

Do Cloze Exercises Make Pleasure Reading More Effective?

Beniko Mason and Tom Pendergast

The pleasure (extensive) reading approach has received a good deal of attention recently. As a result, many teachers have become interested in using guided readers and other authentic reading materials—in place of traditional reading textbooks—for their reading classes.

Some of these teachers may however feel insecure about changing their traditional, translation-based reading classes completely into extensive reading classes, where students are mainly involved in getting experience in reading—and not in analyzing sentences!

They may also feel that doing away entirely with traditional ideas is somewhat akin to throwing the baby out with the bath water—a feeling of wanting to hedge their bets. This could be especially true of Japanese teachers, who know that Japanese students are trained to do a variety of reading exercises and that they derive a good deal of self-satisfaction from accomplishing the difficult tasks which these exercises provide.

On the other hand, these same teachers also know that students cannot become good readers through translation and exercises alone. Hence our weak hypothesis is that an extensive reading class which incorporates a skill building activity may at the least provide a greater deal of “satisfaction” for both teachers and students. Our strong hypothesis is that inclusion of the skill building activity may improve reading

skills more significantly than extensive reading alone.

Kitao and Kitao (1986) say that after teaching more than 2500 students at ten different colleges and universities since 1978, they have strong doubts about Japanese students' English reading proficiency. They conclude that students improve their reading comprehension if they are taught using a method that avoids translation, and suggest extensive reading, among other activities.

Krashen (1985), Smith (1971, 1983), and other researchers have also recommended extensive reading in order to develop reading comprehension skills and a fondness for reading in English.

As it appeared that extensive reading would be helpful in achieving some of our goals in the English Department reading program at Shitennoji International Buddhist University Junior College (IBU), we have developed and fine-tuned this program since 1981. In recent years, we have been carefully observing our students' progress with several different instruments, one of which is a cloze test which we have developed and refined in-house. The students have shown significant progress between pre-and post-tests over the past two years (See Table 1).

Table 1

1989 Graduates' Progress Over 2 Years

as Measured by a Cloze Test

Mean Scores

Pre '87 Post '89

28.022 50.298

The result shown here is very similar to that obtained with other graduating classes. We have also observed positive affective results.

Students who attend extensive reading classes appear more interested in reading than students who attend traditional intensive reading classes. Books are constantly on loan, with high turnover. Students show great enthusiasm in endeavoring to read at increasingly difficult levels.

When they first started the program, the students whose data are presented in Table 1 began by reading guided readers at the 300-600-word level to get used to *reading* itself - something which most of them had never done in their six years of high school English. Gradually they moved on to higher levels. This year's graduates, at the end of two years of extensive reading in the program, reported a total volume of reading for the two years which ranged between 1000-6500 pages.

At the end of their second year (Jan. '89), the students were given a questionnaire and one of the questions was: What level books can you read comfortably now? Table 2 shows their response:

Table 2

Q: What level books can you read comfortably now?

7%	American books for young adults	7%
16%	2200-word-level books	23%
53%	1600-word-level books	76%
23%	1100-word-level books	99%
1%	600-word-level books	100%

The top seven percent represent those who have achieved the main goal of the program, which is to be able to read ... without a dictionary ... for pleasure ... books that are read for pleasure by American teenagers. Many of these students have made reading in English a part of their lives, and we find that many of them continue with this habit beyond

graduation. The next 16% are on the verge of attaining this goal and will with a little more persistence become comfortable readers of English at their intellectual level.

As we found however that the test scores did not always reflect the teachers' and the students' subjective impression of the latter's reading ability, we could not help but wonder if their unfamiliarity with the cloze procedure might be penalizing them unduly and not giving a true picture of their global reading skills. We wondered if their scores would increase if they familiarized themselves with the format of the test (practice effect), and also if they became more sensitive as to what they should be careful about, such as the plural "s," past tense "ed," and other grammatical features (strategy effect). More globally, cloze exercises are useful in helping students to apprehend the main idea in a passage and to guess at the meaning of words, thereby further enhancing their reading comprehension skills.

An additional factor is that the novelty of extensive reading begins to pall towards the middle of the second semester of the first year. As a result, many students do not seem to complete their reading assignments so faithfully in the second semester as in the first. It therefore seemed to us that the introduction of cloze exercises might help them to recharge their affective batteries, while presumably developing skills which aid them in scoring better on their post-test, and possibly even improving their global reading comprehension.

In order to show that the combination of two approaches - that is, that the combination of extensive reading and some kind of skill building exercises is better than one approach - Kleinmann (1985) conducted a study with English as a Second Language (ESL) students and found that students who used the Reading Lab program improved significantly more

than those who did not. In the lab, the students read but they also worked on the specific skills that were required on the test that Kleinmann used to measure their improvement. His finding seemed to suggest that skill building exercises coupled with the acquisition activity of extensive reading might quicken the acquisition process. We thought therefore that it would be interesting to investigate a combination approach in our own program.

The purpose of this study was twofold. First, to determine whether the combination of extensive reading and a cloze exercise activity would be more effective than just extensive reading. Second, to find out what the students thought.

Hypotheses. (1) The mean gain score made by the experimental group (extensive reading and cloze exercises group) would be significantly higher than the mean gain score made by the control group (extensive reading group). (2) The students' attitudes towards the combination approach would be favorable.

We thought that our findings would help us in deciding whether a program of extensive reading and skill building through cloze exercises was preferable to one of extensive reading alone, and that the result would give us a guideline for the design of the curriculum in our particular program.

Method

Subject. 226 second year students (i. e., Japanese female junior college students, 19-20 years old). The subjects had already completed one year of extensive reading.

Materials. For the extensive reading, Guided Readers from Heine-

mann, Oxford, Collins, Macmillan, Longman, and books for young adults from England and the U.S. were used. Students read mostly guided readers rated at the 1000 to 1600-word level. For the skill building exercises, Cloze Stories for Beginning Readers, Book 2, Walker and Company, New York, was used. This book contains 48 cloze exercises.

Procedures. In the first semester, the reading assignment for the term was thirty books or a total of 1500 pages. In addition, students were asked to do all of the exercises in Cloze Stories for Beginning Readers, Book 2.

The class met once a week for ninety minutes. In class, the students were free either to read or to do cloze exercises, and most did both during the period. Many completed up to 5 exercises in a single class period. Students checked their answers by themselves and asked questions about things that they did not understand.

In the second semester, the cloze exercises were not assigned. Students spent their class time reading. The amount of reading assigned was the same as in the first semester.

Data analyses. A matched t-test was used to determine any significant difference between the two semesters, and a questionnaire was administered at the end of the second semester.

Test. A three-page, 100-item cloze test, deleting every tenth word from an essay, was used. It was written by a Japanese girl about her experience at the time of the atomic bomb in Hiroshima. It was originally in Japanese, but was translated into English. The students were required to finish it in 60 minutes. The reliability of the test is $r = .87$ with a test-retest reliability measure. It has been used for several years in our reading program, and it appears to correlate sufficiently with observed/reported reading proficiency: that is, those who score more than 60 seem to be able to comfortably read English books for

young adults, those who score 50 or above seem to be able to read 2200-word-level books, etc. The test was graded by the acceptable word system. In order to obtain a range of likely answers, it was administered beforehand to seven native speakers. To ascertain the students' attitudes towards the cloze exercises, a questionnaire was used.

Results

The cloze test was given three times: before the first (summer) semester, at the beginning of the second (winter) semester, and at the end of the second semester. Table 3 shows the mean gains for both semesters.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Cloze Score Gains

	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum	n
Summer	4.195	5.471	-10	19	226
Winter	3.066	5.69	-9	24	226

In order to find out whether the combination approach was more effective, a paired t-test was performed on the gains for the two semesters. Table 4 shows that the observed t-value is significant, which means that the students did better on the post-test after the summer semester than on the one after the winter semester. This seems to support hypothesis (1), that the combination of reading and cloze will produce better results than reading alone.

Table 4

Paired t-test

X: Summer Cloze Gain Y: Winter Cloze Gain

Mean X-Y	DF	Paired t value
1.128	225	1.784
		.025 < p < .05

To find out how positively they felt about the combination of cloze exercises and extensive reading, a six-scaled rating statement was used. Table 5 shows their response:

Table 5

Q: It was good that we did both reading and exercises.

Scale	1	2	3	4	5	6
n	3	17	54	77	55	20
%	1	8	24	34	24	9
		33%			67%	

n total = 226 1=strongly disagree 6=strongly agree

Two-thirds of the students (67%) think that it was profitable to do both extensive reading and cloze exercises. Another question reveals what they thought they learned from doing cloze exercises. Table 6 shows their response.

Table 6

Q: What did you learn from the cloze exercises?

61%	I learned how to guess better.
16%	I learned how prepositions were used.

- 14% I learned more about grammar.
9% I learned vocabulary.

In order to find out whether the students thought cloze exercises had anything to do with their reading improvement, one question was asked. Table 7 shows their response.

Table 7

Q: Why do you think you became a good reader?

- 60% Because I read.
29% Because I did reading and cloze exercises.
5% Because I did cloze exercises.
6% I don't know.

This shows that 60% of the students think that they became better readers because they read, and about 34% of the students think they became better readers at least partly because of the cloze exercises.

Although the students acknowledge that cloze exercises are beneficial, they do not seem to think that this activity was particularly useful in helping them to become better readers. Table 7 shows that 60 percent of them said that the reason they became better readers was because they read. To a very similar question: what do you think is the reason for your unsatisfactory improvement in reading?, Table 8 shows their response:

Table 8

Q: What do you think the reason is for your unsatisfactory improvement in reading?

- 74% I did not read enough.
12% I did not read seriously
8% I did not do enough cloze exercises
6% I did not do more difficult cloze exercises.

As Table 8 shows, they think that they did not improve as much as they had hoped not because of the lack of doing cloze exercises, but because of the lack of reading.

Discussion

There are some environmental differences between the first and second semesters in our program. During the first semester students are usually very busy attending job interviews and orientations and/or doing their practice teaching for a teaching certificate. During the second semester they are more relaxed and ready to study.

Another skewing factor was the fact that there were some students who continued on with their cloze exercises during the second semester. This was either because they were serious students who did not want to miss out on a chance for improvement or simply because they enjoyed doing these exercises. We could not very well discourage them in their efforts just because we were conducting research. We were therefore concerned that the result would show no difference between the semesters. Our fears in this regard seem groundless in retrospect, as they clearly seem to have learned more in the summer semester. We feel therefore that it is safe to conclude that the combination of extensive reading and cloze exercises may be more effective than the reading alone.

It is important to note here that the students themselves reported

that they felt that reading was more important for their progress than cloze exercises, and that reading was fundamental to their reading improvement. This is particularly salient, since more conservative teachers might otherwise mistakenly conclude from our finding, namely that the *combination* of approaches was superior to extensive reading alone, that skill building exercises are more effective than extensive reading.

The question asked in this study was not whether extensive reading or skill building exercises would contribute more to reading gains, but whether a given kind of skill building exercise (cloze practice) combined with extensive reading would be more effective than extensive reading by itself. The conclusion is that cloze practice is one type of skill building exercise which can be used effectively with an extensive reading class.

Needless to say, there are other exercises besides cloze for developing reading comprehension. Decisions as to which exercises should be used with extensive reading must be made wisely, on a principled basis, so that our attempts to help our students improve their reading will be successful to the extent that we can irrevocably exorcise that deadly urge to go back to teaching students with intensive reading and exercises.

References

- Kitao, K. & Kitao, S. K. (1986). Difficulties Japanese have in reading English. Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, Department of Communication (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 278214).
- Kleinmann, H. H. (1985). The effect of reading laboratory instruction on ESL growth. Research and Teaching in Developmental Education, 1. (1), 38-52.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). Inquiries and Insights. Hayward, CA.: Alemany Press.
- Smith, F. (1971). Understanding Reading. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Smith, F. (1983). Essays Into Literacy. London: Heinemann Educational Books.

四天王寺の舞楽衣裳の色彩 について(第十一報)

—「林歌」の甲の色彩について—

今 津 玲 子

1.はじめに

先に四天王寺に現存する舞楽装束のうちから、平舞の装束の半臂や下襲、及び、林歌の袍や八仙の袍、陪廬及び打毬楽や散手の装束等について、その色彩並びに配色構成の調査を行い、その調査結果について、報告してきたが^{1) 2) 3) 4) 5) 6) 7) 8) 9) 10) 11)}本報では「林歌」の装束うちから甲について、その色彩と配色構成を分析し一つの成果を得たので、報告する。

なお、本研究は、前報告でも述べた様に考古学的に復元されたものを問題にするものではなく、現在の色彩を問題にするものであるが、今回の調査資料は特に顔料で彩色されたものの鮮明な色を記録した。後の世の参考資料の一助ともなれば幸いである。

2.調査対象

調査対象は、四天王寺に現存する舞楽装束のうちの、慶長年間のもので、重要文化財に指定されている「林歌」の装束のうちの甲である。革に胡粉を塗り、その上に顔料で彩色をした甲で、麻布の裏打ちが施され、鉢には緑の地色に、中央に宝輪の金具、鉢の周囲は金箔押しの縁取り、鉢巻きには、魚子地に唐草の蝶番金具と桐紋の環座がついている。

参考までに、故実叢書(37)「舞楽図説」、および講談社発行の「秘宝三巻、四天王寺」等の文献により「林歌(りんが)」の舞曲と装束についての概要を述べる。