

Syntactic Context Cues

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Definition

Syntactic Context Clues – identification in a way a word is used in a grammatical construction. Context clues that are based on structure and grammar.

Syntactic Context Clues – Patterns of rules by which words are put together into meaningful phrases and sentences

Special Note: There is some controversy regarding the appropriateness of specifically teaching context cueing systems. See Reutzel and Cooter, p. 235 and p. 249 for some information regarding this debate. Although they maintain the utility of use of context cues as a strategy for reading, they also caution that teaching cues can become an end for students rather than a means for helping them read.

Assessment Tool Listing Page*

- 1. Running record/ MSV analysis**
- 2. Cloze Passages**

***Assessment tools for syntactic cues can easily be adapted to assess semantic cues also!**

Informal Assessment #1

Running Record/ MSV Analysis

A running record is generally the preferred assessment for measuring a student's use of syntactic cues. The exact procedures can vary; the record can be highly structured as in the Analytical Reading Inventory or can use any text while recording on a separate blank sheet of paper. The following description will be of the less structured method as described in Reutzel and Cooter:

- 1) Locate a sample of text of approximately 100-200 words in length.
- 2) Sit alongside student so you can both see the page.
- 3) As the student reads the passage orally, mark correctly read words with checkmarks, and record all miscues the student makes, including self-corrections. On p.36 of Reutzel and Cooter there is a suggested shorthand for recording miscues.
- 4) Following the reading of the passage, conduct an M-S-V analysis to assess use of cueing systems. For this section, the Syntactic system is of interest: for each miscue, analyze whether it is grammatically correct: is the miscue the correct part of speech or tense? (or, as Reutzel and Cooter say, "Does it sound right?" p.35)
- 5) The resulting analysis should reveal whether a student pays attention to grammatical information while reading. (note that the procedure could also assess semantic cueing systems as well.)

Source: Reutzel, D. R., & Cooter, R. B. (2003). Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction: Helping Every Child Succeed (2nd ed.). Merrill-Prentice Hall. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Informal Assessment #2

Cloze Passages

Cloze passages are short passages culled from reading materials that are typical of the classes' instructional program. The passage should be about 250 words long and be approximately at the student's instructional level. Traditionally, every fifth word is deleted from the passage, with the exclusion of the first and last sentences which are left intact. If the task proves to be too hard for a reader, the examiner can delete every eighth word or tenth word, etc. instead. The reader must rely on syntactic and semantic knowledge to fill in the blanks in the passage, so this procedure can be used to assess both knowledge of syntactic cueing systems and semantic cueing systems. The reader should read through the passage once, then reread and fill in as many blanks as they can. The passage should be scored using the one-half/one-third formula: if the reader gets at least one half of the blanks correct, they are assumed to be at the independent level for that passage. Between one-half and one-third correct, the reader is assumed to be at the instructional level, and any less is assumed to be the frustration level.

****Note:** use of Cloze passages could also be an effective instructional method for teaching use of syntactic or semantic cues.

Sources: Reutzel, D. R., & Cooter, R. B. (2003). *Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction: Helping Every Child Succeed* (2nd ed.). Merrill-Prentice Hall. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Miller, W. H. (1993). *Complete reading disabilities handbook*. West Nyack, NY: The Center for Applied Research in Education.

Recommendations/Instructional Strategies

1) Guided Reading

Guided reading occurs in small groups of students who have similar skills and reading interests. The teacher focuses on teaching the groups using carefully selected texts in their zone of proximal development. Teachers help students learn and use cueing systems by modeling their application using the strategies of predicting, sampling, confirming, and cross-checking to self-correct. Some examples of prompts that can be used to help a student select and apply the syntactic cueing system from Reutzel and Cooter (p. 69) follow:

- Try this word. Does that make sense?
- Does this sound right to you? (repeat back what child said)
- What could you do if you do not know a word?
- Check that word again. Does it sound right?

This strategy is also useful for teaching semantic cueing systems.

Sources: Reutzel, D. R., & Cooter, R. B. (2003). *Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction: Helping Every Child Succeed* (2nd ed.). Merrill-Prentice Hall. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

2) Missing Morphemes

This is a kind of variation on a cloze procedure. Print sentences that have deleted morphemes instead of words. The child must complete the passage using knowledge of grammatical structures and syntactic cues. The following is an example of this procedure with inflectional endings deleted from the words: (from Miller, W. p. 308)

Know _____ as much as possible about zoo _____ certain _____ is very interest _____. The animal _____ who live in zoo _____ often do clever things that almost make them seem like human being _____. Many zoo _____ are now fair _____ nice places for animal _____, and zoo _____ are get _____ better all the time.

Source: Miller, W. H. (1993). Complete reading disabilities handbook. West Nyack, NY: The Center for Applied Research in Education.

3) Contextual Word Attack Instructional Sequence

This method is a sequence of instruction for context cueing systems; the first part of the sequence involves specifically teaching syntactic cues. This method is tailored to primary level readers.

First, the teacher writes a sentence or pair of sentences on the board with minimal meaning information and a blank space. For example,

Don has a _____.
He is _____ it.

The teacher asks students to generate possible words to fill the blank spaces; because there is only minimal semantic information, students must use syntactic knowledge to select the correct part of speech for the missing word.

After the students generate a sufficient number of possibilities, the teacher reads the possible responses out loud so the students can hear if the words they selected follow grammatical patterns of speech. To continue with the exercise and teach semantic cues, the teacher would add a meaning reference to the sentence and have students select from their list which word(s) now fit.

Source: Wallen, C.J. (1969). Word attack skills in reading. Columbus, Ohio: Merrill Publishing Company.

4) Metacognition- Click or Clunk

Since using syntactic context cues requires a reader to be carefully monitoring what he or she is reading and comprehending, and actively apply grammatical rules, teaching metacognition is a beneficial strategy for increasing use of cueing systems (Miller, 1993). One useful strategy for helping students monitor their reading and comprehension is click or clunk. In this strategy, students are instructed to ask after reading each sentence to stop and ask themselves if the meaning or idea “clicks” for them, or “clunks.” If it does clunk, students should go back and reread. Upon rereading, students will hopefully be able to identify the word missed after the initial reading using syntactic or semantic cues from the text.

Sources: Reutzel, D. R., & Cooter, R. B. (2003). Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction: Helping Every Child Succeed (2nd ed.). Merrill-Prentice Hall. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

Miller, W. H. (1993). Complete reading disabilities handbook. West Nyack, NY: The Center for Applied Research in Education.

5) Morphemic Analysis

Morphemic analysis involves teaching students to understand bound morphemes, such as prefixes, suffixes, and inflectional endings in order to help them be able to better identify a word. Knowledge of these morphemes allows a student to analyze the grammatical part of speech of an unknown word thus giving him or her more information to base syntactic cues on. Of special use for teaching syntactic cueing systems are teaching suffixes and

inflectional endings because of their grammatical functions. Teachers using this strategy can simply tell students the meanings of some morphemes, and have students figure out the meanings of other words with the morphemes. For example, the teacher could introduce the function of the inflectional ending –ed, that it makes a verb take the past tense. Students could then work on a list of words identifying the significance and meaning of verbs with and without the –ed ending.

Source: Reutzel, D. R., & Cooter, R. B. (2003). *Strategies for Reading Assessment and Instruction: Helping Every Child Succeed* (2nd ed.). Merrill-Prentice Hall. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey.

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