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ABSTRACT

This paper acquaints the classroom teacher and researcher with the cloze procedure as a multipurpose tool. The cloze procedure is discussed as a measurement, diagnostic, and instructional instrument. In particular, the advantages and disadvantages of the cloze procedure for each of these purposes are considered. Cloze passages, their construction, scoring, and administration are discussed in terms of the purposes for which the procedure is to be used. A discussion of ways of using cloze as an instructional technique is presented, with emphasis on how different types of cloze passages can be used for different aspects of reading instruction. The advantages of the cloze procedure over other types of diagnostic instruments are also discussed. (WR)

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The Case for Cloze in the Classroom

Symposium XX: The Close Procedure and the Classroom Teacher

It has been almost two decades since Wilson Taylor introduced the cloze procedure into the professional literature (Taylor, 1953). Since then, both the research literature and the uses of this procedure have increased considerably. Cloze has been used in such diverse areas as research on readability Bormuth, 1968), divergent thinking (Byrne, 1971), and attitudes (Manis & Dawes, 1961). Unfortunately, the cloze procedure has remained primarily a research tool. Teachers have not made use of it in the classroom, and often have not even heard of the procedure. The purpose of this article is to suggest to teachers how this tool, which has proven so valuable in research, can be used in the classroom.

Let us begin by describing what we mean by the cloze procedure. The cloze procedure involves the student's completing a mutilated written passage. The construction of the cloze passage is a mechanical procedure. First, we pick a passage from the student's instructional material or some other material we wish to test him on. The passage selected should be 250 words or more in length to get a reliable score. Then we delete every 5th word, replacing the deleted word with an underlined blank of standard length. Then we give the passage to the student and ask him to read it and fill in the blanks. The student's written response is compared with the actual word deleted. The student is given credit only for those responses that match the actual word deleted, but is not penalized for poor spelling. It is important to note that there have been other deletion patterns (e.g., every nth noun, all structural words, etc.) and alternative scoring criteria

(e.g., acceptable synonyms) suggested. However, research has shown that by deleting every 5th word and by applying the exact word scoring criterion, the result is a cloze passage and score of both greater reliability and discriminative power (Bormuth, 1967; Taylor, 1953).

Classroom Applications of the Cloze Procedure

Now, let us turn to how cloze might be used in the classroom. Three areas of classroom application to be discussed include the use of cloze as an evaluation tool, for diagnostic purposes, and as an instructional activity.

Evaluation:

As an evaluation tool, the cloze procedure is useful to evaluate both the material's difficulty and a student's performance on that material. The evaluation of a material's difficulty is related to the subject of readability. Cloze has been extensively used in recent readability research. As a result of this research, formulas have been developed which provide readability estimates that are more sensitive and reliable than what was previously available (Bormuth, 1969). Teachers can avail themselves of this useful tool by simply applying these formulas to any material of interest. No cloze test need be given. From the application of these formulas, the teacher can obtain an estimate of the readability of any material. Such information would be helpful in making decisions regarding the selection and sequencing of instructional materials.

The cloze procedure is also useful in evaluating student performance on some selected instructional material. Students

may be compared and ranked on the basis of their cloze performance on a particular material or set of materials. In addition, the teacher can interpret the cloze scores in a criterion reference framework. By using criterion standards that have been developed, the cloze scores can be interpreted in terms of some meaningful standard of performance (Bormuth, 1972, 1971; Bormuth & Bortnick, 1969). In the case of these standards, meaningfulness refers to the maximization of a set of cognitive (e.g., information gain) and affective (e.g., interest) variables that are essential if the instruction is to be beneficial (Bormuth, 1971). The teacher is thus provided with some objectively established levels of performance by which cloze scores can be evaluated in terms of instructional benefit for the student.

The following will illustrate the usefulness of a criterion reference standard in the interpretation of cloze test scores. Research evidence indicates that students who score below 35% cloze comprehension on a given passage, will gain little or no new information from reading material at that level of difficulty (Bormuth, 1971; Bormuth & Bortnick, 1969). Thus, if a teacher constructs a cloze passage from a science textbook and finds three students who score below this level, she knows that the material is inappropriate for them. Thus, the teacher is using an objective criterion to decide how scores of a particular level have meaning for students on the particular instructional materials from which they will be taught.

Diagnoses:

In addition to using cloze to indicate readability and performance, teachers can also obtain diagnostic information from students' responses on a cloze passage by examining the patterns of incorrect responses. Table 1, taken from a fourth grade student's cloze performance, illustrates both the analysis and instructional implications for incorrect responses (Bortnick & Lopardo, 1972).

Table 1

Diagnostic Analysis of a Fourth Grade Student's Incorrect Cloze Responses

1.	Substitutes an acceptable synonym, e.g., we for people. Long ago, _____ had the same reasons...	1.	Meaning of passage not altered therefore no instructional implications indicated; student understands syntactic, semantic language constraints.
2.	Reads up to deletion only. Whenever people want to (be) messages...	2.	Teach the strategy of reading beyond the deletion for additional cues; teach student that this same strategy may be applied when he meets an unknown word.
3.	Inflectional error, e.g., offices for office.	3.	Teach student how a verb form (e.g., is) signals the singular or plural form of a noun.

Instruction:

A final area of cloze procedure application is that of instruction. It is generally agreed that the contextual cue is a powerful word recognition strategy and basic to the extension of a meaning vocabulary for both the beginning and the more advanced reader. Cloze-type material can be used in a variety of ways to teach the use of context. A review of the literature on cloze

as an instructional technique indicates vocabulary development and reading activities in the various content areas are other instructional possibilities (Jongsma, 1971).

In a recent article the authors have spelled out a detailed instructional procedure (Bortnick & Lopardo, 1973). This procedure can be summarized by the following directions to the student:

1. Read through the entire cloze passage silently.
2. Reread the cloze passage writing in words you think fit the blanks.
3. If you can, try to offer your reasons for your choices for these blanks: (teacher selects certain items).
4. Compare your choices with the original passage.
5. Be prepared to discuss both passages.

The preceding instructional procedure can then be varied by the use of different types of cloze passages to focus on different aspects of reading instruction. Some examples include:

1. Prepare cloze passages deleting certain lexical items (nouns, verbs, adjectives) to focus instruction on the syntactic constraints of the language.

2. Prepare cloze passages deleting items for which students must supply synonyms to focus instruction on vocabulary (meaning) development.

3. Prepare cloze passages in which items containing certain phoneme-grapheme correspondences are deleted (e.g., all words deleted contain the short a vowel sound) to focus instruction on this particular type of word analysis strategy.

Advantages of the Cloze Procedure

It should be clear that other instruments are available that serve the same functions as those just described for the cloze procedure. One might therefore ask, "Why use the cloze procedure?" The answer is that the cloze procedure has a number of advantages over other available procedures.

The cloze test is preferable to other tests because it is the most psychometrically sound test available. A fundamental problem with most traditionally constructed tests is that is is difficult to determine whether a high score indicates good performance or simply an easy test. The cloze test is objectively derived directly from the written instruction in an operational manner; therefore, different test writers can produce reliable and equivalent instruments over the same material. This fact eliminates the variance in test construction caused by the biases and idiosyncrasies of the individual test writer. Consequently, the difficulty of the test is directly dependent upon the difficulty of the written material over which it is derived, no matter who actually constructs the test.

From the standpoint of the classroom teacher who has limited time, professional support, and expertise in test construction, the cloze procedure is ideal. It is a simple and convenient tool to develop, administer, and score. In a short period of time, a secretary or instructional aide can be easily trained to produce cloze passages. Moreover, the test constructor need not possess a knowledge of the subject matter to produce a content-valid test over the material. In the development of a reliable test instrument, it is often necessary to revise items and to do item analysis studies. The item writing procedure is itself a lengthy time consuming process. Such procedures are unnecessary to produce a cloze passage or to assure that the passage will be a reliable and discriminating measurement.

It is just as easy to obtain alternative forms of a test. Further, such tests can be taken directly from the student's instructional materials, and can thus provide information on the student's performance relative to his peculiar instructional needs.

The administration and scoring of cloze passages is also easy. The test takes a short period of time to give and can be given to large groups. A scoring key using the exact word criterion is easily made; using such a key, scoring is both fast and objective.

Limitations

The cloze procedure is not an instructional panacea, however, and it is important to recognize its limitations. With regard to classroom use, cloze is not a valid measure for all students, particularly for those who lack word recognition skills. As word recognition skills are commonly presented in the first three grades, many reading experts feel that the cloze procedure should only be used with students in the fourth grade and up. However, it seems more appropriate to recommend that the decision of whether or not the test is valid for a student should rest on the critical element of adequate word recognition skill, not on grade level designation.

With regard to administration of the test, unless students fully understand that good performance on a cloze test requires fewer correct answers than other tests do, students become easily discouraged about their performance and give up. In the authors' experience, proper test instructions and preparation of the students for the task do much to alleviate this difficulty.

Precisely what the cloze test measures is an issue which is still not resolved. Cloze may measure only a general understanding

and facility with the language and not comprehension of the information contained in and between sentences. However, cloze performance has been shown to correlate highly with performance on standardized achievement tests. Even if cloze does yield information about a student's understanding of the literal information of the material, it does not provide information on the important higher level comprehension skills such as inference and critical reading. Therefore, a cloze test should be viewed as a complement to, not a replacement of, other comprehension tests.

Summary

In this discussion of the cloze procedure, some of the classroom uses have been suggested and illustrated. The advantages and practicality of the cloze procedure reveals it to be a multipurpose tool which every teacher can apply in the classroom. However, practical application of the cloze procedure has only just begun. Further work and experience is necessary to continue its development as a classroom tool. Yet, teachers can begin to apply it in the classroom now.

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