

## Extended Abstract

# ① Effectiveness of the 'CLOZE' as a Test Item in the Entry Test for Diploma in English & Advanced Certificate in English

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## Introduction

A test is a method of measuring a person's ability or knowledge in a given area. The purpose of a test is to understand who the testee is – that is his previous experience of the subject, his entry behaviour etc. A language test measures the language behaviour and infers the general ability of the student in the language. Proficiency tests are concerned with an individual's ability to use language appropriately and effectively. It measures the person's ability to use language in different situations.

A good proficiency test should fulfil three requirements that is it must have practicality, reliability and validity. A test ought to be practical within the means of financial limitations time constraints, ease of administration, scoring and interpretation. A proficiency test should also be reliable. That is, it should give the same result when used twice on the same subject. Another characteristic of a good proficiency test is validity. That is, it should actually measure what it intends to measure.

## Background

One of the major issues in language testing has been the question of whether language should be tested by discrete points or by integrate tests. The rationale for discrete point tests comes from structural linguists who argued that one grammar item should be tested at a time. Hill (1994) criticising these discrete point tests claimed that they are contrary to the communicative nature of language. He believed that competence in language cannot be viewed as the sum of competence in all its parts, and that language competence is a unified set of interacting abilities which cannot be separated and tested. He stated that tests such as

the cloze test, oral interviews and dictation which are integrative of all four skills are better measures of proficiency since they successfully invoke the use of the internalised grammar of the learner. Davidson (1995) too argues in favour of integrative tests. He believed that we should not aim to test how much language someone knows, but test his ability to operate in a specified sociolinguistic situation with ease and effect. According to Davidson the natural redundancy of language is one of its most salient characteristics. If that natural redundancy is aborted in some way by the construction of isolated test items such as discrete points that are unrelated to contexts of communication, then much of the naturalness of the test is lost. Therefore, he stated that, in general, language tests should involve the same sort of meaningful sequence that is so characteristic of natural communication. Hill (1994) and Davidson (1995) pointed out that if a teacher wants to find out how well the students have learned a particular point of grammar or an item of vocabulary, then the teacher can use a discrete point test. If a decision is to be made about how well a student uses the language, then an integrative test should be used. Cloze is a test item which can be identified as an integrative test. It is a reading selection in which every  $n^{\text{th}}$  word (where  $n$  usually ranges from 5 to 8) has been deleted and the testee is asked to fill in the blanks with words that are semantically or syntactically appropriate to the selection as a whole. The rationale for the cloze test is based on Gestalt psychology which refers to the human tendency to complete familiar but not quite finished patterns – to see a broken circle as a whole one, for example, by mentally closing the gaps. Parry (1994) referred to this as a psycholinguistic guessing game. The systematic blanks provided in a cloze passage require the student to ask specific questions about the words that would fill the blanks. Parry (1994) stated that in order to answer these questions and supply the missing words, the students must sample the graphic display, make predictions, test them and confirm hypothesis and that this process constitutes the act of reconstructing the writer's message. One way in which students can succeed in reconstructing the writer's message is to take advantage of the redundancy of language, that is, the provision of information by more than one source. The context provides the reader with alternative sources to find the missing word. In order to complete a cloze passage the student must have a good knowledge of the semantic and syntactic systems of the language.

## **Study**

One test item that has been used repeatedly in the Entry Test for Diploma in English/Advanced Certificate in English by the Department of Language Studies of the Open University is the cloze. As discussed earlier, it has been hypothesized that the cloze is an appropriate test item which reflects the overall language competence of the students. However, it has been observed that although the students score very high marks at the Entry Test and join the Diploma in English and Advanced Certificate in English programmes there are some students among them who do not possess the required standard of language ability to cope with the requirements of the course. Therefore an attempt has been made to identify whether there is a correlation between the marks obtained for the cloze and the marks obtained by the students for CA1 (Advanced Writing Skills).

## **Results**

An analysis of the test scores reveal that in the year 2000 10% of students scored between 35 – 39 for the cloze test 30% scored between 35 – 39 for CA 1 (Advanced Writing Skills). In the year 2001 18% scored between 35 – 39 for the cloze and 14% scored between 35 – 39 for CA 1 (Advanced Writing Skills)

## **Discussion**

The low marks that those students got for the cloze indicate that they are not highly proficient in the language, which may account for the poor performance of some students in the ongoing programmes. Therefore more weightage can be given to the 'cloze' in the Entry Tests in future in order to eliminate students who are not fully competent in the language. But it has to be mentioned that these findings are affected by one crucial factor. As cloze is a test item that has not been practised in schools students may have found it difficult to answer such an unfamiliar test item. But it is a common difficulty for all candidates. However further research needs to be done to compare the marks of cloze with CA 2 and CA 3 (Advanced Writing Skills) and also with the marks that the students got for the other test items in the Entry Test.