This presentation introduces two research projects that use the cloze test as a measure of proficiency for language testing and SLA research purposes. The first project tested validity and reliability of the cloze test as a measure of L2 Chinese proficiency and the second project used the cloze test to examine the use of verb-based cues in L2 sentence processing.

In the field of SLA, researchers usually rely on comprehensive tests (e.g., HSK) or institutional status (i.e., the level of Chinese course a student is enrolled in) to measure proficiency in the L2. However, comprehensive tests tend to be cumbersome and institutional status makes it difficult to compare findings across studies. The first project reported here constructed a cloze test, which was a paragraph of 400 characters, tested with 101 L2 learners of Chinese, and compared the results with other measures of Chinese proficiency. The cloze test had 40 blanks and participants were asked to fill in each blank with one word of 1-2 characters. Participants also completed a language background information questionnaire and a placement test. Results showed that cloze test scores were highly correlated with placement test scores \((r=.89, p<.001)\), moderately but significantly correlated with final exam scores of the previous semester \((rs>.44, ps<.05)\), age of acquisition \((r=-.26, p<.05)\), length of classroom instruction \((r=.29, p<.01)\), length of residence in Chinese-speaking countries \((r=.45, p<.001)\), daily use of Chinese \((r=.29, p<.01)\) and daily use of English \((r=-.29, p<.001)\), and marginally correlated with self-reported proficiency in listening \((r=.19, p=.06)\) and self-reported proficiency in speaking \((r=.19, p=.07)\). These results indicated that the cloze test was a valid and reliable measure of L2 Chinese proficiency. In addition, the cloze test could clearly distinguish among learners in different levels of Chinese courses (beginning, intermediate, and advanced), suggesting that it could also be used as a placement test.

The second study concerns whether L1-Chinese learners of L2-English are able to use verb-based cues to anticipate the following words when comprehending sentences in their L2. In a self-paced reading experiment, 78 L1-Chinese learners of L2-English were compared with 32 native English speakers on their processing of sentences containing temporary ambiguity about whether a noun was the direct object of the verb preceding it or the subject of an embedded clause (e.g., The referee warned the spectators might get too rowdy.) L2 learners also completed a cloze test. Results showed that while native speakers showed graded effects to the frequency of verbs taking direct objects or sentential complements, L2 learners showed graded effects to verbs’ overall frequency \((r=-.30, p<.05)\), and that this effect came primarily from lower proficiency learners \((r=-.28, p<.05)\). These results suggested that the L2 learners had not yet amassed sufficient experience with each verb in its different possible sentence structures to have stable verb-specific knowledge about the likelihood of different structures following it, and that cloze test was a sensitive measure to detect such differences between learners with lower and higher proficiency.