

## Dictogloss: The Role of Reconstruction Tasks on Noticing

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### Abstract

*The idea that noticing captures a key role in second language acquisition, made the practitioners in the field search for ways of promoting noticing. In order to focus the learners' attention to the form in the input, different attention gathering techniques, procedures and activities have been used. This study is an investigation of the role of dictogloss; a reconstruction activity popularized recently, as a task in promoting noticing. Two groups of Intermediate Turkish learners of English language (n=42) were given a pre-test before they were presented the same linguistic form by traditional Present-Practice-Produce method. The difference in the educational intervention was that, the experimental group was presented dictogloss activities in the Production stage of PPP. After 4 weeks of educational intervention, the groups were given the post-test, the results of which indicated the positive effect of dictogloss activity on noticing.*

**Keywords:** *Dictogloss, Noticing, Reconstruction*

### INTRODUCTION

Over the past several decades, the Task-Based Language Teaching and learning have increasingly taken the attention of the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) world. This is mainly because both practitioners and researchers in the field emphasize the need to elicit output from language learners which represent their performance. Such samples of output provide information about the learners' level of L2. In that sense, it is possible to say that task-based language teaching constitutes a strong version of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). That is, tasks can provide the basis for an entire language curriculum (Ellis, 2003). However, it should also be noted that tasks are not the only way of realizing a strong version of CLT. Nevertheless, tasks can function as a useful device for planning a communicative curriculum, particularly in contexts where there are few opportunities for more authentic communicative experiences, for example, as in the case of many foreign language learning situations (Ellis, 2003).

According to the Common European Framework (2001) classroom tasks, whether reflecting "real-life" use or essentially "pedagogic" in nature, are communicative to the extent that they require learners to comprehend, negotiate and express meaning in order to achieve a communicative goal. The emphasis in a communicative task is on successful task completion and consequently the primary focus is on meaning as learners realize their communicative intentions. However, in the case of tasks designed for language learning or teaching purposes, performance is

concerned both with meaning and the way meanings are comprehended, expressed and negotiated. A changing balance needs to be established between attention to meaning and form, fluency and accuracy, in the overall selection and sequencing of tasks so that both task performance and language learning progress can be facilitated and appropriately acknowledged.

### *Defining a "Task"*

Ellis, R. (1994) expresses the need for tasks in a foreign language classroom for they give learners an environment which best promotes the natural language learning process. Taking the change in foreign language teaching perspectives in the past last decades from more structure-based to an organic process that follows its own agenda, this new perspective gives learners tasks to transact, rather than items to learn. By engaging in meaningful activities, such as problem solving, discussions or narratives, learners stretch and develop their interlanguage system (Foster, 1999).

The above discussion brings us to the point where the definition of a task should be given. What exactly is a task? How does a task differ from an activity that a language teacher does in his/her classroom? What makes it different from an 'exercise' or a 'drill'?

The most elaborate of available definitions of a language learning task is that of Candlin (1987: 10)

One of a set of differentiated, sequenceable, problem-posing activities involving learners and teachers in some joint selection from a range of varied cognitive and communicative procedures applied to existing and new knowledge in the collective exploration and pursuance of foreseen or emergent goals within a social milieu.

The idea that tasks are "differentiated" and "sequenceable" is unquestionably valuable. Because tasks have a beginning, a middle, and an end, they provide an orientation for the learner against the opaque background of a course syllabus (Swales, 2009). Tasks are clearly "sequenceable" in the sense that tasks can be graded in terms of difficulty or complexity and in terms of alternating the focus from one that conceives the student as a language user to one that conceives the student as a language learner (Kim, 2009; Samuda & Madden, 1985)

Furthermore, Candlin (2001) lists some key features of tasks that are required in a language classroom, whatever the emphasis and the orientation of the tasks are. Input, specification of roles, settings –classroom arrangements-, actions, monitoring, outcomes and feedback are considered as required in task setting and implementation.

"Tasks" are activities that call for primarily meaning-focused language use. In contrast, "exercises" are activities that call for primarily form-focused language use. However, we need to recognize that the overall purpose of tasks is the same as exercises –learning a language- the difference lying in the means by which this purpose is to be achieved (Ellis, 2003).

No matter how tasks are defined, the use and the effectiveness of tasks have been widely accepted in the field (Parrot, 1993; Murphy, 2003; Littlewood, 2004; Seedhouse, 1999). Tasks have become the core of many scientific studies. Doughty (2003: 288) describes two recent lines of research in the field of English Language

Teaching (ELT). Processing instruction studies and focus on form studies are the first line, and the fundamental question of how L2 learner attention can most efficiently be directed to cues in the input is the second line of study.

The study in hand is a result of the second line of investigation stated above. The main focus of the study is to test the effectiveness of an attention drawing technique used in language classrooms, namely dictogloss.

### *Reformulation and Reconstruction*

For Nassaji (2007), reformulations (or recasts) refer to interactional feedback that rephrases the learner's erroneous utterance into a target like form. Reformulations might contribute significantly to language acquisition, he concludes. When the teacher or an interlocutor reformulates the learner's erroneous utterance, the feedback may not only provide the learner with the correct model of the target language (i.e., positive evidence), but it might also shift attention from the message to the form by signaling to the learner that the utterance contains an error and the interlocutor is correcting that error. In such cases, the feedback might result in *noticing the gap*, a process that occurs when the learner compares his or her original output with the teacher's output and then realizes that his or her interlanguage differs from the target language (Schmidt & Frota, 1986; Swain, 1995).

Rather than simply correcting a student's written text, which usually involves attention to surface features of the text only, the teacher reformulates it, using the content the student has provided, but recasting it so that the rewritten draft approximates as closely as possible to a putative target language model (Thornbury, 1997). Whereas reformulations do not demand responses from learners, elicitation requires some sort of reaction (Egi, 2010).

Reformulation has been widely researched both pedagogically (Thornbury, 1997) and empirically (Adams, 2003; Swain and Lapkin, 2002; Tocalli-Beller and Swain, 2005). This strategy consists of a native or near-native speaker re-writing the text produced by the L2 learner by making only the necessary corrections and readjustments to make it native-like without changing the original meaning. All research on reformulation (Adams, 2003; Qi and Lapkin, 2001; Swain and Lapkin, 2002) agrees that its effectiveness is largely sustained by the presence of the following basic SLA constructs: *output*, *noticing*, *language related episodes (LREs)* and *peer dialogue* (Ibarrola, 2009).

Unlike reformulation, the starting point of reconstruction activities is the teacher's text, which the learner first reads and then reconstructs (Thornbury, 1997). Other than dictogloss, copying, memorization and recitation of texts, dictation and rhetorical transformations are also different types of reformulation.

According to Vasiljevic (2010) reconstruction helps students try out their hypotheses and subsequently to identify their strengths and weaknesses. A reconstruction task encourages students to consider the input more closely. Noticing is known to be one of the crucial elements of the language learning process. The reconstruction and correction stages help the students to compare the input to their own representation of the text and to identify the possible gaps. It is through this process of

cognitive comparison that new forms are incorporated, students' language competence improves, and students' interlanguage is restructured.

### *Dictogloss*

Dictogloss, a form-focused collaborative writing task, is derived from the words "dictation" and "composition". Dictogloss is a task-based procedure aimed at providing an opportunity for learners to reflect on their own output through text reconstruction. A short dense text is read twice at normal speed. The first time, students should only listen in order to let the words 'wash over them' (Wajnryb, 1990: 8). The second time, they are encouraged to take down notes. In the next stage, students work together in small groups to reconstruct the text, pooling their respective notes and linguistic resources and aiming to maintain the informational content of the original text (Malmqvist, 2005). The various text versions are then analyzed and compared. Later, a distinction is made between differences that are acceptable or unacceptable.

Wajnryb (1990: 10) points to interaction, active involvement and improvement of language skills as central aspects of the dictogloss approach: Working in this way, learners are actively engaged in the learning process. Through active learner involvement, students come to confront their own strengths and weaknesses in English language use. In so doing, they discover what they do not know, and then what they need to know. It is through this process that they improve their language skills.

Vasiljevic (2010) describes how the dictogloss procedure facilitates the development of the learners' communicative competence. Students' speaking time is significantly longer than in a traditional teacher-centered classroom. At the same time, the pressure to reconstruct the text within the time limit also means that students are more likely to use time effectively. Furthermore, students' communication is much more natural in a dictogloss class than in classes involving a list of discussion questions of topics, or communication activities with simple question-and-answer format. A collaborative reconstruction task gives learners the opportunities to practice and use all modes of language and to become engaged in authentic communication. There is more turn-taking and students are more likely to use confirmation and clarification strategies.

The dictogloss procedure also promotes learner autonomy. Students are expected to help each other recreate the text rather than depend on the teacher to provide the information. The analysis and correction stage enables the students to see where they have done well and where they need to improve. Students gain insights into their linguistic shortcomings and also develop strategies for solving the problems they have encountered.

## METHOD

### *Research Questions*

To further our understanding of the effect of dictogloss activities on noticing and learning in Second Language Acquisition on the selected linguistic item, this study investigated the possible efficacy of dictogloss as a focus on form activity. The research questions are as follows:

1. Does Dictogloss have any effect on the learning of the target item chosen?
2. Does Dictogloss facilitate retaining the structure well over time?

### *Participants*

The participants were 42 intermediate level students, 28 females and 14 males enrolled in the Intensive English Program at a state university in Turkey. The participants had studied English for an average of 6 years before they started their higher education.

Based on the pre-test results, students who scored more than 90% and less than 10% were excluded from the study given the potential for a ceiling effect and developmental readiness. Among the participants in the final subject pool (n = 42), 19 were in the experimental group, and 23 were in the control group.

### *Procedure*

The study in hand is a quasi-experimental design study with one experimental and one control group. The participants were given a pre-test before the educational intervention to test their existing knowledge on the linguistic form to be presented. After the elimination of students who scored more than 90% and less than 10% from the pre-test, experimental and control groups were formed and given the educational intervention. During this process, students in two groups were presented the target item using the lesson plans developed for both groups. In order to eliminate the teacher factor the researcher taught the courses for both groups. The experiment was conducted in classes during their regular class periods. The educational intervention took four hours every week and lasted four weeks. Immediate post-test was given after the four weeks. Other than the immediate post-test, in order to test retention, the participants were given the delayed post-test four weeks after the treatment. The number of the activities, length of time allowed and language level were considered and, as far as possible kept equal for both groups. In order not to put a group in an advantageous position, the same texts were used with different types of activities. Also, in both groups the discussion among the students and teacher was in the target language.

Both for the experimental and control group the intervention followed the very common paradigm of teaching; presentation, practice and production, often known by its initials PPP. The aim of a PPP lesson is to teach a specific language form- a grammatical structure, or the realization of a particular function or notion (Willis, 2004). Therefore, a traditional PPP course starts with the presentation of the target form. In the practice stage, controlled activities are carried out with the emphasis on correct production of the form. Finally, in the production stage, the learners are given the opportunity to use the new pattern in a less controlled situation.

In the study, in both experimental and control groups, the target structure was introduced in the Presentation stage, the students were given more controlled activities about the same target form in the Practice stage and lastly, they were asked to produce the new form either in written or oral form.

### Instruments

The same test was used as the pre and post-tests. The test included 60 questions in different types including; True/False, fill in the blanks, sentence completion and some production type of questions. Other than the target item, there were different grammatical items on the test so as not to make the form salient for the learners. However, when grading the tests, only target item questions were analyzed. The test was developed by the researcher for the study and the reliability and validity tests were conducted. The Cronbach's Alpha value was found to be .997, which is considered to be highly reliable (George and Mallery, 2003).

### FINDINGS

For each participant there were three types of data: pre-test scores obtained before treatment, post-test scores obtained after treatment, and delayed post-test scores obtained after four weeks. A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used in order to find out the effectiveness of the dictogloss. All analyses were done on SPSS 11 version.

Table 1.  
*Results of Pre-test for Groups*

Groups	N	Mean
Experimental Group	19	40,2
Control Group	23	39,6
Sig.	.93	

According to the results of the pre-test, the experimental group had a mean score of 40.2 and control group 39.6. There is no statistically significant difference among the groups according to the results of the pre-test  $p \leq .93$  which is higher than 0.05; therefore it is not significant ( $F=.148$ ;  $df = 3$ ;  $p=.93$ ). This shows that the participants in both groups had the same level of knowledge on the target from before the educational intervention. Therefore, any difference in post-test can be directly attributed to the treatment.

Table 2.  
*All Test Results for the Experimental Group*

Test	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Delayed	Post-
Mean	40,2	81,4		75,1

The table above shows all test results for the experimental group and clearly states the increase in the mean scores of the participants of the experimental group. The group has increased its mean score from 40,2 to 81,4 after the educational intervention. However, according to the results of the delayed post-test, the participants were unable to retain what they have learned in their interlanguage, since there was a decrease of almost 6 points four weeks after the treatment.

Table 3.  
*T-Test for All Test Scores of Experimental Group*

		Mean	t	df	Sig.
Pair 1	Results of Pre-test	40,2	-15.17	18	.007
	Results of Post-test	81,4			
Pair 2	Results of Pre-test	40,2	-13.03	18	.057
	Results of Delayed Post-test	75,1			
Pair 3	Results of Post-test	81,4	2.46	18	.001
	Results of Delayed Post-test	75,1			

Table 3 presents the t-test scores of the experimental group. T-test is used for comparing the means of two samples (or treatments), even where they have different numbers of replicates. In simple terms, the t-test compares the actual difference between two means in relation to the variation in the data (expressed as the standard deviation of the difference between the means).

It is clear from the table above that there is a significant difference between the test scores of the experimental group gained from the pre-test and the post-test ( $t = -15.17$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p \leq .007$ ), which means there are differences between the performances of the students after the educational intervention. When the students' attention is directed to the target item in the input via dictogloss activities, they learn the new structure more effectively.

Pair 2 shows the comparison between the test scores of pre-test and delayed post-test. Here, there is a statistical difference between the test scores ( $t = -13.03$ ;  $df = 18$ ;  $p \leq .057$ ). This shows that students did not forget what they had learnt between the treatment and the delayed post-test. According to the results of the t-test between the pre-test and the post-test scores, it is possible to say that the students have learned the target form, and that this learning has continued until the delayed post-test was conducted because there is a statistical difference between the pre-test and the delayed post-test scores. Although the students' scores decrease in the delayed post-test, the students have not forgotten what they have learned completely.

However, in the long term students were unable to retain the new information to the degree acquired in the post-test. The comparison of the results of the post and delayed-post test scores reveal a decrease in the test scores; however, we can still talk about a statistically significant difference between the scores. This basically means that the learners have gained scores from the delayed post-test which are very different from

the post-test. As mentioned above, this may not be very positive since it signals some kind of loss, the loss of what has been acquired after the treatment.

Table 4.  
*All Test Results for the Control Group*

	Pre-Test	Post-Test	Delayed Post-Test
Mean	39,6	73,7	72,3

The table above presents the mean scores of the control group for each test given. The pre-test mean score 39,6 has increased to 73,7 after the treatment. This increase cannot be observed in the delayed post-test scores. There is a slight decrease in the scores of the participants from post-test to delayed post-test.

Table 5.  
*T-Test for All Test Scores of Control Group*

		Mean	t	df	Sig.
Pair 1	Results of Pre-test	39,6	-22.32	22	.001
	Results of Post-test	73,7			
Pair 2	Results of Pre-test	39,6	-14.94	22	.007
	Results of Delayed Post-test	72,3			
Pair 3	Results of Post-test	73,7	.72	22	.001
	Results of Delayed Post-test	72,3			

When the t-test results of the control group for each test was considered, it was seen that for this group all test results are significant. It is highly significant for the pre-test and post-test (Pair 1  $t = -22.32$ ;  $df = 22$ ;  $p \leq .001$  Pair 2  $t = -14.94$ ;  $df = 22$ ;  $p \leq .007$ ) and post-test and delayed post-test (Pair 3  $t = .72$ ;  $df = 22$ ;  $p \leq .001$ ) results. The results of post-test and delayed post-test are highly significant, since they show that students retained the target form four weeks after the treatment.

The control group was successful in retaining the newly learned item in their interlanguage. In other words, the traditional type of teaching (Present-Practice-Produce without extra emphasis on the output) helped learners to keep what they have learned in their interlanguage.

We are able to make these kinds of interpretations by analyzing the mean scores of the tests. The mean score of the delayed post-test of the control group is 72,3 however; the mean score of the experimental group was 75,1.

## DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to test the effectiveness of a focus on form activity, namely dictogloss, and analyze its value by answering the two research questions:

*Research Question 1: Does Dictogloss have any effect on the learning of the target item chosen?*

The results reveal that the answer to the first research question is positive, meaning that dictogloss activities have positive effects on the learning of the target item. First of all, the participants engaged in the dictogloss treatment outperformed those who were exposed to the same input under traditional PPP technique for immediate learning according to the results of the post-test. The statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test for the experimental group reveals this. The students have increased their mean score from 40.2 to 81.4 in experimental group, and from 39.6 to 73.7 in the control group. The increase in mean score of the experimental group is 41.2; however, for the control group the difference is 34.1. When the mean scores of both groups are compared it is evident that dictogloss is an efficient technique for attracting learners' attention to the form in the input, therefore leading to the acquisition of the new item. As a result, it is possible to say that dictogloss fosters immediate uptake.

*Research Question 2: Does Dictogloss facilitate retaining the structure well over time?*

As with the first research question, the answer to the second research question is also affirmative. The delayed post-test results of control and experimental groups reveal different outcomes. According to the delayed post-tests, even though the test results for both groups are statistically significant, the control group seems to have an advantage over the experimental group. Dictogloss activities have helped the learners to acquire the target item but the decrease of the learners' delayed post-test results -from 81.4 to 75.1- is evidence of loss of knowledge. On the other hand, the control group's post test results decreased from 73.7 to 72.3, a fall of only one point. Statistically, it is possible to say that dictogloss activities facilitate retention. However, a comparison of the two groups -dictogloss versus traditional PPP- shows the latter seems to have an advantage over dictogloss in retention with this target item. Therefore, it can be said that the traditional PPP technique seems to work for learning and retention.

Kowal and Swain (1997) have found evidence of noticing, hypothesis-testing, and metatalk when using the dictogloss technique with 8th grade French immersion students. The teacher using this technique found that students often focused on more than just the grammatical aspect being emphasized. They discussed grammatical aspects, but also orthographic and semantic issues. The following pair work and whole class discussion did promote student discussion about the links between meaning and form in relation to the composing process. Also, the results of our study reveal that when students reflect consciously on the language they are producing, this may be a source of language learning. This actually brings us to the point where value of collaborative work for second language learning should be emphasized. Because dictogloss is an activity in which students work in cooperative groups to recreate a text,

this not only provides an authentic opportunity for cooperative learning, but encourages students to focus on meaning when listening to a text and also to develop effective listening strategies and proof reading and editing strategies.

The conclusion that the learners who participated in the dictogloss tasks outperformed the traditional learning group according to the post-test scores is consistent with the general trends observed in previous studies (Song & Suh 2008; Izumi, 2002; Izumi, 2003). The fact that the learners who engaged in the dictogloss tasks did significantly better suggests that having output opportunities was effective in developing learners' ability to use the target form in a more accurate, target-like way.

Regarding the issue of attention and SLA, this study appears to shed some light on the interconnections between attention, further processing of input, and L2 learning. Considering that the findings of this study about learning showed that the output groups outperformed the non-output group on the production post-test, it seems plausible to reason that the greater total amount of noticing of the two output groups played a role in mediating input and learning.

Acknowledging some limitations of the current study, several suggestions can be made for future research. Most of all, the size of the participants for both control and experimental groups were relatively small, and the participants were taken from several different intact classes, which weaken the value of random sampling in a strict sense and, furthermore, limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies would be expected to gather the data from a greater number of participants in an experimental design, rather than in a quasi-experimental design, to enhance external validity or generalizability.

Next, a longitudinal study including more treatment sessions could shed more light on the acquisitional process in SLA. Only four hours of treatment for four weeks (16 hours in total) may have been inadequate. Another limitation that must be stated is about the target item. Subsequent research could additionally investigate other targeted linguistic structures to find possible relationships between the output–input treatment and the specific structure types as well as between output task type and the type of target form. Future research could extend this study by exploring the impact of other kinds of output tasks designed in light of task complexity literature, examining potential links among task complexity, noticing, further processing (e.g., restructuring, uptake), and learning.

Much of the research into task-based teaching has focused on adult classes in ESL contexts. As Candlin (2001) observes, however, little empirical research has been conducted on task-based teaching in school EFL contexts. As was stated by Doughty (2003), how to direct learners' attention to input has just begun to be investigated in SLA. This study focuses on this issue and found that dictogloss as a task to push the learner to produce the target form as output during the production stage directs the Turkish learners' attention to form.

Since its invention, dictogloss has been used as a teaching technique and a research tool. Jacobs and Small (2003) state that dictogloss represents a major shift from traditional dictation. When implemented conscientiously, dictogloss embodies sound principles of language teaching which include: learner autonomy, cooperation among learners, curricular integration, focus on meaning, diversity, thinking skills, alternative assessment, and teachers as co-learners. Mathews-Aydinli (2008)

recommends that to stimulate the kind of cognitive activity necessary for learning, different tasks are necessary: for example, using dictogloss activities with students, in which students listen to a text, take notes, and then work with a partner to reconstruct the text.

From the pedagogical aspect, this study suggests an alternative presentation to account for the learning of a chosen linguistic item. Thus, every new item to be presented to a learner should be presented in a way to take the attention of the learner.

In conclusion, while it is accepted that there are a number of issues that need to be addressed in further research, this study supports the idea that dictogloss is a useful addition to both students' and teachers' repertoires for focusing students' attention to a rich variety of form during meaningful interaction.

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## APPENDIX

### MONOPOLY

Probably the most recognized board game around the world is the game of Monopoly. In this game, players vie for wealth by buying, selling, and renting properties; the key to success in the game, in addition to a bit of luck, is for a player to acquire monopolies on clusters of properties in order to force opponents to pay exorbitant rents and fees.

Although the game is now published in countless languages and versions, the beginnings of the game were considerably more humble. The game has developed so much because of being published in countless languages. Because it is an international game, it is published in each country with place names appropriate to the target language. The game was sold internationally, therefore foreign locations were used.

The game was invented in 1933 by Charles Darrow, during the height of the Great Depression. Darrow, who lived in Germantown, Pennsylvania, was himself unemployed during those difficult financial times. Darrow used the advantage of being unemployed, since he had so much free time, he was able to find time to invent the game. He set the original game not as might be expected in his hometown of Germantown, but in Atlantic City, New Jersey. The long walks along the Boardwalk and the visits to the Park Place in Atlantic City made him to set the game in Germantown. But because Atlantic City was the site of numerous pre-Depression vacations with very positive memories, he set the game there.

Darrow made the first games by hand and sold them locally. However, in 1935 Parker Brothers purchased the rights to Monopoly and took the first steps toward the mass production of today within the same year. Parker Brothers has a big role in the popularity of the game. Darrow was paid only 100 \$ by the manufacturing company, because he could not expect the possible fame of the game.

Adapted from Phillips, D. (1996). Longman Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test: Skills and Strategies. NY: Longman.

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