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**Mexico**

# Integrating Language Skills through a Dictogloss Procedure

Not long ago it was common to find instructors teaching languages, particularly English in non-English-speaking countries, without a degree and with little to no experience or expertise. But today, governmental agencies like Mexico's Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Public Education) have begun to require that teachers have a degree that demonstrates sufficient skill and language proficiency. Nevertheless, being able to speak English and having a degree do not necessarily lead to purposeful language teaching, particularly with a traditional instructional approach that isolates language skills without appropriate contextual clues in a classroom environment where the teacher is didactic expert and students complacently follow along.

Traditional methods of teaching English often include translating structures from the target language to the mother tongue; although this method may seem antiquated, it is still commonly practiced. Indeed, those teachers who were taught by traditional methods tend to continue teaching with similar methods. Teachers tend to teach the way they were taught (Prabhu 1987), and if an English language teacher learned English via the translation method, this same method is likely to reappear when the teacher plans, implements, and evaluates instruction. Many English teachers around the world—in Mexico, for example—may still prefer direct instruction even though they are often free to choose from a variety of methods or strategies (Bollin 2003).

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate interactive and student-centered examples of dictogloss activities that offer an alternative to traditional dictation (usually reserved for listening comprehension) and that can be applied both within and outside the English language-learning classroom (Wajnryb 1990). Dictogloss procedures are practical, yet flexible enough to account for the needs, interests, and learning preferences of each learner. But more than that, the dictogloss activities allow English learners to be active and reflective during the learning process.

Instead of reinforcing a linear approach to learning (i.e., input-comprehension-output), the dictogloss procedures illustrate a learning approach where students have opportunities to integrate reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills through social interaction.

For this discussion, the terms *error* and *mistake* will be used interchangeably, although we recognize that there is a difference between the two in that the former is a more systematic recurrence while the latter is usually a less frequent occurrence.

## A dictogloss procedure to assess the English language learner

The original dictogloss procedure was intended to provide an alternative to traditional grammar teaching through written dictation (Wajnryb 1990). The procedure embraced interactive communication through the following stages:

1. *Preparation.* The first stage includes a warm-up related to the topic or a preliminary speaking or writing exercise; a group discussion around key vocabulary terms helps activate learners' prior knowledge. To conclude this stage, the teacher informs learners about what they are expected to do during the activity.

2. *Dictation.* A story, news report, or other text is presented in English at a normal rate of speed. Learners listen to the dictation and take notes. The language used in the text and the length of the text depend on the learners' level of English proficiency; maturity level; and interests, needs, and learning preferences. The number of times the text is repeated and the amount of prompting required between texts will depend on the educational context; the key is to provide natural input in order to promote listening comprehension skills that enable learners to carry out the rest of the task. That is, listening skills are treated not as an isolated learning event but as a purposeful educative experience.

3. *Reconstruction.* Students work individually or in groups to produce their versions of the original text, capturing the essence of the text and generating correct grammar. They recreate the text in their own words, trying to recall as many sequences and details as possible. This stage indicates to the teacher what students recall from the original; the teacher uses this evidence to determine whether students are keeping up or whether further instruction is required.

4. *Analysis and correction.* Most of the student collaboration takes place in this stage. Students self-assess their own texts and then form groups in order to conduct peer assessments. Either individually or as a group, students notice differences between their own texts and the original in regard to form, meaning, and language use. In this final stage, learners assume a more active role, relying on their individual strengths to collaborate and correct each other. Constructive criticism through peer support and teacher guidance helps form relationships that encourage students to collaborate and cooperate through social interaction.

Throughout the stages of the dictogloss procedure, the teacher adopts a facilitative role to monitor receptive and productive skills, providing ample evidence for assessing language skills. For instance, if many students indicate that they do not understand the text after it has been read twice, the teacher may decide to present it again. The learners who are not able to detect certain types of mistakes might benefit from participating in a whole-group discussion in which the teacher provides feedback and further explanations. This formative feedback leads to changes to instruction and assessment that guide the learner to greater language-related outcomes.

Following are two lesson plans showing how a dictogloss procedure can specifically promote writing and speaking productive skills among language learners while at the same time integrating the other skills. For each procedure, we provide alternatives for advanced and lower-level English language learners; we also demonstrate how to combine interaction and reflection so that learners at all levels may utilize the four skills in order to promote a more dynamic language-learning experience. We applied the procedures to pre-service English language educators who were at a basic level and whose L1 was

Spanish. Learners at this level—A2 on the Council of Europe (2001) scale—should be able to understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of immediate relevance; communicate in routine tasks; and describe in simple terms their background, immediate environment, and matters of immediate need.

## A dictogloss procedure to promote writing skills

Although there are many ways to design and implement a dictogloss procedure, the first example promotes writing skills. One objective of this example is to allow learners to integrate the four skills through self-assessment and peer assessment. The procedure also helps educators determine whether they need to change instructional designs or need to guide learners in adapting tactics that will facilitate individual learning trajectories. The six-stage process is an adaptation of the original dictogloss procedure and is meant to serve as a flexible framework that can be tailored to local contexts.

A key component of the procedure is determining the type of input to be provided. Because our class consisted of first-year college students, we designed a written text to expose them to typical university experiences comparable to their own. The text included common idiomatic expressions so they would gain exposure to a wider lexicon. A quick Creative Commons search led to a variety of topic-related pictures that could be reused and remixed freely (as long as attribution is given) without the need to get permission from the original owner of the pictures (see http://creativecommons.org).

An alternative to creating an original text is to find an authentic text (one that is not intended for teaching purposes) that is appropriate for the learners. To support the text, any form of visual aids may be used: realia, props, personal objects, and images. Regardless of the type of text and visuals used, a lot will depend on what students are asked to do with the written material, so selecting an appropriate text will require knowing what one plans for each of the six stages of the procedure.

### 1. Initiation stage

The procedure begins with an initiation, a means of "warming up" to the topic. During this stage, the teacher presents two pictures that relate to the chosen topic.

For the purpose of this example, we will use the topic of a typical college experience in the United States. Two pictures that depict scenarios related to this topic are presented either as individual handouts or projected onto a screen (for sample pictures see www.flickr.com/photos/carmichaellibrary/3008748339/sizes/o/in/photostream and www.flickr.com/photos/velkr0/3472576304/sizes/l/in/photostream). The teacher then initiates an instructional conversation with the class about key vocabulary terms based on the two pictures. Instructional conversations are a type of classroom discourse that permits teachers to provide a semi-structured group discussion that activates students' prior knowledge and critical thinking skills (Díaz-Rico 2004; Goldenberg and Gallimore 1991). Instructional conversations also serve as a formative assessment technique that helps teachers collect oral evidence as to what students already know and can do (Eisenkraft 2004). The initiation stage typically lasts 5 to 10 minutes, or possibly more depending on the learners' readiness levels and individual preferences of the teacher. (As much as the pictures facilitate the discussion of vocabulary terms, they are optional. An alternative to using pictures is to present key vocabulary related to the text.)

### 2. Input stage

The next stage activates the learners' receptive skills based on authentic input. The teacher reads a short text aloud to the class at a normal rate of speed. Learners are asked to recreate the ideas and correct sequences presented in the text. We presented the following text to our students, who were freshman university students studying for bachelor of arts degrees in English language teaching in Mexico:

> We didn't have much time. As we all stuffed our faces, we knew we only had a few more minutes to finish lunch before our next class. Since we arrived late to lunch, we were left standing as the six of us continued talking about what we were doing this weekend. Most of us were going to go to the big football game on Saturday because we wanted to see

our dear friend Susan march in the marching band. Suddenly, the bell rang, so we all marched right into our next class, American History. Since this was a freshman class, which was required of all incoming students, it was common to end up with few vacant seats in a lecture hall that seated well over 100 students. The good thing about our professor, though, was that he uploaded all of his lectures to YouTube so we could check them out if we happened to miss a class or if we did not understand something during the lecture. Professors typically do not take roll, which means that it is our responsibility to make sure we keep up with our course readings and homework. Although there is a lot of required reading for the class, it is possible to keep up if you can learn how to prioritize. In other words, it is possible to have a great college experience that includes doing well academically while also having an enjoyable social life.

Several options are available in the input stage. The length of the text and the number of times the text is read to the learners will depend on their readiness levels (i.e., language proficiency, maturity level, and content knowledge) and the particular objectives of the dictogloss activity (e.g., learning strategies, integrating skills with a focus on written discourse, integrating skills with a focus on spoken discourse, and correcting errors). Moreover, different strategies may be used to facilitate the learners' abilities to comprehend and to reproduce the text: notetaking, drawing a picture or schematic map, and completing an outline, among others. Depending on how teachers choose to implement the procedure, they can anticipate spending 10 to 15 minutes or more on this stage.

### 3. Independent stage

Once the teacher has verified that most of the learners have completed an outline, a list of key words, or a concept map to guide their organization, learners continue with the independent stage and reproduce in their own words as much of the original text as

they can. Learners must recall the essence of the original text by writing one paragraph that includes as many details and language sequences as possible. At this point, the teacher has options regarding feedback. One approach is to have the learners create the stories individually, with no intervention from the teacher; this approach allows the teacher to see exactly what learners can achieve individually. Another approach is for the teacher to provide individual, small-group, or whole-group feedback as needed. Finally, the instructor may gather evidence and provide whole-group feedback at the end of the stage, giving learners an opportunity to make changes to their respective texts as necessary. Regardless of how much feedback is provided, the main objective is to allow learners to create as much as possible on their own. This stage contrasts with a later interactive stage that encourages collaboration. The time it takes to complete the independent stage will depend on (1) the amount of feedback the teacher provides and (2) the degree to which learners are able to notice mistakes on their own. When we applied this procedure in our class with no teacher feedback, the independent stage lasted approximately 25 minutes.

### 4. Independent internalization stage

Once the students have completed their texts to the best of their ability, the teacher hands out the original text or projects it on a screen for the entire class to view. This process of comparing personal texts to the original is referred to as independent internalization; it allows learners to notice differences in lexicon, grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, among other things. When learners notice that a change is needed, they make annotations to their texts by using a colored pen or pencil to cross out words and make notes along the margins of the text without erasing their original text. Writing out annotations allows learners to elaborate on their mistakes in punctuation, spelling, word order, verb tense, subject-verb agreement, semantics (idiomatic expressions, colloquialisms, etc.), and other types of mistakes that relate to the objectives of the individual or course. The objective of this stage is for learners to use the original text as a model to facilitate deeper detection tactics when recreating the essence of the original text in their own words.

Because learners do not erase any of their work when making annotations, the teacher will be able to determine the accuracy of the self-corrections and decide whether future instructional changes are warranted. Additionally, learners are instructed not to add any missing text should gaps exist between the original and their own text because the objective is for students to reflect and compare their creations (i.e., personal recollections of the text in their own words) to the original text. Because texts are to be turned in, the teacher will ultimately determine not only the students' level of accuracy in self-assessing but also their level of listening comprehension. This type of informal formative assessment allows teachers to determine whether future instructional changes need to be made and whether changes in the learners' tactics need to be addressed. We needed approximately 20 to 25 minutes for the independent internalization stage.

### 5. Interactive stage

The interactive stage allows learners to shift from a self-correcting to a peer-correcting activity. In groups of three, students exchange texts and look for additional mistakes that went undetected during the independent internalization stage. When students detect an error, they discuss it with the group (without making any annotations) in order to arrive at a group consensus. When a consensus is reached, the student who detected the mistake makes the appropriate changes by crossing out words and making annotations using a pen or pencil of a different color from the one that was used during the independent internalization stage. Again, no part of the original text is to be erased. We allocated approximately 20 to 25 minutes for the interactive stage.

The consensus work of the interactive stage allows learners to integrate additional linguistic skills (listening, speaking, and reading) when peer-correcting each other. For instance, before learners annotate a text, a consensus must be reached that requires oral communication about grammar and vocabulary-related issues. Decisions at this stage are made through deliberation, which allows each learner to take on a teaching or leadership role as the opportunity arises. One learner may be stronger in grammar, another in vocabulary, and a third in word order. Depending on what is being corrected in the text, each learner exercises leadership skills when teaching others during the correction process. In other cases, more homogeneous groups (i.e., students at the same level) may also benefit from collaborative learning in which peer correction results from a group decision-making process. As the teacher observes group interactions, inferences can be made at individual and group levels as to the type of subsequent interactions needed.

### 6. Final internalization stage

During the final internalization stage, students scrutinize the text, and each learner completes a reflection sheet (see Table 1) by indicating the types of errors he or she committed, how each error was detected, and knowledge of the error.

| List the type of error you committed and give an example | Indicate how the specified error was detected (check as many as you want) | | | Indicate your knowledge of the error (check one) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grammar, vocabulary, collocation, spelling, etc. | By a classmate | By me | Other (by book, notes, dictionary, teacher, etc.) | I knew the error. | I have heard of the error. | The error is new for me. |
| 1. | | | | | | |
| 2. | | | | | | |
| 3. | | | | | | |

**Table 1. Reflection sheet**

In our case, working with students who received no feedback from teachers, the number of detected errors via self-correction and peer correction rarely exceeded 10 for each learner. If teacher intervention is part of the procedure, then the number of errors could be more. Discretion should be used when helping learners list errors in a manageable way: learners may choose the most common types of errors, errors based on what was discussed in prior classes, or errors prioritized according to individual needs and the goals of the class.

When learners complete the reflection sheet, they are to articulate the error by providing examples. For instance, students may simply copy a part of their text and any notations that they or their classmates made, or they may also choose to describe their mistake metalinguistically. Evidence of metalinguistic awareness comes from learners using formal terms like *grammar, pronouns, verb phrases,* and *collocations* to refer to errors they committed. For the purposes of conducting a dictogloss procedure, the teacher may choose to teach grammar either with little metalinguistic awareness (i.e., teaching grammar covertly) or with a strong focus on metalinguistic awareness (i.e., teaching grammar overtly).

After learners turn in the reflection sheets, the teacher will review them to note any errors on the reflection and determine what errors were noticed by the learners themselves. Based on this information, teachers can focus future instruction on the types of errors being committed and decide if clarification is needed, such as in the case of students interpreting certain usages as errors when in fact they are correct. Moreover, the reflection sheets also serve as a learning heuristic for each student to reflect on personal types of errors that tend to recur. The internalization stage personalizes the learning process while integrating the four skills, self-assessment and peer assessment, and direct teacher feedback. Although we are using the terms *error* and *mistake* interchangeably, the reflection sheet helps distinguish between the two; that distinction also will determine what subsequent instruction might be necessary.

## A dictogloss procedure to promote speaking skills

The previous example illustrates how a dictogloss provides opportunities for language learners to practice writing skills; a dictogloss can also facilitate learners' speaking skills. For this activity, the objective is to use the dictogloss as a means for learners to recall a news report while distinguishing between intonation units and developing proper intonation. In addition to gaining practice recognizing intonation patterns, learners practice listening skills as they recall as much of a news report as possible.

So that learners benefit from identifying intonation units and receive adequate listening and speaking practice, the text must be chosen carefully. For this particular dictogloss example, a *Special English* report from Voice of America (Watson 2012) was used because of its appropriateness for learners at the lower A1 and A2 Common European Framework levels (Council of Europe 2001). Learners at these levels will benefit from a *Special English* report that (1) uses a core vocabulary of 1,500 words, (2) uses the active voice and avoids idioms, and (3) is read at about two-thirds the speed of standard English (Voice of America 2011). If learners are at a higher level, a more authentic text is appropriate. Also, texts may be chosen based on topics that learners are interested in or need to know about for a particular purpose.

Although one of the unique aspects of a dictogloss is that input is typically presented authentically (i.e., the text is not intended for teaching purposes and is presented at a normal rate of speech), we made the decision to use the *Special English* program to make input more comprehensible for the learners. Comprehensible input has been well researched in developing strategies and learning tactics that help the English language learner convert input into knowledge and skills that can be used for useful production or intake (Krashen 2003). The following example outlines six stages that teachers may follow when the goal is to identify intonation units while also providing listening and speaking practice. The example provides practical alternatives and is meant to be flexible enough for teachers to adapt it to local contexts.

### 1. Initiation stage

The teacher begins the initiation stage by building schemata before the *Special English* report is played to the entire class. As with the written dictogloss, selecting a topic for the spo-

ken dictogloss will depend on the readiness levels, interests, and needs of the learners. For this example, we have chosen the topic of "foreign students." To make the input stage that follows more comprehensible for the learners, the teacher discusses the topic and how the learners' personal experiences and interests relate to it. Other characteristics of the news broadcast might also be discussed, such as covering a text moving from the general to the specific—the *what, how, when, where, with whom,* and *why* of the text—and the overall discourse structure of a news program itself. The initiation stage may last 15 to 20 minutes, or more, depending on the level of language proficiency and the content being discussed.

## 2. Input stage

During the input stage, which typically takes 15 to 20 minutes, the teacher plays the *Special English* report one time, uninterrupted. Students create a visual representation of the text individually; this representation may take the form of a drawing, graphic organizer, outline, or flowchart. Prior experience with these types of visual representations might be necessary, depending on the maturity level of the learners. An alternative is to have listeners take notes or write down key words. Depending on how much information learners gather after their first listening, the broadcast may be repeated until the learners have written down most of the information they need to recall the main points. The information that learners write down should be detailed enough to prompt communicative discourse but not so complete that they simply read automatically from their notes.

## 3. Interdependent stage

The interdependent stage allows learners to collaborate with one another. They form groups of three and compare their respective visual representations with the goal of developing a single group visual representation by reaching a consensus regarding as many details of the original broadcast as possible. They also decide on who will assume each of the roles portrayed in the *Special English* report—typically a broadcaster, interviewer, and interviewee. The idea is to divide the class into groups based on the number of speakers in the audio or video. After each group has determined the roles and the script, the

broadcast can be played back a final time in order to provide one last model for learners. The interdependent stage may take between 15 and 20 minutes, depending on the context.

## 4. Rehearsal stage

During the rehearsal stage, the teacher reviews the visual representations, and each group informs the teacher who will fill each role. This review process assures that each group has enough details to produce an accurate script. Upon approval from the teacher, the students draft their own broadcast scripts, trying to capture as many details of the original as possible. At this point, students may wish to elaborate by creating additional information that supports the original text. The goal is to include as many points as possible from the original broadcast, then allow room for learners to be creative and augment the broadcast as they desire. Depending on the size of the class, each group might prepare a five-minute broadcast.

The groups rehearse their broadcasts until they are comfortable with the delivery. Groups are encouraged to time their performances and perhaps record them in order to evaluate their performances just by listening to themselves. The teacher can also offer feedback on the performances. Since this dictogloss variation has learners read from a script, various aspects of spoken discourse can be addressed: voice projection, intonation, volume, and the like. The rehearsal stage can take anywhere from 20 to 40 minutes.

The groups then prepare for a final performance in front of the entire class. As an alternative, they might choose to record themselves two or three times, then decide which version is the best and why. Another variation would be to have groups produce a video of their broadcast and have others assess the performance based on predetermined criteria. A rubric listing these criteria is a worthwhile assessment tool not only for preparing for the performance, but also for evaluating performances, including appropriateness of intonation patterns, voice projection, diction, overall language proficiency, content knowledge, and the like. Learners and the teacher can collectively develop the rubric before the performance task, or the teacher may introduce a pre-established rubric that is appropriate for measuring both the process and the product.

### 5. Performance stage

During the performance stage, individual groups perform in front of the entire class. Alternately, in classes of more than 30 learners, groups can pair up and assess each other. Rubrics could be used here as well. Once groups have finished their assessment, they form new group pairs to begin the assessment process again. While learners peer-assess, the teacher monitors the performances and offers additional feedback as necessary. As the teacher moves around the room, common errors could be presented in the form of brief instructional conversations, which would also include learners' own assessments of errors that were found.

### 6. Reflective stage

The final stage of the spoken dictogloss procedure is to have each learner reflect on individual errors. This reflective stage allows learners to prioritize which errors are most common. The teacher may choose not to use the term *error*, instead framing this stage as an opportunity to prioritize areas where learners can improve. For any dictogloss procedure that focuses on errors, the teacher may want to explain from the beginning the importance of supporting each other's language development and the need to complement error correction with something positive. For example, a demonstration of appropriate language that learners can use to correct each other assists them in building the rapport needed in a supportive learning environment.

The two dictogloss procedures described above are meant to serve as flexible frameworks that others can fine-tune to fit local contexts. The estimated times will depend in large part on teacher preferences, learner profiles, and the type of course being offered. For example, in the case of a spoken dictogloss, more communicative approaches can easily fit within this framework as learners focus more on creating spontaneous language than on reading from a script. But one essential tenet to all dictogloss procedures is the integration of language skills, given the aggregate of synergies that exist when learning how to read, write, listen, and speak an additional language. Another tenet is the key role self-assessment and peer assessment have on the learning process; in fact, conducting the dictogloss procedure may lead teachers to rethink how they view their role as instructional leaders. Instead of thinking of themselves as didactic informants, English teachers might be better off considering themselves language-learning designers who create opportunities for the greatest number of learners to get the most benefit out of every class.

### Conclusion

The learners who participated in this dictogloss appreciated the way that all four language skills were made purposeful. They also mentioned that the experience of giving and receiving peer feedback was a new way of realizing how much they had learned and one that motivated them to become more aware of their increased knowledge and ability. As researchers, we were encouraged by the fact that each time the dictogloss procedure was implemented, learners interacted and supported each other more over time. As a result, they accepted responsibility for not only their own personal learning but also the learning of their classmates.

One key challenge language educators face is to create experiences that will live on in learners' future experiences, to use Dewey's (1997) words. The two dictogloss variations in this article emphasize the writing and speaking skills without isolating the other skills necessary to maintain authentic interaction. It is precisely this authentic interaction that prepares learners for future experiences with English and motivates them to go beyond what they might do in a more traditional language-learning experience (i.e., completing decontextualized exercises that may fail to hold meaning and relevance to authentic experiences). A dictogloss provides a framework for educators to integrate language skills with social interaction that encourages learners to take ownership of their learning. Thus, learning becomes more meaningful and relevant for what learners are likely to face in the future.

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