

## The Effect of Text Organization on the Performance of EFL Learners on C-Test

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### **Abstract**

Many studies have been done regarding cloze test and its variations. The present study is carried out to see the effect of text format on the performance of EFL students on C-test. The participants were 130 EFL students. To have a homogeneous group, they were given Oxford Placement Test (Allen, 1985) Test 1 B 1. Based on their scores on the proficiency test, 42 students were chosen from among them. The group was presented C-test with two versions: scrambled and unscrambled. Later, the statistical procedures were carried out. To answer the questions raised, descriptive statistics and a t-test was run. The results showed significant differences between the performances of the learners on two versions. It reveals that not only the text format but also the test format has an effect on the testees' performance. It also states the fact that the scrambledness of the text impinges upon the testees' performance.

**Keywords:** text organization, EFL learners' performance, C-Test.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Testing is an important part of language learning and teaching. The importance of testing in any language learning and teaching experience has been revealed by many studies. Of special importance are the tests that demand the testees' knowledge in different areas of language (Farhady, Jafarpoor, and Birjandi, 1994). If different skills are tested at the same time, then the test is integrative. According to (Farhady et al., 1994) integrative tests attempt to measure the actual aspects of activities that one must usually perform in using language. Such tests have been proposed as superior measures of language testing. Dictation, composition writing, oral interview, and cloze tests are examples of integrative tests. Fotos (1991) reported that it has theoretically been claimed that the cloze test measures advanced skills and global proficiency because it relates with dictation, reading test, essay writing, and standardized proficiency tests. C-test which is a modification of the cloze test is what this study is concerned with. Two formats of the aforementioned test are under investigation here:

scrambled and unscrambled. Hinofotis (1987 cited in Fotos, 1991) affirms that the term cloze is related to the concept of “closure” in Gestalt psychology. This concept is concerned with the ability to perceive incomplete patterns as complete wholes. According to Farhady et al. (1994: 278) the word Gestalt “emphasizes the notion that properties of the whole influence the way in which the parts are perceived; that is why this theory is sometimes referred to as the theory of “the whole”. As Taylor (1953) states the cloze test is a piece of prose in which every nth word has been deleted (the number is usually 5 to 10). Practically, tests with every 5<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> word deleted have shown greater superiority. It is also mentioned that cloze tests with every 7<sup>th</sup> word deleted are known as standard cloze tests. The testees complete the test by replacing the missing words or supplying suitable equivalents. According to Oller and Conrad (1971) all one must do is to prepare a cloze test is to:

1. Select a passage of prose of suitable difficulty, definable in terms of population and its language objectives of approximately 250 to 500 words in length, and
2. Delete every nth word.

It is worth mentioning that to provide the testees with more contexts, the first and the last sentences of the passage remain unutilated. And as Davic (2014) asserts, understanding a few words in a sentence can help us figure out the next one.

#### *A. C-Test*

According to Heidari Soureshjani (2012), it is claimed that the C-test has some advantages over the cloze test because regarding the variety of passages, a better sampling of content areas, styles, genres and certain vocabulary items can be covered. Also a more representative sample of all language elements can be considered. And since it is every second word which is removed; scoring is easy and objective because there is usually only one correct response. Unlike cloze tests, learners enjoy doing C-tests, either as a classroom task or as a more formal test, which seem to have a beneficial backwash effect on learners. He knows it as a means of general proficiency test. The ease of making C-test as a modification of cloze test is also claimed by Farhady et al., (1994) where one chooses a passage of suitable length and, starting with the second sentence, deletes the second half of every other word. For words with odd number of letters one deletes half of the word plus one letter, ignoring one-letter words such as “I” and “a” and counting from the next. According to Klein-Braley (1997: 63) the C in the name C-test was chosen as an abbreviation of the word “Cloze” in order to indicate the relationship between the two test procedures. Dornyei & Katana (1992) report that C-test is a highly integrative test which measures global language proficiency.

#### *B. The Effect of Text Format*

According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), text is a semantic unit, a unit of meaning not of form. As they mention text is any passage, spoken or written, of any length that forms a unified whole. It is a unit of language in use. There is an element in the text that organizes it as a meaningful unit. And according to Richards, Platt, and Platt (1992), the underlying

structure that accounts for the organization of a text is called scheme or macrostructure. A text in which the underlying scheme or macrostructure is used is coherent. According to Brown and Yule (1983), the idea that a sentence can be understood without considering the text has been questioned.

Richards et al., (1992) stated that full understanding of a text is often impossible without reference to the context in which it is used. To make it clear, cohesion is separately explained. According to Widdowson (1990), the ties or connections within a text are called cohesion. According to Yule (1996), the 'connectedness' present in a text may only be the connection between words, while another factor may help the text to be interpreted, and that is coherence. Chastain (1988) defined coherence as a product of language and characteristic of the minds' organization of reality; it is the logical organization of the peoples' ability to understand each other. Many writers have proved the effect of coherence on one's comprehension. This notion has been stated by McNamara, Kintsch, Songer & Kintsch (2009), and Foltz, Kintsch, and Landauer (1998)

In the present study, a modification of the cloze test, C-test, with two formats (scrambled and unscrambled) is considered. Some studies have been done on the effect of text format on the testees' performance. According to Kobayashi (2014), text organization and test format have a significant impact on the students' performance. Laesch and Kleeck (1987) say that the cloze procedure includes the deletion of every nth word from a passage. This makes the testees rely on their knowledge of underlying linguistic rules and also to get the meaning of the passage to fill in the blanks. This shows the role of coherence in understanding a text. Klein-Braley (1997) affirms that the language operations necessary for restoring damaged texts should be related to the learners' competence. Knowing a language involves knowing the items that make up a language, and it also involves being able to supply the items when they are missing or being able to do without them. In another study done by Oller (1973), it was concluded that if the testee is familiar with the text of a cloze passage, he or she will perform better. Sciarone and Schoorl (1989) affirmed that the performance on a cloze test varies significantly with the choice of text on which the test is based.

Fotos (1991) states that cloze test requires the testees to rely upon organizational constraints to fill in the blanks and infer meaning. Bensoussan and Ramraz (1984) reported that the choice of the text may be more important than the format by which it is tested. While in the study done by Chichara, Oller, and Charvezoller (1977) to see the effect of on intact & scrambled texts on the testees' performance the results state significant difference, that is to say, that the students will answer better on intact coherent text. Thus, the effectiveness of imagery formation was compared to the effectiveness of rote learning. It was reported that the logical-sequence group performed better than scrambled-sequenced group. It was concluded that imagery formation can play an important role in developing reading comprehension. It is also supported by McKeown et al. (1990). In a research done by Taylor & Samuels (1983), elementary school students read and recalled normal and scrambled versions of texts. The result indicates that students aware of structure recalled significantly more of normal passage than that of the scrambled one. In the study done by Yamada (1979), thirty-two EFL learners were tested regarding scrambled and sequential cloze test, which differed only in the

existence of inter-sentential cohesion. First, the scrambled cloze test was given and then the sequential cloze test was given. After the test, the students reported that until they were given the sequential-type cloze test, they did not notice that the sentences of the scrambled-type cloze test could be arranged to form connected narratives. The present study is carried out to see if the scrambledness of sentences (incoherence) affects the testees' answering the C-test.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### *A. Cloze Test*

Brown (1993) affirms that the cloze procedure first appeared in 1953 when Wilson Taylor used it as a device for approximating the readability level of written materials. According to Oller (1973) cloze tests are better indicators of the readability of prose than any of the formulas yet devised. It also appears to be a useful measure of reading comprehension. He adds that data from a wide variety of sources are cited in support of the cloze technique as a global measure of language proficiency. According to Brown (1994) cloze tests require knowledge of vocabulary, grammatical structure, and discourse structure, reading skills and strategies, and internalized 'expectancy' grammar (that enables one to predict an item that will come next in a sequence). So, they are good measures of overall proficiency. The same result was stated by Gafen (1979 cited in Nowroozzadeh, 2000). It is also mentioned by Fotos (1991) that cloze tests have the potential for being useful tools of integrative language assessment in EFL situations. Alderson (1980) believes that the cloze procedure is merely a technique for producing tests like any other techniques. However, he adds that with different populations and different languages findings might conceivably be different. Heilman (1983) mentions that cloze procedure has been suggested as a possible solution to the problem of placement testing, since it is easily prepared, easily scored, and appears to be a valid measure of language proficiency. When the testees answer, they will be given scores according to how well the words guessed match the original words or whether or not they make sense Mousavi (1997).

### *B. Cloze Test and Validity*

According to Brown (1993) the cloze technique looks somehow magical in the ways it creates well-centered, reliable, and valid tests of overall ESL proficiency. According to Oller (1973) many studies have supported the utility and validity of cloze procedure for measuring various aspects of language usage. The reliability and validity of cloze tests are also confirmed by Brown (1980). In the study done by Laesch and Kleeck (1987) it is stated that the cloze test as a kind of integrative test has greater face validity for measuring academic linguistic readiness.

### *C. Alternate Forms of Cloze Test*

Cloze test and its variations appear to be useful in testing. Madsen (1983) mentions three forms as variations of the standard cloze test 1. M-C cloze test. 2. Selected deletion

cloze test. 3. Inflectional cloze test (which is another version of C-test). From among them C-test is what this study focuses on.

### **1. C-test**

According to Jafarpur (1995) some writers like Alderson (1980), and Brown (1993) questioned the validity of the cloze procedure, so the criticisms raised against the cloze procedure pushed the testing experts to start a new movement. This new movement that has emerged for assessing comprehension of more specific linguistic elements in a text is known as C-test. This procedure in the realm of testing is intended to retain the positive aspects and to account for all the drawbacks that have been found with the cloze procedure. Clearly (1988) affirms that C-test is an adaptation of the cloze requiring word completion which begins at the second sentence, the second half of every other word is deleted, until the required number of deletions is obtained. A C-test should contain at least 100 items, spread over four or five short, thematically distinctive texts. This idea is supported by Klein-Braley and Raatz (1984; 1985). Clearly (1988) tested the change of deletions in C-test. In his study he attempted to address the problem of poor discrimination by means of an experimental C-test variant in which grammatically unmarked items were deleted to the left rather than right. It was concluded that C-test and other testing techniques which have proved effective at intermediate and advanced levels may be less suitable for lower levels. He further concluded that C-tests are as much tests of general achievement as of general proficiency. On the other hand, Klein-Braley (1985) presented the theory of language proficiency and discussed the defects of the classical cloze performance as a measure of language proficiency. Instead, she gave an example of C-test and claimed that C-test was empirically a valid measure of language proficiency. In another study done by Klein-Braley (1997) it was concluded that C-tests as placement measures are highly reliable, and institutionally valid in terms of subsequent performance after placement. She added that There are critics who believe that not enough is yet known about C-test processing and what these tests actually in terms of psycholinguistic completion strategies test. Having read the result of many studies, further research seems necessary to see the effect of text format on the testees' performance on C-test.

## **III. METHODOLOGY**

This part includes information about the participants, their numbers, educational status, instrumentation, administration procedures, scoring procedures, statistical procedures, and the result.

### *A. Participants*

The participants were 130 Iranian advanced students from Shiraz Navid Institute studying English as a foreign language 35 males and 95 females. Based on their scores on the

Oxford Placement Test (Allen, 1985) used as a pretest. Since the study was not gender bound, it was not important how many males or females we had in each group. Later, the scores were arranged in an ascending order. Two extreme points were observed, there were some very high, and some low scores. The mean was 29.07 and standard deviation was 4.33. Having 1 SD below the mean and 1 SD above the mean, the suitable range was found to be 24 to 33. Then the lower and higher scores were excluded. This way a homogeneous group was selected. To be sure about the equality of the means of the two groups, an independent t-test was counted on the obtained data.

**Table 1: The pre-test statistics**

	Mean	SD	t-value	Sig
Group 1	29.13	2.210	0.195	0.84
Group 2	29.04	2.214		

Since the t-value was lower than the critical value, the result stated that there was no significant difference between the two means. So, the two groups were homogeneous.

*B. Instrumentation*

The materials were 1. Oxford Placement Test (Allen, 1985) 2. Scrambled and unscrambled C-test which are explained and presented below.

**1. Pretest**

The Oxford Placement Test Allen (1985) Test 1 B1 with 50 items having three choices including one correct answer and two distractors served as the pretest.

**1.1. C-test**

To make unscrambled or sequential C-test, a text was chosen which was used by Nowroozadeh (2000). To provide the students with enough contexts the first three sentences were left intact. From the fourth sentence the second part of every other word was deleted. For the words with odd numbers, half of the word plus one was deleted. Words like ‘I’, and ‘a’ were ignored. The test contained 100 items with the last sentence left unchanged. This made the sequential C-test. In order to make the scrambled C-test, the sentences were disordered randomly. Again, the first three sentences were kept unchanged. This was the scrambled C-test. It is worth mentioning that the testees were asked about their ideas regarding the tests they were given.

### 1.2. Scoring Procedure

The scoring procedure for the Oxford Placement Test was very easy. Each correct response was given a point and their scores were out of 50. The C-tests were very time consuming to correct, though. The exact word method was used to correct the C-tests. The misspelling or bad hand-writing were ignored to the extent that the word was recognizable for the one who wanted to correct the papers.

### C. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed via a number of statistical procedures. The following steps were followed to analyze the data. First, the descriptive statistics of the data obtained from the placement test were computed. According to their scores on the Oxford Placement Test (Allen, 1985), two groups were chosen. To be sure about the equality of the two groups regarding their knowledge of English, the means of the groups drawn from the population were compared via independent T-test to see if the difference between the two means was significant. Third, the descriptive statistics were calculated for each test i.e. scrambled and unscrambled C-test. Forth, to see how much the text format affected the testees' performance the means of the scrambled and unscrambled C-test were compared via paired t-test.

## III. RESULTS

As was mentioned before, the total participants in this investigation were 130 advanced students. From among them 84 students were chosen who were divided into two equal groups of 42. Both groups answered the scrambled version of the test. To see the effect of text format on the testees' performance, the Mean and standard deviation were calculated. Later, The Means and standard deviations of the scores obtained from scrambled and unscrambled C-test were computed through descriptive statistics. Later, to see if the difference between the two Means obtained was significant the paired t-test was used to compare the two means.

**Table 2: The descriptive statistics and t-test for scrambled and unscrambled C-test**

	Mean	S.D	t-value	df	sig
Scrambled C-test	83.71	11.20	-3.73	41	.000
Unscrambled C-test	89	8.45			

### III. CONCLUSION

To carry out this study, 84 students were chosen according to their scores on a pretest. Their scores were arranged from the highest to the lowest. Then, the scores were distributed into two groups of 42. According to the result of t-test used to compare the two means, the two groups were homogeneous. The result stated the fact that, since the t-value was not above the critical value, there was no significant difference between the two means. It was concluded that the two groups were homogeneous. First, the students performed on the scrambled version of the test and later, they were given the unscrambled C-test. The means obtained from the scrambled and unscrambled C-tests were compared through paired t-test. The results are shown in Table 4. 2. The t-value obtained was higher than the critical value so, the difference between the two means was significant at.000 level of significance. It was concluded that the testees did better on the unscrambled C-test than the scrambled C-test. It was also found that the text format or text organization has a direct effect on the testees' performance.

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