

On What Rational Cloze Tests Can Measure: A Revisit Applying Confirmatory Factor Analysis

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In response to the demand for quality tests that are easy to construct and in view of the cohesive and coherent competence that is important to reading comprehension and writing development, the present study was motivated and conducted, in the hope that its results could prove informative as to whether easily constructed rational cloze tests could be customized for classroom language teachers' testing objectives with high reliability and construct validity. Employing the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), the current study aimed to investigate whether additional evidence can be obtained to support Bachman's (1982) claim that the rational cloze test can be designed by classroom language teachers to measure an array of reading skills as intended, specifically including cohesive and coherent competence. In this study were a total of 713 participants, all college students, taking the general English courses at four universities in northern Taiwan. The participants' dichotomously-scored responses to a rational cloze test constructed by Bachman (1985) were analyzed through the CFA on the item-by-item level in the program Mplus, which provides a convenient mechanism to perform the CFA of dichotomous responses. The present study, partly following Bachman (1982), tested the general trait model, the four specific traits model, and the general plus specific traits model—the last comprising a general factor plus the four specific traits. The testing results of the present study have lent support to the hypothesized general plus specific traits model, stating that rational cloze tests can be designed to tap distinct and related language competence, such as syntactic competence, the cohesive and coherent competence that depends on contexts of across-clauses and across-sentences, and extra-textual inference, all of which could be explained by the second-order general language proficiency factor. Based on the findings of the present study, implications and recommendations were provided for future research and classroom language teachers, as well as language test constructors.

Key words: rational cloze tests, confirmatory factor analysis, second-order factor, cohesive competence, coherent competence

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