Pilot Test

In the initial stages of development, we needed to give careful consideration to six related issues:

- how we were going to interpret the complex concept of proficiency;
- how we would develop proficiency descriptor statements relating to levels of performance;
- how we would design the pilot test itself: whether language skills would be fully integrated, or whether the test would have different sections which related to different language skills;
- how we would deal with the integration of cognitive development and linguistic development;
- how we would reflect the expectations enshrined in the *New Zealand Curriculum Framework* and, in particular, how far we could make the test consistent with the Maori curriculum, a curriculum that was itself not yet fully implemented in schools and one that is, inevitably, experimental in nature;
- how we would reflect the cultural and educational values inherent in Maori education adequately, at the same time as attempting to meet the rigorous standards that must be required of any language test that is commissioned by a government agency.

These issues are addressed below.

Language Proficiency

We began by defining proficiency, in general terms, as involving knowledge of language (not knowledge about language) and the ability to make use of that knowledge in performing a range of communicative tasks. Thus, proficiency was conceptualized as involving a combination of operational competence and pragmatic competence, with operational competence relating to grammatical competence and textual competence, and pragmatic competence relating to illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence (Bachman and Palmer, 1992).

One of the major debates in academic circles surrounding language proficiency relates to the extent to which general language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) relate to academic and cognitive performance. Cummins (1986, p.164) notes, for example, that "it is inappropriate to use test scores from linguistic academic . . . tasks as an accurate assessment for these skills in a child's second language for at least several years of schooling". There is, currently, no research relating to bilingual and Maori-immersion schooling in New Zealand that indicates the stage at which

comparisons might validly be made in relation to language and literacy and other curriculum areas. Even in the absence of such research, it seems sensible to assume that there are likely to be some similarities between the situation of students studying in Maori-immersion contexts in New Zealand and that of language minority students who, as Cummins observes (1984), may take considerably longer to attain grade/age appropriate levels in second language academic skills than it does for them to achieve such a level in face-to-face communication.

There is, then, a major difference between face-to-face conversational fluency and verbal-academic skills, the latter taking considerably longer to develop than the former. Clearly, both are required in the case of students who are learning academic subjects through the medium of Maori. However, to have made verbal-academic skills the exclusive focus of our test would have been, we believe, inappropriate in the case of students who are in their fifth year of schooling, particularly as many of these students have, as our questionnaire returns indicated, had limited exposure to the language. Even so, certain compromises needed to be made in the interests of practicality. So, for example, the listening test involved responding to a taped narrative rather than participating on a one-to-one basis in a conversation.

Language Proficiency and the New Zealand Curriculum Framework

The New Zealand Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education, 1993) states the *principles* that give direction to all teaching and learning, the *seven essential learning areas,* and the *essential skills* to be developed by all students. It gives direction to the more specific *national curriculum statements,* and outlines the *policy for assessment* at school and national levels. The seven *essential learning areas* are: health and physical well-being, the arts, social sciences, technology, science, mathematics, and language and languages. The *essential skills* are: communication skills, numeracy skills, information skills, problem-solving skills, self-management and competitive skills, social and co-operative skills, physical skills, and work and study skills. Under the heading of communication skills, reference is made to "listening, speaking, reading, and writing", and to "different cultural, language, and social contexts" (p.18). The *principles* include reflection of the multicultural nature of New Zealand, including ensuring "that the experiences, cultural traditions, histories, and languages of all New Zealanders are recognised and valued" (p. 7).

The *National Curriculum Statements* define in more detail the knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, and values described in the *National Curriculum Framework* and specify the learning outcomes for all students. Specific objectives, described as 'achievement objectives' are defined, and set out in a number of levels (usually eight) to indicate progression and continuity throughout schooling from Years 1 - 13. The curriculum statements also suggest assessment procedures, provide assessment examples, and include guidelines relating to appropriate approaches to teaching and learning. Curriculum and assessment policy for all years of schooling is based on these New Zealand curriculum documents.

Like other Curriculum Statements, the Maori curriculum (Ministry of Education, 1996) specifies eight levels of attainment that are not specifically related to age or years of schooling. On the assumption, however, that the majority of students would, in core subjects, progress through at least one curriculum level in two years of schooling, we attempted to focus our testing for students in Year 5 of schooling on Levels 2 and 3 of the curriculum, with some parts of the assessment relating to Levels 1 and 4. There were, however, difficulties in determining what was expected of students at each of these curriculum levels for a number of reasons:

- The curriculum provides no rationale for the decisions reached in terms of assignment of particular categories to specific levels;
- Vocabulary is banded over several levels. Thus, for example, entries may span Levels 1 - 3, or 4 - 6;
- Little account appears to have been taken of discourse considerations and so it is difficult to determine precisely what the expectations are in relation to fully contextualized language use.

There may be good reasons for each of the things listed above. Even so, they did present us with difficulties in attempting to relate the test to the curriculum statement in any precise way. The decision we reached was that we would focus on relevant aspects of the general statements of achievement in the curriculum, rather than on the curriculum details. These statements of achievement relate to eight levels of performance and are expressed in terms of the following skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, presenting. Thus, at Levels 3 and 4 in listening, the learner is expected, for example, to be able to respond to main ideas, synthesise spontaneous and recorded language, identify significant language features (verbal and non-verbal), identify the intention of the speaker, and remember main topic ideas.

Clearly, we needed to take account of these objectives in designing the proficiency level descriptors for our test. However, it was also important to pay careful attention to the New Zealand curriculum statements for modern languages such as Spanish and Japanese. This is because these statements include language learning descriptors (general statements about language proficiency development) at different levels. Thus, for example, the curriculum statement for Spanish (Ministry of Education, 1995) includes four *language development descriptors,* each spanning two of the eight curriculum levels. The first of these is outlined below:

> . *Emergent communication: levels 1 and 2*
>
> Learners can understand language that contains well-rehearsed sentence patterns and familiar vocabulary, and can interact in predictable exchanges. They can read and write straightforward versions of what they have learned to say. They are aware of and understand the typical cultural conventions that operate in interpersonal communication. Although they may be enthusiastic participants in class, learners may still be reticent about speaking Spanish outside the classroom.

We began by designing general proficiency level descriptors that would relate to all levels of proficiency and would, therefore, be appropriate for a proficiency test designed to span the entire spectrum from beginner to advanced. From the eight level descriptors we designed at this initial stage, we abstracted the first four and redesigned them with the needs of Year 5 students in mind. We then designed more specific descriptors that related to listening, speaking, reading and writing. The general proficiency level descriptors are listed below followed by an example of a skills-related descriptor.

Proficiency Level Descriptors: general

LEVEL 0
Non-user
To be used only where the student provided no appropriate responses to the test materials.

LEVEL 1 (emergent communication: beginner)
Intermittent user
The student can recognise, understand and use a few familiar words, phrases and sentences and can follow some simple instructions and respond appropriately (verbally and/or physically) to a limited range of simple questions.

LEVEL 2 (emergent communication: elementary)
Limited user
The student can recognise, understand and use simple language that contains well-rehearsed sentence patterns and familiar vocabulary in predictable contexts. S/he can understand and respond appropriately to simple questions and instructions. S/he can interact in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways in a limited range of familiar contexts. Routine, learned responses may be delivered confidently. However, more complex communicative requirements are likely to be marked by hesitancy, error, inappropriacy and misunderstandings.

LEVEL 3 (survival skills: early intermediate)
Moderate user
The student can understand and use familiar language with some flexibility and can pick up some new language from its context. S/he can understand and respond appropriately to many questions and instructions relating to people, things and events. S/he can interact in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways in a range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts. S/he demonstrates a developing understanding of the linguistic sequencing of events and of the ways in which the relationships among events may be indicated linguistically. S/he can make appropriate connections between visually and verbally presented information and can use these connections in formulating appropriate responses. Both routine, learned responses and language that is adapted to meet the requirements of new situations is used correctly and appropriately much of the time.

LEVEL 4 (survival skills: intermediate)
Competent user
The student can understand and use familiar language flexibly, is adept at picking up new language from context, and can adapt his or her language to meet the needs of a range of new contexts and situations. S/he can respond appropriately, coherently and accurately to both simple and more complex instructions. S/he can understand the ways in which people, things and events interact in coherent discourse and can reflect that understanding in responding to, and using, the language.

Proficiency Level Descriptors: skills-specific (example)
Reading

LEVEL 2 (emergent communication: elementary)
Limited user

The student can read and understand a range of familiar words and a range of simple, well-rehearsed sentence patterns which provide simple, factual and descriptive information relating to people, actions, circumstances, and feelings. Familiar words, and routine, learned phrase, clause and sentence patterns may be read with confidence. However, more complex reading requirements are likely to be marked by frequent misunderstandings.

Cultural, Linguistic and Cognitive Appropriacy

As Armour-Thomas observes, "the more familiar and culturally appropriate the content of the stimulus materials, the more likely children are to demonstrate behavior that accurately represents their real abilities" (1992). One advantage we had in designing this test was that cultural considerations could be treated as of central importance from the outset. We believe that the test reflects many of the values central to Maori society as well as including material of relevance to the lifestyles of many rural and urban Maori students. In deciding on the test vocabulary, we decided to echo the thematic foci indicated in the lexical listing in the Maori curriculum. In doing so, we also found that several of the central beliefs and values listed in the *Te Aho Matua Curriculum* (the curriculum of some *kura kaupapa Māori* schools) surfaced. It may be that these beliefs and values would have surfaced in any event. However, the fact that they did is what really matters.

Hēmi and Miria, the central characters who appear in the test, are cousins, a Maori boy and girl of approximately the same age as the test subjects. The other characters are mainly school friends and members of the extended family of Hēmi and Miria. The test moves between urban and rural settings as Hēmi, who has recently moved from a rural to an urban home, reflects on his experiences and prepares for a holiday back home in the country.

In deciding on the overall cognitive focus of the test, we decided to concentrate on the concrete operational stage generally considered to apply to children in the 8 to 11 year old range. That is, we aimed to provide concrete rather than abstract referents for logical connections (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969; Brainerd, 1978). In designing the test, we adopted the middle ground between the assessment of basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1980). To have focused exclusively on interpersonal communication skills would have involved long-term observation and recording; adopting a middle ground allowed for a more cost-effective and less intrusive approach. Because language skills development can be uneven, and because students will not all exhibit the same pattern of skills development, we aimed to produce a test that had four sections, each one focusing on a different general language skill (listening, reading, speaking, writing). However, integrating reading and writing and listening and speaking in subsequent tests may be a more appropriate approach.

Interpersonal communication involves the negotiation of meaning in context using a wide range of paralinguistic and situational cues. Cognitive/academic proficiency, on the other hand, tends to be marked by the ability to respond appropriately in the absence of rich extra-linguistic cues and, thus, to make maximum use of the cues that are available in language itself, to reflect what Bruner (1975) has referred to as analytic competence. In order to avoid placing too much emphasis on analytic competence, we began by providing some contextual information in the form of pictures of the central characters in the test and some of their extended family members, pictures that reappeared in the test booklets given to students. We also decided to ensure that there was thematic continuity, that each section of the test was linked thematically to the preceding one/s. Although this thematic and pictorial continuity would provide students with an increasingly rich range of contextual cues as the test proceeded, it was important also to ensure that these cues were not essential to adequate performance in each section of the test, that, in other words, there were sufficient linguistic cues in each section of the test to allow for successful completion irrespective of performance in earlier sections. There is, however, one exception. In the case of the writing section of the test, we make direct reference to the reading section. This is because we felt that the benefits to be gained from contextualizing the writing task outweighed any disadvantages. Even so, it is possible, though more difficult, to complete the writing task with reference only to the pictorial cues contained in the student booklet.

The Pilot Test

The test aims to assess the students' ability to:

- understand and interpret spoken Maori used in context;
- extract general and particular meanings from written texts dealing with day-to-day topics;
- drawing on visually presented information, write clear, well organized and coherent Maori dealing with a specific topic;
- with reference to an event sequence represented pictorially, respond and interact appropriately in spoken Maori.

The test is divided into four parts: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. Before beginning the test, the students are shown pictures of some of the central characters. Before each section of the test, there are practice tasks to prepare the students for the test response requirements.

The listening section of the test involves listening to a narrative about the experiences of a young Maori boy and his family in moving from the country to the city. Narrative past time is interspersed with references to future plans and previous experiences, and there are temporal, comparative and logico-deductive links. The students are given a general focus question and then asked to listen to the entire narrative before attempting to answer the question. They are then given two questions relating to the first part of the narrative and invited to listen to that part again before answering these questions. This procedure is continued until the final section is reached. The questions are delivered orally as part of the listening tape. Students' answer books also provide written versions of the questions. Students respond by ticking one, or more than one, picture in their answer book. Under each picture (which provides a pictorial representation of a possible response), there are also written versions of possible responses. An example is provided:

Mō wai tēnei kōrero?

Mō Hēmi

Mō Koro

Mō Whāea Mihi

Of course, as indicated below, it was often necessary to have more complex pictorial representations:

There were occasions also when we asked our illustrator, Alan Oliver, to represent aspects of Hēmi's imaginative life. At one point, for example, Hēmi wishes that his pet cow, Pirimai, could be magically transported to the city:

Although we decided, in order to make scoring as simple as possible, to use a multi-choice format for the listening and reading sections of the test, the students are advised that there may be one, or more than one, acceptable response. In some cases, students need to tick four boxes to cover all aspects of the response. This had a number of advantages as well as a number of obvious disadvantages.

The reading section of the test involves reading a letter written by one of the main test characters to another. Once again, there is a multi-choice format. The writing section, however, offers more opportunity for individual response to the task. Even so, we built in a number of features that would constrain that choice, features that had the unfortunate effect of reducing the requirement for sensitivity to the discourse as a whole there were a number of reasons for this decision. The most important of these was that many teachers (60% of our sample) are themselves speakers of Maori as a second language. They might, therefore, have some difficulty in evaluating test responses unless we were able to provide them with exemplars that were likely to reflect reasonably closely the type of responses that they would be required to evaluate.

The final section of the test is the speaking section. It involves a picture story. Here, students are given a series of ten pictures in order and, after being given a sentence that relates to the first picture, asked to tell the story that is represented by the pictures. There are a number of important sequential and logical links between the pictures. One of the pictures in the series follows:

The Pilot

We conducted a pilot of the test with seventy students in five schools. Some of the results achieved are indicated in Figures 1 - 7 following. These results should be treated with extreme caution. This was simply an initial pilot study and involved a small sample who were selected simply on the basis of availability at relatively short notice. Furthermore, there is a clear requirement for the type of detailed statistical studies that could not be conducted within the timeframe available.

Figure 1: Total score distribution

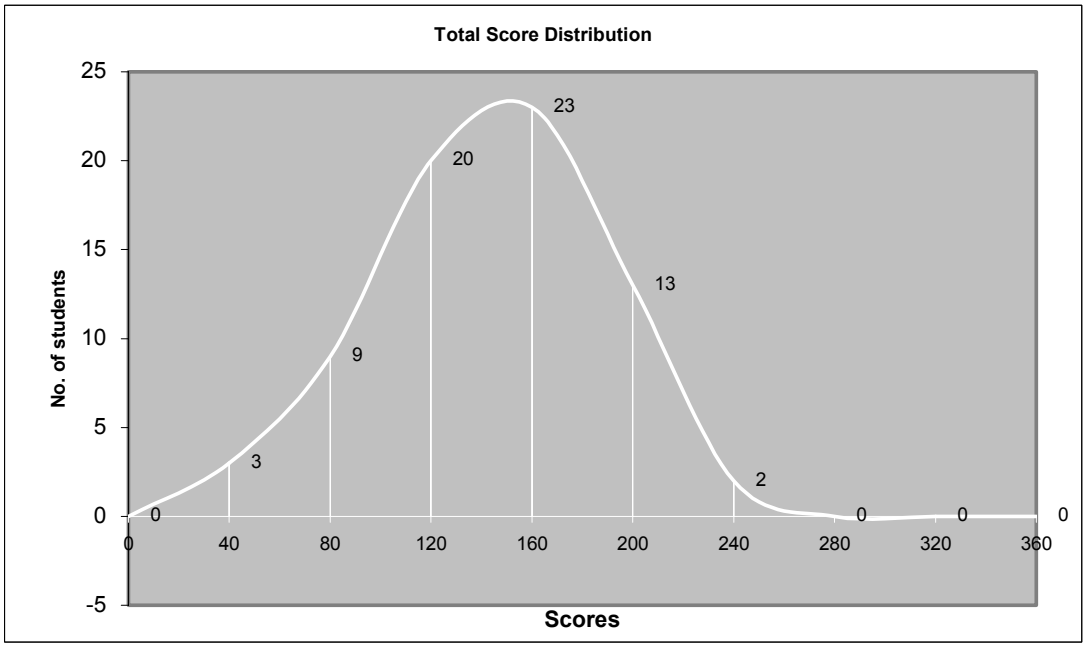


Figure 2: Overall distribution in terms of proficiency levels (%)

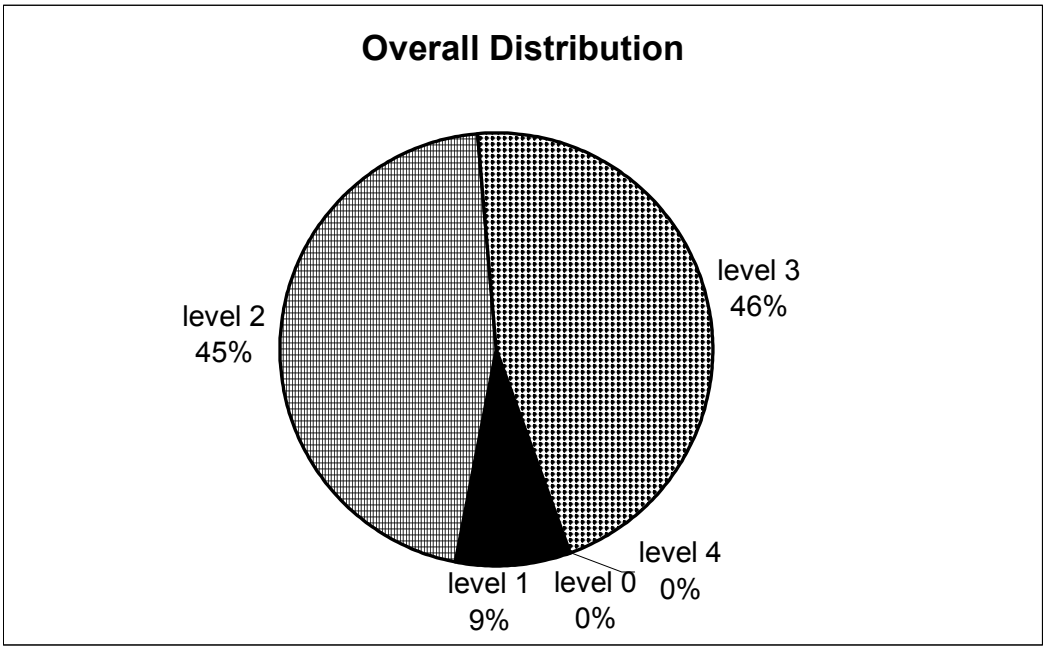


Figure 3: Overall distribution in terms of proficiency levels (ACTUAL NUMBERS)

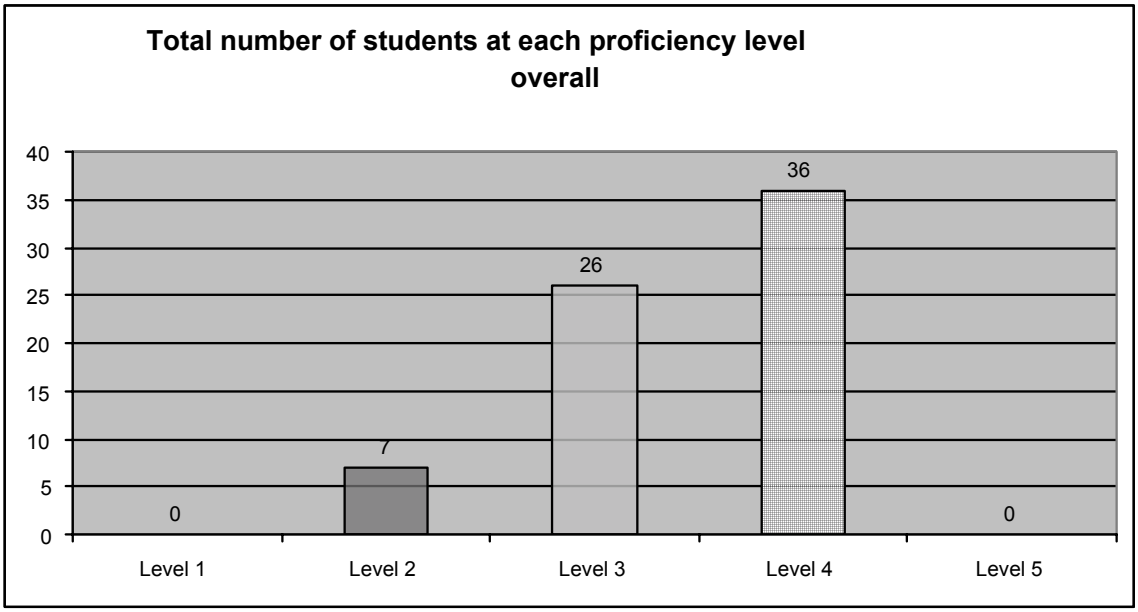
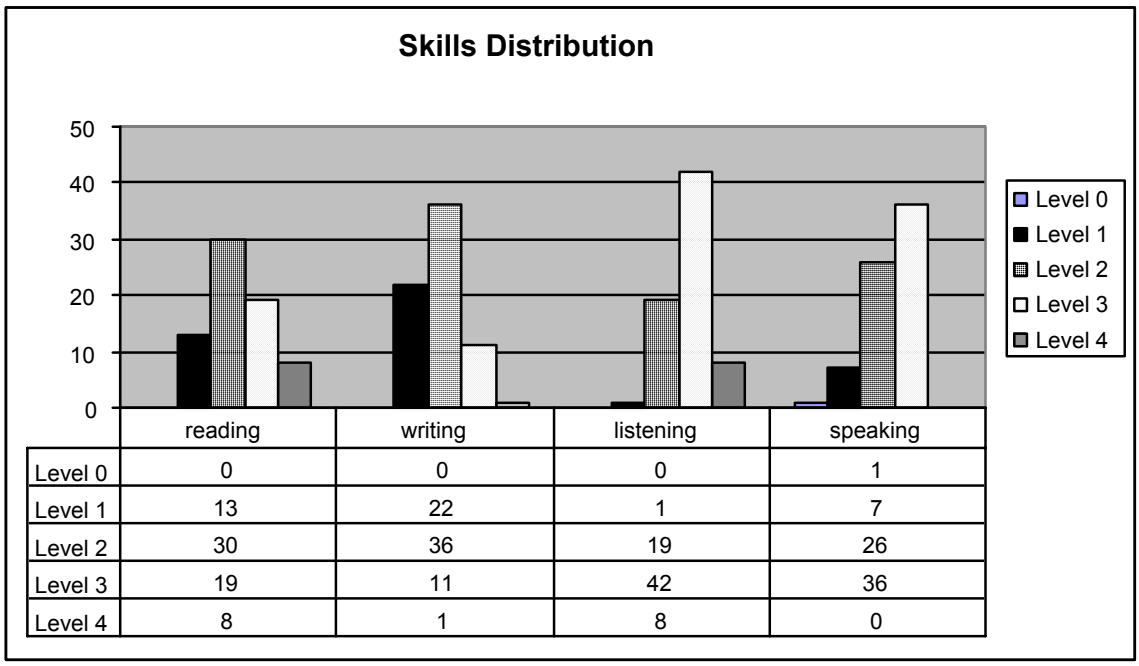
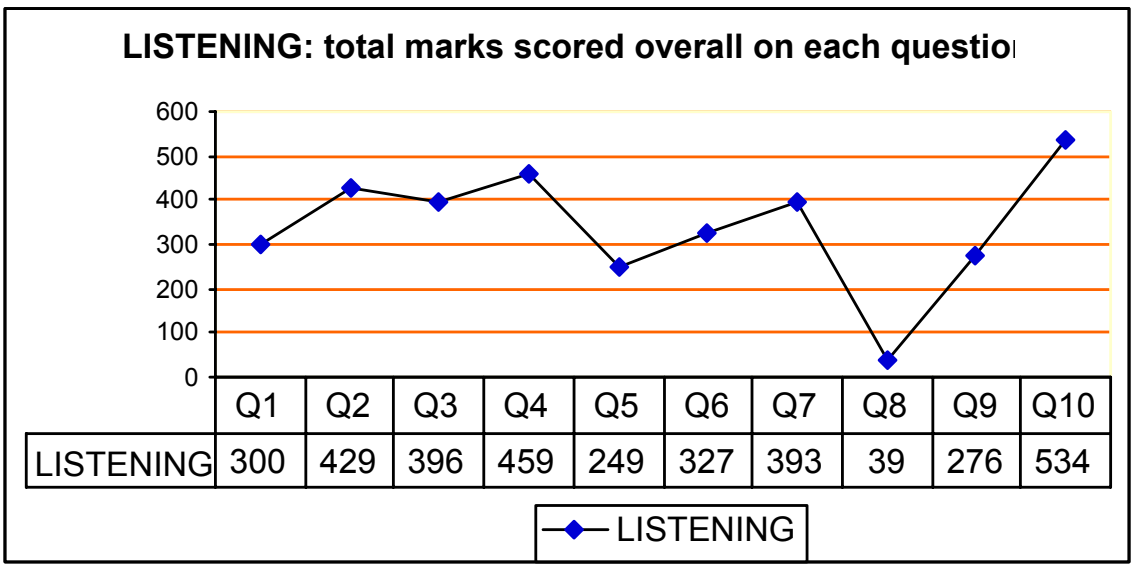


Figure 4: Comparison of proficiency levels in different skill areas in pilot test



	reading	writing	listening	speaking
Level 0	0	0	0	1
Level 1	13	22	1	7
Level 2	30	36	19	26
Level 3	19	11	42	36
Level 4	8	1	8	0

Figure 5: Listening Scores: shows the total overall score for each question in the listening section of the test.



	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
LISTENING	300	429	396	459	249	327	393	39	276	534

Figure 6: Reading Scores: shows the total overall score for each question in the reading section of the test

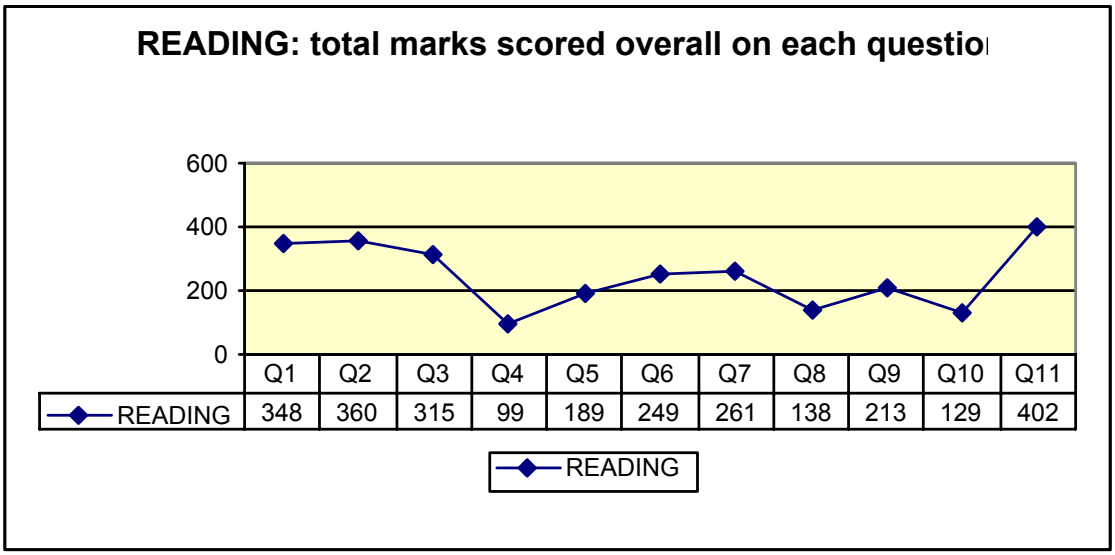
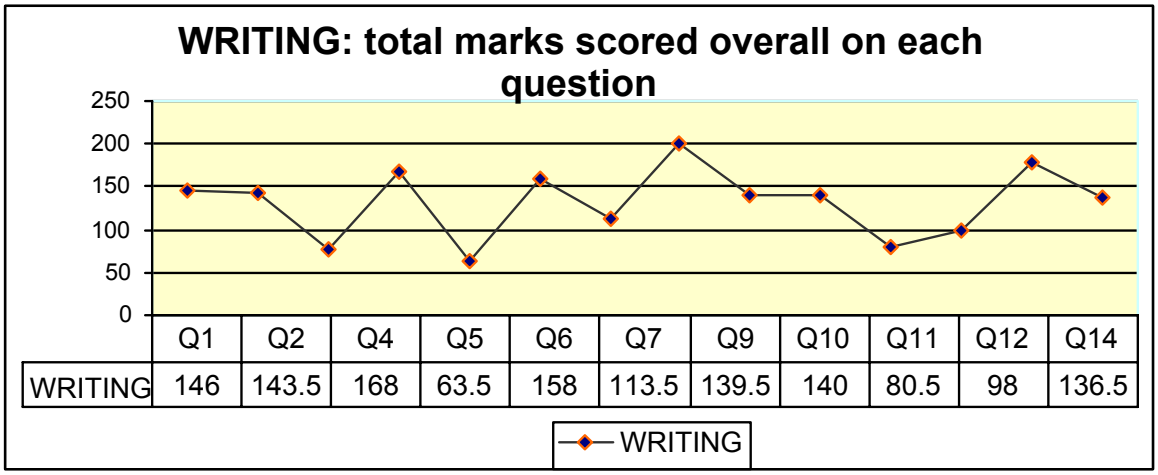


Figure 7: Writing Scores: shows the total overall score for each question in the writing section of the test



As indicated above, these initial pilot test results should not be given too much weight. The subjects were selected in terms of geographical convenience. The pilot test conditions were not always ideal. Furthermore, the pilot test alerted us to certain alterations that needed to be made to the test itself, to the test scoring, and to the marking schedule. Clearly, therefore, a more carefully planned and controlled pilot test involving a larger number of subjects and more detailed statistical studies is required. Even so, it is interesting to note that most of the students scored overall in

the Level 2 and Level 3 range (as we would expect in terms of curriculum expectations) and that scores were higher for listening and speaking than they were for reading and writing (as we would also have expected).

Teacher Test Guides

An important aspect of our assignment was to produce a pilot test that could be administered and scored by teachers without the need for major professional development. We therefore produced a number of pilot guides for teachers. These included a test administration guide, a test scoring guide and analysed examples of typical writing and speaking responses. There was also an outline of the proficiency level descriptors and an explanation of how scores relate to proficiency levels.

Recommendations to the Ministry of Education

We did not recommend that the Ministry of Education make the test available to schools. Before that can happen, a number of major developments are required. We now have a single test which itself needs to be subjected to considerably more scrutiny in relation to the approaches adopted, the Maori curriculum, the aims and objectives of teachers and students, and, above all, accepted psychometric criteria of reliability and validity. When all of this has been done, further tests need to be developed in consultation with teachers as part of a test battery, and further, more detailed, pilot studies need to be conducted. Furthermore, additional test batteries need to be developed that are appropriate for later stages of schooling. In particular, there is a need for a test battery that relates more directly to the language skills required for performing academic tasks. There is, thus, much to be done following this initial stage of development.

The next task is to develop and trial test batteries. These may, in some respects, be similar to the pilot test already developed. It is equally possible, however, that they may incorporate features of another test that we developed in the initial phase of the research, a more communicative test in which reading and writing and listening and speaking were fully integrated. Although we initially rejected that test on the grounds that it would be too difficult to administer and score, the potential of a test of this type is worth further consideration.

When the test batteries have been designed and fully trialled, the task will not have been completed. Ongoing test development will be required as will professional development opportunities for teachers in relation to test administration and scoring. These professional development opportunities could be supplemented by a test preparation materials bank and a test video. A test advice internet site could also be established.

Test batteries such as those under consideration here could prove useful to teachers and schools. However, any comparison of the test results of different schools is likely to be unhelpful. This is, in part, because (i) sample sizes will inevitably be small; (ii) student language backgrounds (including length of time in bilingual or immersion settings) vary widely.

Maori proficiency testing needs to be supplemented by diagnostic testing and by research on the acquisition of the language by children. In the process of developing this pilot test, we began work on diagnostic testing and on Maori language acquisition. We hope that we, and others, will have an opportunity to continue that work and that that work, will inform future developments of the Maori curriculum.

In connection with all of this, it is important to note that the New Zealand Ministry of Education has now issued a further contract in the area of Maori language proficiency testing. The School of Maori and Pacific Development at the University of Waikato has been asked to complete and trial a proficiency test battery for Year 5 students along with a single pilot test for Year 8 students. This project is currently under way and is being directed and administered by a Maori team in consultation with teachers. The fact that more time and more financial assistance has now been made available than was the case in the study reported on here should mean that there is an excellent opportunity to resolve some of the problems associated with the initial phase of development.

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