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*Schema-Based Cloze Multiple Choice Item Tests: Measures of Translation Ability**

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Abstract

The validity and reliability of a schema-based cloze multiple choice item test (MCIT) as an indirect measure of translation ability was concurrently explored by administering it with a Persian to English MCIT, and an English to Persian open ended translation examination (OETE). The results obtained on the performance of 110 non-native undergraduate university students showed that the schema-based cloze MCIT had the highest reliability ($\alpha = 0.91$). The Persian to English MCIT enjoyed an acceptable degree of reliability ($\alpha = 0.84$) whereas English to Persian OETE defied reliability estimates due to its subjective nature. Although the three tests correlated significantly with each other, they presented three significantly different measures of translation ability. Since the schema-based cloze MCIT provided the most reliable measure and correlated more significantly with its traditional counterpart and since it took less time to be scored, it is suggested that schema-based cloze MCITs be employed as indirect measures of translation ability to save time and remove subjectivity in translation.

Key words: Schema theory, multiple choice item tests, open ended questions, reliability, validity and practicality

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Introduction

Although it was totally banned from classrooms by structuralists for quite some decades, translation has received a more favorable treatment on the part of language educators in recent years. Instead of impeding language learning process, as supposed by structuralists, translation is encouraged as a communicative activity in classrooms. For example, Widdowson (1983) stated that :

What we are aiming to do is to make the learner conceive of the language in the same way as he conceives of his own language and use it in the same way as communicative activity. This being so, it would seem reasonable to draw upon the learner's knowledge of his own language use to communicate, that is to say, it would seem reasonable to make use of translation (p. 158).

In spite of renewed embracing of translation in language classes, its measurement has still remained largely an unaddressed question not only in testing but also in textbooks written specifically on translation (e.g., Newmark, 1988). According to Farhady and Khany (1999), however, there are two alternative methods for measuring translation: open-ended questions requiring test takers to translate what they read and multiple choice item tests on which the test takers have to choose the most appropriate translation from among alternatives.

The open-ended translations are by their very nature subjective in that the responsibility of scoring falls on their testers. The degree of subjectivity increases as various testers adopt different units of translation in scoring, i.e., single words, phrases, clauses, sentences, paragraphs, and the whole text. Khodadady (2001a), for example, showed that test takers provide significantly different translations for function words whose number is limited in language, e.g., auxiliaries, pronouns, and prepositions. Table 1 presents the English function words written for the Persian word *be* in the translated sentence: *for assessing any phenomenon, we should view it as it was viewed at the age of its appearance*. As can be seen, the appropriate translated word *should* is significantly different from *must*, *would* and *let us* ($\chi^2 = 18.00$, $df = 3$, $p = .000$). Whether to accept *must*, *would* and *let us* as correct responses or not is a subjective decision.

Table 1
The chi-square
of function words translated as English equivalents

Function words	Observed frequency	Expected frequency	Residual	
must	13	5.5	7.5	$\chi^2 = 18.00$
would	1	5.5	-4.5	df = 3
should	7	5.5	1.5	p = .000
lest us	1	5.5	-4.5	
Total	22			

As the second alternative method, the traditional multiple choice item tests (MCITs) solve the problem of subjectivity in scoring translation. They do, however, lack a sound theory in terms of construction and interpretation (Khodadady, 1997, 1999, Khodadady & Heriman, 2000). Not only does schema theory provide MCITs with a powerful rationale. It also resolves the problem of translation unit and offers schema as an alternative. Khodadady (2000, 2001, 2002) defined schema as any abstract concept realized in a word which can stand by itself or combine with other concepts to produce an idiosyncratic image in the mind of a given person. This image has a positive and direct relationship with the person's experiences with the concept gained through its application with other semantically and syntactically related concepts. According to Khodadady (2001), the translation of any schema depends on the translator's experiences with the schema itself and its preceding and succeeding schemata. The more compatible the translator's schemata with the author's schemata, the more accurate the translation would become. This compatibility can be determined by focusing on the semantic features the source language (SL) schema shares with its target language (TL) equivalent and its distinctive features that signal the incompatibility of other related schemata. The contextual schemata, i.e., schemata preceding and succeeding the TL equivalent, specify the distinctive features.

The present paper does not attempt to apply the theory of schema to translation as Khodadady (2001) did. It is designed to bypass the TL and focus on the SL itself. The paper explores the validity, reliability and practicality of schema-based cloze MCITs as measures of translation by developing them in one language, i.e., English, and administering them concurrently with open-ended translations and traditional MCITs designed in both Persian and English.

Method

Participants

The participants of the present study were 113 university undergraduate students majoring in Arabic Language and Literature. They had enrolled for the course *English For Specific Purposes II* (ESP II), which was offered by the first researcher of the study at Kurdistan University in 1379 (2000). The participants were at an intermediate level of English language proficiency because they had to pass *General English* and *ESP I* before they took ESP II.

Out of the 113 participants, three did not take part in Persian to English translation examination and thus were excluded from the study. Of 42 female and 68 male participants who took all the tests, 61 were evening students and met every Monday at 4 p.m. and the rest were morning students who attended classes every Monday at 10 a.m. Most participants ranged in age between 19 and 24 and a few were more than 40 years old.

Materials

The material used in the study consisted of a collection of 16 passages which ranged from 400 to 500 words in length. They were chosen from *The Literary History of the Arabs* (Nicholson, 1969), *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Brill, 1971), and *Anthology of Islamic Literature from rise of Islam to the present time* (Kritzeck, 1964). These references are widely used as textbooks in Iran. The content of these references are also used to develop tests employed for the admission of students who wish to continue their graduate studies in Iran.

Instruments

Three tests were employed in the study. They were designed as achievement tests on the materials offered during the course and administered as part of the requirement for the course ESP II offered at Kurdistan University. The participants had to obtain a minimum score of 10 out of 20 on each test to pass the course.

1. Schema-based cloze multiple choice item test

Eight paragraphs were chosen from the materials covered during the course from which 60 schemata were deleted and numbered as the items of the test. Each deleted schema was given along with three alternatives having semantic and syntactic relationships with the deleted schema. The following item was, for example, used in the test. Besides these ephemeral sheets, books of all sorts, old and new, have been ... by the native and European presses of Cairo.

- a. increased b. multiplied c. produced d. developed

The validity of schema-based cloze MCIT has already been established in the literature. Khodadady (1997) and Khodadady and Herriman (2000), for example, showed that schema-based cloze MCITs correlate significantly with the TOEFL as a measure of English language proficiency. Research findings also show that they measure objective-based achievement and correlate significantly with content based traditional MCITs (Khodadady, 2001). (The schema-based cloze MCIT is given in Appendix 1).

2. Persian to English multiple choice item test

The Persian to English multiple choice item test (MCIT) consisted of 36 items developed on the materials offered during the course. These items were based on English sentences translated into Persian by the researchers. The translation was given as the stem of the items and the original English translation was presented along with three distracters. The following item provides an example. (The English to Persian MCIT is presented in Appendix 2.)

آیا از نثرنویسان بزرگ قرن نوزدهم کسی را می شناسی؟

- Do you know someone of the prose righters of the ninetieth century?
- Do you know great prose write any of the ninety century?
- Do you know any of the big prose rights of the nineteen century?
- Do you know any of the great prose writers of the nineteenth century?

3. English to Persian translation examination

The English to Persian translation examination consisted of 20 original sentences taken from the 8 covered passages. The students were required to translate these sentences into Persian. The following question serves as an example. (The English to Persian translation examination is presented in Appendix 3.)

لطفاً جمله زیر را به فارسی روان ترجمه کنید :

It is generally believed that from the long and monotonous march of the caravans and the uniform stride of the camels grew the unique rhythmic song of the riders which incited the camels to a faster pace.

Procedure

The course ESP II was to be offered in 17 sessions lasting for one and a half hours each. Out of these three sessions were canceled because of public holidays. Due to the shortage of time and participants' various questions only eight passages were covered during the term. The participants were told these eight passages will be used to develop three tests and they had to take the tests as their course requirement.

The schema-based cloze multiple choice item test (MCIT) and the Persian to English MCIT were administered two and one week before the final examination, respectively. The English to Persian translation test was held as the final examination. All the tests were administered under standard conditions.

Data Analysis

The internal consistency reliability coefficient of schema-based cloze multiple choice item test (MCT) and Persian to English MCIT were estimated by Cronbach Alpha (α). Due to the subjective nature of English to Persian translation examination, its reliability coefficient could not be determined. The response to each item of the test was, however, broken into four parts on the basis of structure and meaning and 0.25 was assigned to each part. (The scoring procedure for the English to Persian translation examination is given in Appendix 3.)

For determining the validity of schema-based cloze MCITs as measures of translation ability, the schema-based cloze MCIT was correlated with the Persian to English MCIT and English to Persian translation examination. All statistical analyses were performed by using SPSS Release 10.0 for windows, standard version. They were carried out to test the following three hypotheses:

- 1) The schema-based cloze MCIT will correlate significantly with the Persian to English MCIT.
- 2) The schema-based cloze MCIT will correlate significantly with the English to Persian OETE.
- 3) The scores obtained on the schema-based cloze MCIT will be significantly higher than the Persian to English MCIT and English to Persian OETE.

Results and Discussion

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics belonging to the schema-based cloze MCIT, Persian to English MCIT and English to Persian OETE. As can be seen, the schema-based cloze MCIT has the highest reliability coefficient and thus has psychometric superiority ($\alpha=0.91$) over the other two methods. Although this reliability coefficient is affected by the number of schema-based cloze multiple choice items, the very fact it is easier to develop these items more than the traditional Persian to English multiple choice items and English to Persian open-ended questions enhances the feasibility of schema-based cloze MCITs.

Table 2
Basic descriptive statistics for the three tests

Tests	No.of items	Mean	Sd	Kurtosis	α
Schema-based cloze MCIT	60	41.1	10.6	-.64	.91
Persian to English MCIT	36	31.4	5.8	.71	.84
English to Persian OETE	20	14.0	3.5	.10	

Table 3 presents the correlation coefficients of the three translation testing methods. As can be seen, the schema-based cloze MCIT correlates significantly with the Persian to English MCIT (0.61). This result supports the first hypothesis that *the schema-based cloze MCIT will correlate significantly with the Persian to English MCIT*. The second hypothesis that *the schema-based cloze MCIT will correlate significantly with the English to Persian OETE* is also supported by the significant correlation (0.71) obtained on the two methods. The correlation coefficient of the schema-based cloze MCIT and the English to Persian OETE (0.71) is also much higher than the correlation coefficient of the Persian to English MCIT and English to Persian OETE (0.61).

Table 3
Correlations coefficients of the three tests

Tests	Persian to English MCIT	English to Persian OETE
Schema-based cloze MCIT	.61*	.71*
Persian to English MCIT		.61*

Note: * $p < 0.01$

Table 4 presents the results of a one-way ANOVA with repeated measures for the scores of participants on the alternative tests. As can be seen, there are significant differences between the means obtained by the three measures ($p < 0.0001$). These results support the third hypothesis that *the scores obtained on the schema-based cloze MCIT will be significantly higher than the Persian to English MCIT and English to Persian OETE*.

Table 4
One-way ANOVA with repeated
measures for the score of participants on the three measures

Source of Variance	DF	MS	F-test	Sig.
Between subjects	2	20705.96	389.92	.0001
Within subjects	327	53.10		
English to Persian OETE				

Table 5 presents follow-up Scheffe tests. As can be seen, the schema-based cloze MCIT, Persian to English MCIT and English to Persian OETE are substantially different from each other. These results indicate that adopting various methods of translation brings about significantly different performances on the part of test takers. As an indirect measure of translation, the schema-based cloze MCIT differs significantly from its traditional counterpart and thus provides a theoretically and empirically more valid method of translation competence.

Table 5
Scheffe T-tests of the participants' performance on the three measures

Tests	Persian to English MCIT	English to Persian OETE
Schema-based cloze MCIT	9.75*	17.33*
Persian to English MCIT		27.09*

Note * $p < 0.0001$

Conclusion

The performance of relatively large number of undergraduate students on schema-based cloze multiple choice item tests (MCITs), traditional MCITs and English to Persian open-ended translation examinations (OETEs) revealed the fact that developing these testing methods on the same seen texts yield significantly different results. While the schema-based cloze MCITs derive their construct validity from a sound theory, the traditional MCITs and OETEs lack

such a rationale.

The traditional MCITs and OETEs are, however, direct measures of translation in that they require test takers either to compare the original text with their translated versions to choose the best translation or to translate from source language to target language. Considering the theoretical and empirical superiority of schema-based cloze MCITs over the traditional MCITs and OETEs, it is suggested that the schema-based cloze MCITs be used as measures of translation ability or be administered along with other methods.

The researchers acknowledge the fact that the results of this study are based on a rather small size of texts, i.e., eight passages. Since it was announced that the participants had to take three tests developed on the texts taught, the administration of the first test restricted the content of the second in that the participants could guess that the content presented in the first test would not be given in the second. The content of the third test was thus predictable by the participants. Further research is, therefore, needed to replicate the study and remove these limitations.

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