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Date : 23 June 2012
THE EFFECT OF DICTOGLOSS AS A LANGUAGE TASK
IN ENHANCING STUDENTS’ GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE
IN SK FELDA ULU TEBRAU

KANMANI A/P GOPAL

This project report is submitted in partial fulfillment
Of the requirement for the award of
The degree of Master of Education (TESL)

Faculty of Education
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

JUNE 2012
I declare that this project report entitled “The Effect of Dictogloss As A Language Task In Enhancing Students’ Grammatical Competence in SK Felda Ulu Tebrau” is the result of my own research except as cited in the references. The project paper has not been accepted for any degree and is not concurrently submitted in candidature of any other degree.

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This piece of work is dedicated to my loving parents, Mr & Mrs Gopal Rajamah, husband, Ganthy Ramasamy, mother in-law, Santhammah, my sisters, Puranee and Kumutha Gopal and my little angle Shruti.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to my father Mr. Gopal Keresnan who taught me the value of education and who has been the inspiration for my aspiration. Thank you for your love and sacrifice.
This current study investigates the effect of dictogloss as a language task in enhancing students’ grammatical competence. The main focus of this study was to seek whether dictogloss task can help to improve students’ knowledge on simple past tense. A comparison between the dictogloss and the traditional method were also done to identify the most effective method in students acquiring grammar. This study also seeks to answer what are the students’ attitudes towards the dictogloss technique. This study was conducted in a primary school which involved 30 Year 5 students from two different classes and they were 5 Al Farabi and 5 Al Jazari. The treatment was administrated for 12 weeks which consists of grammar teaching using the traditional method and the dictogloss technique for one hour each week. A quasi-experimental design was used to measure the effectiveness of dictogloss in enhancing students’ grammatical competence. Mean and standard deviation were performed on the data to answer the research questions. The results of the data analysis indicated that students from the experimental group performed better after being exposed to the dictogloss technique compared to the students from the control group. This was seen in terms of the marks that were obtained in the posttest. Learners also have positive attitudes towards the dictogloss technique and this was seen through the analysis of questionnaire. Implication for future research and classroom practice was discussed. Some recommendations for future research were also indicated.
ABSTRAK

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Grammar is often associated with the traditional forms of instructions in which knowledge is transmitted in a one-way process from a dominant teacher to a class of silent, obedient learners. Blackboard and posters are used as teaching aids in this traditional method. As for the learners, their role is to memorize the rules and apply them in various exercises given. As this traditional grammar instruction was criticized for its drills and drudgery and its boring and banal exercises, teachers and researchers of second language have been looking for ways to change this grammar study to more student-centered where they play more active roles in discovering and processing knowledge. This desire to make learning more student-centered is by introducing a language teaching task in the classroom known as the dictogloss. According to Wajnryb (1990), dictogloss gives learners a more precise understanding of English grammar and consequently leads to higher accuracy in language use.

Dictogloss is defined as an activity in which short pieces of language are read out at normal speed to students (Jacobs: 2003). According to Storch (1998); Wajnryb (1988, 1989) dictogloss is known as grammar dictation is a task-based, communicative teaching procedure. This procedure was popularized by its leading proponent Ruth Wajnryb (1986,
1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1998c, 1989, 1990). Apparently, the procedure has been used by a growing number of teachers in Australia, where it originated. In a dictogloss teaching procedure, the teacher dictates a short text at normal speed to the learners. The learners jot down familiar words and phrases. Then working in small groups, the learners pool their “battered texts” and strive to reconstruct a version of the text from their shared resources. Each group of learners produce their own reconstructed version, aiming grammatical accuracy and textual cohesion but not at replicating the original text. Finally the whole class reconvenes and the groups’ versions are analyzed and corrected.

The students use their grammar resources to reconstruct a text and they become aware of their shortcomings and needs in grammar in this procedure. Here learners work on combination of meaning and form, which makes grammar learning more purpose and meaningful. According to Celce Murcia & Hilles (1988); Wajnryb (1988, 1989) dictogloss is an effective method to create conditions for learning grammar and vocabulary. Kidd (1992) in his article observes that this technique is the “most sophisticated dictation variant” he has encountered. He endorses the dictogloss procedure for being “interesting, motivating, communicating... specifically designed for the teaching of ESL grammar” and says that “the dictogloss is a sophisticated and ingenious procedure, an excellent example of the flexibility of dictation format.”

Therefore, this present study is undertaken in the researcher’s classroom where the researcher engaged as a teacher. The researcher provides students with an opportunity for greater acquisition of grammar through dictogloss beside the traditional method of teaching. The dictogloss technique also incorporates four language skills; they are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The supporters of dictogloss (Swain & Miccoli, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Storch, 1998; Nabei, 1996; Lim & Jacobs, 2001) pointed out that dictogloss has multiple skills and systems activity where learner practice listening, speaking, reading and writing and rely on their knowledge of semantic, syntactic and discourse systems of the target language to complete the task. The four language skills which are integrated in this task will result in students having more confidence in all language areas.
1.2 Background of Study

Grammar teaching in Malaysia school is accordance with the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Grammar teaching in both KBSR (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Rendah) and KBSM (Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah) syllabi suggests that the grammar should be taught in integration with the language skills. There is no provision for teaching grammar particularly. Pupils are taught by the teachers to get involved in using the structure without drawing attention to grammar rules in covert grammar teaching. Here, the students pay more attention on the exercise and not the grammar rules. In addition, during the exercise the mistakes made by the learners are tolerated.

Presently, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which is implemented by Malaysian schools was focusing in giving students favorable opportunities to use the current language freely, purposefully and in a creative way. Therefore, the essential feature of grammar teaching is integrated with other skills such as reading and writing. The purpose of this is to motivate learner-centered and communicative activities throughout the lesson.

However, ESL teachers have the obligation to cultivate in learners competence and skills of grammar. Through Communicative Approach to language teaching, these teachers are required to select ‘appropriate’ and ‘effective’ methods and strategies to teach grammar in English language classrooms. Unfortunately, what is considered ‘appropriate’ and ‘effective’ remains ambiguous as teachers are not given well-defined guidelines in the English Curriculum Specifications on how to approach grammar teaching. In attempt to fill in the gap, a methodological approach known as dictogloss will be used to assist ESL learners in learning the grammatical structures.
1.3 Statement of Problem

Dealing with grammar has been a difficult task in the researcher’s school as the students in this school have insufficient exposure to the language. They only listen, speak, read and write English during the English lesson. In contrast, the students frequently converse daily in their own mother tongue (Malay). Hence, the English Language is to them a foreign language, rather than a second language. Moreover, mother tongue interference (tendencies to do word for word translation and the use of second language sentence patterns or structures in the target language) is also another factor which contributes towards the ineffectiveness of the teaching and learning process. To compound their problem further, there is their parents’ lackadaisical attitude towards the English Language. This is because they think that it is not important to learn the subject. Hence, the students are not motivated to speak and write at home.

Furthermore, their use of the English Language is confined to the English lesson within the class timetable for the majority of the students and there is not much exposure from the outside either. Hence, the majority of the students lack the linguistic competence, especially in the area of grammar. This distinctive problem is the main cause of the students’ inability to write well even with the teacher’s guidance. According to Harmer (1987), people who learn language encounter a number of problems, especially with the grammar of the language. One of the difficulties in learning English is that when learners think that they have acquired a particular grammar rule, they discover that there are variations to that rule. For example, when students think that they have worked out the English past tense by adding –ed to a verb, they become confused when they come across the irregular verb forms of the Simple Past Tense.

For example, Last week I drank a glass of milk (correct past tense), instead of

Last week I dranked a glass of milk (incorrect past tense)
Thus the present study will apply dictogloss as a classroom procedure to replace the traditional method of teaching grammar. Dictogloss offers a context-rich method which is suitable for learners to use as a learning tool.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effect of dictogloss as a language task in enhancing students’ grammatical competence among Year 5 in SK Felda Ulu Tebrau and also to determine students’ attitudes towards the dictogloss procedure. The dictogloss task is selected for this research in order to help language learning students have a better understanding of how grammar works on a text basis and also to raise grammar consciousness. This will help them to identify their shortcomings or needs, so that teaching can be directed more precisely towards these areas.

1.5 Research Objectives

The objective of the study is to investigate the effectiveness of dictogloss task in improving students’ knowledge on simple past tense. Further, it seeks to determine students’ attitudes towards the dictogloss procedure.
1.6 Research Questions

1. Does teaching grammar through traditional method and dictogloss technique result in gains in scores in a test of grammar?

2. Between the two methods, the traditional method of teaching grammar and teaching grammar through dictogloss technique, which is the most effective method in acquisition of grammar?

3. What are students’ attitudes towards dictogloss technique?

1.7 Significance of the Study

This study explores the effectiveness of the dictogloss procedure compared to traditional method in context which is important in teaching of grammar. It provides language teachers with information about dictogloss and it can motivate the language teachers to try out a variety of form-focused collaborative activities, such as the dictogloss, when teaching any of the skills courses. This research also provides additional input as it will explore the effectiveness of the dictogloss procedure compared to the traditional method. This is also important in teaching of grammar into the current situation as there is no well-defined approach to the teaching of grammar.

Besides that, the teacher can motivate learners to see grammar classes in a positive light; giving students the chance to participate in dictogloss activities. These activities will give them a fresh opportunity to work collaboratively on language tasks. Furthermore, the findings of this study would provide useful information, rather than just the theoretical aspect of it, to teachers to use the dictogloss as a teaching procedure at a primary level. Lastly, the dictogloss procedure gives the teacher a chance to observe their students and their
observation can be used as learning device for them in improving their method of teaching and the same time meet the requirement of the students.

1.8 Limitation of the study

There are some limitations in this study that should be noted. Most of the previous studies in dictogloss have examined the Language Related Episodes (LREs). This Language Related Episodes is one of the important elements in the reconstruction part of the dictogloss exercise. A Language Related Episode is any part of a dialogue where language learners ‘talk about the language they are producing, question their language use or correct themselves or others’. However, in this study LREs is not examined. This decision was made because of time limitation and numbers of students who are involved in the study.

1.9 Theoretical Framework

This section presents an overview of theoretical frameworks which underpins dictogloss: comprehensible input by Stephen Krashen (1981), comprehensible output by Merill Swain (1997) and noticing by Schmidt and Frota (1986).
1.9.1 Comprehensible Input

Krashen (1982) have argued strongly that for acquisition to take place, the learner’s need input that contain the language form, and this input will be acquired according to the natural order. Exposure to comprehensible input through dictogloss is an effective way to enhance students’ grammatical competence. Krashen’s (1985) Input Hypothesis which stresses that acquisition of a second language is facilitated if students are given enough comprehensible input.

Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis states that in anxiety-producing situations, there is an affective filter which acts as a mental block preventing acquirers from fully utilizing the input they receive. But when the filter is low or down, the acquirer can fully comprehend the message and use the input to enhance his language competence. This condition is met in dictogloss during the reconstruction stage where students feel relaxed and at ease while working in groups to gather their notes and working on their version of the text. This provides learners with level-appropriate input that is enhanced by making the students to write a text which is sufficient to allow noticing of the target form to happen.

1.9.2 Comprehensible Output

One activity which has been frequently used in comprehensible output research is grammar dictation, commonly known as the dictogloss. The dictogloss (Wajnryb, 1990) has been proposed as a procedure that encourages students to reflect on their own output. Kowal and Swain (1997) and Swain (1998) report on the dictogloss technique and studies that have been conducted with 8\textsuperscript{th} grade French immersion learners. From their study with the learners, they have found evidence of noticing, hypothesis-testing, and metatalk when using
the dictogloss technique. In this study, they found that the students often focused on more than just the grammatical aspect being emphasized. They not only discussed grammatical aspects but also orthographic and semantic issues. The pair work and class discussion did promote student discussion about the links between meaning and form in relation to the composing process.

A follow-up study (see discussion in Swain, 1998) showed that during the reconstruction stage which involves conversation, the students were able to reach a correct solution. The result of the correct solution was seen on their posttest a week later where they perform accurately. Similarly, during the same stage (reconstruction) when the students incorrectly solve the solution, their posttest result tended to be inaccurate. In other words, students tend to “stick with” the knowledge they had co-constructed collaboratively. Such results strongly suggest that when students reflect consciously on the language they are producing, this may be a source of language learning.

1.9.3 Noticing

The Noticing Hypothesis basically states that conscious awareness (noticing) plays an important role in grammar instruction since learners must consciously notice the grammatical form of their input in order to acquire. Two types of noticing are necessary for language acquisition. First, learners must attend to the features of the input in order for the input to became intake. Second learners must “notice the gap” by making comparisons between the input and the output. Noticing operations occupy a key role in Ellis’s model of second language acquisition, facilitating the process whereby explicit knowledge become implicit knowledge. In short: ‘No noticing, no acquisition’. It follows that language teachers could promote noticing, by focusing their learners’ attention on the targeted language in the input through dictogloss. In the classroom, this kind of noticing is
customarily promoted through dictogloss activities and procedures involving input enhancement.

1.10 Definition of terms

Focus on form (FonF)

According to Long (1991) focus on form refers to the learners’ attention on specific linguistic properties in the course of carrying out communicative activities. Thus, it focuses on the grammatical sentence structure.

Grammatical competence

According to Ellis (1994), grammatical competence is also known as linguistic competence. It refers to the knowledge of the items and rules that comprise the formal systems of a language.

Dictogloss

It is a procedure used in language teaching to teach grammar where learners are required to work together to recreate their own parallel texts which are semantic approximations to the original text, created out of learners’ own grammatical and linguistic resources.