

PROMOTING INTEGRATED LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH DICTOGLOSS

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ABSTRACT

Why do we learn a language? The obvious answer is, “to communicate in that language”. We communicate through words, signs, symbols and other nonverbal means and such communication involves any of / all the four basic language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Many a time, we use more than one skill. As the primary objective of language learning is to communicate with others, it would be beneficial and meaningful to provide an integrated learning experience to our students rather than teaching only one language skill at a time. Teachers of English take recourse to the Task Based Instruction (TBI), Content Based Instruction (CBI), etc., in teaching English. While these approaches have their pride of place in the domain English Language Teaching (ELT), many teachers are yet to implement the integrated language teaching and learning in their classrooms. This paper brings out an important teaching tool, namely, Dictogloss, for promoting integrated language learning. Dictogloss is a classroom activity wherein the learner reconstructed a text dictated by their teacher. Also known as dicto-comp, this important tool combines the processes of dictation and composition. The paper discusses the importance of dictogloss for encouraging integrated language learning and also provides practical guidelines to conduct this activity in ELT classrooms.

KEYWORDS: Task Based Instruction (TBI), Content Based Instruction (CBI), Dictogloss, ELT Classrooms

INTRODUCTION

Integrated Language Learning

As we use English in an integrated manner in most of the communication contexts, it's beneficial if the language is learnt involving more than one language skills. Some of the skills are generally integrated in the class rooms. For instance, the reading comprehension tasks involve integration of reading and writing. However, if we can integrate speaking and listening along with the other two skills, the task may become more interesting and also enable the teacher to save time on looking for independent resource material. Oxford Rebecca (2001) compares the process of ELT to the weaving of a tapestry. Besides the four strands—teacher, learner, setting, relevant language—other strands consisting of the four primary language skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing are very crucial for language leaning. Of course , several other strands such as vocabulary, spelling, pronunciation, etc., also compose the tapestry of ELT. When all the four skills are interwoven during instruction, the skill strand of the tapestry leads to optimal ESL/EFL communication. When we teach English by integrating all the four language skills, we adopt the integrated approach to ELT whereas if we teach these skills independently, we resort to the segregated approach. It is also known as the language-based approach as the language itself is the focus of instruction and such instruction does not emphasize on learning for authentic communication. While discussing the segregated language Mohan (1986) mentions, “In the segregated-skill approach, the mastery of discrete language skills such as reading and speaking is seen as the key to successful learning, and language learning is typically separate from content learning”. This is contrary to the integrated

way that people use language skills in normal communication, and it clashes with the direction in which language teaching experts have been moving in recent years. Possibly, teachers think it is easier to use segregated skills approach: separating writing from speaking or listening from reading. They may also feel that it is difficult to concentrate on more than one skill at a time. Peregoy and Boyle (2001) feel that often segregated skill ESL / EFL classes present instruction in terms of skill-linked learning strategies, listening strategies, speaking strategies and writing strategies. For instance, activities such as guessing meaning based on context, breaking a sentence or word down into parts to understand meaning, etc., are used in classes. According to Oxford (1996) “many strategies, such as paying selective attention, self-evaluating, asking questions, analyzing, synthesizing, planning, and predicting, are applicable across skill areas.” Common strategies help weave the skills together. If teachers can improve their students’ learning strategies in one skill area they can often enhance the students’ performance in all language skills

Integrated-skill instruction falls under two categories: Content Based Instruction (CBI) and Task Based Instruction (TBI). The first of these emphasizes learning content through language, while the second stresses doing tasks that require communicative language use. By using a diverse range of materials, textbooks, and technologies, these methods can benefit the ESL or EFL classroom. CBI involves students practicing all the language skills in a highly integrated, communicative fashion while learning content such as science, mathematics, and social studies. CBI is valuable at all levels of proficiency, but the nature of the content might differ by proficiency level. For beginners, the content often involves basic social and interpersonal communication skills, but later, the content can become increasingly academic and complex. CBI may be classified into three types: theme-based, adjunct, and sheltered (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). The *theme-based model* integrates the language skills into the study of a theme (e.g., urban violence, cross-cultural differences in workplaces, natural wonders of the world, or a broad topic such as change). The theme must be very interesting to students and must allow a wide variety of language skills to be practiced, always with an aim of communicating about the theme. This is the most useful and widespread form of CBI practiced in EFL/ ESL teaching. In the *adjunct model*, language and content courses are taught separately but are carefully coordinated. In the *sheltered model*, the subject matter is taught in simplified English tailored to students' English proficiency level. Coming to the TBI, students participate in communicative tasks/ activities in English. Tasks are defined as “activities that can stand alone as fundamental units and that require comprehending, producing, manipulating, or interacting in authentic language while attention is principally paid to meaning rather than form.” (Nunan, 1989). In this type of instruction, team work is often used to increase student interaction and collaboration. For instance, students work together to create an advertisement, prepare an article for campus magazine, enact scenes from a play, or take part in other joint tasks. TBI can be used for developing proficiency in English at all levels though, of course, the nature of the task varies from one level to the other. Tasks become increasingly complex at higher proficiency levels.

Oxford (2001) observes, “The integrated-skill approach, as contrasted with the purely segregated approach, exposes English language learners to authentic language and challenges them to interact naturally in the language. Learners rapidly gain a true picture of the richness and complexity of the English language as employed for communication.” In addition, this approach stresses that English is not just an object of academic interest or merely a key to passing an examination; instead, English becomes a real means of interaction and sharing among people. In fact, it allows teachers to track students' progress in multiple skills at the same time besides promoting the learning of real content. Finally, the integrated-skill approach whether it uses CBI or TBI or some hybrid form, can be highly motivating to students of all ages and backgrounds.

Dictogloss / Dicto-Comp

Coined by an Australian Ruth Wajnryb, the term Dictogloss refers to *a form of dictation, in which the students hear and reconstruct the whole text rather than doing so line by line (Wajnryb 1990)*. It is a classic teaching technique where we are required to reconstruct a text by listening and noting down key words. Dictogloss is useful in that learning becomes an active involvement and that it stimulates motivation, which can be used as a pre-reading activity, to present grammar and vocabulary, to name a few examples. It is a task-based activity / procedure enabling students to use their grammar and vocabulary resources to reconstruct a text and get to know their shortcomings and needs. The aim of Dictogloss is not to create the replica but a text with the same content and grammatical and lexical accuracy. In its aim, Dictogloss differs from the traditional dictation where learners are required to reproduce the dictated text. In fact, dictogloss is also known as Dicto-comp, a combination of dictation and composition.

Dictogloss combines four skills as listening skill, reading skill, writing skill and speaking to help students make their own text in learning foreign language (Richards and Richard 2009) . It can be used as a language teaching technique used to teach grammatical structures, in which students form small groups and summarize and reconstruct a target-language text. It is often regarded as a multiple skills and systems activity. Learners practise listening, writing and speaking (by working in groups) and use vocabulary, grammar and discourse systems in order to complete the task. First, the teacher prepares a text that contains examples of the grammatical form to be studied. The teacher reads the text to the students at normal speed while they take notes. Students then work in small groups to prepare a summary of their work using the correct grammatical structures, and finally each group presents their work to the rest of the class (Rod 2003). Dictogloss activities encourage learners to focus on the form of their language while also being based in communication, and are used in task-based language teaching. Dictogloss activities have several advantages. They integrate the four language skills of listening, reading, speaking, and writing (Pauline Gibbons 2002). They also give students opportunities to talk about both content and the language itself. Furthermore, dictogloss activities are a useful way of presenting new factual information to students and encourage them to listen for key points. Finally, they give support to less confident students, as they are encouraged to participate in their groups as part of the structure of the activity (Pauline Gibbons 2009).

Dictogloss: Stages

Dictogloss involves four stages: Preparation, Introduction and Dictation, Reconstruction, Analysis and Discussion. Let's discuss one by one

Preparation: Teachers who wish to implement Dictogloss activity in their classrooms need careful planning and preparation. The language of the content should be appropriate to the level of students; it should be of appropriate length so as to be completed in the allotted time; the topic should interest the students and they should find it useful. Considering all these statements, we can say that selection of topic is the first step. Topics can be from domains of science, technology, literature, history, etc. Brief biographies of eminent authors, news of recent events, world's greatest speeches, etc., may also be used as the content for Dictogloss. Teachers can use video CDs, Audio CDs or they themselves can read out the text. However, if they decide to read out the text, it's better to show the text or related visuals on power point slides or overhead projector transparencies depending upon the available facilities.

Introduction and Dictation: At first, teachers should explain the activity to their class. A brief introduction to the

topic should be given so as to facilitate the learners' understanding of the topic. Key words in the text can also be presented. Then the rules are to be shared: the text will be delivered twice through dictation by teacher or video or audio; students can take notes the second time; once the presentation of text is over, the teacher divides the class into teams of three to five; the teams are asked to reconstruct the text; the text should retain the original meaning and should be grammatically accurate.

Reconstruction: As mentioned earlier, the teams are asked to sit together and reconstruct the text by pooling their notes. At this stage the teachers should go around the teams and help them if required. Some students might have missed some points and hence the teacher can help them out. If they look for some words teachers can provide. Most importantly, the teachers should set a time limit for this reconstruction activity.

Analysis and Discussion: This stage is the most interesting and interactive stage of Dictogloss. Two teams can be selected and asked to present their version one by one. The other teams are asked to compare these versions with their versions and comment on the comparison. Keeping time in mind, the teacher can give chances to more teams. Finally the teacher once again presents the original text and informs the class which team's reconstruction is closer to the original.

Integration of Skills Using Dictogloss (An Example)

The following video of 2.10 minutes on Diabetes was used as a Dictogloss

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/condition/diabetes/multimedia/blood-sugar/vid-20084642>

Text

Our body uses glucose for energy. Glucose metabolism requires insulin, a hormone produced by your pancreas. Here's how normal glucose metabolism works, and what happens when you have diabetes — a disease where your body either can't produce enough insulin or it can't use insulin properly. The food you eat consists of three basic nutrients: carbohydrates, protein and fat. During digestion, chemicals in your stomach break down carbohydrates into glucose, which is absorbed into your bloodstream. Your pancreas responds to the glucose by releasing insulin. Insulin is responsible for allowing glucose into your body's cells. When the glucose enters your cells, the amount of glucose in your bloodstream falls. If you have type 1 diabetes, your pancreas doesn't secrete insulin — which causes a buildup of glucose in your bloodstream. Without insulin, the glucose can't get into your cells. If you have type 2 diabetes, your pancreas secretes less insulin than your body requires because your body is resistant to its effect. With both types of diabetes, glucose cannot be used for energy, and it builds up in your bloodstream — causing potentially serious health complications.

Vocabulary: Diabetes, metabolism, nutrients, absorbed, break down, secrete, resistant

Steps

- Learners are introduced to the text (dictogloss)
- **First Time:** Learners relax and listen to the text
- **Second Time:** Learners listen to each sentence while writing down notes
- In groups of 3-5, students read the notes, discuss the reconstruction. When reconstructing the text, learners orally review the notes and brainstorm. Finally they write out a reconstruction of the original text.

- The groups then present their version sentence by sentence to the class and verify the content against the original

As it can be seen, all the four language skills namely, listening, reading, speaking and writing are integrated in this class room activity. Besides these skills, the learners can also expand their vocabulary skills.

CONCLUSIONS

Dictogloss or Dicto-comp, a combination of dictation and composition and also a reconstruction activity has many benefits, especially since it involves the student practicing all four language skills. They begin by listening, followed by note taking, text reconstruction and discussion. At the end, they will be able to practice reading too. By practicing such integrated skills, students learn various aspects of language which are authentic and which come in handy in real life communication situations. Teachers of English generally do not come across many activities that can engage such a variety of skills in such a short period. Hence, Dictogloss, if repeated, can prove to be really effective. Done regularly, the students would acquire better skills in taking more productive and useful notes, and in creating summaries that are better in structure and style.

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