CLOZE TESTS AND READING STRATEGIES

IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN CHINA

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ABSTRACT

As China opens up to the global market, mastering English has assumed great significance, as proficiency in English means opportunities for better jobs as well as further education in better universities in the country or abroad. The need to learn English has become imperative in China. Currently, English is a compulsory subject in China. The teaching of English aims to equip students with speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in both day to day English communication and academic English. In China, cloze tests are regarded as very efficient in measuring students' integrative competence in the English language and have been used in the most important English tests. Cloze procedure involves the skills of thinking, understanding, reading and writing based on the learners' underlying knowledge of reading comprehension and writing subskills such as grammar and sentence construction. Cloze exercises are routinely used by teachers to help improve students' reading abilities. However, the majority of students in China perform poorly in cloze tests and they regard it as the most difficult part of their language assessment.

The aim of this study was to find out what particular problems Chinese students had with cloze tests or exercises, and to determine whether these difficulties were associated with inefficient use of reading strategies. This study focused on a group of Chinese students who were studying at the University of the Western Cape. The data was collected through interviews with the students, a cloze test completed by the students, a questionnaire distributed to the students and five English teachers in China.

The findings of the study reveal that the problems the Chinese students had with the cloze procedure were related to their inefficient use of reading strategies as well as their lack of awareness of their own reading processes. In addition, the students did not receive sufficient instruction in strategies to deal with cloze. The cloze procedure

used by teachers and for tests can be improved to facilitate students' reading competence.

DECLARATION

I declare that *Cloze Tests and Reading Strategies in English Language Teaching in China* is my own work, that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Guangling Lu

May 2006

Signed: **…………………………..**

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and context

1.1.1   The role of English in a changing China

During the initial years of the People's Republic of China in the 1950s, when Mao Zedong was the leader, English was not considered to be an important language to acquire. Russian was the dominant foreign language in China at that time, because, as Bray and Borevskaya (2001:350) explain, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) provided a great deal of technical and other assistance to China, and the Chinese leadership looked to the USSR for models of many kinds. As official policies were closely guided by the Soviet Union, much of the education system was restructured along Soviet lines. To learn from the USSR, more and more people needed to know the Russian language and communicate with Russians, and it seemed that the only way to achieve such a goal was to teach Russian in schools (Du, 2001:127). Therefore, Russian as a foreign language[1] was taught at schools, colleges and universities. At that time, people took great pride in learning the Russian language (Du, 2001:127). However, with the diplomatic break with the USSR in 1960, Chinese people started to lose interest in Russian and began to give priority to English.

In the late 1950s and the early 1960s, English teaching started in secondary schools, but was also introduced at primary schools in some big cities like Beijing and Shanghai. The textbooks, which were based on the former Russian model, were very traditional and the methodology was very outdated (Boyle, 2000)[2]. The urgent need to open up to the international scene accelerated the appearance of new English teaching

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[1] A foreign language plays no major role in the community and is primarily learnt only in the classroom (Ellis 1994:11-12).
[2] Accessed from the Internet, page number was not available.

materials. English teaching began to focus on English listening and speaking, and the culture of English speaking countries (Boyle, 2000)[3]. However, the progress made in the early 1960s was swept aside by the Cultural Revolution, which started in 1966 and lasted for ten years.

During the period of 1966 to 1976, as Li (2002)[4] claims, learning English was by no means popularly promoted in China because of the Cultural Revolution. The country lurched into a state of near anarchy (Brisbane, 2000:2). Almost everything foreign, traditional, or so-called revisionist was strongly criticized (Du, 2001:127). At that time, most schools were closed. Both teachers and students were absent because of participation in this political movement (Du, 2002:75). The students travelled all over the country in order to take part in criticism and debate and to exchange revolutionary experiences (Dow, 1975 cited in Boyle, 2000[5]; Brisbane, 2000:2). As You (2004:74) recounts, English teaching, along with other foreign language education, was almost brought to the brink of collapse. Foreign languages, foreign cultures, and foreign products were labelled as the 'evil weeds of capitalism' by leftist groups in different political campaigns. Foreign language teachers were branded as spies (Boyle, 2000)[6]. Most foreign language schools were forced to shut down and foreign language education stopped for several years (You, 2004:74). Those who studied English by listening to the 'Voice of America' and the BBC were criticized for listening to the enemy propaganda broadcasts (Li, 2002)[7]. They would be accused of being spies or special agents and would be investigated, or even arrested and put into prison (Du, 2001:127).

Many Chinese people participated in the Cultural Revolution, but many also criticized it. As Du (2001:127) points out, China had almost completely closed its doors to the outside world during the Cultural Revolution. In the late 1970s, when China

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re-opened its doors to the world, the Chinese government was shocked by the gap in science and technology between China and other countries, such as the USA and Japan, as well as by the impact of the globalization of the English language.

China needed to make the transition to a market economy and to implement second leader Deng Xiaoping's open-door policy with regard to foreign technology and investment. The government realized that English was an important tool for international relationships and national development. English plays an important role in facilitating contact with other countries for economic and trade relationships and cultural, scientific and technological exchange, and in promoting the development of the national and world economy, science and culture (Brisbane, 2000:4). The teaching of English was revived in 1978 and English began to be implemented as a foreign language in middle schools and colleges. The first formal training programme for translators and interpreters also started at the Beijing Foreign Language Institute in 1978 (Boyle, 2000)[8]. Since then a lot of emphasis has been placed on learning English.

As Li (2002)[9] points out, an 'English fever' has existed among university students since 1979, when the state began to select some students who were outstanding in their major subjects as well as in English and sent them to study abroad. Between 1977 and 1987, close to 50,000 students were sent to 76 foreign countries for higher education and research (Sedgwick & Xiao, 2002)[10]. To acquire advanced knowledge in science and technology, many college students also wanted to pursue their education further in the West (Huang & Xu, 1999)[11]. The opportunities of international exchanges spurred many students on to serious English study, and the 'English fever' has raged on ever since. In the 1980s, the emergence of self-employment and foreign investment led to a rapid increase in international

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businesses in China. As a result, many positions requiring proficiency in English emerged. Suddenly, English became highly desirable for trade, careers, study and overseas travel. Many people, not only university students, began to pursue English studies to gain job opportunities in foreign businesses. As Brisbane (2000:2-3) claims, learning English became a necessity for the ambitious and a hobby for many.

Before the 1990s, education at universities was free, and university graduates accordingly submitted themselves to national needs. They were prepared to do the jobs assigned by the government (Cheng, 1999:63). As Cheng states, job allocation usually involved the sacrifice of individual interests and even individual lives (Cheng, 1999:65), but people were proud of 'serving people' by doing the jobs that the state wanted at that time. The 1990s brought further shifts towards a market economy, and further international openness (Bray & Borevskaya, 2001:350). People began to rely more on themselves and on the market than on the government (Chan & Mok, 2001:26). Education became more sensitive to market needs, stressing practical and applied values (Chan & Mok, 2001:29). Students began to link their education with their preferred career. In order to make themselves more competitive, students tended to choose programmes and courses of 'market value' (Chan & Mok, 2001:29).

In the early 1990s, universities began to admit self-sponsored or organization-sponsored studies for high fees (Bray & Borevskaya, 2001:354). In this way, students paid the high study fees and sought jobs for themselves or worked for the organizations that paid for their study fees after graduation. Gradually, self-sought jobs became preferred to jobs in state enterprises (Cheng et al, 1999:123). In the late 1990s, when all universities started to charge fees, state job assignment was abolished. As Cheng and Jin and Gu (1999:125) point out, students and parents were then forced to view education as a private investment. They had to calculate the returns on their investment. The learning of English was considered as a way of insuring such returns. Mastering English meant better job opportunities, wealth and chances of international exchanges. As a result, all kinds of English training courses emerged.

When in 2001, Beijing won the bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games and China became a member of the World Trade Organization, the thirst for English reached a climax. Chinese people saw the importance of English as a world language. They realized that engagement in international business and hosting the Olympic Games required more bilingual (Chinese-English) speakers. To make themselves more competitive, people were prepared to pay for English training courses. Parents put a lot of money into their children's English education, with the view of securing good jobs for them in the future. Part-time English schools and English courses for children or adults have mushroomed in China.

Nowadays, Chinese people feel eager to learn English, because English is regarded as one of the basic skills in many domains, along with Chinese language skills and computer skills. The mastery of English has become a criterion for individual evaluation at school, colleges and job applications. Proficiency in English is necessary when applying for a senior position. In education, English is a compulsory subject from primary three in public schools. In some private schools English is taught from the first year. Other private schools and kindergartens even have bilingual education in Chinese and English. Students who want access to the key schools or universities must have above-average or excellent marks in English.

1.1.2 English in Education

China's education system is composed of three levels. The first level consists of six years of primary school education. The second level involves middle school education. This level is divided into three years of junior school and three years of senior school. Primary school and junior school constitute the nine-year compulsory education period. The third level is college or university education. English as a foreign language began to be part of the curriculum in middle schools and colleges in 1970. Since 1999, English has become a compulsory course for primary school students at

and above the third grade according to the new National English Curriculum Standard. Except for a few private schools where some other languages such as French, Japanese or Spanish are taught as second foreign languages, English is taught as the only foreign language[12] in most of the schools. English is considered a subject as important as Chinese and Mathematics at schools, and is one of the six compulsory subjects in the Senior School Entrance Examination. The students selected at the key senior schools must have above average or excellent marks in English.

Students who want to study at college or university are required to pass mandatory nationwide examinations – the National College Entrance Examination (also *Gaokao*). Enrolment is based on the scores in the examination. English is one of the three compulsory subjects for such examinations. According to the current 'three plus X' examination system, a student who wants to be enrolled into a college has to sit for exams in three major subjects: Chinese, English and mathematics, plus any other subject ('X') particularly required by the college. English occupies 20% of the total score of the examination (Huang & Xu, 1999)[13]. The level of the English examination has become increasingly higher and more difficult over the years. According to China's new National English Curriculum Standard, the English vocabulary required for university entrance increased from 500 words in 1980 to 1,600 words in 1985, to 1,800 words in 1999, and lastly to 3000 words in 2003. As Huang and Xu (1999)[14] point out, it illustrates that greater emphasis is being placed on proficiency in English.

At college and university, English is also a compulsory subject. Students are required to take two years of college English in their first and second year, and to take specialized English courses in their third and fourth year. The aim of these English courses is to ensure the students' practical application of English in the future (Huang

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[12] In China English is learnt only in the classroom. Students do not use English as a means of communication outside the classroom.
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[14] Accessed from the Internet, page number was not available.

& Xu, 1999)[15]. To graduate or obtain a bachelor's degree, students must take and pass a College English Test (CET). According to the CET public website (2004) and CET inquiry service website (2004), the CET is a national standardized test which measures the English proficiency of college students in China. It was designed and developed independently in China by language testing professionals and has been shown to meet international standards of educational assessment. The CET is a test battery, which comprises 'the CET Band 4 (CET-4)', 'the CET Band 6 (CET-6)', and 'the CET Spoken English Test (CET-SET)'.

Students who are majoring in English are required to take Band 6 while other students are required to do Band 4. While CET-4 and CET-6 mainly test students' abilities in listening, reading and writing, CET-SET focuses on testing students' English spoken ability (Du, 2001:133). Certificates for CET-4 and CET-6 fall under two categories: pass and distinction. A pass is awarded to candidates who obtain a score of 60 or above, but below 85 and a distinction is a score of 85 or above on a 100-point score scale. Certificates for CET-SET indicate the candidate's level of oral English proficiency. Only the students whose scores in CET-4 are above 85 are entitled to participate in the CET English Spoken Test, which started in 1999.

Since its inception in 1987, the CET has attracted an increasing number of candidates every year. In the academic year of 2003 more than 9.15 million college students in China took the test (adapted from CET inquiry service website). Owing to its scientific approach, consistent marking, rigorous administration and comparable scores, the CET is now well established as a large-scale standardized test and is universally recognized in China. Furthermore, the State Education Commission requires that at least one specialized fourth-year course in each department of a college be conducted in English, and, if conditions permit, the number of courses given in English is expected to increase. This shows that English is treated not only as

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a foreign language but also as a medium for gaining knowledge (Huang & Xu, 1999)[16].

1.1.3 The importance of English in China

Economic developments have promoted the use of English in China. The emergence of a large number of foreign investments in the 1980s is probably a major contribution. Most of the foreign investors were English speakers, but there were few businessmen proficient in English in China at that time. For business purposes, Chinese businessmen had to hire interpreters and translators of English. Meanwhile, in the foreign investment enterprises, English was required for staff in senior positions to communicate with their supervisors who were English speakers. Thus, proficiency in English became a requirement for people who applied for a job in these enterprises. Nowadays, this situation also applies to jobs where English is not necessarily required. In many cases, the companies require candidates to demonstrate proficient English skills, despite the fact that they have no chance of using English at all when working in such positions. Knowledge of English is regarded as an asset and an important part of the competence of candidates who apply for company jobs.

The market demands place a high premium on English language skills developed up to academic level. Learning English at schools is seen as laying the foundation for acquiring academic English in higher education. Studying English in colleges and universities is regarded as preparation for the use of academic English in future jobs. With the development of the market economy and further international openness of China, there will be more and more economic and technical exchanges between China and foreign countries. It needs students to be proficient not only in everyday English communication, but also in academic English related to their majors, such as business, finance, technical science, medicine, computer science, and education.

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[16] Accessed from the Internet, page number was not available.

At college and university, the main emphasis in the teaching of English is on reading academic articles in English. This equips students with reading skills and strategies to deal with books, journal articles, technical reports, manuals, commercial letters, and documents written in English. Chinese students have traditionally relied on the dictionary to deal with unfamiliar words. However, the dictionary invariably fails to keep pace with the constant rapid expansion of the English vocabulary. In many cases, students cannot find particular words they encounter in texts in the latest dictionary, and their lack of contextual knowledge makes it difficult for them to guess the meaning in English. Therefore, it is deemed essential for students to have the ability to deal with passages with information gaps. This requires students to use reading skills and strategies such as scanning, skimming, making predictions, using background knowledge, applying critical reading strategies, etc.

1.1.4 Cloze procedure in English tests

The use of cloze procedure as part of English tests is intended to check students' global language proficiency, including the ability to use reading skills and strategies for dealing with passages with information gaps. Cloze tests have been an important part of English tests in China, especially in the intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced English tests such as the National College Entrance Examination, College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 (CET – 4/6), and the Entrance Examination for Master's programmes. On average, they can occupy 20% to 30% of the scores. They are regarded as very efficient and an objective means of measuring students' integrative competence in the English language because they involve the skills of thinking, understanding, reading and writing based on the learners' underlying knowledge of reading comprehension and writing sub-skills such as grammar and sentence construction. Senior school English teachers in China also use cloze tests in various formal and informal tests and examinations. As a student at and above senior school level, every Chinese student must have had many experiences of cloze tests.

Moreover, as Hyland (2003:216) points out, cloze tests are widely used in international large-scale standardized tests, such as TOEFL and IELTS, which are aimed at students who are going to study abroad.

An unfortunate side effect of all these tests is that colleges, universities and companies have come to rely completely on the marks candidates obtain in the English examinations as the only means of evaluating their proficiency in English, instead of looking at their actual ability to use English effectively. It is only the certificate that interests them. Therefore, in order to graduate or apply for a job, the students and candidates have to enrol for the well-recognized examinations such as CET – 4/6, TOEFL, and IELTS and strive to get a certificate of qualification in the tests.

1.1.5 The false belief in English tests

Too much emphasis on English tests has led students to a false belief that passing these tests is more important than the actual ability to use English. Their focus has shifted from the use of English to the usage of English. Widdowson (1978:1-21) claims that learning a language can be separated into two aspects: language usage and actual language use. Proficiency in language usage means knowing the linguistic rules of the language, and having the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences either in writing or speaking. Proficiency in language use means being able to use the language appropriately in different situations for effective communication. Many Chinese students believe that if they can master the usage of English, they can pass the examination easily. The fact is that, to some extent, not much context and discourse is provided in the examination texts. The texts provided in the exam papers are usually only short extracts from longer texts. Therefore, the contextual clues and linguistic discourse that could help students to comprehend and respond are very limited in the passage. They are more likely to check students' knowledge of language

usage. Students often do not understand that the reading of an examination text and the writing of an examination essay are processes that are very different from the real reading and writing processes they will be involved in outside the examinations. Moreover, some students just focus on learning the examination strategies instead of aiming at wider proficiency in English. As a result, it is not unusual to see a holder of CET Band 4/6 certificate who is actually very weak at using English, "… so much so that he/she often fails to speak a complete sentence (Yao, 2001)[17]".

Another reason is that students cannot find many opportunities to use the reading strategies outside classroom situations. They do not have opportunities to choose reading materials. They only read their English textbooks, hence their reading behaviour is more passive than active. Students see no relationship between the reading in classroom and the reading that is likely to be related to their future jobs. So their focus is limited to passing the English examination. Then, when they read an English text with information gaps, they do not know what reading strategies can be used to deal with the gaps.

1.2 Rationale for the study

Cloze procedure involves assessing the readability of a text as well as the reading comprehension of individual students. However, Rye (1982:47-48) points out that cloze procedure has also been used to help learners improve their reading ability in many studies. Rye (1982) also describes the use of the procedure as a teaching instrument to improve learners' reading ability (1982:47-57).

Cloze exercises are widely used in senior English classes in China. However, after every National College Entrance Examination, reports from the English examination often indicate that cloze tests are those parts of the examination in which students

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perform poorly. It is regarded as the most difficult part of the examination by a majority of students. Many English teachers ask the same question repeatedly every year: Why do students perform so poorly in cloze tests, despite having spent much time on cloze exercises and getting cloze strategy instructions?

Understanding a cloze text is essential for completing it. Many studies indicate that cloze procedure is a test of reading comprehension. For example, Daines (1982:52) argues that the reader's success in supplying the deleted words is an index of his/her ability to comprehend the reading matter. Responses reveal both text comprehension and language mastery levels (Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1999)[18]. The difficulty students have in cloze tests may reflect their difficulty in reading. When I was a student in senior school and in College, I too performed poorly in the cloze tests, even though I was regarded as one of the better English students.

I have therefore decided to explore the possible reasons for the poor performance of Chinese students in cloze tests. This research will be useful to English teachers in China who are interested in improving not only cloze performance but also the reading strategies of students. It could also make a contribution to the ways in which Chinese students' proficiency in English is assessed.

1.3 The purpose of the study

The specific purpose of this study is to find out the problems that Chinese students have with cloze tests and to determine whether they are associated with the inefficient use of reading strategies. Reading strategies employed by students and those recommended by teachers during the cloze procedure will be analysed to see how they contribute to the performances on the cloze procedure.

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1.4 The research questions

This study focuses on four questions.

The main question is "Why do Chinese senior school students and college students perform so poorly in cloze tests?"

The subsidiary questions are:

(1) How do the students feel about their experiences in cloze tests?

(2) What strategies can be used to address the problem?

(3) Does long term cloze testing have any effects on students' use of reading strategies?

1.5 Outline of the study

Chapter 1 provides the background and context to the study, the rationale and the purpose of the research. It also introduces the research questions. Chapter 2 focuses on the literature review on cloze procedures in English teaching and learning. In particular, it focuses on cloze tests used as a measurement of reading comprehension. Chapter 3 discusses the research design and methodology employed in this study. Chapter 4 presents and analyses the data. Chapter 5 draws conclusions and makes recommendations for improving cloze tests performance.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the background of English learning and teaching in China from the initial years of its foundation to the present day. It particularly focussed on the

emphasis that has been put on high levels of achievement in English through national tests, which includes cloze tests. The next chapter deals with the literature on cloze procedure.
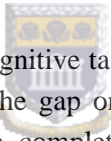
CHAPTER 2

CLOZE PROCEDURE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Before reviewing the literature on cloze procedure, I think it is necessary to explain the origins of this term. Rye (1982:3) claims that the term 'cloze procedure' was first developed by Wilson Taylor in 1953. He explains that the term *cloze* derived from the Gestalt psychology concept of '*closure*'. It describes a tendency that humans have to complete a familiar but not-quite-finished pattern. Urquhart and Weir (1998:156) further explain that it refers to the tendency of individuals to complete a pattern once they have grasped its overall significance. Rye (1982:3) explains that

> Cloze procedure is essentially a cognitive task. The reader has to reason and construct suggestions to fill the gap on the basis of the evidence derived from the context. … the completion of meaning, based on understanding and reasoning, is a cognitive task.

Brown (2002:109) claims that it is not difficult to get people to take a cloze test because of the compulsive human need to fill gaps.

Taylor (1953) was the first to study cloze procedure for its effectiveness as an instrument for determining the readability of materials in the reader's native language in 1953. After that initial study, it was investigated for its appropriateness as a measure of readability of L1 and L2 materials. In the 1960s, studies focused on cloze tests as a measurement of reading comprehension in L1 and L2. During the 1970s, cloze tests began to be used as a measurement of overall L2 proficiency (Ahluwalia, 1992:82). Today, cloze tests are widely used in some places (such as China) and as part of some large-scale language tests (such as TOEFL, IELTS).

What is a cloze test? A standard cloze test is a passage with blanks of standard length replacing certain deleted words which students are required to complete by filling in the correct words or their equivalents. During traditional cloze testing, every fifth word is removed from a 250-500 word reading passage, and is replaced by a standard-length blank space (Helfeldt et al, 1986:216). Usually, no word is omitted either in the first or the last sentence of the passage. Students are required to supply either the original word of the author or an appropriate equivalent in the blank space. Many studies show that the reliability and the validity of cloze tests are affected by factors like the rate of deletion, nature of the text and scoring systems, etc. 'Deletion rate' refers to the frequency of deleting words. As Steinman (2002:293-294) explains, there are two options in designing a cloze test according to its deletion rate: a random cloze or a rational cloze. A random cloze deletes every n^{th} word consistently, so that all classes and types of words have an equal chance of being deleted. A rational cloze is the one in which a specific type of word is deleted according to a linguistic principle, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.

Alderson (2000) cited by Yamashita (2003:269) clearly differentiates between these two types of format by calling the rational cloze 'gap-filling tests' and confining the term 'cloze' only to the random cloze. Ahluwalia (1992:83-84) states that different deletion rates would result in either increasing the difficulty of the text or in unpredictable differences in the difficulty. Another factor that would affect the reliability and the validity of the cloze is the nature of the text. The nature of the text such as its familiarity level and difficulty level would improve or hamper cloze performance (Ahluwalia, 1992:86-88).

However, Alderson (1980, 1983 cited in Ahluwalia, 1992:86) and Yamashita (2003:286-287) argue that cloze test performance is not directly related to the difficulty level of the text; it involves other factors such as scoring procedures, and content familiarity for the readers. Different scoring methods include: exact word method, multiple-choice scoring method and contextually acceptable word method.

'Exact word method' requires the testee to provide the original word deleted from the text while 'contextually acceptable word method' allows for the words that fit the gap either to be synonyms of the deleted word or semantically acceptable words. 'Multiple choice scoring' is the most popular method used in China. Brown (2002:105) found that the differences in scoring method impact significantly in relation to the proficiency of students.

Although there are weaknesses in the reliability of cloze procedure, it is widely used in English teaching. As Legenza and Elijah (2001:351) point out, many studies have been conducted on cloze procedure concerning the construction of cloze tests, the relationship between cloze and reading comprehension, and the usefulness of cloze as a teaching technique. These will be addressed in the next section.

2.2 The role of cloze procedures in English teaching

Cloze procedure has been used in English teaching for decades since 1953. It was firstly used as an instrument for assessing the readability of written materials for school children in the United States (Brown, 2002:79). Then it was used in teaching for different purposes. There are three major purposes for using cloze procedure in English teaching. They are listed below.

2.2.1 Cloze procedure as a measure of readability

Cloze procedure can measure the difficulty of a text. As a student, I understand only too well the problems caused by the difficulty of some expository materials. Rye (1982:12) explains that if the language is too difficult, the task will lead to frustration and an increasing lack of confidence about reading. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers "… to assess the difficulty of the material which they expect their pupils to

read" (Rye, 1982:12). Cloze procedure has turned out to be a subtle instrument measuring readability. It is used to assess the difficulty of textbooks and other reading materials. As Rye (1982:18) claims:

> Cloze procedure can measure the difficulty of a text, not in terms of word length or familiarity, or of sentence length, but in terms of a particular individual's understanding of, and response to, the language structure of the text. Cloze procedure measures a personal response to linguistic variables.

Rye (1982:19) and Kilfoil and Van der Walt (1997:169) point out how particular cloze scores have been adopted and used as criteria for establishing the readability and comprehension level of texts. The classification of readability level was derived from Betts's (1946) 'reading comprehension level', which has been used by many researchers, e.g. Harris & Sipay (1975:167), Bormuth (1967 & 1968), Rankin *et al.* (1969) cited in Rye (1982:19) and Legenza & Elijah (2001:351). Betts used three levels to classify readers:

✧ Independent level - the learners can read fluently and comprehend easily without assistance.

✧ Instructional level – the learners can read and comprehend if they receive guidance from a teacher.

✧ Frustration level – the learners fail to progress satisfactorily and their comprehension is faulty.

If learners get 90 percent in the multiple-choice cloze test – the text is considered suitable for learners at the Independent Level and would not require much teacher guidance; between 75 and 89 per cent – the text is considered suitable for learners at the Instruction Level and requires some teacher guidance; and less than 75 percent – the text is considered to be at the Frustration Level and would be too difficult without teacher guidance.

Cloze procedure is not only valuable in providing information as to how readable the particular texts are for the students who are going to have to use them, but also invaluable as a means of comparing different texts (Rye, 1982:24).

2.2.2 Cloze procedure as a test of language proficiency

Cloze procedure is also used for testing purposes. It seems that a wide range of skills like vocabulary, grammar, structure, and reading skills are involved in the process of completing a cloze procedure. Many researchers indicate that cloze procedure is a good test of overall English language proficiency. For example, Ahluwalia (1992:82) claims that cloze procedure is an integrative, global measure of language competence. She explains that cloze tests measure the grammar of expectancy underlying the skills of thinking, understanding, speaking, reading and writing. For Cohen (1980 cited in Ahluwalia, 1992:83) cloze procedure measures global language competence consisting of linguistic knowledge, textual knowledge, and knowledge of the world. As it calls on testees to use knowledge such as vocabulary, grammar, sentence construction, text structure, cohesion and the reader's prior background knowledge. Askes (1991:42) regards cloze procedure as one of the integrative tests (global tests) that integrate language components into a total language event, which requires an integrated performance from the learner in a meaningful context. Thus for Steinman (2002:291), a cloze can replace the sections on test structure, written expression, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

Researchers such as Rashid (2001:10) conclude that cloze tests are reliable for measuring the language proficiency of ESL students. Cloze tests are also important parts of foreign language tests. Chinese scholars (Tao, 2004; Li, 2004; Zhu, 2004; Bai, 2004; etc)[19] recognize cloze procedures as a very efficient means of measuring integrative English language competence. The 'Integrative language competence' involves the skills of thinking, speaking, reading, understanding and writing. Chinese

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[19] Accessed from the Internet, page numbers were not available.

scholars and English teachers accept the effectiveness of cloze procedure as an instrument testing integrative English language competence almost without question, which might explain why cloze procedure is so popularly used in various English exams, both formal and informal.

However, Ahluwalia (1992:82) and Steinman (2001:292) acknowledge that many researchers criticize cloze procedures for merely involving the ability to utilize redundancy in a passage. That is, they view cloze procedure as sentence-bound, requiring readers to look only at the immediate sentence to figure out the word. Urquhart and Weir (1998:157) question the reliability and validity of cloze as a device for testing global comprehension of a text, since cloze procedures delete words, rather than phrases or clauses, which do not usually carry textual cohesion and discourse coherence and thus focus readers' attention on individual words to the detriment of global understanding.

2.2.3 Cloze procedure as teaching instrument

The third use of cloze procedure in English teaching is as a teaching instrument to help improve learners' language ability. Many researchers and teachers have used it successfully in improving learners' language ability. Some purposeful uses of cloze procedure in teaching will be discussed here. Helfeldt, Henk and Fotos (1986:216) mention cloze procedure as 'passage-completion' technique, which is an informal instrument to determine learners' instructional reading level. Knowing the actual reading level of the learners, teachers can adjust and give guidance to the learners more properly. Lombard (1990:24-25) describes the use of cloze tests in her English second language classes for junior and senior students. She illustrates how cloze tests help solve reading problems of learners and increase their confidence when they receive immediate and satisfactory feedback. Legenza and Elijah (2001:354) claim that cloze is effective as a teaching technique especially when teaching is based on an error profile. For example, one such method is using teacher-developed cloze

exercises to remedy specific error types, e.g. deleting only one part of speech at a time, which students then have to insert so that the sentences are semantically correct. Steinman (2002:292-293) describes her use of cloze procedure as a teaching instrument for students to practise using context clues as a reading strategy and to encourage vocabulary improvement in teaching. In her teaching, the methods of teacher-made cloze texts, rational deletion and accepted word scoring were combined with the negotiation of comprehension of the text and discussion of the word choice after the completion of cloze texts.

Cloze exercises are widely used by Chinese teachers in English classes, but they seem to be less effective than the teachers expected. They expect cloze exercises to improve their students' language ability, but the repeated cloze exercises fail to improve this significantly. This situation may be the result of the teachers' inappropriate use of cloze procedure, which I will discuss in Section 2.3.3. Because of the teachers' inappropriate use of cloze procedure, students regarded cloze exercises as practice for cloze tests in examinations, rather than exercises that related to their practical reading and writing abilities.

2.3 The link between cloze procedure and reading

2.3.1 Reading

Dreyer (1998:18) claims that reading is the most important skill for second language learners in academic contexts. Students must develop an approach that will enable them to read academic texts with facility and full understanding (Groebel, 1981:282). According to Harris and Sipay (1975:5-7), reading is 'the meaningful interpretation of written or printed symbols'. The 'meaningful interpretation' is the comprehension of the text. At the intermediate and advanced levels, Cooper (1986:10), Clarke and

Silberstein (1987:238-241) indicate that reading comprehension involves a large number of reading skills. These skills are listed below:

Vocabulary skills

➢ Use context clues to determine the meaning of an unfamiliar word.
    ➢ Use structural analysis (such as prefix, suffix, etc) to determine word meaning – semantic knowledge.
    ➢ Use dictionary to determine word meaning.

Reading speeds

➢ Skimming – read quickly for global comprehension.
    ➢ Scanning – read quickly for precise details.
    ➢ Reading for comprehensive understanding – develop an overall understanding, identify relevant details, and identify the relationships between ideas.
    ➢ Skipping unknown words.
    ➢ Critical reading – make inferences by relating the text to past experiences (background knowledge), ask questions, evaluate and judge the information and the author's opinion.
    ➢ Monitoring – make clarification, summary, question, and prediction.

Syntax knowledge – structure of the language.
Grammar skills
Discourse knowledge – cohesion and coherence of the text.

DeBoer & Dallmann (1960:120) believe that good reading comprehension requires flexible use of reading strategies that integrates different reading skills for different purposes. They regard reading as a search for meaning that requires the active participation of the reader. They claim that reading includes two aspects. One is the reading process and the skills needed for this process. It involves reading skills like skimming, scanning, reading for comprehension, and critical reading; language skills

such as vocabulary knowledge, syntax knowledge and discourse knowledge, etc. The other is the active role of the readers. It requires learners to use the reading skills consciously and effectively; for example, use background knowledge to help comprehension of the topic, use textual cues to confirm his/her expectation, selective or combinative use of different reading skills for different tasks, identify links between ideas, guessing vocabulary from context, etc.

Moreover, meaningful reading is dependent on learners' fluency in reading. This is what Merritt (1969) cited in Rye (1982:48-49) calls 'Intermediate Skills', the ability which enables a reader to read fluently. Fluency in reading depends on learners' ability to make use of certain clues in the context to help them predict what words are going to come next. In this way the reading process is not slowed down by the learner spending a long time focusing on every word (Rye, 1982:48). Rye (1982:5) cites Goodman (1967) and Ryan and Semmel (1969) who argue that reading is a psycholinguistic guessing game and a constructive language process. He explains that the fluent reader is able to use factors in language which make letters and words predictable to construct hypotheses about what may be coming next in any language sequence. These hypotheses are then confirmed or modified as the eyes scan the ensuing context information. The processes involved in fluent reading are in some ways similar to the processes involved in completing cloze deletions. When completing a cloze deletion the reader samples the context information, constructs a response and then checks the response with the available context information (Rye, 1982:7). Therefore Rye (1982:7) claims that cloze procedure is one way of developing certain reading skills.

According to Carrell and Eisterhold (1988:76), the role of background knowledge in ESL/EFL reading comprehension has been formalized as schema theory. The previously acquired knowledge is called the reader's background knowledge, and the previously acquired knowledge structures are called schemata (Carrell and Eisterhold, 1988:76). According to schema theory, comprehending a text is considered as an

interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988:76-77). This interactive process of interpretation can be separated into two basic modes: bottom-up and top-down processing. Bottom-up processing is readers using the input information to activate their background knowledge and interpret what they are reading. Top-down processing is readers using background knowledge to make conceptual predictions about the meaning of the text and then searching information to confirm the predictions. Both bottom-up and top-down processing can occur simultaneously during reading comprehension processes (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988:77). When the incoming information being processed through bottom-up processing and the conceptual predictions being made through top-down processing are compatible, readers have a satisfactory interpretation of the text (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988:79). Thus, as Carrell and Eisterhold (1988:82) claim, "Reading comprehension depends crucially on the reader's being able to relate information from the text to already existing background knowledge". For second and foreign language learners, background knowledge is important in reading comprehension. Activate the background knowledge that relates to the content of the reading can help reading comprehension. Activating relevant schema requires more than just relying on one's linguistic knowledge. As the meaning of a passage is usually culturally specific, if the reader does not possess or cannot access the appropriate content schema, reading comprehension will fail. Comprehension is efficient if the reader can activate the appropriate existing schemata.

2.3.2 Cloze procedure as a measure of reading ability

Cloze procedure is acknowledged by many as a means of assessing reading ability. Rye (1982:29-42) confirms the usefulness of cloze procedure in measuring reading ability while acknowledging its weaknesses as a reading test. Many researchers (Rye, 1982:29; Steinman, 2002:291) recognize that cloze procedure correlates with other reading tests. Neville (1984:28) claims that if the readers of the cloze texts are so confident in their reading that they can restore the exact words used by the author (or

synonyms), they must be competent readers. Cloze tests had been popularly used in some standardized reading tests to test reading ability in the 1970s. Rye (1982: 33) lists these standardized cloze tests which are published in the United Kingdom, such as GAPADOL Reading Comprehension, Wide-span Reading Test, and the London Reading Test. Scholars (1987) claims that the processes of cloze procedure reflect learners' success in reading. Reading requires learners to utilize clues available in language, and cloze procedure requires a similar ability (Rye, 1982:75).

2.3.2.1 Cloze and reading comprehension

Some researchers emphasize that cloze procedures measure reading comprehension. Helfeldt, Henk and Fotos (1986:216) claim that the traditional cloze test has enjoyed twenty-five years of use as a measure of reading comprehension ability. Research has shown that cloze performances are closely related to the performances on other reading comprehension tests (Helfeldt, Henk and Fotos, 1986:216), such as multiple-choice questions and simple answer questions. Rye (1982:91) cites the result of Taylor's (1957) experiment that there is an eighty-five percent overlap between the cloze test and the comprehension test. From this point of views, cloze tests can be considered reliable in testing reading comprehension. Gunning (1998:344) also claims that cloze procedure can be used as a comprehension test (assessing comprehension). As he puts it, "If you have not comprehended what you've read, you have no basis for filling in the blanks". Because the words are omitted, the readers are forced to pay close attention to meaning. Neville (1984:117) contends, "If we can restore correctly the words omitted from a passage, we must have a good grasp of its comprehension". Yamashita (2003:285) claims that the result of his study supported the claims of some other researchers (e.g. Bachman, 1982 & Alderson, 2000) that cloze procedure can be used to assess reading comprehension.

However, as Urquhart and Weir (1998:157) point out, some researchers doubt the validity of cloze procedure as a device for testing global comprehension of a text,

because it appears to focus a reader's attention on local words and sentences rather than on a piece of connected discourse.

2.3.2.2 Cloze procedure and the assessment of reading strategies

Cloze procedure is also used to assess reading strategies used by readers or to develop learners' reading strategies. Because some words are deleted, cloze forces readers to be more aware of the meaning and calls for the use of reading skills like scanning and searching that are often neglected in second language reading (Steinman, 2002:291). Ahluwalia (1992:82) considers the process of taking a cloze test as involving more active reading rather than passive reading and readers should be more conscious of their reading strategies during this process. As Brown (2002:107-109) points out, cloze tests are based on contextualized written language; they need readers' conscious and effective use of reading strategies. Rye (1982:50) seems to support the above opinions that the normal flow of the reading process is interrupted in cloze procedure; readers have to use reading strategies more flexibly. Fyfe and Mitchell (1983:9), mention their use of cloze exercises in the formative assessment of reading strategies in secondary schools. The cloze exercises were used as the assessment task, which they introduced into the natural reading task. Gunning (1998:347) concludes that cloze is an essential teaching technique that fosters reading for meaning and use of context, especially effective for students who fail to read for meaning. To fill in the gaps correctly, students must have a good grasp of the meaning of the text as a whole. Processes involved include the use of reading strategies such as previewing (read the whole text before starting the cloze test), predicting (activate background knowledge to make a guess about the information contained in the text), using context clues about the deleted word in the surrounding context, using language knowledge to select appropriate lexical items and proper grammar forms for the gap.

More particularly, Rye (1982:50) points out that cloze procedure develops scanning and search reading abilities. He cites the authors of the manual for the Edinburgh

Reading Test (1977) who argue that when facing a cloze passage, students will employ the reading skills of searching for information from the surrounding syntactic and semantic circumstance, re-reading the whole passage (not necessarily following the order of the author's sequence), looking for clues that their memory tells them are present, and looking for material that may provide a basis for a guess. Rye (1982:3, 32) argues that the reader must use evidence derived from the context and scan for unspecified information.

2.3.2.3 Cloze procedure and text structure

Cloze tests are valid and reliable measures of how far a reader is able to predict the language sequence of a text. Rye (1982:90) declares:

> When parts of the main content of the text are removed, namely when certain nouns and verbs are deleted, the resulting test can be used to assess the reader's understanding of the content of the text. Although all cloze tests inevitably assess an understanding of content, the removal of only certain content words frees the reader from having to concentrate on syntax and puts a greater emphasis on the actors and their states, processes and actions.

His declaration seems to be supported by many researchers. For example, Yamashita (2003:269) argues that cloze can be used to measure readers' higher-order skills relating to cohesion and coherence of a text. Harrison (1980) and Gilliland (1972), cited in Greene (2001:84), claim that cloze procedure measures readers' grasp of 'between sentence meanings and relationships' and their ability 'to use a variety of contextual interrelationships'. Greene (2001:84) claims the importance of 'seeing the connections' would seem to make the cloze task particularly appropriate for evaluating the coherence of a student's comprehension.

2.3.3 Using cloze procedure in the teaching of reading

If used appropriately, cloze procedure can be used to help learners improve their

reading competence. According to Rye (1982:40), many researchers have proven the reliability of standardized cloze tests in this regard. He argues that teacher-made cloze tests can also be validly and reliably used in some situations. He suggests that teachers should use cloze procedure to construct their own reading tests. These need not necessarily replace professionally developed tests, but "… there are situations where teacher-made cloze tests could be adequately used (Rye, 1982:39)". Rye (1982:40) reports that cloze exercises produced significant gains in reading ability. He cites Rankin's (1959, 1969) report, which explains that there is no distinct different score between Rankin's own cloze tests and standardized reading tests on the same material. That is, teacher-made cloze tests measure the same abilities measured by conventional tests.

It is worth pointing out that only the proper use of cloze procedure can improve the reading ability of the learners. Rye (1982:48) concludes that cloze is effective when the instruction is carefully sequenced in length and difficulty, and adjusted to the reading abilities of the students. As Steinman (2002:292) puts it,

> When preparing a cloze, we choose to delete those items that force the readers to read beyond the sentence. We should provide a cloze training for our students, during which we emphasize the value of reading the whole text before focusing in on the deletions.

Therefore each teacher should make his/her purpose clear for using cloze. For example, the teacher can gain an understanding of particular problem areas in learners' reading ability by analyzing the errors learners made in the cloze passage. Rye (1982:75) argues that performances on the cloze procedure reflect the learner's ability to use the language context. A cloze exercise is especially valuable for students who neglect context clues (Rye, 1982:48). Rye (1982:53) argues that cloze procedure also helps in developing the ability to infer implicit meaning from a cloze passage when using group discussion activities. "All through the discussion a thoughtful

awareness of the context has underpinned that discussion (Rye, 1982:53)." In such activities cloze procedure makes students read carefully and reason together meaningfully about their choice of word to fill the deletion. This helps them to think about the context beyond the immediate linguistic segment. The teacher can help the learning process to continue after the group discussion by giving credit for appropriate, as well as correct responses, and by explaining possible reasons behind the author's choice of words (Rye, 1982:57).

The teacher should also know the advantages and weaknesses of cloze procedure. Rye (1982:75-76) claims that cloze procedure has the advantage that it does not require a teacher to 'sit in' on the whole reading process, but just to check the learners' progress at his/her convenience. However, working on short passages would produce frustration when students are unfamiliar with cloze procedures. Therefore, some instructions are necessary for students before a cloze exercise starts. For example, Gunning (1998:344) advises, "…give them (students) some tips for completing it (cloze exercise)". Rye (1982:76) holds that "Students should have the chance to become acquainted with the technique (the cloze procedure)". In addition, Rye (1982:76) argues that the cloze passage should be related to learners' interests or expected areas of interest to avoid increasing the difficulties.

The incorrect use of cloze procedure fails to help improve reading abilities. Rye (1982:47) summarizes such improper use, such as exposing children to cloze procedure for comparatively short experimental periods; giving the pupils no training in how to use context clues; and asking the subjects to fill in cloze passages without involving them in any group discussion or feedback from the teacher. Because the less competent reader finds cloze disproportionately difficult, Fyfe and Mitchel (1981:32) suggest that cloze exercises could be used more appropriately in a mixed ability class if cloze formats were modified and different kinds of cloze exercises were set, based on the same passage. The cloze procedure used by Chinese teachers shows many of the problems listed above. Some of the teachers gave short periods (e.g. a month,

several weeks) for students to practise cloze exercises just before the examinations. Some gave students a cloze exercise to finish without giving proper examples and an explanation of the skills to be employed in this process. Some just asked students to practise by filling in different cloze passages repeatedly and gave only the correct answers rather than explaining them or allowing for group discussion. These inappropriate uses of cloze procedure do not help to improve students' language ability but increase their frustration with cloze tests.

2.4 Difficulties students actually have with cloze tests

As Rye (1982:7, 75) argues, the processes involved in reading are in some ways similar to the processes involved in completing cloze deletions. The difficulties the students have in cloze may be the reflection of their difficulties in reading. Edwards (1978) cited in Rye (1982:73) identifies six main areas of reading failure: insufficient sight vocabulary, inadequate visual analysis skills, inadequate auditory analysis skills, and inability to use context clues, inadequate comprehension skills, and inefficient rates of reading. However, some reading skills, like using a dictionary to determine the meanings of words, are not available to the readers during cloze tests; therefore a more flexible use of reading strategies is needed to complete a cloze. It is worth looking at the actual difficulties students have with cloze tests.

The first difficulty students have with cloze tests may be their inefficient reading rates. Rye (1982:48-49) found that fluency in reading is essential during the process of completing a cloze test. Students first need to skim the text to gain a global comprehension before focusing on the deletions, because understanding the gist and thinking about the coherent meaning of the cloze text can help students to complete the cloze deletions. However, the students may fail to read fluently and rapidly. Their fluency may be hindered because of a great number of unknown words, or they may

have difficulty in applying phonic and semantic analysis to the difficult words (Rye, 1982:73). The students may have difficulty in using information given in the immediate discourse to anticipate the meanings of new and unfamiliar words (Rye, 1982:73), or they spend a disproportionate time on the difficult words instead of using the context to work out their meanings. As a result, the students' reading slows down and their attention focuses on the linguistic segment rather than the whole passage (Rye, 1982:73). As Yamashita (2003:287) found, skilled readers filled in the gaps one by one throughout the text, while less skilled readers spent more time decoding linguistic chunks (e.g., clauses and sentences) before thinking about the coherent meaning of the text.

The second difficulty may be the learners' inadequate reading skills. For example, students may have insufficient background knowledge for reading the text. As was previously discussed, background knowledge is significant for reading comprehension. Hong Kong researcher Hung Chan (2003:64) claims that appropriate background knowledge can facilitate ESL/EFL reading comprehension. The results of her study confirm that background knowledge helps ESL learners to fill information gaps in cloze tests even though they do not have the required proficiency to make use of the lexical, syntactic, or discourse structures used in the text to fully understand the text. However, readers would fail in comprehension if they did not possess appropriate background knowledge to understand a text, or if they could not access the appropriate existing knowledge (Carrell & Eisterhold, 1988:81). As some researchers such as Yamashita (2003:286-287), Pressley and Afflerbach (1995) cited in O'Connor and Clein (2004:117) found in their research, the skilled readers check their schemata against the meaning provided by the text, while the less skilled readers found it difficult to check their schemata against the text meaning. Skilled readers make use of their prior knowledge to support reading comprehension, less skilled readers probably have related prior knowledge about the topic but they do not apply it in the reading of the cloze text.

Another problem that reveals students' inadequate reading comprehension skills may be the absence of some reading strategies that are applied in normal reading processes, such as making predictions about the content of the texts, asking questions, identifying main ideas, identifying supporting details, identifying relationships between main ideas, identifying the sequence of the main ideas, etc. Yamashita (2003:287) points out that students often activate grammatical knowledge and check word forms, which they do not usually do in normal reading processes, instead of using text-level comprehension (which requires the general reading strategies mentioned above) when working with cloze texts.

The third difficulty may be the students' inability to use context clues. Many researchers indicate that the processes of completing a cloze test require the use of a wide range of context clues. Yamashita (2003:283) argues that since cloze tests tend to measure reading comprehension ability including lower-level (clausal and sentential) and higher-lever (contextual) processing, they require readers to use both local grammatical and semantic information and extra-text information. Geva (1992, cited in Steinman, 2002:296) contends that ability to complete a cloze test or exercise requiring inter-sentential and discourse reading correlates with general reading proficiency. Perfetti (1985:49) claims reading comprehension includes a number of local and text-modelling processes. The students' inabilities to use context clues may be the result of their failure to adjust the weight of the information. Yamashita (2003:285-286), who compared skilled readers and less skilled readers in her research, found that the skilled readers were able to give different weight to different types of information according to their importance in understanding the text. For skilled readers, clause-level information was only used as a source for confirming their answers. They tended to use a wider range of textual constraints and were able to incorporate information from a wider range of discourse clues. That is, skilled readers used text-level information as a main source of information more frequently and used sentence-level and extra-textual information as a supplementary source to confirm their answers. Less skilled readers, on the other hand, were less able to use text level

information, while they put heavier emphasis on local grammatical information. Even if they had some sense about the type of information necessary to answer the item, they were not successful in using the source.

In cloze tests, therefore, less skilled readers tend to focus on the lower level, single sources of information rather than higher level, multiple information sources. In other words, they use clausal or sentential information frequently, but inter-sentential and textual information less frequently, if at all. Because the students fail to weigh different sources of information in reading, their use of different information becomes less efficient and the completion of cloze deletions becomes more difficult and time-consuming.

2.5 Specific difficulties Chinese students have with cloze tests

There is little research on the specific difficulties Chinese students have with cloze tests. As has been stated, most Chinese students are passive ESL readers. They do not choose to read English in their independent time, they do not have experience in reading English widely, and they do not have the wealth of background knowledge that teachers assume they have (D'Arcangelo, 2002)[20]. In addition, because the Chinese language is totally different from the English language, Chinese students face problems in various aspects when they attempt to understand a text in English (Huang, 2003)[21]. Most obviously, reading comprehension would be very difficult when they are not familiar with either the topic of the text or the construction of the language.

The first difficulty Chinese students face may be a linguistic one. To take just one aspect: some particles such as inflections, articles and prepositions, and anaphoric expressions such as reference, substitution, ellipsis and lexical cohesion are used very

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differently or do not exist in the Chinese language, and hence are difficult for Chinese students to handle (Huang, 2003)[22]. Look at the following examples: _in_ 1976, _on_ April 15, _at_ 4:15 pm. As the examples show, there are three preposition words – _in_, _on_ and _at_ normally used to talk about time in English language. In Chinese, there is only one preposition word – _zai_ used to talk about time: _zai_ 1976 nian (in 1976), _zai_ 4 yue 15 ri (on April 15), _zai_ xia wu 4:15 (at 4:15 pm). From the above example, we can see particles in English language like these are difficult for Chinese students to understand and master. As Huang (2003)[23] points out, Chinese students often misunderstand and misuse these words. To understand a sentence, Chinese students need to distinguish varied shades of meanings when particles or anaphoric expressions are used. Otherwise, they might become confused and feel at a loss about the meaning. Another aspect of English is that the relationship between different parts of a sentence is usually decided by an analysis of the connecting words and the sentence structure (Huang, 2003)[24]. To understand the sentence, students need to make a careful analysis of the sentence based on common sense and grammatical knowledge. In complete contrast, in the Chinese language the relationship between different parts of a sentence is based on reasoning (Huang, 2003)[25]. So cloze tests which require linguistic knowledge seems more difficult for Chinese students.

Furthermore, to reconstruct meaning from a text, students have to use the graphic symbols, syntactic structures and semantic systems of the English language. Therefore, it is a challenge for Chinese students to understand the text with complicated structures in English. It is not unusual for Chinese students to focus too strongly on the recognition of individual words because they are not familiar with the structure of the English language. When they are learning a new word, they spend a lot of time memorizing the spelling and translation of the word. This is also done when they try to master phrases and sentences - they memorize the relationships

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between words, rules of grammars and the structures of sentences. When they are reading, they try to recognize every word and to translate it into Chinese. Similarly, they tend to read word by word during the cloze procedure. As a result, their reading is slower. Their comprehension of the meaning derived from connected discourse becomes deficient because of their word for word reading. The insufficient comprehension of coherent meanings of the text hampers the completion of the cloze test or exercise.

The second difficulty Chinese students have may be their particular use of background knowledge. Usually, reading includes both top-down and bottom-up processes. Gunning (1998:105) claims that the appropriate use of background knowledge is a key component in reading comprehension. Carrell and Eisterhold (1988:81) point out that the background knowledge second language readers bring to a text is often culture-specific. In this situation, the schemata Chinese students possess may not be appropriate for understanding the culturally unfamiliar texts. As Huang (2003)[26] states,

> Chinese people and English native speakers have different ways of thinking and modes of expression, owing to their respective and unique social practice and geographic environments. In this connection arise the problems in our students' comprehension of their English texts: because we don't have their experiences, we don't know what it means, not only linguistically, but also emotionally and cognitively.

If the students do not realize this situation and rely too heavily on their background knowledge, their comprehension will be unsuccessful. On the other hand, if Chinese students cannot access the appropriate existing schemata even though they possess the appropriate schemata, their use of schemata will be inadequate. In other words, they fail to transfer their existing background knowledge to assist in their comprehension of English texts. As they have limited experience of reading English texts, they lack

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the practice of relating existing schemata to a particular reading. Another reason is that Chinese students do not receive proper instruction in using background knowledge to facilitate cloze text comprehension because of the teachers' improper use of cloze exercises, which has been discussed above. Their application of schemata may be very insufficient or not successful. During the cloze procedures, in particular, the transfer of background knowledge needs the more conscious and active efforts of the readers, such as using incoming information to activate corresponding schemata. As Carrell and Eisterhold (1988:81) point out, even when possessing the appropriate schemata, actually accessing them depends initially on readers' sufficient use of textual cues. It is not always necessary to read a wide range of discourse to activate schemata, but readers have to check their expectations derived from their schemata against the actual meaning provided by the text. However, Chinese students often tend to ignore the textual cues or do not use the cues effectively in activating their prior knowledge. As a result, the students' application of irrelevant background knowledge makes their reading comprehension less successful.

Hong Kong researcher Hung Chan (2003:64) claims that high language proficiency is able to compensate for the lack of background knowledge in second language reading comprehension. 'High language proficiency' involves the use of different reading strategies. DeBoer and Dallmann (1960:120) also argue that good reading comprehension requires a flexible approach to reading texts. However, Chinese students put too much focus on the completion of the cloze deletions rather than the use of reading skills when reading a cloze text. They fail to use proper reading techniques to the reading of cloze texts, because they regard the processes of reading this kind of text (with a number of information gaps) as different from the processes of reading normal texts. Too much focus on the cloze deletion makes Chinese students overuse grammar and vocabulary skills rather than other reading comprehension skills. Another reason may be the limited time for the students to finish the cloze test. The time limit makes them nervous and anxious to complete the deletions before they can fully understand the meaning of the text.

The third difficulty Chinese students have may be their overemphasis on low-level information. They rely too much on the local linguistic information the text offers. As Huang (2003)[27] puts it, "Chinese readers often get lost while reading paragraphs with implied meanings or meanings 'between the lines'." When they are faced with the blanks, they tend to get cues for the blanks from the nearest context within local sentences rather than from the wider context. And, although they currently use reading skills such as reviewing, skimming, and scanning more frequently, the use of these skills are limited to sentence level rather than clause or text level. Therefore, their answers may be semantically acceptable but syntactically unacceptable, or syntactically acceptable and fit into the syntax of the sentence, but not make sense in the context of the whole passage (Rye, 1982:77-78).

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with literature written on the cloze procedure and its use in English language learning and teaching. There are three major purposes for using cloze procedure in language teaching: assessing the difficulty of written texts, testing global language proficiency, and helping learners to improve their language ability. In particular, cloze tests measure learners' reading ability in terms of their comprehension of the cloze text, their use of reading strategies during the reading process and their comprehension of the text structure. In addition, the difficulties students actually have in completing cloze tests and the particular difficulties Chinese students have were also discussed in this chapter.

The next chapter deals with the research methodology employed in collecting the data and provides explanations for the choice of methodology.

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CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter dealt with the theoretical framework and the literature on cloze procedure. The use of cloze procedure in English language learning and teaching, especially in the teaching of reading, was discussed. A central concern of the chapter was the difficulties students, especially Chinese students, have with cloze tests. This chapter focuses on the research methodologies and techniques used to collect the data for this study.

3.2 Research methods

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to find out the problems Chinese students have with cloze tests and to determine whether they are associated with an inefficient use of reading strategies. This type of research is primary research, for the data is derived from primary sources of information (Nunan, 1992:8). That is, the data is gathered from interviews with students using English as a medium of instruction and from questionnaires with students and teachers who were working with cloze procedures. This type of research is a combination of qualitative and quantitative research since it is concerned with an in-depth understanding of the students' reactions in cloze tests, employing non-quantitative analysis as well as quantitative and statistical analysis. The qualitative paradigm yields qualitative data, which is analysed interpretively (Nunan, 1992:4-5). The qualitative data in this study includes interviews, transcripts and questionnaires.

Quantitative research methods record data in numerical forms. The quantitative data in this study includes students' performances on the cloze test, students' use of reading skills and teachers' recommended strategies to their students doing cloze tests. The participants in the interviews were twenty Chinese university students at the University of the Western Cape and five Chinese teachers who teach English in China. The interviews were used to find out the opinions and attitudes the students had on the cloze procedure. The questionnaires were offered to twenty students to find out the processes they used to do cloze tests, and to English teachers in China to find out what strategies they recommended to students doing the cloze tests.

With the aid of the above techniques, I investigated the problems that Chinese students have with cloze tests and established to what extent their problems with cloze tests reflected their insufficient use of reading strategies during the process. I also attempted to find out whether a lengthy period of exposure to cloze exercises and cloze tests is of any help in improving their use of reading strategies when dealing with texts with information gaps.

3.3 Research Sample

The participants of this study were twenty Chinese university students at the University of the Western Cape, both undergraduate and postgraduate. I selected students who were available and willing to answer my questions, were willing do the cloze test and complete the questionnaire. Only the ones who had at least three years' of senior schooling in China were chosen for my study. Students who had completed junior and senior schooling in China would have had plenty of exposure to cloze tests. Therefore, they were likely to hold particular attitudes and opinions on cloze tests. In addition, English would have been used as a medium of instruction during their studies at the University of the Western Cape. Both undergraduate and postgraduate

students had been exposed to plenty of reading materials. To read widely and comprehensively, fluency in reading is essential. As discussed, the processes involved in fluent reading are similar to the processes of the cloze procedure, so the reading strategies applied in the cloze procedure could reflect the ones they used in reading texts with information gaps.

Five teachers also participated in my study. There were particular criteria for selecting the teachers for my study. Firstly, membership of the English/Bilingual Forum in Education Online (an education information Website in China, available: http://www.eduol.com.cn) was necessary. I believed that the people who visited this website and joined in this forum were all English teachers. Secondly, they had to be current teachers at a senior or junior school in China and willing to provide relevant information such as real names, teaching qualifications, the name of their school, postal contact details, etc. The detailed information I required the teachers to provide helped me to ensure they were qualified and serious about answering the questionnaire. Thirdly, they had to have at least two years of English teaching experience. The teaching experience was necessary to ensure that they had had experience of giving students cloze exercises and cloze tests. In addition, the teachers were required to provide their email addresses to me, because I communicated with them electronically. Contact with the teachers by email was the most convenient way for me, saving time and money.

3.4 Research Techniques

3.4.1 Interviews

3.4.1.1 Using interviews as a research technique

An interview is one way of investigating a group's attitudes and opinions. I used semi-structured interviews, because I needed the students' views and opinions and I wanted them to express freely what they wanted to say about the topic. Nunan (1992:149) states, "In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a general idea of where he/she wants the interview to go, and what should come of it, but does not enter the interview with a list of predetermined questions". In other words, the interviewer determines the topics and issues rather than the order of the questions of a semi-structured interview. As Nunan (1982:149) claims, semi-structured interviews can produce rich information because of their flexibility. The interviews were conducted before the cloze test.

3.4.1.2 The procedure for conducting the interviews

I firstly designed and composed the main questions for the interviews. Then I translated the questions into Chinese, because the interviews would be conducted in Chinese. It is worth pointing out why I used Chinese - the students' first language - for the interviews. I believed using Chinese could reduce the interviewees' anxiety and avoid obstructing the flow of the interview due to the interviewees' limited English proficiency. They could obviously express themselves with greater ease and fluency in their first language. Before conducting the interviews, I explained the purpose of my study to the interviewees. I also explained clearly to them that the information I got from them would be used for academic purposes only. Then I asked the interviewees for permission to take notes of their answers. Once I had their permission, I conducted

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the interviews, taking detailed notes of their answers, which were translated into English afterwards. The interviewees were interviewed individually. They were also informed that they were welcome to add more relevant information during the interview process. Lastly, I organized the notes from the interviews.

3.4.1.3 The interview questions

The semi-structured interviews were used to find out the students' attitudes, views and opinions of cloze tests and how their teachers assisted them with the cloze procedures. Eight sets of interview questions were asked in the interviews, but the order of the questions and further questions depended on the interviewees' responses. The interview questions were the following:

Table 1: The interview questions

1. Have you had any experience of cloze tests or cloze exercises?
2. How often did you have a cloze exercise or a cloze test (approximately)?
3. Can you remember the first time you worked with cloze? Do you think you got a clear introduction to cloze procedure?
4. How do you feel about cloze tests or cloze exercises?

5. What abilities listed below do you think are tested by cloze procedures?
   - Reading comprehension
   - Grammar skills
   - Vocabulary skills
   - All of the above

6. What did you usually do during cloze exercises?
   - Completed the deletions individually and silently without any feedback.
   - Discussed with a partner or in a group.

7. What did you usually do after cloze exercises?   - Received the correct answers without explanations.

- Received correct answers and some explanations from teachers.
- Received detailed explanations with instruction of reading comprehension strategies of the cloze passages.
8. Did your have any problems with cloze tests? What were the problems?

3.4.2 The cloze test

3.4.2.1 Using the cloze test

A 209-word cloze text adapted from the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) exam paper on January 8, 2005 was used for the test. Twenty words were removed from the text and the students were asked to fill in the omitted words by choosing the best one from three options. I chose this text because CET is a well-established national standardized test and is universally recognized in China. It is designed to measure the English proficiency of college and university students. Furthermore, this kind of cloze test – multiple-choice - is the one with which Chinese students are most familiar. The text was used to help me assess the students' performances with this type of cloze procedure. The respondents were not allowed to use any kinds of dictionaries and references, and the time for them to finish the test was limited to fifteen minutes.

The cloze test is attached as Appendix B.

3.4.2.2 The procedure used for conducting the cloze test

Firstly, I prepared the test papers for the test. Secondly, to enhance their concentration, I chose quiet places such as a classroom or library for the respondents to complete the test. Before they commenced with the test, I gave them a brief introduction to the cloze test even though they were familiar with this kind of test. I also told them that they had exactly fifteen minutes to complete the test, and that they were not allowed

to use any dictionaries or references during the process. Once they had completed the test, I was ready to begin with my assessment of their performance.

3.4.3 The questionnaires used with the students

3.4.3.1 Using the think-aloud method as a research technique

A questionnaire was submitted to the student respondents after the completion of the cloze test. It required them to engage in thinking aloud. According to Nunan (1992:117),

> Think-aloud techniques are mental actions in which subjects think back on actions performed at some prior time, for example, complete a task or solve a problem. The researcher collects the think-aloud protocol and then analyses it for the thinking strategies involved.

According to Gunning (1998:105) think-aloud occurs when "… readers or writers describe their thought processes as they read a selection or compose a piece." It is one way to determine how students are processing text by having them discuss what is going on in their minds as they read.

> Think-alouds can focus on aspects of reading. They assess students' ability to predict, read flexibly, and integrate text information with background knowledge (Gunning, 1992:106).

Groebel (1981: 282-287) used a questionnaire to find out what strategies can facilitate English reading comprehension. I used the questions to help the students engage in thinking aloud by asking what they were doing. The questionnaire items include some closed items and some open-ended items. The closed questions were used to check whether the students used particular reading skills. The open question was used to investigate the reading strategies used by the students. As Nunan (1992:143) claims,

responses to open questions contain more useful information and more accurately reflect what the respondent wants to say.

3.4.3.2 The procedure during the think-alouds

I designed and composed the questionnaire in advance, and presented it to the respondents immediately after the completion of the cloze test. The students were told that there was no time limit in this process, and that they could use either English or Chinese, or even code-mix these two languages. I allowed the interviewees to choose the preferred language(s) for them to use, because it helped them to express themselves fluently, reducing the obstructions caused by having to translate between the two languages. The students could consult me at any moment during this process if they had any problems in understanding the questions. I translated their responses into English afterwards.

3.4.3.3 The questions used with the student respondents

To determine how the students processed the cloze procedure, the forty questions in the questionnaire were designed to reflect their reading processes during the cloze test they had completed. By asking what the students were thinking in the initial twenty questions, I wanted to gain an understanding of how they used their reading strategies when completing each blank space of the cloze text. The students' answers to the rest of the questions were likely to reveal what strategies they used to complete the test. The questions were the following:

Table 2: Questions for the testees

1. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 61?
2. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 62?
3. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 63?

4. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 64?
5. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 65?
6. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 66?
7. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 67?
8. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 68?
9. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 69?
10. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 70?
11. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 71?
12. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 72?
13. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 73?
14. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 74?
15. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 75?
16. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 76?
17. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 77?
18. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 78?
19. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 79?
20. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 80?
21. Did you work on the blanks directly before reading the whole text?
22. Did you read fast for the gist of the text by skipping the blanks before focusing on them?
23. Did you scan the text constantly while finding answers to the blanks?
24. Did you stop and reread the confusing sections while you were reading?
25. Did you read the first sentence of every paragraph before you read the whole text?
26. Could you predict what would be in the passage while you were reading the first sentence?
27. Did you ask yourself what you knew about the topic of this passage? If you did, what did you think of?
28. Did you ask yourself questions about what the text was about after reading the whole text?
29. Did you ask yourself whether you understood the text or not?
30. Did you compare the contents of the text with what you already knew?
31. Did you picture in your mind the people, events and places that you were reading

about?
32. Did you read the text twice or more often?
33. Could you work out the main ideas of the passage (main idea of every paragraph)?
34. Could you work out the links between the main ideas (links between the paragraphs)?
35. Did you skip the unknown words while you were reading the text?
36. Did you use context to try to figure out an unfamiliar word?
37. Did you try to use semantic or phonic analysis to figure out an unfamiliar word?
38. Did you review the paragraph(s) immediately preceding or following the paragraph in which a particular blank appears?
39. Did you review the words immediately preceding or following the blank constantly to work out an answer?
40. What are the skills you usually use when you read a text with unknown words or an unfamiliar topic? Select six from the skills listed above (or add other skills you feel are necessary) and rank them according to their importance.

(This combination of reading skills was extracted from Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:170-171 and Gunning, 1998:106-108)

3.4.4 The questionnaire used with the teachers

3.4.4.1 Using questionnaires as a research technique

Reading comprehension requires using reading strategies flexibly and consciously. Students' difficulties in cloze tests may be the result of their insufficient use of reading strategies. What strategies could be used to deal with the cloze test that I offered to the students, and which strategies were crucial during this process? In Groebel's (1981:283-284) study, a questionnaire was submitted to a group of teachers to find out the strategies they thought students should use during the reading of academic texts. To find out the answers to my questions, I asked several teachers to recommend a number of strategies, which they believed students ought to use when reading cloze texts, and to rank these strategies in order of importance. The questionnaire was administered and collected by e-mail. I chose this way as being the most feasible one for me to interact with teachers in China. According to Hyland (2003:145) technology has opened up and enabled possibilities for remote

communications.

3.4.4.2 The procedure

Firstly, I prepared the questionnaire for electronic transmission. As I had their email addresses, I sent the cloze test with the questionnaire to the teachers by e-mail. The teachers were required to read the cloze text first. In the introduction to the questionnaire, they were informed that the students were forbidden to use any dictionaries and other references. Once they had completed their responses, the teachers sent their responses to me by e-mail.

3.4.4.3 The questions for the teachers

Table 3: The questions for the teachers

Which skills listed below do you think the students should use during the reading of a cloze text?
- Work on the blanks directly before reading the whole text.
- Read fast for the gist of the text by skipping the blanks before focusing on them.
- Scan the text constantly when finding answers to the blanks.
- Stop and re-read the confusing sections.
- Read the first sentence and the last sentence of the text before reading the whole text.
- Predict what would be in the passage when reading the first sentence.
- Use prior knowledge related to the topic of this passage.
- Ask him/herself questions about what the text is about after reading the whole text.
- Ask her/himself whether she/he understands the text or not.
- Compare what she/he has just learned from the reading with what she/he

already knew.

- Picture in her/his mind the people, events and places that she/he is reading about.

- Read the text twice or more.

- Find the main ideas of the passage (main idea of every paragraph).

- Find out the links between the main ideas (links between the paragraphs).

- Skip the unknown words when reading the text.

- Use context to figure out the unfamiliar words.

- Use phonic or semantic analysis to figure out the unfamiliar words.

- Review the paragraph(s) immediately preceding or following the one in which the blank appears.

- Review the words immediately preceding or following the blank.

Some other skills you think are necessary:

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Rank the six most important skills according to their importance.

(This combination of reading skills was extracted from Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:170-171 and Gunning, 1998:106-108)

3.4.5 Document analysis (the cloze text)

To find out what problems the students actually had in dealing with the cloze procedure, it was necessary to analyze the cloze text used with them. The linguistic analysis of the text was necessary in order for me to examine whether it was suitable for the Chinese students and to understand what difficulties they faced when dealing with the cloze procedure.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Particular ethical issues were taken into account before collecting the data. Before I started with the process, I asked the students permission to conduct the research. First of all, I briefly explained to them the purpose of my research. Then I made it clear to them that the data they would provide me was strictly to be used for research and the results they obtained in the cloze test were not necessarily linked to their current studies. After getting their permission, I gave the students the questionnaire and the cloze test. With regard to the teachers, I firstly sent them an email to explain the purpose of my research. After I got permission from the teachers, I sent them the questionnaires and assured them that the data they provided was only meant for my research.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology used in this study. It included a discussion of research techniques such as interviews and questionnaires, as well as the sampling procedure. The next chapter deals with the presentation and analysis of the collected data.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

4.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the presentation and interpretation of the data. The participating students' responses in the interviews, the students' performances in the cloze test and their self- reports on the cloze procedure are presented first. This is followed by a presentation of the teachers' views on the questionnaires. Finally, the data is analyzed and discussed.

4.2 Data from the interviews with students

Twenty Chinese university students from the University of the Western Cape made up my sample student population. The objective of the interviews was to find out the students' experiences, attitudes, views and opinions on cloze tests. Eight sets of interview questions were used as prompts in the interviews (see Appendix A). In this section, I provide the students' responses to the questions in the interviews. The responses fall into two major themes: the students' experiences with the cloze procedure and their attitudes or opinions towards cloze tests.

4.2.1 Students' experiences with cloze

Question 1: Did you have any exposure to cloze tests or cloze exercises?
All twenty students gave an affirmative reply.

Question 2: How often did you have a cloze exercise or a cloze test?

Three students out of the twenty indicated that they had a cloze exercise/test on a daily basis, twelve students said that they had a cloze exercise/test on a weekly basis, four students indicated that they had a cloze exercise/test on a monthly basis, and one student said that he had a cloze exercise/test on a semi-annual basis.

Students' responses to Question 1 and Question 2 also revealed the year in which they were first exposed to cloze exercises/tests:

One student among the twenty indicated that he began to do cloze exercises/tests when he was at primary school; four students indicated that they began to have cloze exercises/tests when they were at junior school; fourteen students said that they began to have cloze exercises/tests when they were at senior school; and one student indicated that he began to have cloze exercises/tests when he was at college/university.

Question 3: Can you remember the first time you worked with cloze? Do you think you got a clear and detailed introduction to cloze?

Six students out of the twenty thought that they got a simple but clear introduction to cloze from their teachers; seven students said that they got a detailed introduction to cloze from their teachers; four students indicated that the introduction to cloze from their teachers was not clear enough; and three students said that they did not get any introduction to cloze the first time they worked on it. Two students mentioned that teachers should prepare students well in the cloze procedures by giving them very detailed instruction on the skills and strategies that are useful for finishing cloze.

Question 6: What did you usually do during cloze exercises?

All twenty students indicated that they usually finished cloze exercises individually and quietly without a chance to have discussions with teachers or other students. However, one student said that he tried to discuss possible answers with other students during cloze exercises, even though discussions during exercises were not encouraged or allowed by teachers.

Question 7: What did you usually do after cloze exercises? Did you:

> – **Receive the correct answers without explanations;**
>
> – **Receive correct answers and some explanations from teachers;**
>
> – **Receive detailed explanations with instruction on reading comprehension strategies to be used with the cloze passages?**

Two students indicated that they received only correct answers without explanations from their teachers after cloze exercises; twelve students indicated that they received correct answers and some simple explanations, and six students indicated that they received detailed explanations with instruction on reading comprehension strategies to be used with the cloze passages. Only one student mentioned that they were given the chance to provide reasons for their answers. She said her teacher usually asked them for their reasons for choosing the answers and had discussions with them before he gave final explanations.

4.2.2 Students' views on cloze

Question 4: How did you feel about cloze exercises?

Fifteen students out of the twenty indicated that they thought cloze was difficult and that they did not like cloze exercises and cloze tests; five students indicated that they thought cloze was easy and that they enjoyed doing cloze exercises and tests.

Question 5: What abilities do you think cloze procedures test: reading comprehension, grammar skills, vocabulary skills, or all of the above?

Fifteen students among the twenty declared that cloze procedures tested all of the three abilities listed above; five students declared that cloze procedures tested only one of the abilities. In addition, the students mentioned that some other knowledge was also required to complete cloze procedures. Three students said that cloze procedures tested their knowledge of phrases, such as the relationships between verbs and prepositions; one student said that cloze procedure also tested background knowledge; one student said that it tested one's ability to use synonyms; and one

student said that it required familiarity with the English language.

Question 8: Did you have any problems with cloze tests? What were the problems?

Seven students said that they had problems in comprehending the cloze passages because the number of blanks in the text hampered their reading of the text; two students indicated that they had problems in using grammar skills in such tests; fifteen students indicated that they had problems in using vocabulary skills, and one student indicated that the problem she had was due to unfamiliarity with English.

4.3 Data from the cloze test

All twenty students finished the cloze test, which included twenty blanks (attached as Appendix B). The objective of this test was to find out whether Chinese students are really weak in writing cloze tests. Students' performances on the cloze test were assessed by calculating the number of correct answers. The results here show the percentage of correct answers. Two students got the lowest score of 30% and two students got the highest score of 85%. The following table summarizes the results of the twenty students' performances on the cloze test:

Table 4: The students' performances on the cloze test

Students' Number	Percent of score
Student 1	50%
Student 2	40%
Student 3	65%
Student 4	75%
Student 5	35%

Student 6	80%
Student 7	40%
Student 8	85%
Student 9	75%
Student 10	65%
Student 11	50%
Student 12	55%
Student 13	45%
Student 14	30%
Student 15	30%
Student 16	40%
Student 17	70%
Student 18	55%
Student 19	60%
Student 20	40%
Average score	54%

As shown in Table 4, the majority of the students, that is, seventeen out of the twenty, got scores below 75%. Only three students got scores above 80%. Nine of the twenty students even got scores below 50%.

4.4 Data from students' questionnaire

All twenty students who finished the cloze test responded to the questionnaire (attached as Appendix C). The questionnaire consisted of forty questions. The students' responses are organized around three main themes: the type of information that students used to finish each item of the cloze test, reading skills used by students

during the process of completing the cloze and reading skills normally used by the students.

4.4.1 The type of information that students used to complete each item

Questions 1 to 20 dealt with this theme. The objective of these questions was to find out how different levels of information helped students to finish the cloze. Yamashita's (2003:275) classification of information type was employed:

> (1) Clause level: the students use information provided by a clause in which an item appears.
> (2) Sentence level: the students use information provided by a larger context than the clause in which an item appears, but within the sentence.
> (3) Text level: the students use information provided by a larger context than the sentence in which an item appears, but a context from within the text.
>   - Adjacent context: the students use information provided by a sentence that immediately precedes or follows the sentence in which an item appears.
>   - Wider context: the students use information provided by a context, which is more than a sentence apart from the sentence in which an item appears.
> (4) Extra textual: the students use information not provided by the text, which includes such mental resources as the students' background knowledge, beliefs, and images.
> (5) Guessing: the students' guesses.
> (6) Missing: The student does not/cannot say anything about his/her cognitive processes.
>   In the cases where students use two or three sources of information to answer an item, each information source is counted as one token. (So the total number of information sources used for answering the 20 items exceeded 20.)

The following table shows the six information sources used correctly or incorrectly by the twenty students in my sample:

Table 5 Information categories to answer the cloze test

Categories	Total	Correct	Incorrect
(1) Clause	153	90 (59%)	63 (41%)
(2) Sentence	106	60 (57%)	46 (43%)
(3) Text	52	40 (77%)	12 (23%)
(4) Extra-textual	8	5 (63%)	3 (37%)
(5) Guessing	85	44 (52%)	41 (48%)
(6) Missing	2	2 (100%)	0
Total	406	241 (59%)	165 (41%)

The above table shows how often the six information sources were used correctly or incorrectly by the students.

4.4.2 The reading skills used by students during the processes of completing the cloze test

Questions 21 to 39 dealt with this theme. The objective of these questions was to find out whether these reading skills were used by students when they were reading the cloze text. If the student gave an affirmative answer to the question, it meant that she/he used the reading skill. The results are shown in the following table:

Table 6: Reading skills used by students in reading of the cloze text

Reading skills	Number of students(20)
1. Work on the blanks directly before reading the whole text.	15
2. Read fast for the gist of the text by skipping the blanks before focusing on them.	10
3. Scan the text constantly when finding answers to the blanks.	15
4. Stop and reread the confusing sections.	19
5. Read the first sentence and the last sentence of the text before reading the whole text.	6

6. Predict what would be in the passage when reading the first sentence.	13
7. Ask yourself what you know about the topic of the passage.	6
8. Ask yourself questions about what the text was about after reading the whole text.	13
9. Ask yourself whether you understand the text or not.	15
10. Compare what you have just learned from the reading with what you already knew.	13
11. Picture in your mind the people, events and places that you are reading about.	13
12. Read the text twice or more.	12
13. Find out the main ideas of the passage (main idea of every paragraph).	17
14. Find out the links between the main ideas (links between the paragraphs).	14
15. Skip the unknown words when you were reading the text.	19
16. Use context to try to figure out an unfamiliar word.	17
17. Try to use semantic or phonic analysis to figure out an unfamiliar word.	14
18. Review the paragraphs immediately preceding or following the one in the blank you are doing.	14
19. Review the words preceding or following the blank you are doing constantly.	20

(This combination of reading skills was extracted from Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:170-171 and Gunning, 1998:106-108)

The above table shows how many students used the particular reading skills during their reading of the cloze text.

4.4.3 Reading skills normally used by students

Question 40 dealt with this theme. The objective of this question was to find out what reading skills are normally used by the students when they are reading a text with unknown words or unfamiliar topics. The students were asked to rank the skills they normally used according to their importance. The skills were scored according to their rank of importance, for example, the one ranked in the first place would get the highest score – 6 marks; the one in the second place would get 5 marks, and so on. The students' responses are shown in the table below:

Table 7: Reading skills the students usually use in reading a text

Range	Reading skills	Total scores	Number of students' choice					
			1 (6)	2 (5)	3 (4)	4 (3)	5 (2)	6 (1)
1	Skip unknown words.	53	2	2	3	4	3	1
2	Use context to figure out the unknown words.	51	1	5	5			2
3	Refer to the dictionary.	40	6		1			
4	Read fast for the gist of the text.	35	4	1	1		1	
5	Read the text twice or more.	35	1	1	2	3	3	1
6	Use semantic analyses	23	1		2	2	1	1
7	Review the paragraph(s) immediately preceding or following the one you are reading.	20	1	1	2	2		1
8	Find out the main ideas of the text (main ideas of every paragraph).	20		1	1	2	2	1
9	Review the words immediately preceding or following the ones you are reading.	14		1	1		2	1
10	Use prior knowledge.	12		1	1		1	1
11	Use grammatical analyses.	11			2	1		
12	Find out links between main ideas.	10			1	2		
13	Use knowledge of phrases.	9	1			1		
14	Picture the people, events and places that you are reading about.	7	1					1
15	Predict what would be in the passage when you are reading the first sentence.	6		1				1
16	Use internet.	6	1					
17	Depend on your familiarity of English.	6	1					
18	Scan the text for specific information.	5		1				
19	Ask for help from others.	5		1				
20	Guess the meaning of the unknown words.	5		1				
21	Do more reading practice.	5		1				
22	Read the text aloud.	3				1		
23	Analyse sentence structure.	3					1	1
24	Read the text for details.	4					1	2
25	Write/copy the confusing sentence.	2					1	
26	Depend on the knowledge of words you have had.	2						2

(This combination of reading skills was extracted from Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:170-171 and Gunning, 1998:106-108)

4.5 Data from teachers' questionnaires

Five English teachers in China answered the questionnaire (attached as Appendix D). In terms of teaching experience, three had been teaching for four years, one for eight years, and another for two years. The questionnaire was used to find out what skills the teachers believed ought to be used by the students in reading the cloze text and which of the six skills were the most important ones that would enable the students to finish the cloze.

4.5.1 Skills that ought to be used by the students in reading the cloze text

The first part of the questionnaire dealt with this theme. Teachers were asked to select the skills they thought ought to be used by students from those listed below the question. The objective of this part was to find out what reading skills the teachers believed the students should use when reading the cloze text. The findings are illustrated in the following table:

Table 8: Reading skills to be used by students in reading the cloze text

Reading skills	Number of teachers
1. Work on the blanks directly before reading the whole text.	
2. Read fast for the gist of the text by skipping the blanks before focusing on them.	4
3. Scan the text constantly when finding answers to the blanks.	2
4. Stop and reread the confusing sections.	5
5. Read the first sentence and the last sentence of the text before reading the whole text.	1

6. Predict what would be in the passage when reading the first sentence.	1
7. Ask yourself what you know about the topic of the passage.	2
8. Ask yourself questions about what the text was about after reading the whole text.	2
9. Ask yourself whether you understand the text or not.	3
10. Compare what you have just learned from the reading with what you have already known.	2
11. Picture in your mind the people, events and places that you are reading about.	2
12. Read the text twice or more.	5
13. Find out the main ideas of the passage (main idea of every paragraph).	4
14. Find out the links between the main ideas (links between the paragraphs).	5
15. Skip the unknown words when you were reading the text.	3
16. Use context to try to figure out an unfamiliar word.	4
17. Try to use semantic or phonic analysis to figure out an unfamiliar word.	1
18. Review the paragraphs immediately preceding or following the one featuring a particular blank.	4
19. Constantly review the words immediately preceding or following a particular blank.	4

4.5.2 Other skills the teachers thought were necessary for reading the cloze text

The second part of the questionnaire was aimed at finding out whether there were some other skills the teachers thought were necessary for students' reading of the cloze text. The teachers were asked to write down the skills. Three teachers added more skills that they thought were necessary. Their answers appear in the table below:

Table 9: Some other skills necessary for reading the cloze text

Skills	Number of teachers
Use grammatical rules.	1
Consider genre of the text, analyze text structure, context and language.	1

	Use knowledge of collocation and combination relationships between words.	1

4.5.3 The six most important skills the teachers recommended

The third part of the questionnaire was to find out which skills the teachers felt were most important for the students to complete the cloze. They were asked to select six skills and rank them according to their importance. The skills were scored in the same way as the students were scored. The following table shows the result of the teachers' answers. The skills are arranged according to their total scores.

Table 10: The most important skills the teachers recommended

Range	Skill	Total scores	Number of teachers' choice					
			1 (6)	2 (5)	3 (4)	4 (3)	5 (2)	6 (1)
1	Read fast for the gist of the text by skipping the blanks before focusing on them.	24	4					
2	Find out the main ideas of the passage (main idea of every paragraph).	15	1	1	1			
3	Read the text twice or more.	14		1	1	1		2
4	Ask yourself what you know about the topic of the passage (use prior knowledge related to the topic of this passage).	8		1		1		
5	Use context to try to figure out an unfamiliar word.	7				1	2	
6	Stop and reread the confusing sections.	7			1		1	1
7	Find out the main ideas of the passage (main idea of every paragraph).	6			1		1	
8	Scan the text constantly when finding answers to the blanks.	5			1		1	
9	Ask yourself whether you understand the text or not.	5		1				
10	Review the paragraphs preceding or following the one in which the blank you are dealing with occurs.	5		1				
11	Picture the people, events and places that you are reading about.	2					1	

| 12 | Skip the unknown words when you are reading the text. | 1 | | | | | | 1 |

(This combination of reading skills was extracted from Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:170-171 and Gunning, 1998:106-108)

4.6 Analysis of the data

4.6.1 Students' experiences of cloze

Three major issues emerge from the data:

- The duration and frequency of Chinese students' experiences of cloze tests or cloze exercises;

- The quality of their first experience of a cloze exercise; and

- Their performance on cloze tests or cloze exercises.

Firstly, the data indicates that the participating Chinese students had been exposed to cloze tests or exercises for a considerable length of time – the majority at senior school, but some even at junior school. That is to say, most of the students had at least three years' experience of cloze procedure. Secondly, the data indicates that the students had cloze tests or cloze exercises frequently. The majority had had at least one cloze exercise or cloze test every week, others less frequently, like once a month. So the students who had cloze exercises or cloze tests on a weekly basis had had approximately 35 encounters with cloze per year, while those who had cloze exercises or tests on a monthly basis had had 9 experiences of cloze in a year.

The data indicates that many of the students received clear or detailed introductions to cloze from their teachers the first time they did cloze exercises, so they had some skills in dealing with cloze the first time they worked on it. However, some students received insufficient or even no introduction to cloze the first time they worked on it,

which may have resulted in confusion and inability to complete a cloze exercise. The cloze procedure was difficult for these students and it took them a while to master the skills necessary for dealing with it. The data appears to show that the seven students who received insufficient or no introduction to the cloze procedure from their teachers the first time they worked on it, thought cloze was difficult and disliked it; while the four students who felt cloze was easy and enjoyed doing it, received a detailed introduction to the cloze procedure from their teachers the first time they worked on it.

Surprisingly, there was only one way in which teachers expected students to complete cloze exercises; that is, by completing the exercises individually and quietly without any chance of discussion with others. All twenty students indicated that they did cloze exercises in this way. The data also indicates that most of the students received correct answers and explanations from their teachers after finishing cloze exercises. They could find out whether their skills and understanding of the cloze text was correct or not from their teachers' instructions. However, during these processes, the students had no chance to give reasons for their answers, because the teachers did not provide opportunities for them to do so. They just accepted the reasons provided by the teachers.

In summary, students had plenty of experience with cloze tests or exercises. However, students rarely analysed their skills in the cloze procedures because their teachers did not provide them with the opportunities to do so.

4.6.2 Students' views and opinions on cloze

Although the Chinese students who took part in my study had plenty of experience with cloze tests or exercises, many of them regarded these experiences as painful, and did not want to repeat them. This situation was further confirmed by the finding that the majority of students, that is, fifteen out of the twenty students, did not like cloze

tests or exercises because cloze was 'difficult' for them and they seldom did well in such exercises.

The students' dislike of cloze did not hamper their due recognition of cloze. Many of the students, that is, fifteen students out of the twenty, regarded cloze as a measure of integrative English language competence, which tested students' vocabulary ability, grammatical ability, comprehension ability, etc. The biggest problem the students identified with cloze tests or exercises was the vocabulary problem. The students mentioned that the main difficulty they had in this regard was synonyms. Words with synonymous relationships often occur in options for the same blank. The students said that they were often confused about the differences between the synonyms, as they were not sure which word in the synonym list fitted in the particular context of a cloze text. The second problem for the students was comprehension of the cloze text. The students said that the blanks in cloze texts hampered their understanding of the texts. They were unable to get a coherent understanding of an incomplete text. The third problem for some students was grammar. The students were bothered that they had to consider many factors such as time, tense, aspect, concord, etc. The students also considered unfamiliarity with English as a problem.

4.6.3 The students' use of different levels of information

Data from the students' questionnaire responses shows that, with the exception of two cases, the students seldom used two information sources but just used a single source. As shown in Table 5, clause-level information was the source most frequently used by the students. However, their use of clause-level information was not very successful, as 41% of their attempts to use this information were incorrect. Students often used sentence-level information, which was also less successful, with 43% of their answers being incorrect. The students often tried to guess the answers. In many cases, the students (including the students who got high scores in the cloze test) could not identify the source of information they used for the answers, so they just guessed. Not

many successful attempts at guessing (52%) were made, because "… to answer the test by mere guessing is difficult" (Yamashita, 2003:277). The students did not use text-level information frequently. Despite this, text-level information was the source of information most successfully used by them, with a 77% rate of success. They also seldom used extra-textual information. A number of their attempts (37%) at using extra-textual information were incorrect. A further two students did not provide any information about their answering processes.

I divided the students into two groups according to their scores on the cloze test. The eleven students who obtained scores higher than 60%, were labeled the high score group. The remaining nine students who obtained scores lower than 55% were labeled the low score group. The different types of information used by the high score group and the low score group were compared and the result is shown in Table 11.

Table 11: A comparison of different types of information used by the high score group students and the low score group students

Information level	The high score group			The low score group		
	Total	Correct	Incorrect	Total	Correct	Incorrect
Clause	82 (45%)	56 (29%)	26 (14%)	71 (32%)	34 (15%)	37 (17%)
Sentence	29 (16%)	21 (12%)	7 (4%)	78 (35%)	39 (17%)	39 (17%)
Textual	28 (15%)	24 (13%)	4 (2%)	24 (11%)	16 (7%)	8 (4%)
Extra-textual	5 (3%)	4 (2%)	1 (0.5%)	3 (1%)	1 (0.4%)	2 (0.9%)
Guessing	37 (20%)	27 (15%)	10 (5%)	48 (21%)	17 (8%)	31 (14%)
Missing	2 (1%)	2 (1%)				
Total	182 (100%)	134 (74%)	48 (26%)	224 (100%)	107 (48%)	117 (52%)

As the data above shows, there are differences in using different types of information

between the high score group and the low score group. The low score group students used clause-level information and sentence-level information frequently, but half of their attempts at using these two types of information were incorrect. High score group students also used clause-level and sentence-level information often, but their use of these two types of information was more successful than the low score group students. Low score group students used less textual-information and extra-textual information than high score group students. Both high score group students and low score group students often tried to guess the answers, but high score group students were more successful at guessing the answer than low score group students.

In short, to complete the cloze test, the students preferred to use a single source of lower level information, or they merely guessed. The less successful the student was at using different levels of information, the lower the score was.

4.6.4 Students' use of reading skills during the cloze procedure

On the one hand, the data derived from the cloze test indicates that the students really performed poorly in the cloze test. On the other hand, the students' responses to the questionnaire (shown in Table 6) indicate that they used all of the nineteen reading skills. How is it that they obtained low scores on the cloze test if they used so many reading skills? As discussed in the literature review, comprehension of the cloze text is important for completing a cloze, because it is the basis for filling in the blanks. To gain a good grasp of the comprehension of a text, students have to use reading skills flexibly. When one compares the students' responses with the teachers' recommendation (shown in Table 10), one notes that the students even used the reading skills that teachers did not expect them to use. In the following section the students' problems in using reading skills are discussed.

Firstly, good comprehension of a text requires students' efficient use of a reading pace when they are reading. Questions 21 to 24, Question 35 and Question 38 and 39

examined whether students used different reading paces during the process or not. All of the five teachers agreed that students should not have worked on the blanks directly without reading the whole text. However, a majority of the students, that is, fifteen students out of the twenty, worked on the blanks directly before reading the text. Further investigation showed that almost all the students worked on the blanks directly when they got the paper. In other words, they filled in the blanks before getting to know what the text was about.

However, it is nearly impossible to complete a cloze successfully without knowing the gist of the passage, because students have no basis for filling in the blanks without comprehending what they have read (Gunning, 1998:34). By not knowing the gist of the test passage, the students in my study did not have a good basis for retrieving the words in the blanks. It seems that they did not realize that this problem hampered their performance on the cloze test. They probably thought the information they picked up while they were working on the blanks was enough to help them to comprehend the text. However, they did not know that they were at risk of misinterpreting the writer's original meaning and reading their own meanings into the text. Therefore the possibility for them to fill in the words correctly would have been very low.

My investigation and the students' responses to Question 21 made me doubt the students' affirmation of Question 22. Fifteen students claimed that they worked on the blanks directly without reading the whole text for answering Question 21, while ten students said that they read the text fast to get the gist before working on the blanks for answering Question 22. There were five students who did not realize that they gave affirmative answers to two contradictory questions, or that the answers they gave contradicted each other. These students probably misinterpreted the questions.

Understanding the gist of the text and thinking about a coherent understanding of the text can help students to complete the cloze deletions. While four of the five teachers believed that the students should read fast for the gist of the text before focusing on

filling in the blanks, only ten of the twenty students agreed with this. In other words, only half of the twenty students were concerned with a coherent understanding of the text before they worked on the blanks. At least half of them completed the cloze deletions based on an incomplete and fragmentary understanding of the text.

To get a coherent understanding of the text, students have to read rapidly and fluently, so they need to skip unknown words in the text. While three out of the five teachers expected students to use this skill, nineteen out of the twenty students skipped the unknown words while they were reading the text. The reason for the students regarding this skill as very important and necessary was because they encountered a number of unknown words in the text. I knew this to be the truth, because some students asked me for the meanings of the words 'purchasing', 'hairdryer', 'principles', 'estimates', and so on after they had finished the cloze test. It was clear that almost all the twenty students knew how to deal with unknown words in the text. Their understanding of the text was not hampered by the unknown words.

There seemed to be a mismatch between the students' claim in the interviews and their actual performance in the cloze tests. Seven of the students said in the interviews that one of the biggest problems in their reading of a cloze text was that their understanding of the text was hampered by the blanks in the cloze. If the students could read rapidly and fluently by skipping unknown words, they were supposed to get a global meaning of the text without being hampered by the blanks. There was no evidence to show that the existence of the unknown words was a problem for the students to understand the text.

To get a good comprehension of the text, rereading was necessary. While all of the five teachers felt the students should read the text twice or more, only twelve of the students read the text twice. The teachers obviously regarded this skill as more important than some of the students. It is possible that the twelve students who reread the text felt that their understanding of it was not sufficient enough for completing the

blanks after only one reading. There could be three explanations why the remaining eight students read the text only once. One is that they may have thought that they understood what the text was about after the first reading. However, it is hard to see a foreign language learner making sense of a fairly complex text, which has a number of blanks, after only one reading and without first reading the text rapidly to get the gist. The second explanation is that they may have been in a hurry to complete the blanks, so were not overly concerned about the content of the text, even though they did not understand the text completely. The third explanation could be that, as they knew that the result of this test did not count as part of their studies, they did not treat it as seriously as a formal test.

When confusion or difficulties occur, slowing down the reading pace or even stopping and rereading the confusing section is effective for getting a better understanding of the text. Five of the teachers indicated that stopping and rereading the confusing sections was necessary for comprehending the text, and nineteen of the students actually did so. Both the teachers and the students regarded this skill as necessary during the reading. Fourteen of the students reviewed the paragraph(s) immediately preceding or following the one they were reading and sixteen students reviewed the words preceding or following the ones they were reading. This was a skill four of the teachers expected them to use. There was therefore a very close correlation between teacher expectation and student performance in this regard.

To complete the deletions, the search for specific information needed to be more focused. Fifteen of the students scanned the text constantly when finding answers to the blanks. Only two of the teachers expected them to use this skill. The students clearly exceeded teacher expectation in regard to the use of this skill. In short, the students tended to adjust their pace according to specific parts of the text rather than to the whole text.

Secondly, good comprehension of a text involves adequate reading comprehension

skills. Questions 25 to 34 and Questions 36 to 38 examined whether the students used reading comprehension skills or not. Using pre-reading skills such as activating background knowledge and predicting something about the text can help prepare students for understanding the text. Thirteen of the students predicted what would be in the passage when they read the first sentence, while only one teacher expected them to do so. It seems that many of the students thought this skill was useful for them to understand the text, while the teachers did not feel the same. It means that this skill might not have been necessary for reading this specific text. As Carrell (1983, cited in Murray, 1985:9) states, meaning does not reside in the text but is constructed out of the interaction between a reader's background knowledge and the text. Understanding the text also requires the students to activate their background knowledge, to relate what they read in the text to what they already know. Six of the students said they asked themselves what they knew about the topic, an aspect only two of the teachers thought was important. However, the students who claimed that they had asked themselves what they knew about the topic could not explain what part of their background knowledge they had activated. It seems that their use of background knowledge was not efficient or they could not access the appropriate existing knowledge.

Using while-reading skills helps students to read actively and interactively, so that their comprehension of the text can be more efficient. Thirteen of the students pictured in their minds the people, events and places that they were reading about, while two teachers expected them to do so; more students regarded this skill as important than the teachers did. This skill was regarded as necessary for the students because the topic of this text and the examples the author gave were related to their practical lives. If the students could picture what they were reading about, it would be easier for them to understand the text. In addition, the description of buying a hairdryer in this text was easy to picture. Seventeen of the students tried to use context to figure out an unfamiliar word, a skill four of the teachers thought they should use. The students' use of this skill therefore correlated closely with the teachers' opinion.

Fourteen of the students tried to use semantic or phonic analysis to figure out an unfamiliar word, while only one teacher thought they should use this skill; thus many more students used this skill than the teachers expected. According to the students' responses in the questionnaire, they mainly used this skill to deal with the word 'hairdryer'. The different opinions between the use of this skill by the students and the teachers' expectations occurred because of the different opinions on the word 'hairdryer'. This word was easy and could be recognized at first glance by the teachers because they were more familiar with English than the students. However, it was not so easy for the students to recognize this word at merely a glance, so semantic analysis was necessary to be used. In total, many of the students used while-reading skills properly when they were reading the text.

Post-reading skills help learners check and extend their understanding of the text. Thirteen of the students asked themselves questions about the text after reading the whole text, while two of the teachers thought they ought to do so. The students merely asked themselves questions, but they did not really answer the questions themselves. Or, even if they could not answer their own questions, they did not take further actions for improving their understanding of the text. Fifteen of the students asked themselves whether they understood the text or not, which was what three of the teachers expected them to do. This means that the students could use this skill properly just as the teachers expected. Thirteen of the students compared what they had just learned from the reading with what they already knew, which two teachers expected them to do. As discussed above, the topic of the text and the examples given by the author were related to the students' practical lives, so this skill must have been very useful for the students to understand the text. Many of the students used this skill even though not many teachers regarded it as very important.

Seventeen of the students could find out the main ideas of the passage (main idea of every paragraph), and four of the teachers regarded this skill as important. In line with the expectation of all five teachers, fourteen of the students could find out the links

between the main ideas (links between the paragraphs). The correspondence between the students' use of these two skills and the teachers' expectations indicates that many students could use these two skills for understanding of the text.

In short, most of the while-reading skills and post-reading skills were used successfully by the students, but the students did not really use pre-reading skills during the reading of the cloze text.

My comparison of the six reading skills most popularly used by the students to deal with the cloze and those chosen by the teachers (shown in Table 12), revealed big differences between what students actually used and what teachers thought ought to be used. For example, the teachers thought the skill 'read fast for the gist of the text by skipping the blanks before focusing on them' was the most important one for dealing with the cloze. However, the students did not regard it or use it as one of the most important skills. The students ignored most of the pre-reading skills that prepare them for understanding of the cloze text.

Table 12: A comparison of the six most important reading skills selected by the students and the teachers

Range	Students' choice	Teachers' choice
1	Review the words immediately preceding or following the ones you are reading.	Read fast for the gist of the text by skipping the blanks before focusing on them.
2	Skip the unknown words when you are reading.	Find out the main ideas of the passage (main idea of every paragraph).
3	Stop and reread the confusing sections while you are reading.	Read the text twice or more.
4	Find out the main ideas of the passage (main idea of every paragraph).	Ask yourself what you know about the topic of this passage (use prior knowledge related to the topic of this passage).
5	Try to use context to figure out an unfamiliar words.	Use context to figure out the unfamiliar words.

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6	Work on the blanks directly before reading the whole text / scan the text constantly when you finding answers to the blanks / ask yourself whether you understand the text or not.	Stop and reread the confusing sections.

In summary, the students used different paces and various reading comprehension skills during the process of reading the cloze text, but there were flaws in their reading rates and reading comprehension skills. They ignored the adjustment of reading pace for understanding of the whole text, overused some of the skills such as 'review the words immediately preceding or following the blank you are dealing with', and insufficiently used some of the skills like 'using prior knowledge related to the topic of the text'.

4.6.5 Reading skills normally used by the students

As shown in Table 7, the students used some skills which were not allowed or inconvenient to use in cloze tests, such as 'refer to the dictionary', 'use internet', 'ask help from others', 'read the text aloud', and 'write/copy the confusing sentence'. The comparison of six reading skills most popularly used by the students in the cloze test and in normal reading is shown in Table 13.

Table 13: A comparison of the six reading skills most popularly used by the students in the cloze test and in normal reading

Range	Choice of reading skills in cloze test	Choice of reading skills in normal reading
1	Review the words immediately preceding or following the ones you are reading.	Skip unknown words.
2	Skip the unknown words when you are reading.	Use context to figure out the unknown words.
3	Stop and reread the confusing sections while you are reading.	Refer to the dictionary.
4	Find out the main ideas of the passage (main idea of	Read fast for the

	every paragraph).	gist of the text.
5	Try to use context to figure out an unfamiliar words.	Read the text twice or more.
6	Work on the blanks directly before reading the whole text / scan the text constantly when you are finding answers to the blanks / ask yourself whether you understand the text or not.	Use semantic analyses

As shown in the table above, the students' use of reading skills in reading a normal text was different from the skills used in dealing with a cloze text. Apart from using 'skip unknown words' and 'use context to figure out the meaning of unfamiliar words', and 'refer to the dictionary' which was forbidden in the cloze test, they used 'read the text fast for gist' as one of the most important skills. They recognized that it was necessary to know the gist of the text, which differed from the way they treated a cloze text. They also used the skills 'read the text twice or more' and 'use semantic analyses', which were not regarded as important and were not frequently used in their reading of the cloze text. When reading a normal text the students paid more attention to comprehension of the text than on completing the blanks, so their use of reading skills focused on helping them to get a coherent meaning of the text rather than helping them to figure out the meaning of the local clause or an unfamiliar word.

4.6.6 Other skills to be used by students for reading the cloze text

As shown in Table 9, the teachers recommended three more skills than they thought were necessary for the students' reading of the cloze text. One of the teachers recommended the skill 'Use grammatical rules.' As time, tense, aspect, etc. are expressed differently in English and in Chinese, using grammatical rules can help the students understand the text, especially some complex clauses, better. Although the students were not asked whether they used grammatical rules or not, twelve of the students' responses in the questionnaire revealed that they used grammatical rules to help them complete the blanks. The grammatical rules were mainly used by the

students to deal with the clauses "If you are buying a hairdryer, you might <u>think</u> you are making the <u>best</u> buy if you choose one <u>whose</u> look you like and which is also the cheapest <u>in</u> price." and "Before you buy an expensive <u>item</u>, or a service, do check the price and <u>what</u> is on offer." Both of these two clauses were complex, and it was necessary for the students to use grammatical analysis in order to understand them better. Making clear the relationships between the clauses as well as the functions of different parts of the clause were helpful in completing the blanks here. The students' responses in the questionnaire also revealed that some of them used grammatical analyses in reading a normal text.

One of the teachers also recommended the skill 'Use knowledge of collocation and combination relationships between words.' The students' responses in the questionnaire revealed that they used this skill twenty-four times to deal with the blanks in the cloze. If the students were unfamiliar enough with the collocation and combination relationships between words, this skill was very useful for them to choose the most appropriate words. However, if the students had been familiar with these relationships between words, using this skill would have caused misunderstanding of local parts of the text and confusion in understanding the meaning of phrases, which were collocated or combined by a word with other different words. The students' responses to the questionnaire indicated that they also used "knowledge of phrases" in their reading of normal text. Their use of this skill would have been more efficient in normal reading than in reading a cloze text, because they could have referred to a dictionary when confusions occurred.

One of the teachers recommended the skill 'Consider genre of the text, analyze text structure, context and language' as well. Sometimes, considering what particular purpose a text is being composed for can help learners understand what information is conveyed and how linguistic patterns work in the text, because "… the writer is seen as having certain goals and intentions, certain relationships to his or her readers, and certain information to convey, and the forms of a text are resources used to

accomplish these" (Hyland, 2003:18). However, this skill must have been the one fewest students used in reading of the cloze text, as none of the students mentioned it in their responses to the questionnaire, neither in the reading of the cloze text nor in the reading of normal texts. When the students were reading the cloze text, their teachers seldom asked them to consider the genre of the text and to analyze the text structure; context and language were considered much more important. The students were not used to considering the genre of a text because they were not trained to do so.

4.6.7 An analysis of the cloze text and the possible problems the students experienced with it

The aim of this analysis is to see what difficulties the students had with the cloze text that I provided, and to see whether the difficulties were the same as those that the students claimed they usually had in cloze exercises.

As stated in the literature review, no word is usually omitted either in the first or the last sentence of the passage. As both the first and last sentence in the passage is considered essential for the understanding of the text, it is necessary to keep the first sentence and the last sentence in their original state. However, the last sentence of the cloze text contained a blank, which increased the difficulty of the cloze for these Chinese students.

In the literature review, we noted that there are two options in designing a cloze according to the deletion rate: the random cloze, which deletes every n^{th} word consistently, such as 3rd, 6th, 8th, 12th, etc; and the rational cloze in which a specific type of word is deleted according to linguistic principles, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc. The following table indicates the frequencies and the types of the words that were deleted in the cloze text:

Table 14: The deletion frequencies and the types of the words omitted in the cloze text

Number of the blank	Deletion frequency	Type of word	Number of incorrect attempts by the 20 students
61	2nd	Noun	6
62	11th	Verb	0
63	6th	Preposition	12
64	5th	Adjective	5
65	13th	Verb	7
66	5th	Adjective	9
67	6th	Determiner	16
68	10th	Preposition	13
69	13th	Verb	9
70	8th	Noun	11
71	18th	Verb	16
72	14th	Verb	9
73	8th	Verb	9
74	8th	Noun	9
75	11th	Noun	12
76	6th	Noun	13
77	21st	Noun	3
78	6th	Noun	4
79	9th	Determiner	5
80	7th	Preposition	6

As the above table shows, the cloze text was not designed according to either a fixed deletion frequency or a specific linguistic principle. So the cloze text was neither a random cloze nor a rational cloze. That is to say, it was not a normal cloze but a specially designed cloze that combined different deletion frequencies with the deletion of different types of words. This type of cloze, which has been used a great

deal in China, seems more difficult for second language learners. It is difficult because the blanks can occur in any place and they can be any type of word, making it unpredictable and complex for students who are learning English as a foreign language. In this situation, taking all factors such as word type, function of the word in clause, number, concord, etc. into consideration was especially difficult for the students in filling in the blanks.

In the following section, some of the actual problems my sample of students had in the cloze will be analyzed and discussed. Firstly, the incorrect attempts of the students in choosing answers to each blank were counted, and the result is shown in the fourth column of Table 14. Then, possible reasons for some of the problems are provided and discussed and then compared with the students' answers in the interviews or their responses to the questionnaire. The blanks in which the students made most incorrect attempts were blanks 67 and 71, as sixteen students among the twenty failed in choosing the correct answer for each of the blanks. There are five other blanks in which over half of the twenty students made incorrect attempts.

Blank 67 tested the students' mastery of determiners. The determiner omitted in the blank with the following part of the clause "(whose) look you like" expresses the meaning "the one which you like the look (appearance) of". As the students were not familiar with English, there were some difficulties they faced when completing the blank. Firstly, the word "look" was working as a noun meaning "appearance" in the clause "if you choose one (whose) look you like". The students were quite familiar with the word "look" as a verb meaning, "see" but rarely knew it as a noun meaning 'appearance'. So they might not have understood the clause properly, especially when they did not reread the sentence. Secondly, the words "its", "which", "whose" and "what" in the options for the blank did not make much sense themselves when they were independent of the context. To choose the best answer to the blank, the students must have put them into the context of the clause and sentence and then judged which one fitted best. However, the students would not have known the possessive

relationship between 'one' and 'look' because of their improper understanding of the clause, so they did not consider the possessive determiner 'whose' as the right answer. They would have eliminated 'whose' because they were not familiar with it and selected 'which', the one they were more familiar with. Besides, some of the students might have got an incorrect hint from the word, 'which' in the following dependent clause 'which is also the cheapest (in) price'. They might have thought that the dependent clause, which Blank 67 was in, had the same function as the following dependent clause, so they used "which" in Blank 67 as 'which' in the following dependent clause. Five students' responses to the questionnaire indicated clearly that they selected 'which' because 'which' was used in the following dependent clause. To complete Blank 67, the students had to face several problems such as figuring out the meaning of 'look' in the particular context of the clause, analyzing the function of the word in the blank, and knowing the difference between the words in the options. Lacking knowledge of the language caused them difficulties in completing this blank. However, the students did not acknowledge this.

Blank 71 tested students' mastery of verbs. The four verbs in the options for this blank were not synonyms and they had quite different meanings. It should not have been difficult for the students to tell the differences among them. However, most of the students' attempts to choose the answer for this blank were incorrect. What was the problem for the students? According to the responses the students provided in the questionnaire, thirteen students made their decision for the answer based on the meanings of the sentence and the word. The students translated the sentence before looking at the options for the answer. Then they translated every word of the options into Chinese and put them into the blank to see which one fitted the best in terms of meaning. As a result, their answers were chosen based on Chinese, rather than English idiom. It means the answer was acceptable to the Chinese students when the sentence was translated into Chinese, but might not be acceptable to a native English speaker. This situation may be related to the problems in using grammar skills and unfamiliarity with English, which some of the students claimed in the interviews.

Blank 63 and Blank 68 tested the students' mastery of prepositions. Selecting the right preposition in English is one of the most difficult aspects for the students. As is shown in Table 9, twelve of the twenty students' attempts to choose an answer to Blank 63 were incorrect and thirteen of their attempts were incorrect for Blank 68. Preposition usage is difficult for second language learners to master, because a preposition in itself is meaningless and hard to define in mere words. Prepositions are nearly always combined with other words and can be made up of a million different words. Chinese students usually learn prepositions or preposition structures as isolated items but seldom learn them with patterns in which they normally occur. So it is difficult for the students to tell which preposition (structure) can be used in a certain situation. As for the options for Blank 63, 'add' can combine with every one of them as a verb + preposition structure: 'add up', 'add to', 'add… in' and 'add on'. Every one of the options seemed to be the reasonable answer to the students. In this situation, the students were most likely to choose the one having a combination relationship with 'add', as this was one with which they were familiar. The students' responses in the questionnaire indicated that they chose the answer because they knew the combination relationship between 'add' and that preposition. That is to say, they did not consider the context but just relied on their memory, which allowed them to select the preposition having a combination relationship with the word 'add'. They eliminated the other combinations because they could not remember or they were not sure of their combination relationships with 'add'.

Blank 70, Blank 75 and Blank 76 tested the students' knowledge of nouns. Eleven of the twenty students' attempts at selecting an answer to Blank 70 were incorrect, twelve of their attempts were incorrect in Blank 75, and thirteen of their attempts were incorrect in Blank 76. All the words in the options for each of the three blanks were synonyms. There were three groups of synonyms. Knowing the differences among synonyms is also one of the difficulties experienced by Chinese learners of English, because there is no absolute one to one relationship between English words and Chinese words. Sometimes, two or more English words could have completely the

same meaning in Chinese; or an English word could have several meanings in Chinese. So it was difficult for the students to tell the differences among synonyms especially when they had learnt them as isolated items independent of context. For example, for Blank 76, the four words 'appliance', 'equipment', 'utility' and 'facility' in the options had the same meaning, viz. 'an instrument or device or an useful thing', in Chinese. The students could not tell the differences among them merely according to their Chinese translations, if they had not paid attention to the contexts they usually occur in when they learnt the words. Usually, the students just guessed when they could not tell the difference among synonyms. The students' responses to the questionnaire revealed this situation, with six students guessing the answer to Blank 70, seven doing the same for Blank 75, and six students guessing the answer to Blank 76. The students did not acknowledge their problems with synonyms and prepositions. Instead, they attributed their problems to a lack of vocabulary.

In summary, the actual problems the students had in the cloze test were mainly caused by a lack of proficiency in English, which included insufficient mastery of vocabulary and grammar and unfamiliarity with English. During the interviews, the students also felt that these were their main problems with cloze exercises. However, there was a difference between the actual problems the students had in the cloze test and the problems they claimed they had in the interviews. The results of the cloze test showed that the blanks in the text did not hamper the students' comprehension of the text, although many of them regarded the blanks as one of the major problems during the interviews. It is likely that the students' lack of proficiency in English stemmed from the fact that they were taught vocabulary and grammar as isolated items and rules separate from the contexts in which they could occur.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presented and analysed the data collected through interviews with

students, a test completed by the same students and questionnaires given to teachers. It discussed some of the students' experiences and views on cloze, their performances on cloze, the effects of different types of information and reading skills used by the students during the cloze procedure, and the reading skills normally used by the students. It also included a comparison of the reading skills actually used by the students and those recommended by the teachers.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Cloze procedure involves the skills of thinking, understanding, reading and writing based on the learners' underlying knowledge of reading comprehension and writing subskills such as grammar and sentence construction. It is regarded as a very efficient test for measuring students' integrative competence in English, and has been used in most of the important English tests in China. It is also used as a teaching instrument to help students to improve their reading competence. However, a majority of students perform poorly in cloze tests and they regard it as the most difficult and most unpopular part of the English test. The aim of this study was to find out what particular problems Chinese students have with cloze procedure and to determine whether these problems are associated with an inefficient use of reading strategies. This study focused on a group of twenty Chinese students who were studying at the University of the Western Cape. All twenty students had had plenty of experience with cloze tests in English while studying in China.

5.1 Summary of the findings

This section summarises the findings that were revealed through the interviews with the twenty Chinese students, the cloze test completed by them, the questionnaire provided to the twenty students and five English teachers. It also draws out the implications of the findings with regard to cloze tests focusing particularly on the problems the twenty Chinese students had in completing the cloze test as well as on the reading skills used by the students.

5.1.1 Findings from the students' experiences of the cloze test and their performances on it

Firstly, I found that many of the students really did not enjoy their experiences with cloze tests and exercise because they seldom did well at them and consequently felt frustrated with cloze procedures. As foreign language learners, the students faced problems with various aspects such as lexical and grammatical problems when they were reading a cloze text, and needed to know the skills for dealing with them. The quality of the first exposure to the cloze procedure was very important for the students. A proper introduction, which needed to explain what a cloze test or exercise was, the skills for dealing with it and how to use these skills laid an essential foundation for the students. The students' confidence and performance on cloze tests did not necessarily relate to the duration or frequency or the time they had worked on cloze tests or exercises, but were closely related to the quality of their first exposure to it. The students, who had been given a proper introduction to the cloze procedure by their teachers, usually did better in it because they knew what skills could be used.

The students who did not have proper introduction to the cloze procedure usually lacked confidence in doing such tests or exercises and did not like doing them, because they did not know how to deal with them. Many students were in this situation. They had a concept of what the cloze procedure entailed as they had been introduced to it by their teachers, but they rarely knew what skills to use to deal with a cloze text. Without adequate preparation, it was impossible for them to do well in the cloze procedures.

The second finding from the data is that the students did not improve their skills with cloze exercises and tests despite having had plenty of exposure and experience of them. This situation can be related to the way in which the students did cloze exercises. All of the students always did cloze exercises silently and individually without discussion with others. Their teachers did not provide opportunities for them

to think about their own use of reading skills during the cloze procedure. After the cloze exercises, the teachers seldom encouraged the students to think about whether their use of the skills was effective or not. The students expected the teachers to tell them what the right answers were and what skills should have been used <u>after</u> a cloze exercise. This dependence on the teacher meant that the students could never work out for themselves how they should do a cloze test or exercise.

5.1.2 Findings from the problems the students had with the cloze procedure

These findings were drawn from the questionnaire distributed to the students and the teachers.

Firstly, there were some problems in the use of reading skills by the students. The students failed to adjust their reading speed in order to get the gist of the cloze text, although they could manage this with other types of reading. It does not mean they did not know how to control their reading speed to gain a coherent meaning of the text. They could read rapidly and fluently by skipping unknown words and using context or semantic analysis to figure out difficult words. They just ignored the content of the text or they did not mind whether they understood the text or not before they concentrated on the blanks. They were concerned with parts of the text rather than understanding the whole text. It seems that the students did not first do a quick reading of the text before they worked on the blanks. For them, understanding the phrase closest to a blank was more important than the overall meaning of the text, and their incomplete understanding of the text hampered their performance in the cloze test.

From the comparison of reading skills used by the students and those recommended by the teachers, I found that although the students had mastered all the reading comprehension skills, they did not use them flexibly. Using skills flexibly means selecting and using the skills that are most helpful for understanding the text. It was

not necessary to use all the reading skills in reading the cloze text, because not all of the twenty skills were very useful for this text. However, the students tended to overuse skills such as 'Predict what would be in the passage when reading the first sentence' and 'Review the words immediately preceding or following the blank you are dealing with'. The students also had problems with using some of the reading skills efficiently. For example, they did not activate their prior knowledge successfully although they had related background knowledge. Although they asked themselves questions about the text, they were unable to apply this skill effectively to improve their understanding of the text.

Secondly, the students did not use contextual clues adequately. The comprehension of a cloze text includes intersentential and discourse reading, lower-level (clausal and sentential) and higher-lever (contextual) processing. The students should have used both local grammatical information and extra-text information. However, the students failed to adjust the weight of the information. All of the students, irrespective of their scores, relied heavily on lower-level (clausal and sentential) information and totally ignored higher-level (contextual and extra-textual) information. Furthermore, in many cases, even the high score group students could not identify what information they used. It is possible that they just guessed without using any information or they were not sure what the sources of the information were.

Thirdly, from a comparison of the readings skills used by the students during the cloze procedure with the skills normally used by them, I found that long experience of cloze exercises helped very little to improve the students' use of reading skills in normal reading because the students regard the reading of a cloze text as completely different from the reading of a normal text. When the students were reading the cloze text, they were concerned only with completing the blanks by getting information from the immediate local discourse. Their use of reading skills therefore mainly focused on understanding of the words or clauses but not the coherent meaning of the text. When they were reading a normal text, they were concerned more about the content of the

text, so their use of the reading skills was related to the understanding of the whole text. The most important reading skills normally used by the students were not regarded as important and were rarely used during the reading of the cloze text. So, long experiences of cloze tests and exercises did not actually help improve the students' use of reading strategies.

From the flaws in the students' reading of the cloze text, I found that the students lacked awareness of their own reading processes and reading strategies.

5.1.3 Findings based on the nature of the cloze text

Firstly, even though the cloze procedure is frequently used in China, the type of cloze exercise that combines different deletion frequencies with deletion of different types of words and words deleted in the last sentence is not, in my opinion, suitable for foreign language learners. When the unpredictability of frequency of occurrence and type of omitted words in the text is accompanied by students' own problems such as difficulties in comprehending the text, unfamiliarity with sentence structures, insufficient mastery of grammar and vocabulary, lack of knowledge of English, inadequate mastery of synonyms and prepositions and so on, it is extremely difficult for students to deal with such cloze exercises. The difficulty causes frustration and makes the students lose interest. Perhaps it is wrong to use the cloze procedure to help students improve their reading competence, or the teachers do not realize that more appropriate kinds of cloze can help students improve their reading competence.

Secondly, the aim of learning a language is to use it in communication. Reading is regarded as communication between readers and the writer through the text. However, I found out through this study that reading of cloze texts does not facilitate the students' abilities in English communication; because students assume that the only function of a cloze text is the completion of the blanks instead of improving communication skills in English. Perhaps the students' misunderstanding comes from

the inappropriate use of cloze exercises by their teachers, who frequently use them to help students prepare for tests instead of using them as instruments that can help students improve their reading abilities.

5.2 Limitations

There were a number of limitations in this study and they must be acknowledged. Firstly, with a small sample, the data collected did not represent all the Chinese students at the University of the Western Cape. As a result the findings cannot be generalised to the broader population of Chinese students at this university. Secondly, the techniques chosen to collect the data may not have been sufficient to provide an in-depth understanding of the difficulties Chinese students have with cloze tests. For example, techniques like classroom observation, which would have assisted in establishing the students' difficulties in reading cloze texts, were not used. Thirdly, one cloze test might not fully reflect the performances of the students in other cloze procedures.

5.3 Conclusion and recommendations

The findings of this study reveal that the problems the sample population of students had with the cloze test, were to some extent associated with their inefficient use of reading skills. To perform better in cloze tests, the students must learn to use reading strategies more effectively. Mastering reading skills does not, however, mean that the students can employ them effectively. Firstly, self-monitoring and awareness reading processes and strategies must be promoted. As Dreyer (1998:19) states, learners' awareness of their own reading processes plays a significant role in improving reading comprehension. They must be aware of the skills they currently use, monitor

strategies for effective reading, weed out ineffective strategies and control the strategies consciously. Secondly, students must feel responsible for their own learning and take positive steps to improve their own use of reading skills in dealing with cloze tests. Chinese students tend to rely too much on their teachers, so they seldom think about the problems they have with cloze tests and exercises. If they know what problems they have, they rarely take a positive step to solve these problems. They get used to waiting for their teachers to point out the problems they have and to tell them how to improve. The students must pay more attention to their own use of the strategies and try to find out the problems in their using of the strategies but not just waiting for the instructions from their teachers, and then take more active steps to improve their own use of the reading strategies.

However, teachers also need to reconsider the ways in which they deal with cloze texts. Teachers as facilitators must help students to become more aware of their own reading strategies instead of just accepting the strategies of the teachers. They should also help their students to improve their own strategies. Teachers should encourage the students and create opportunities for them to think about their own use of reading skills during the cloze procedures. Discussion is a good way for the students to think about their own use of reading strategies, because they have to provide some reasons for their use of the reading skills. They need opportunities and time to think about their reading processes. Moreover, the use of cloze procedure as a test measuring global English proficiency and as a teaching instrument helping students to improve their reading competence needs to be reconsidered by the teachers and those who compile the tests. Although it has been used in China for many years, it has proven to be too difficult for foreign language learners and tends to cause frustration among them. The teachers must improve the cloze texts they use, as well as their instruction strategies.

In conclusion, I would like to recommend that more research should be done on topics such as reading strategy instruction in order to facilitate the effective use of reading

skills during a cloze test, the use of cloze exercises that help students develop their reading competence, and on developing cloze tests suitable for foreign language learners.

This study has focused on some problems students have in using reading strategies during cloze tests. I hope that it will contribute to the more effective use and design of cloze tests and exercises to improve students' English communicative ability. Throughout the study, it emerged that students need to make a positive effort to improve their English communicative ability through cloze exercises. Teachers also need to assist their students by using cloze exercises properly and efficiently, and test or exercise designers need to be careful about their choice of the type, content and the level of difficulty of the cloze test.

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Appendix A   **Interview Questions**

1. Did you have any exposure to cloze tests or cloze exercises?

2. How often did you have a cloze exercise or a cloze test (approximately)?

3. Can you remember the first time you worked with cloze? Do you think you got a clear introduction of cloze?

4. How did you feel about cloze tests or cloze exercises?

5. What abilities listed below do you think cloze procedure tests?

     - Reading comprehension

     - Grammar skills

     - Vocabulary skills

     - All of the above

6. What did you usually do during cloze exercises?

     - Completed the deletions individually and silently without any feedback.

     - Discussed with a partner or in a group.

7. What did you usually do after cloze exercises?

     - Received the correct answers without explanations.

     - Received correct answers and some explanations from teachers.

     - Received detailed explanations with instruction of reading comprehension strategies of the cloze passages.

8. Did your have any problems in cloze tests? What were the problems?

Part IV Cloze (15 minutes)

Directions: There are 20 blanks in the following passage. For each blank there are four choices marked A), B), C) and D) on the paper. You should choose the ONE that best fits into the passage.

Wise buying is a positive way in which you can make your money go further. The 61 to go about purchasing an article or a service can actually 62 you money or can add 63 the cost.

Take the 64 example of a hairdryer. If you are buying a hairdryer, you might 65 you are making the 66 buy if you choose one 67 look you like and which is also the cheapest 68 price. But when you get it home you may find that it 69 twice as long as a more expensive 70 to dry your hair. The cost of the electricity plus the cost of your time could well 71 your hairdryer the most expensive one of all. So what principles should you 72 when you go out shopping?

If you 73 your home, your car or any valuable 74 in excellent condition, you'll be saving money in the long 75. Before you buy a new 76 , talk to someone who owns one. If you can use it or borrow it to check it suits your particular 77. Before you buy an expensive 78, or a service, do check the price and 79 is on offer. If possible, choose 80 three items or three estimates.

61. (   )   A) form   B) fashion   C) way   D) method

62. (   )   A) save   B) preserve   C)in   D)similar

63. (   )   A) up   B) to   C) in   D) on

64. (   )   A) easy   B) single   C) simple   D) similar

65. (   )   A) convince   B) accept   C) examine   D) think

66. (   )   A) proper   B) best   C) reasonable   D) most

67. (   )   A) its   B) which   C) whose   D) what

68. (   )   A) for   B) with   C) in   D) on

69. (   )   A) spends   B) takes   C) lasts   D) consumes

70. (   )   A) mode   B) copy   C) sample   D)model

71. (   )   A) cause   B) make   C) leave   D) prove

72. (   )   A) adopt   B) lay   C) stick   D) adapt

73. (   )   A) reserve   B) decorate   C) store   D) keep

74. (   )   A) products   B) possession   C) material   D) ownership

75. (   )   A) run   B) interval   C) period   D) time

76. (   )   A) appliance   B) equipment   C) utility   D) facility

77. (   )   A) function   B) purpose   C) goal   D) task

78. (   )   A) component   B) element   C) item   D) particle

79. (   )   A) what   B) which   C) that   D) this

80. (   )   A) of   B) in   C) by   D) from

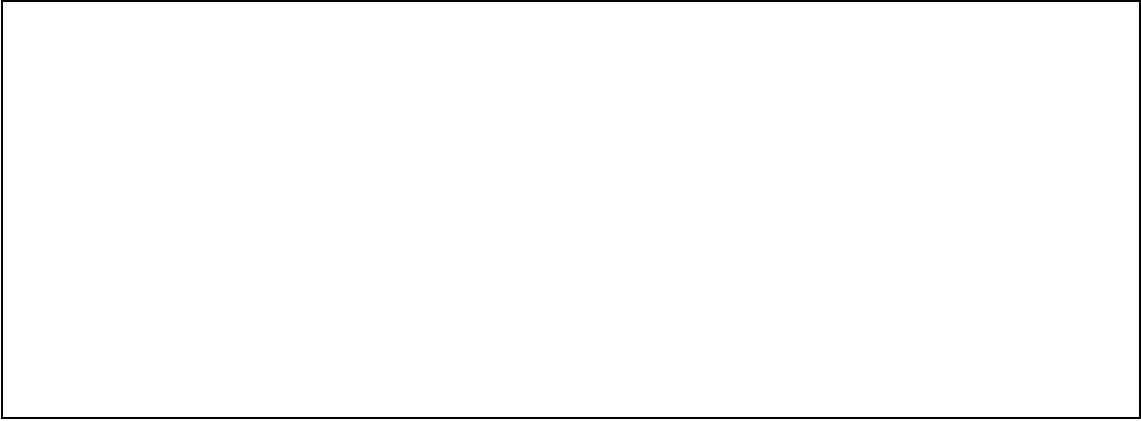(Adapted from The College English Test Band 4 <CET-4>, January 8, 2005.
http://www.chinacet.cn/ ShowArticle2.asp?ArticleID=492&ArticlePage=4)

Appendix C **Questionnaire for students**

Name _____   Student No _____

1. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 61?
2. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 62?
3. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 63?
4. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 64?
5. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 65?
6. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 66?
7. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 67?
8. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 68?
9. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 69?
10. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 70?
11. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 71?
12. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 72?

13. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 73?
14. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 74?
15. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 75?
16. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 76?
17. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 77?
18. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 78?
19. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 79?
20. What were you thinking about the answer to blank 80?
21. Did you work on the blanks directly before reading the whole text?
22. Did you read fast for the gist of the text by skipping the blanks before focusing on them?
23. Did you scan the text constantly while finding answers to the blanks?
24. Did you stop and reread the confusing sections while you were reading?
25. Did you read the first sentence of every paragraph before you read the whole text?
26. Could you predict what would be in the passage while you were reading the first sentence?

27. Did you ask yourself what you knew about the topic of this passage? If you did, what did you think of?
28. Did you ask yourself questions about what the text was about after reading the whole text?
29. Did you ask yourself whether you understood the text or not?
30. Did you compare the contents of the text with what you already knew?
31. Did you picture in your mind the people, events and places that you were reading about?
32. Did you read the text twice or more?
33. Could you work out the main ideas of the passage (main idea of every paragraph)?
34. Could you work out the links between the main ideas (links between the paragraphs)?
35. Did you skip the unknown words while you were reading the text?
36. Did you use context to try to figure out an unfamiliar word?
37. Did you try to use semantic or phonic analysis to figure out an unfamiliar word?
38. Did you review the paragraph(s) immediately preceding or following the paragraph in which a particular blank appears?
39. Did you review the words immediately preceding or following the blank constantly to work out an answer?
40. What are the skills you usually use when you read a text with unknown words or an unfamiliar topic? Select six from the skills listed above (or add other skills you feel are necessary) and rank them according to their importance.

(This combination of reading skills was extracted from Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:170-171 and Gunning, 1998:106-108)

Appendix D   **Questionnaire for teachers**

Name _____   Years of teaching _____

School of teaching _____

Teaching qualification _____

Postal address _____

_____

Which skills listed below do you think the students should use during the reading of the cloze text? Put a tick in the brackets.

- (   )   Work on the blanks directly before reading the whole text.

- (   )   Read fast for the gist of the text by skipping the blanks before focusing on them.

- (   )   Scan the text constantly when finding answers to the blanks.

- (   )   Stop and reread the confusing sections.

- (   )   Read the first sentence and the last sentence of the text before reading the whole text.

- (   )   Predict what would be in the passage when reading the first sentence.

- (   )   Use prior knowledge related to the topic of this passage.

- (   )   Ask himself/herself questions about what the text is about after reading the whole text.

- (   )   Ask himself/herself whether he/she understand or not.

- (   )   Compare what he/she has just learned from the reading with what he/she already knew.

- (   )   Picture the people, events and places that he/she is reading about.

- (   )   Read the text twice or more.

- (   )   Find the main ideas of the passage (main idea o every paragraph).

- (   )   Find out the links between the main ideas (links between the paragraphs).

- (   )   Skip the unknown words when reading the text.

- (   )   Use context to figure out the unfamiliar words.

- (   )   Use the phonic or semantic analysis to figure out the unfamiliar words.

- (   )   Review the paragraph(s) immediately preceding or following the one in the blank you are doing.

- (   )   Review the words immediately preceding or following the blank.

Some other skills you think are necessary:

- _____

- _____

- _____

- _____

Rank the six most important skills according to their importance.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

(This combination of reading skills was extracted from Kilfoil & Van der Walt, 1997:170-171 and Gunning, 1998:106-108)

Appendix E **Extracts from interviews with students**

Interview 1:
S1: Student 1
G: Interviewer

G: Did you have any exposure to cloze tests or cloze exercises?
S1: Yes, I did.
G: How often did you have a cloze exercise or a cloze test?
S1: You mean when I was at school?
G: Yes.
S1: Well, about once in a week. Yes, we had an English exam every week and a cloze was usually one part of the exam.
G: Can you remember the first time you worked with cloze? Do you think you got a clear introduction of cloze?
S1: Yes, I can remember. I got a clear introduction of cloze from my teacher. She told us what a cloze is and how to complete a cloze test. Clear and brief.
G: How did you feel about cloze?
S1: I think cloze is a little bit easier than reading comprehension test. However, it is difficult to some extent.
G: What abilities do you think cloze procedure test? Reading comprehension, grammar skills, or vocabulary skills?
S1: I think cloze procedure tests reading comprehension, grammar skills and vocabulary skills.
G: What did you usually do during cloze exercises? Completed the deletions individually and silently or discussed with a partner or in a group?
S1: We did cloze exercises individually and silently. I didn't have chance to discuss with others.
G: What did you usually do after cloze exercises? Did you receive correct answers without explanations from teacher or receive correct answers with some explanations, or receive detailed explanations with instruction of reading comprehension strategies of the cloze passage?
S1: I often received detailed explanations with instruction of reading comprehension strategies of the cloze passages.
G: Did you have any problems with cloze tests? What were the problems?
S1: Yes, I had problems with cloze tests. The biggest problem is the unfamiliar words in the passage. They hamper my comprehension of the text. The unfamiliar words in the options also make me confused and hesitating for answers.

Interview 2
S2: Student 2
G: Interviewer

G: Did you have any exposure to cloze tests or cloze exercises?

S2: Yes.

G: When did you work with them and how often?

S2: When I was in middle school. About once or twice in a week we had a cloze exercise. Sometimes we had an exam, which included a cloze.

G: Can you remember the first time you worked with cloze? Do you think you get a clear introduction?

S2: Yes I got a clear introduction of cloze from my teacher, but the introduction was not detailed enough.

G: How did you feel about cloze tests or cloze exercises?

S2: Cloze is difficult, because the context that helps understand the text is so limited.

G: What abilities do you think cloze procedure test? Reading comprehension, vocabulary skills or grammar skills?
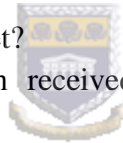
S2: All of them.

G: What did you usually do during cloze exercises?

S2: We always did cloze exercises individually. After that, my teacher would give feedbacks to us.

G: What kind of feedbacks did you get?

S2: After cloze exercises we often received correct answers and some simple explanations.

G: Did you have any problems with cloze tests?

S2: Yes, I had.

G: What kind of problems did you have?

S2: The first problem I have in cloze tests is the unfamiliar words, because the unfamiliar words make comprehension of the text more difficult and I didn't know what the text is about. Another problem is the grammars. Sometimes, the blanks require you fill in the correct form of verbs or nouns etc, I always struggled with this kind of works.