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Can Performance on Mother-tongue Cloze Exercises Predict Performance on Foreign-language Cloze Tests?

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Rationale for this study

I use the cloze in class as both a method of teaching as well as a method of testing. Despite its popularity in language education, many students struggle at first with the exercises I give them, and a few never seem to catch on despite considerable practice and repeated explanation. Like with shadowing, where we recommend that students who are having difficulty with the exercise try shadowing in their mother tongue to become accustomed to it, I thought the same might work with the cloze. I was also curious to see if they could all do it equally well in their mother tongue or if there were different abilities among students and if those differences were correlated to foreign language ability. Furthermore, I was interested in how they approached the task in their mother tongue and perhaps get some insight into their awareness of language. Finally, this study also gave me the chance to compare texts written in the two languages, such as paragraph construction and parallel form, to help me better understand the difficulties my students have when tackling the cloze in English.

Introduction

According to Wikipedia, “A cloze test (also cloze deletion test) is an exercise, test, or assessment consisting of a portion of language with certain items, words, or signs removed (cloze text), where the participant is asked to replace the missing language item.”¹ In English, this often means a sentence or paragraph with words missing, but may also include texts with parts of words missing. Students (or examinees) then have to fill in the blanks. Although a very simple exercise, it is quite flexible. It can be configured in a number of ways and be made from a variety of texts, and it can be used in many ways. For example, I use the exercise in my required first- and second-year English classes for both the teaching and testing of vocabulary, reading comprehension and grammar. The texts I use come from VOA news reports about health and medicine or from FDA press releases for pharmacists. I sometimes ask students to use any word they can think of that will fit into the blank or I give them

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cloze_test (retrieved August 5, 2019)

choices. I also occasionally use it as an easier listening exercise and let them listen for the missing words. When we go over the exercises or tests as a class, we can discuss why some word or words fit and others don't. The reasons for choosing one word over another are not just semantic or syntactic, but also pragmatic and stylistic. In my conversation classes, I use it for pair work as well as for testing. All teachers should include it in their arsenal of teaching techniques, and any language testing program should include it in its protocol. Its omission from any language teaching or testing regimen is an unfortunate oversight. The value of the cloze cannot be overstated. Not only can it evaluate a learner's knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, it can also gauge reading comprehension and overall language ability, all skills including speaking and listening. And more than a testing tool, the cloze is also a method of language teaching. In fact, I would argue that it is how we all learned our mother tongue. Rather than transferring ideas from one mind to another, much of language depends on guessing meaning and intention - precisely what we do as children when our mothers first talk to us and precisely what second language learners must do when dealing with a new language.

Background

The cloze is an indispensable way to test language ability.² We can find examples of it in almost any language test. Tsukuba University, for example, uses a version of the cloze test in what they call SPOT (Simple Performance Oriented Test) "to identify the Japanese proficiency of multiple learners."³ It is used, they explain, as either a placement test or a diagnostic test and in acquisition research. The test, they say, "can measure Japanese language skills in a short time." Furthermore, "it is widely used both in Japan and overseas for placement tests as well as for determining Japanese language skills in acquisition research." The test is multiple choice and asks the examinee to complete a sentence or short dialog. Example questions include:

Sample question 1 : おはよう () ございます。

ご あ こ う

Sample question 2 : A : (), この本を買いましたか?

B : きのうです。

どこで いくら だれが いつ

² See for example: Bachman, Lyle F. (1990) *Fundamental Considerations in Language Testing* Oxford University Press

Hughes, Arthur (1989) *Testing for Language Teachers* Cambridge University Press

Alderson, J. Charles and Beretta, Alan (1992) *Evaluating Second Language Education* Cambridge University Press

³ <http://tbtj-tsukuba.org/p1.html>

Sample question 3 : 私のへやは [] さいです.

○少 ○大 ○天 ○小

While Tsukuba University, among many others, use the cloze for testing, it is also a staple of English language textbooks in Japan and so should be familiar to most university students. In fact, a perusal of high school textbooks shows that it is commonly used. Sanseido's *Crown English Communication* uses a form of the cloze to check learner's reading comprehension⁴. Sanseido also use another form of it in their *Crown English Expression* as a grammar exercise⁵. Bun-Eido use it in one form or other in their *Unicorn* series as does Zoshindo in their *Mainstream* series of English language books for high school. Here are two examples from Sanseido:

Reading excerpt: I feel so lucky to have a beautiful home planet.

Exercise: When Wakata travels into space he feels (1.) to have a beautiful home planet.

- a) Japanese astronauts are very good speakers of English.
- b) Japanese astronauts () very good English.

The exercises give students a chance to recycle the language they have learned from the reading and other exercises. In the first example, students simply need to realize that Wakata says he "feels lucky" to have a beautiful home planet and supply the adjective given in the original.⁶ For the second example, students must transform the noun phrase, "very good speakers of English" into a verb and predicate, "speak very good English."

In later exercises, the cloze summary goes one step further and gets students to think in English. For example, a reading summary cloze exercise from *Crown*⁷ asks students to fill in the blanks with ideas from the reading:

Cleopatra became queen of (1.) at the age of 17 but killed (2.) 20 years later.

Assuming that ordinary Japanese high school students do not know the story of Cleopatra, they must understand that the above paraphrases this idea:

⁴ See for example *Crown English Communication 1*, 2013 Sanseido: Tokyo, page 10

⁵ See for example *Crown English Expression 1*, 2013 Sanseido: Tokyo, page 13

⁶ Grammar explanations come after the fact, but Meriam-Webster gives a good one here:
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/do-you-feel-bad-or-feel-badly> (retrieved August 13, 2019)

⁷ *Crown English Communication 1*, 2013 Sanseido: Tokyo, page 106

She became the queen of Egypt in the year 51 B.C. when she was only 17 years old. ... However, only 20 years later, Cleopatra took her own life and lost her country to Rome.⁸

Although the first blank is simply a matter of completing the noun phrase “queen of Egypt”, which can be done by looking back at the original, the second blank requires that students understand that “she took her own life” means “she killed herself.” Unlike the other examples given above, the answer cannot be copied directly from the original since the passage does not say “she killed herself.” They must somehow understand (presumably from the reading passage) that she committed suicide and then say it in different words.

So, how does someone learn the meaning of idiomatic expressions such as “take one’s own life”? They can, of course, be memorized like so many other vocabulary items. A bit tedious, perhaps. Some of them can be figured out with a bit of thought. In this case, hopefully, students have a feel for the meaning of “take” by having read copious examples of it being used in English. Otherwise, students might try to puzzle out the meaning of “she took her own life” using Japanese, literally 彼女は自分の命を取りました. Doing so, however, will likely cause them difficulty since the word “take” as it is used in English does not match perfectly with the use of its most common translations in Japanese, 取る or perhaps つかむ. Interestingly, and as an example of how using only a dictionary or translation to help one understand the sense of words without also using examples of actual usage and other dictionaries can be treacherous, the online Japanese-English/English-Japanese dictionary Weblio gives three senses for the core meaning of take⁹:

- take something from a place
- take something (in your hand) and
- take something into yourself

While those notions are a useful starting point, they contrast with the definitions offered by English language dictionaries such as The Cambridge Online Dictionary¹⁰ and Merriam-Webster.¹¹ The first explanation Cambridge offers for the verb take is “to remove something, especially without permission.” The first explanation given by Merriam-Webster is, “to get into one’s hands or into one’s possession, power, or control,” but suggests that taking is not such a nice thing to do since the examples of taking

⁸ *Crown English Communication 1*, 2013 Sanseido: Tokyo, page 97.

⁹ See it here: <https://ejje.weblio.jp/content/take>

¹⁰ See it here: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/take>

¹¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/take>

that they use to clarify their explanation include:

- a : to seize or capture physically // took them as prisoners
- b : to get possession of (fish or game) by killing or capturing
- c (1) : to move against (an opponent's piece, as in chess) and remove from play
(2) : to win in a card game // able to take 12 tricks
- d : to acquire by eminent domain

These go a bit beyond the idea of taking something from a place/in your hand, for example, take an umbrella¹², or take into yourself, take two aspirin, etc. In fact, Weblio, offers examples such as:

- a The child took my hand.
- b The child took me by the hand.
- c She took her child to her breast [in her arms.]

While both the Japanese notion of take, as in *つかむ*, and the English sense of take, as in “grab hold of”, are similar, the idea of “to remove” or “take from (me)”¹³ can be easily overlooked if relying on translations or one particular dictionary.¹⁴ Take perhaps has many more negative connotations, such as “I can’t take any more of this heat” and even “it takes me an hour and a half to get to work”, than does 取る. as in “take this (from me and) with you” or “I will take it (from you).” On the other hand, “take away”, to mean subtract and the second explanation in the Cambridge dictionary, is an example that should be familiar to most Japanese learners of English.

In fact, 取る is probably closer in meaning to “get”. In Japanese, the kanji 取 is used in words and phrases such as 取得する, which can be translated to mean “get”, and 取ってきます, “go get”. If learners are thinking in Japanese when they read “Cleopatra took her own life”, they may easily have a mistaken idea of what the sentence means.¹⁵

The above example shows how the cloze exercise gives students an opportunity to learn and practice this sort of analysis and to think in English. In the case of the Cleopatra passage, the question they need to ask, perhaps with the prompting of the teacher, is what did she kill? They can then go back to the passage, also perhaps

¹² Compare: Here, take my umbrella. And: Someone took my umbrella.

¹³ An interesting way to learn word connotations can be found here:
<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Take>

A more academic source might be: <https://www.lexutor.ca/conc/eng/> (retrieved August 9 2019)

¹⁴ Dictionaries are, after all, made by people, who most likely have very different experiences with the words under consideration.

¹⁵ Indeed, “to get a life” is quite different from “to take a life.”

with the teacher's prompting, and try to work out what it means to "take one's life" and how it differs from "taking someone's hand." They should also notice the context of the passage, again with the help of the teacher if necessary: they should notice the word "however" joining the sentences in the original and the word "but" joining the two parts of the sentence in the summary indicating a contrast — she became queen, a good thing, but then twenty years later something bad happened. On the other hand, of course, a teacher might try to short circuit the learning process and simply tell them the answer or give them the translation (perhaps after letting students try to translate it themselves) while reading the passage with them, in which case it becomes another lexical item that the students have to memorize and that they then may have trouble using in a different context.

While the thinking involved in some of the more difficult cloze exercises may be a bit discouraging, they nonetheless offer students the chance to think a bit more deeply about the language they are learning and develop a better sense for how it is used. So, rather than a mindless exercise or a simple test of language ability, the cloze, when used properly, can help learners to think about and understand how the language really works.

In Class

Making cloze exercises from reading passages may seem like a perverse way of teaching — why make reading comprehension more difficult by taking words out of a passage? But like with any kind of teaching exercise, the aim is to help learners understand and practice targeted skills. And as with dissecting a frog or taking apart a machine, if used properly the cloze helps learners see for themselves how the language is constructed and how it works.

To introduce the exercise to my classes, I give students a passage from the VOA. The following is an excerpt from the in-class exercise that illustrates some ways language can be taken apart and then analyzed to help students learn:

A listener in Vietnam was wondering if we could explain the process of becoming a pharmacist in the United States. We suspect the abilities needed for a career in pharmacy are about the same _____. They include excellent skills in science and _____, and the ability to communicate and work well with people. The United States Bureau of Labor Statistics also suggests that a pharmacist needs to have good feet! Many pharmacists _____ all day at work.¹⁶

¹⁶ From: <https://learningenglish.voanews.com/a/if-you-want-to-be-a-pharmacist-you-need-excellent-skills-in-science-and-mathematics-and-good-feet-133774153/115363.html> (retrieved February 22, 2019)

Choices for the missing words are not given since they are common vocabulary items that most students should already know. Instead, students must think about what fits both in terms of content and grammar. The exercise is really a kind of puzzle with different clues for each blank. And as with any guessing game, applying a bit of logic also helps.

Grammatically, the first blank is a noun phrase. The article “the” is our clue. The blank tells us that there is a word that follows the word “same”, meaning that the word “same” here is being used as an adjective and not a pronoun. Moreover, “same” is being used to modify a predicative noun, and so students should ask themselves, “The abilities are the same what?” Finally, using the context clues found in the first two sentences, students may conclude that the abilities are the same in Vietnam and in the US, so probably the same everywhere (or worldwide.) Rather difficult, but for students who like to solve problems potentially rewarding to unwind the logic and understand how the sentence works.

Teachers might suspect, however, that students are either unwilling or unable to do the kind of analysis given above, analysis which is needed to work out the answers for themselves. All too often, rather than approaching this kind of exercise as a puzzle, a kind of problem that they need to solve, students may simply be expecting the teacher to provide the answer. Understandable given the learning environments to which they are accustomed. But by simply providing the answer and not giving students the chance to think the problem through for themselves circumvents learning. On the other hand, some students, although willing to puzzle out the answer, may not know how to approach the problem. In other words, they are not aware of the grammar and how the words are making meaning together as a sentence and as a paragraph. While the first case — students unwilling to think — is both difficult to detect and to correct, we may be able to find out what difficulties students have when tackling this exercise and so teach them some strategies for filling in the blanks, exactly what they did when learning Japanese as children and exactly what they should be doing if they want to learn how to use a foreign language.

Experiment

In order to find out how much intuitive knowledge of language students have and therefore what they need to be taught in order to tackle the cloze, the following experiments were set up to help students get a feel for how the exercise works. It is also hoped that this experiment will perhaps help students who feel resistance to experiential learning overcome their resistance to the cloze exercise. A comparison to their performance on an English language cloze test was also made to see how much if any of their linguistic knowledge of Japanese they could use when reading a foreign language.

The experiment involved making a cloze exercise from a paragraph taken from the Japanese language version of Wikipedia and presenting it to a group of students (“group 1”) using PowerPoint:

薬剤師の業務は多肢¹⁷に渡る。なかでも薬剤師法で一番にあげられる「調剤」は基本的な薬剤師の業務である。薬局等における安全性の比較的低い医療用医薬品の処方監査・投薬業務のほか、安全性の高い医薬品（OTCや漢方薬など）の購入相談業務など内科医的な側面も併せ持つ。¹⁸

Several characters were removed from the first sentence and shown to students before they were shown the rest of the paragraph. Students were asked to guess the missing characters.

A. 1) _ _ 師 2) _ _ 務は 3) _ 肢に 4) _ _ .

They were also asked to roughly estimate their level of confidence in their guesses expressed as a percent.¹⁹ The results are listed in the tables below.

Table 1 Characters used to complete blank 1) _ _ 師

Guess	薬剤	看護	魔術	曲芸	教
Frequency	26	1	1	1	2
Average Confidence Level	74% ²⁰	25%	0%	10%	0%

Table 2 Characters used to complete blank 2) _ _ 務は

の業	の仕	の任	の職	の責	の義	の勤	の主	の事	other	Blank
8	2	1	3	2	3	2	1	3	3	3
70%	0%	50%	37%	25%	NA	27%	7%	23%	0%	NA

¹⁷ The kanji 多肢 is found in the original but was later corrected for other trials of this experiment after it was pointed out by several students that 多岐 makes more sense.

¹⁸ <https://ja.wikipedia.org/wiki/薬剤師> (retrieved April 6, 2019.)

¹⁹ If no answer was given, the response was not included in the average. For other choices, however, no students gave an answer, the percentage is recorded as NA, no answer. Furthermore, since no standard for confidence was established prior to the exercise, this is a rough guide to student thinking at best. Also, it is tempting to judge some responses to the exercise, both guesses and the confidence level as not at all serious.

²⁰ Seven students said they were 100% confident.

By the fifth try, the entire class could fill in the blanks with no difficulty. But even by the third try, all but two students understood that the sentence was about pharmacist (薬剤師). One student had tried to make a sentence about the 薬草園²² while another about the 薬学部.²³ Amazingly, two students had already inserted the exact kanji found in the original by the third try.

Students' performance on these exercises were also correlated with their scores on English language cloze exercises in the form of a multiple-choice quiz made from a paragraph from the VOA with ten words removed. No correlation was found between students' ability to guess missing Japanese characters and missing English words.

Table 5 Correlation between English cloze exercise scores and Japanese cloze for group 1

Midterm cloze and Japanese cloze: N=31, R=0.02
Term-end cloze and Japanese cloze: N=31, R=0.26
Average score for Japanese cloze exercise: 6.5
Average score on midterm English cloze exercise: 6.3
Average score on term-end English cloze exercise: 7.6

Table 6 Correlation between English cloze exercise scores and Japanese for cloze group 2

Midterm cloze and Japanese cloze: N=27, R=0.15
Term-end cloze and Japanese cloze: N=27, R=0.26
Average score for Japanese cloze exercise: 8.1
Average score on midterm English cloze exercise: 7.2
Average score on term-end English cloze exercise: 8.0

The scores for the Japanese cloze exercise were roughly calculated based on how students filled in the four blanks in the case of group 1. Further, because of an error in the original (explained below), 四 was accepted as a correct answer. Likewise, あり/る, 勤 and 職 etc. were also counted as correct since the meaning fit the context.

For group 2, their performance on the fourth slide was used to evaluate their performance and similar considerations were made regarding how well their choices fit the meaning of the sentence. Also, while there were 30 students in the group, three were not counted in the correlation analysis because they left the course for one reason or another.

²² 薬草園の業務状況にてる

²³ 薬学部の業政機関内にいる

Finally, during the exercise, students were asked why they chose a certain answer over another or why, for example, they were confident that they had the correct answer. Three common reasons were given. Students said either:

- 1) I have memorized the sentence.
- 2) I understand what the sentence is trying to say. Or
- 3) I know Japanese.

Discussion

Of course, broad sweeping generalizations cannot be drawn from this in-class experiment — different cloze tests may very well produce different results. But clearly in this case, the results of these exercises and tests cannot be used to predict which students will perform better on English cloze tests. On the other hand, the results do suggest that skills and knowledge unique to Japanese were involved in filling in the blanks on the Japanese cloze exercises presented here and that for the most part they did not transfer to the English cloze tests given to students at mid-term and for the term end exam.

Nonetheless, the results do offer some insights into the nature of language and language use and student awareness of language. Most importantly, the results suggest future direction for teaching. Looking again at the paragraph from Wikipedia and assuming that it is written in the ordinary expository style of a Japanese essay, we can see a repetition of the key word that gives the topic, 業務, and an example of parallel construction. In a follow-up question, these two items were used as targets. Students in the first class were asked to fill in the blanks in the next two sentences in the paragraph:

- B. なかでも薬剤師法で一番にあげられる「調剤」は基本的な薬剤師の _ _ である。

And

- C. 薬局等における安全性の比較的低い医療用医薬品の処方監査・投薬業務のほか、安全性の _ _ 医薬品 (OTC や漢方薬など) の購入相談業務など内科医的な側面も併せ持つ。

All but three students were able to fill in the blank of the second sentence B, with either the exact word, 業務, or a synonym such as 仕事 and 役割 that was deemed acceptable. In the blank left for sentence C, one student tried inserting 後発 in the blank and another thought it must be 低い and yet another was undecided between 低い and 高い. Again, there seems to be no correlation in these students' ability on the English cloze exercises done in class and their performance on the above cloze exercises in Japanese.

Yet, despite the vast majority of students recognizing intuitively the parallel construction in the Japanese sentence, many of these same students (in group 1) failed to notice the parallel construction in the text used for the exam:

Some got traditional acupuncture. Others had 3 () done incorrectly...

In all, 11 students failed to notice the parallel construction of these two sentences, which would have helped them answer with “acupuncture.” This suggests that students need to be made aware of this common writing technique. Writers use this technique to help readers understand how ideas are related and grouped together. Understanding this will help students to take notes from English language sources more efficiently.

Moreover, along with greater awareness of the language, student will also likely benefit from a better understanding of the nature of language, how it is learned and used. That many assumed that they could fill in the blanks because they had the sentence memorized even though none of them had seen it before is not surprising, though. Folk linguistics and the stubborn persistence of behaviorist notions of language and language learning are hard to change since they often appeal to common sense and prevalent language learning techniques, namely, the memorization of word lists. Despite explicit grammar instruction, students seem to have not noticed that language, even their mother tongue, is rule governed behavior. This may help explain why some of them have difficulty with the cloze — they perhaps feel helpless in the face of a novel sentence because they cannot or will not apply the rules they have learned, even though they have had the rules explained to them and can repeat what the rules are when asked.

Yet, that many were able to understand the first sentence and that the expected answer was the one most often given suggests that despite what students think they know about language and language learning, they do have an intuitive sense of their mother tongue. That this sense does not always carry over to a foreign language is borne out by the results of the correlation analysis.

Interestingly, the paragraph for the experiment was copied from Wikipedia without correction and the first sentence, when translated into English, could be read: *The work of a pharmacist has many limbs*. The author assumed that this was perhaps an idiomatic use of the character 肢, which, according to several on-line dictionaries, means: ①てあし。「肢体」「四肢」②本体から分かれ出た部分。「選択肢」[類]支²⁴ and most commonly collocates with 四 or “four”. In fact, quite a number of students filled in the

²⁴ <https://dictionary.goo.ne.jp/word/kanji/肢/> (see also <https://kotobank.jp/word/肢-442795> and also <https://ejje.weblio.jp/content/肢>) retrieved August 2 2019

missing kanji with 四 while many others used 多 to fill in the blank, perhaps assuming that 多岐 is what was meant. In fact, during a discussion of the exercise, students pointed out that it would make more sense if the kanji were 岐, roughly translated as “path” and the word using the combined kanji 多岐 translated as “diverse”. Although also idiomatic, a bit less traumatic to think that pharmacists must “walk” many paths rather than they have many appendages, more perhaps than the usual human being. This error in the original caused some confusion among students. Nonetheless, most students (84%) understood the sentence.

Finally, this quick experiment has suggested that 1) some but not all of the skills needed to complete a cloze exercise in Japanese are different from the skills needed to complete a cloze exercise in English, and that therefore 2) the cloze can help students become more aware of the target language and thus learn important features of the language.

In particular, it is a bit surprising that students do not always make the connection between the key words of a paragraph (for example, in the paragraph from Wikipedia, 業務) and the topic of the paragraph when reading English. Likewise, although the third sentence in the Wikipedia paragraph gives us a very clear example of parallel form, many students miss this when reading sentences in English. Students should be made aware of this language feature and taught how to use it when reading since it will improve their reading efficiency.

Theory behind the cloze

Although there is still considerable debate regarding how we acquire language, (Pinker’s language instinct, Chomsky’s language acquisition device, Piaget’s stages of cognitive development, etc.) we were born with the ability to learn language. And no matter which side of the nativist/empiricist debate you come down on, we all must agree that we learn our first language by interacting with our caregivers (disregarding some special cases) as they speak to us. A child born into an English-speaking environment learns to speak English, another born into a Japanese-speaking environment learns to speak Japanese, and yet another born into a German-speaking environment learns to speak German. None of them starts spontaneously speaking a different language unless exposed to one, and none, as far as I know of, learns to speak from a textbook. Now, while empiricist may argue that children merely learn from experience — a very tempting view to take given its simplicity — what makes first language learning so remarkable is what Chomsky has called “the poverty of the stimulus.” On the other hand, from the moment they are born (and some say even before) children hear people around them using language. Somehow, either with the help of some innate mechanism or through higher cognitive abilities unique to (or perhaps, more highly developed

in) humans, children begin to make sense of these sounds. It may take as much as the first year of life for a child to identify the sounds and then begin to realize that those sounds are, for lack of a better term, “words” — most commonly, at first, the names of people, eg. the child’s own name, mama, papa, etc.; names of common objects, eg. food, animals, etc.; and the names of common actions, eg. go, give, look, etc. Children also eventually learn that there are certain rules for making words and putting them together to form more complex thoughts. Over the next few years, and as many as a further four or five, children learn most of the basic rules for using the words they have learned and begin to expand their vocabulary exponentially. All of this without the help of a dictionary or a grammar book.

So, what does all this have to do with the cloze? When a caregiver says to a child named Sara, “Do you want some milk, Sara?” Sara has to make sense of these sounds. Sara probably already knows her name because she has heard it many times before and in many different contexts: “Look, Sara, a doggie.” “Sara, let’s go.” etc. She has probably already made the connection between the word milk and the white liquid inside her cup or bottle (and learned the words cup and bottle.) So, when the caregiver says:

Do you want some _____, Sara?

The blank is something new, something Sara has never heard before and so like with the cloze, she has to fill in the blank.

But real-life cloze exercises do not end there. We use the skills needed for the cloze every time we have to fill in the blanks when listening or reading, for example, when we cannot hear or read something clearly for one reason or another. An example was Theresa May’s first cabinet meeting, where she said:

Good morning everybody. Thank you very much for coming together today. It’s our first opportunity to meet since the summer recess, but also the first opportunity for us to meet since the fantastic success of GBT at the (sound of cheering.)²⁵

Knowing the context, Ms May must have said something like “at the 2016 London Olympics.” We can also see this happening on news clips roughly edited for YouTube as when an ABC News anchor introduces the next story in a news broadcast²⁶, but the first word is cut off:

...to the massive protest in Hong Kong,...

²⁵ Transcribed from AP News: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jt-KV05BvaA>

²⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-7opA7UCk>

Again, using a few clues, most expert English speakers would fill in with “Now” and not give it a second thought.

Recommendations

The cloze is a very useful exercise and should be a regular part of language class. It can be used to:

- 1) ...teach vocabulary
- 2) ...test vocabulary
- 3) ...give students practice with vocabulary
- 4) ...give students listening practice
- 5) ...raise grammar awareness
- 6) ...help students understand paragraphs, and as a result
- 7) ...help students improve their reading comprehension
- 8) ...test reading comprehension
- 9) ...test achievement

This study found that the cloze is very effective for items 1, teaching vocabulary, and 5, raising grammar awareness in particular as well as helping to introduce concepts of paragraphing, item 6.

Conclusion

Although the exercise did help students better understand the cloze exercise, the simple answer to the question posed in the title is that this way of presenting the cloze in Japanese did not predict which students would do well on English cloze tests. This result, however, cannot rule out the possibility that a differently constructed exercise can predict performance on foreign-language cloze tests.

On the other hand, and more importantly, this study did help inform teaching practice and development of teaching materials, which is why we do this sort of classroom research: to deepen our understanding of our subject matter, to focus our attention on students' needs and to improve our teaching ability. Furthermore, by writing up our studies, we can both share what we have learned with others and more importantly, clarify and consolidate our thoughts. For these reasons, even ordinary teachers and not just researchers must continue their studies no matter what they teach,

The cloze exercise is a remarkably versatile tool for testing and teaching language. Its uses in testing are well known and it is an important exercise in many language textbooks. Moreover, it is a realistic exercise and reflects the way we actually learn and use language.