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## C-Test, Not a Cloze Test : Test Construction

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### Abstract

This article gives an insight into two types of test construction: the Cloze Test and the C-Test. The underlying theory of these two tests is mentioned. The nature of the Cloze Test and the C-Test is discussed together with the deletion procedure. Moreover, samples of test passages are shown with words deleted. Discussion about the deletion is presented, as well as comments on problems encountered.

For the last few years, I have had experience in constructing English tests for graduate students entering Chulalongkorn University. Since these students are from different faculties and have different background knowledge of English, they are provided with different sets of English tests. The main problem for the test construction is to find the appropriate test that can represent the students' competence. Chomsky (1975) views competence as an abstract system of rules internalized in the language user (the grammar) and performance as the rules system in action, used for communication. As learning proceeds, the level of competence becomes higher. Increasing competence is shown in better performance. Klein-Braley (1981) believes that competence itself is not testable, but performance is. Therefore, the only way of assessing competence is to put the learner in a controlled situation where a specific objectively-defined performance is required.

Both Cloze Test and C-Test are considered suitable for assessing the students' competence (Oller 1979; Klein-Braley 1981). What both tests aim at doing is obtaining a random sample of the student's performance, and they do this by using either a systematic deletion or random deletion technique for test construction. The elements deleted in the text are viewed as a random sample of all the elements in the text, and the text itself is considered as a random sample of the language as a whole. Thus the technique of random sampling is the heart of the theory underlying tests of reduced redundancy (word deletion): random sampling of the elements of the language through the text forces the students to show a random sample of linguistic performance in the test.

Once I had read the underlying theory of these two tests: Cloze Test and C-Test, I began to become interested in knowing how to construct both tests, especially the

C-Test. Are they similar to each other? Having had experience with the Cloze Test but not with the C-Test, my next step was to study both of them in more detail but in particular the C-Test.

### Cloze Test Construction

Wilson Taylor (1953) used the term "cloze" to refer to the natural human psychological tendency to fill in gaps when every  $n^{\text{th}}$  word (where  $n$  is a number between 5-10) from a reading passage had been systematically deleted (Other deletion techniques are possible, for instance both Gefen (1974) and Bachman (1981) have recommended the rational deletion of specific items). The examinees were asked to fill in the missing items.

One of the main advantages of Cloze Test as opposed to discrete point item tests e.g. multiple choice is the ease with which they can be constructed. The test constructor needs only find a suitable text, decide on a deletion rate and a starting point, leave out every  $n^{\text{th}}$  word and his test is ready for use.

Usually, Cloze Tests use authentic materials as the basis of test construction. Oller (1979) believes that a suitable text must be carefully chosen and possibly edited texts could be used. Research has shown that the cloze procedure is probably appropriate to just about any text. However, he cautions that certain things must be avoided: emotionally-charged texts; text containing statements that students may strongly disagree with. Alderson (1979) found out that the text selected affected the result obtained.

In addition to the quality of the text chosen, the types of word deletion as well as the starting point can affect the quality of the test.

Both Alderson (1979) and Klein-Braley (1985) experimented with changes in deletion rate and starting point and both came to the conclusion that these factors seriously affected the quality of tests constructed. Also, Klein-Braley found out that in the Cloze-Test, the  $n^{\text{th}}$  word deletion and the rational deletion of specific items were not equivalent.

### C-Test Construction

Klein-Braley considers the idea of reduced redundancy (word deletion) as a basis for testing. Klein-Braley and Raatz (1981) originated a further adaptation of the Cloze Test, namely the C-Test. This test is intended to avoid the problems of the standard Cloze Test.

What is the C-Test? It is a test where redundancy is reduced at the word rather than at the sentence level, as in the Cloze Test. A typical C-Test consists of four to six printed text passages, each composed of 60-80 words. Each passage is presented in the following way: the first sentence is left intact; in the following sentences, the second half of the letters of every second word are deleted and replaced by a blank to be filled in by the examinee. (One-letter words are not counted, and words with an odd number of letters have  $(n+1)/2$  letters deleted.) This is done until there are 20-25 words whose letter halves have been deleted, after that the text is allowed to remain unchanged until it reaches a natural end, usually finishing with one sentence intact.

Examinees are given only a reasonable amount of time to perform the task and usually they are not told the number of the letters that have been deleted. However, sometimes as with second language English

learners, it is desirable to indicate the numbers of letters deleted by inserting separate underline characters.

Tests are scored by counting the number of blanks that have been filled to exactly match the original, with some occasional exceptions where equally acceptable alternatives exist such as this or that for th\_ \_, or with possible credit for poor spelling when the correct word has clearly been recognised. The Cloze Test is scored by using the exact word method and the alternative methods such as synonyms.

### Observations

After having studied the underlying theory and test construction of both tests (Cloze Test and C-Test), I decided to construct my own tests, using the techniques mentioned. These were constructed for a trial group of advanced students on the M.B.A. programme.

I started by choosing authentic materials as the basis of test construction and selected four different texts in order to avoid bias from text content. Each text was chosen for subject and language appropriateness, and did not contain many long and difficult words. Once the passages were chosen, I followed Weiss's study, that is, I used the same passages for both tests.<sup>1</sup>

I found that in order to use the same text for both tests, it was necessary and easier for me to look for suitable passages for the C-Test first and then convert them into Cloze Test passages. This was due to

the word number constraint of the C-Test (approximately 80 words per passage per test). Therefore, C-Test passages are shorter and the content has to be clear right from the opening sentence.

Once I had chosen my trial passages, I constructed the C-Test first. In each of the four passages, I left the first and the last sentences intact. These act as content clues to the students. My first deletion was the second word of the second sentence (the second half of the letters of the word). During the deletion process I found that some words occurred too many times in the same test passage (words such as "title" and "as" in C-Test Passage I; words "name" and "the" in the C-Test Passage III etc.)

I decided to sort my C-Test passages into levels of difficulty using three criteria to do so. For passages containing more function words than content words; words that occurred many times in the same passage and more words with one to three letters deleted than other test passages, I considered easier than the other test passages. The C-Test passages were put in order of difficulty beginning with the easiest, according to the criteria mentioned above. It was also my C-Test experience that proper names could not be deleted.

My next step was to convert the same passages to Cloze Test. I produced two Cloze Tests using systematic deletion and random word deletion. For systematic deletion, every 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> word was deleted, In random word deletion, specific items were deleted. The first and last sentences were left intact.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Weiss (1983) found the correlation between the C-Test and the Cloze Test versions of the same passages to be .69. The students had higher scores on the C-Test passages than on the Cloze Test passages.

<sup>2</sup> For Cloze Tests this is not always necessary but with short passages it is advisable.

Also, I found the starting point of the first deletion affected the difficulty of the test. I found that different deletion rates can affect the difficulty of the test and I would assume the test score. The more function words deleted the easier a Cloze Test is, whereas the more content words deleted the more difficult a Cloze Test becomes.

I also found that when using these same passages for systematic and random deletion for the Cloze Test, the order of difficulty was altered depending on what words I chose to delete. I had to, therefore, rearrange the order of Cloze-Tests when given, commencing with the easiest first and finishing with the most difficult one.

To sum up this article does not attempt to say which test is better but serves only to give the reader more insight into what they are, how the tests are constructed and what the underlying theory is behind them. Samples of my own trial passages are shown in which the words are deleted according to each type of test construction. From my own test construction trial I can tell which test is easier to make. However, I can not say which test is better for testing performance until I have tried my tests out on my own students and then extended my trial to other groups of students. Results must then be correlated and a certain amount of statistical evaluation must be involved before a conclusion can be reached.

### Examples of C-Test Passages

#### C-Test Passage I: The Wrong address

One of my favourite stories concerns an American who went to Malaysia to close a substantial contract. There, (1) i\_ a splashy (2) cere\_ \_ \_ \_ , he (3) w\_ \_ introduced (4) t\_ someone (5) h\_ thought (6) w\_ \_ named Roger. (7) Throu\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ the (8) negoti\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ , he (9) cal\_ \_ \_ the (10) m\_ \_ "Rog" (11) n\_ \_ realizing (12) th\_ \_ his (13) pote\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ client (14) w\_ \_ a rajah, (15) wh\_ \_ \_ is a (16) ti\_ \_ \_ of (17) nobi\_ \_ \_ \_ , not a (18) per\_ \_ \_ 's name. (19) Th\_ \_ well-meaning (20) Amer\_ \_ \_ \_ did (21) n\_ \_ know (22) th\_ \_ in (23) Mala\_ \_ \_ \_ , while (24) ma\_ \_ of (25) t\_ \_ states are controlled by sultans, one state is headed by rajahs. This illustrates the common mistake made by businessmen trying to explore markets overseas. (World Executive's Digest-June 1989)

#### C-Test Passage II: Business Etiquette in West Germany

As a rule, people use full surnames on both business and social occasions, even when they know each other fairly well. German (1) alm\_ \_ \_ invariably (2) add\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ even (3) fami\_ \_ \_ \_ colleagues (4) i\_ the (5) off\_ \_ \_ as Herr Schmidt (6) o\_ Frau Schwartz. (7) I\_ the (8) per\_ \_ \_ has a (9) ti\_ \_ \_ \_ and (10) i\_ Germany (11) profes\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ rank (12) of\_ \_ \_ rates (13) a\_ a title\_ (14) th\_ \_ is (15) us\_ \_ instead (16) o\_ the (17) sur\_ \_ \_ \_ , as (18) i\_ "Herr Professor" (19) o\_ "Frau Direktorin." A (20) Ger\_ \_ \_ who (21) h\_ \_ a title (22) wi\_ \_ be (23) dee\_ \_ \_ \_ offended (24) i\_ you (25) d\_ not use it\_ although it is a worse mistake to address someone as "Herr Doktor" when he has no such title. (World Executive's Digest-April 1989)

#### C-Test Passage III: The Name is Nissan

Nissan Motor Company in 1984 decided to change the name of their automobile offerings in the United States from "Datsun" to "Nissan". To (1) t\_ \_ American (2) cons\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ this (3) i\_ as (4) gr\_ \_ \_ a change (5) a\_ Coca-Cola (6) Chan\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ the (7) na\_ \_ of "Coke" (8) t\_ "Smatz". (9) N\_ \_ only (10) w\_ \_ this a (11) tot\_ \_ \_ \_ new (12) na\_ \_ for (13) t\_ \_ American (14) pub\_ \_ \_ \_ to (15) dig\_ \_ \_ , but (16) ma\_ \_ consumers (17) fo\_ \_ \_ "Nissan" (18) ha\_ \_ to (19) pron\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ , Ironically, (20) "Dat\_ \_ \_" was (21) t\_ \_ only (22) Japa\_ \_ \_ \_ Automobile (23) com\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ to (24) ha\_ \_ a pseudo-American (25) na\_ \_ \_ , which may have give them advantage over other Japanese auto makers in the U.S. market. This benefit was totally lost with the obviously Japanese name Nissan. (World Executive's Digest-May 1989)

#### C-Test Passage IV: The Leisured Young.

To the Japanese, spare time used to be time left over after a task was finished. Leisure, (1) f\_ \_ all (2) prac\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ purposes, (3) me\_ \_ \_ a slightly (4) lon\_ \_ \_ break (5) th\_ \_ usual (6) t\_ recuperate (7) bef\_ \_ \_ the (8) ne\_ \_ stretch (9) o\_ labor. (10) Japa\_ \_ \_ \_ were (11) suspi\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ of (12) lei\_ \_ \_ \_ activities (13) th\_ \_ cut (14) in\_ \_ working (15) ho\_ \_ \_ . Today, (16) yo\_ \_ \_ people (17) dem\_ \_ \_ that (18) la\_ \_ \_ and (19) lei\_ \_ \_ \_ be (20) gi\_ \_ \_ equal (21) wei\_ \_ \_ . Increasingly, (22) th\_ \_ seek (23) fullfi\_ \_ \_ \_ \_ , not (24) a\_ work, (25) b\_ \_ \_ in their leisure time activities. Naturally, this leads them to seek self-expression in the way they use their free time. It is this that lie behind today's recreational individualism. (World Executive's Digest-February 1989)

**Example of Cloze Test Passages (Systematic Deletion : every 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> word is deleted)**  
**Cloze Test Passage I : The Name is Nissan**

Nissan Motor Company in 1984 decided to change the name of their automobile offerings in the United States from "Datsun" to "Nissan". To the American consumer this is (1) \_\_\_\_\_ great a change as Coca-Cola changing (2) \_\_\_\_\_ name of "Coke" to Smatz. Not (3) \_\_\_\_\_ was this a totally new name (4) \_\_\_\_\_ the American public to digest, but (5) \_\_\_\_\_ consumers found "Nissan" hard to pronounce. (6) \_\_\_\_\_, "Datsun" was the only Japanese Automobile. (7) \_\_\_\_\_ to have a pseudo-American name, which (8) \_\_\_\_\_ have given them some advantage over (9) \_\_\_\_\_ Japanese auto makers in the U.S. (10) \_\_\_\_\_. This benefit was totally lost with the obviously Japanese name Nissan. (World Executive's Digest-May 1989)

**Cloze Test Passage II : The Wrong Address**

One of my favorite stories concerns an American who went to Malaysia to close a substantial contract. There, in a splashy ceremony, (1) \_\_\_\_\_ was introduced to someone he (2) \_\_\_\_\_ was named Roger. Throughout the (3) \_\_\_\_\_, he called the man "Rog" (4) \_\_\_\_\_ realizing that his potential client (5) \_\_\_\_\_ a rajah, which is a (6) \_\_\_\_\_ of nobility, not a person's (7) \_\_\_\_\_. This well-meaning American did not (8) \_\_\_\_\_ that in Malaysia, while many (9) \_\_\_\_\_ the states are controlled by (10) \_\_\_\_\_, one state is headed by rajahs. This illustrates the common mistake made by businessmen trying to explore markets overseas. (World Executive's Digest-June 1989)

**Cloze Test Passage III : Business Etiquettes in West Germany**

As a rule, people use full surnames on both business and social occasions, even when they know each other fairly well. Germans almost invariably address even familiar (1) \_\_\_\_\_ in the office as Here Schmidt (2) \_\_\_\_\_ Frau Schwartz. If the person has (3) \_\_\_\_\_ title—and in Germany professional rank (4) \_\_\_\_\_ rates as a title—that is (5) \_\_\_\_\_ instead of the surname, as in "(6) \_\_\_\_\_ Professor" or "Frau Direktorin" A German (7) \_\_\_\_\_ has a title will be deeply (8) \_\_\_\_\_ if you do not use it— (9) \_\_\_\_\_ it is a worse mistake to (10) \_\_\_\_\_ someone as "Herr Doktor" when he has no such title. (World Executive's Digest-April 1989).

**Cloze Test Passage IV : The Leisured Young**

To the Japanese, spare time used to be time left over after a task was finished. Leisure, for all practical purposes, meant (1) \_\_\_\_\_ slightly longer break than usual to (2) \_\_\_\_\_ before the next stretch of labor. (3) \_\_\_\_\_ were suspicious of leisure activities that (4) \_\_\_\_\_ into working hours. Today, young people (5) \_\_\_\_\_ that labor and leisure be given (6) \_\_\_\_\_ weight. Increasingly, they seek fulfillment, not (7) \_\_\_\_\_ work, but in their leisure time (8) \_\_\_\_\_. Naturally, this leads them to seek (9) \_\_\_\_\_ in the way they use their (10) \_\_\_\_\_ time. It is this that lies behind today's recreational individualism. (World Executive's Digest - February 1989)

**Examples of Cloze Test Passages : (Rational Deletion for Specific Items).**

**Cloze Test Passage I : Business Etiquettes in West Germany**

As a rule, people use full surnames on both business and social occasions, even when they know each other fairly well. Germans almost invariably address even familiar colleagues (1) \_\_\_\_\_ the office as Herr Schmidt or Frau Schwartz. If the person (2) \_\_\_\_\_ a title—and in Germany professional rank often rates (3) \_\_\_\_\_ a title—that is used (4) \_\_\_\_\_ of the surname, as in “Herr Professor” (5) \_\_\_\_\_ “Frau Direktorin.” A (6) \_\_\_\_\_ who has a title will be deeply offended (7) \_\_\_\_\_ you do not use it—although (8) \_\_\_\_\_ is a worse mistake to (9) \_\_\_\_\_ someone as “Herr Doktor” (10) \_\_\_\_\_ he has no such title.

(World Executive’s Digest—April 1989)

**Cloze Test Passage II : The Name is Nissan**

Nissan Motor Company in 1984 decided—to change the name of their automobile offerings in the United States from “Datsun” to “Nissan”. To the American consumer this is (1) \_\_\_\_\_ great a change as Coca-Cola changing the (2) \_\_\_\_\_ of “Coke” to “Smatz”. Not only (3) \_\_\_\_\_ this a totally new name for the (4) \_\_\_\_\_ public to digest, (5) \_\_\_\_\_ many consumers found (6) “\_\_\_\_\_” hard to pronounce. Ironically, (7) “\_\_\_\_\_” was the only Japanese (8) \_\_\_\_\_ Company to have a pseudo-American name, (9) \_\_\_\_\_ may have given them some advantage (10) \_\_\_\_\_ other Japanese auto makers in the U.S. market. This benefit was totally lost with the obviously Japanese name Nissan. (World Executive’s Digest—May 1989)

**Cloze Test Passage : The wrong Address**

One of my favorite stories concerns an American who went to Malaysia to close a substantial contract. There, in a splashy ceremony, (1) \_\_\_\_\_ was introduced to someone he thought (2) \_\_\_\_\_ named Roger. Throughout the negotiations, he (3) \_\_\_\_\_ the man “Rog” not realizing (5) \_\_\_\_\_ his potential client (5) \_\_\_\_\_ a rajah, which is a title (6) \_\_\_\_\_ nobility, not a person’s (7) \_\_\_\_\_. This well-meaning American did not know that in (8) \_\_\_\_\_, while many of the (9) \_\_\_\_\_ are controlled by sultans, (10) \_\_\_\_\_ state is headed by rajahs. This illustrates the common mistake made by businessmen trying to explore markets overseas. (World Executive’s Digest—June 1989)

**Cloze Test Passage IV : The Leisured Young**

To the Japanese, spare time used to be time left over after a task was finished. Leisure, (1) \_\_\_\_\_ all practical purposes, meant a slightly longer break (2) \_\_\_\_\_ usual to recuperate (3) \_\_\_\_\_ the next stretch of labor. (4) \_\_\_\_\_ were suspicious of leisure activities (5) \_\_\_\_\_ cut into working hours. Today, (6) \_\_\_\_\_ people demand that labor and (7) \_\_\_\_\_ be given equal weight. Increasingly, they seek fulfillment, (8) \_\_\_\_\_ at work, but in their leisure time activities. Naturally, this leads (9) \_\_\_\_\_ to seek self-expression in the way they use their free (10) \_\_\_\_\_. It is this that lies behind today’s recreational individualism. (World Executive’s Digest—February 1989)

**The Author**

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