

The cloze procedure is no stranger to many classroom teachers and pupils today. It has become increasingly popular as a measure of language skills, in particular of the skill of reading comprehension. Teachers are familiar with the form of cloze but are often left to work out the implications of its use on their own. In view of its popularity, the need to appreciate its relationship to the reading construct has thus become more urgent. An attempt is made here to provide some insights into the use of the cloze procedure as a measure of reading comprehension. With this elucidation, the use of the cloze procedure in the classroom may become more meaningful and be put to greater effect.

To learn about the cloze procedure, some understanding of the psychology of the reading process is necessary. The Gestalt psychology of the closure provides the initial theoretical base. It explains the basic human tendency to complete something that is incomplete. In the performance of a cloze task, the same tendency is exhibited. Given a piece of information in which words have been systematically deleted, a fluent reader will still get the complete message as the missing words will not pose any problems for him. He will have filled in the gaps automatically with the relevant words. In other words, a fluent reader does not need to focus on every single word in order to comprehend fully what he is reading.

With this fundamental understanding, the teacher can examine the constraints that govern a reader's efficient processing of the missing words. Grammatical constraints, for example, can govern word order. In a sentence like 'The _____ girls are dancing', the missing word would have to be an adjective.

Semantic constraints, likewise, can determine a fluent reader's accurate prediction of the missing word. For example, in a deletion like 'As it began to _____, he puts on his raincoat', the probable answers would be 'drizzle' or 'rain'.

Adding to these constraints is that of 'frequency of usage'. This means that some words occur in conjunction with others because of common usage. Under this category, we can have usage like 'Slowly and _____, the thief went through all the cupboards' (Expected answer 'stealthily'). Or in this sentence, 'Long, long _____, there lived an old woman with her children in a shoe' (Expected answer 'ago'). Yet another can be 'Selling cookware from door to door is his bread _____ but-ter' (Expected answer 'and').

Rye (1982, p.6) has classified these categories as alliterative reinforcement, rhythmic and collocation, respectively. In everyday language, it would appear largely to be simply idiomatic usage evident in the English language. Familiarity with such usage would account for the accurate prediction of the missing words. In this domain of language use, the teacher will probably realize that it is one of the more difficult areas for comprehension, in particular for second language learners.

Finally, there exists an order of difficulty for the word classes when it comes to ease of prediction.

From various research it has been found that structure words are relatively easier to predict than content words. This has been attributed to frequency and range of choice. It appears that structure words occur more frequently than content words. Also, the range of choice of structure words for prediction is more limited than the range in the content word class.

Among the content words themselves, replacing nouns and verbs is more difficult than adverbs or adjectives, as the former categories involve grammatical information and meaning. For example, look at the following sentences:

1. The beautiful _____ silently
_____ the _____.

2. _____ boy _____
eats _____ pie.

3. _____ cat _____
slept _____ bed.

The deletions in sentences 2 and 3 are easier to replace as the meaning is more obvious. When the cloze task is more controlled in terms of given contextual meaning, supplied mainly through nouns and verbs, prediction is definitely aided.

With the realization of this interplay of variables that can affect performance in a cloze task, the teacher can consciously manipulate

the deletion pattern to suit the reading level of his students.

While assessment has often been the chief focus in the use of the cloze procedure, the teacher, with his knowledge of what the cloze task involves, can further employ it as a teaching strategy as well as for diagnostic purposes in reading failure.

References:

Rye, James, *Cloze Procedure and the Teaching of Reading*, London: Heinemann Educational Books Inc., 1982.

Raggett, et al., (eds)., *Assessment and testing of Reading: Problems and Practices*, London: Ward Lock Educational, 1979.

