STRATEGY USE AND THE CONSTRUCT OF C-TESTS
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Research question: What knowledge do upper-intermediate level students activate while solving a C-test?

Research method

Three C-tests from previously used exams with good reliability values
C-test: every second half of every second word is deleted

An example for the C-test
Ironically the loss of genetic diversity accelerated with the green revolution of the 1960s. Back th__________(1), with t__________(2) best inten__________(3), scientists deve__________(4) new mir__________(5) seeds b__________(6) carefully crossb__________(7) plants t__________(8) increase fo__________(9) production - mos__________(10) rice a__________(11) wheat – i__________(12) poor nat__________(13). The n__________(16) seed resi__________(17) to ins__________(18) and dieu__________(19) yielded mil__________(20) of additional tons of grain a year.

10 participants (1 male, 9 female): English majors at a Hungarian university – all upper-intermediate learners
Procedures: Students solve the task while thinking aloud
Analysis: identifying the strategies students use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lexical strategies</th>
<th>searching the mental lexicon and activating lexical entries that fit into the text</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Syntactic strategies</td>
<td>using the knowledge of relationships among sentence components including word class information, often signalled by word order (based on Paribakht and Wesche, 1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Morphological strategies</td>
<td>using knowledge of L2 word derivations and of grammatical inflections (based on Paribakht and Wesche, 1999)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Textual strategies</td>
<td>using information from beyond the sentence boundaries and knowledge of cohesive devices (based on Paribakht and Wesche, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using background knowledge</td>
<td>using knowledge inferred from the theme and topic of the text (based on Paribakht and Wesche, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation</td>
<td>uttering the missing word in the L1 in an effort to recall the English equivalent, or translating the L2 solution into L1 for self-check and evaluation</td>
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Results

Figure 1. The mean number of strategies used by the participants

Figure 2. The comparison of reliable and unreliable items in terms of number of strategies used

Discussion

The results in Figure 1 suggest that the C-tests used in this study measure the following components of communicative competence (Bachman & Palmer, 1996):
- grammatical competence: knowledge of lexical items and syntactic structures
- textual competence: ability to use of contextual and cohesive clues.

The results in Figure 2 indicate that participants employed significantly more lexical, syntactic, contextual and translation strategies, and they also relied on background knowledge more frequently when responding to reliable items (p<0.05). Students gave automatic answers more frequently in the case of unreliable items than to reliable items. No such difference was found in the case of morphological strategies.

Conclusion

With the help of the C-tests under investigation English majors' knowledge of lexis, phrasal-level syntax and discourse competence can be assessed, but relatively little information can be gained about the knowledge of morphology.

References