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## RESUMO

O trabalho sobre *Dictogloss* pretende resgatar alguns aspectos didáticos do uso do ditado, para que repensemos sua importância na prática do ensino de Língua Inglesa. Refletimos sobre esse uso a favor das quatro habilidades desenvolvidas e como essa técnica pode ser aplicada, em termos práticos, em sala de aula. Pesquisamos as noções de argumentos contra e a favor do uso do ditado, e como encontramos a importância desse uso. Verificamos também a diferença dos termos *Dictation* e *Dictogloss*, trazendo como exemplo uma aula desenvolvida com procedimentos, estratégias e avaliação. Os aspectos gramaticais também foram explorados nas atividades propostas. Os autores que buscamos para desenvolver a ideia sobre essa prática são Davis (1988), Essberger (2001), Harmer (1991), Murray (2001), Tims (2001), Ur (1996) e Wajnryb (1997).

**Palavras-chave:** ditado, dictogloss, procedimentos.

## ABSTRACT

This paper about *Dictogloss* aims to rescue some didactic aspects of the use of Dictation in class so that we can think over the importance

of that in the teaching practice in the language learning process. We also reflect about the four abilities and how this technique can be used to master the reading, listening, writing and speaking skills. We researched the arguments for and against the use of dictation in the classroom e how we can find the importance of this use. We also verify the difference between *Dictation and Dictogloss*, having as an example a lesson developed with procedures, strategies and evaluation. The grammars aspects were also exploited. The authors we mention are: Davis (1988), Essberger (2001), Harmer (1991), Murray (2001), Tims (2001), Ur (1996) e Wajnryb (1997).

**Keywords:** dictation, dictogloss, procedures.



## INTRODUCTION

“Like many teaching techniques that go completely out of fashion for a time, dictation is making a coming back.”  
(HARMER, 1991, p.119)

What is dictation?

When interviewed, in the 60's, Rinvoluceri said that a book about dictation techniques would be useless, because everybody knew what dictation was. Everybody thinks of dictation as an “outmoded, teacher-centred writing activity with no real input from the student” (ESSBERGER<sup>1</sup>, 2001). What Davis and Rinvoluceri (1988) suggest is a new methodology for using dictation in the classroom. So, dictation can be an activity which should involve students and teachers and that can be useful in the learning process.

<sup>1</sup>Joseph Essberger is an English teacher in London and also author of some articles about ELT. The article mentioned on this paper is “*Writing – the great dictator*”, published on *TEFL.NETinspire!Enzine*.

Davis and Rinvolucrí (1988, p.1) suggest asking ourselves some questions before trying to define dictation:

- who gives the dictation, and to who?
- who controls the pace of the dictation?
- who chooses or creates the text?
- who corrects it?
- how long should the texts be?
- how should the voice dictating sound?
- must the listener write down everything?

These questions will help us understand better what dictation is in the way I would like to discuss it. I will try to answer these questions throughout this paper.

## **ARGUMENTS FOR AND AGAINST THE USE OF DICTATION**

Essberger (2001) points out some problems using dictation. I am going to try to counter argue them:

- 'it is time consuming'; however, the positive outcomes can justify the time we spend on an activity. Learning takes time. When timing is really a problem, the teacher can propose shorter activities or vary the correction and pace in each stage, gaining time.

- 'it does not really develop writing skills', which is true, but the mechanical part of dictation can help students improve spelling and punctuation which are relevant features of writing.

- 'it is considered a teacher-centred activity'. If we look at the four first questions asked in the introduction and think that dictation can be only done and controlled by the teacher, this is certainly a teacher-centred activity. However, if we change the focus to the students, letting them dictate, control the pace of dictation, choose or create the text and correct themselves or each other, they are going to be the centre and then we have much more engaging activities related to dictation.

Dictation activities have to have a clear aim, for the teachers and

for the students, and then we should look back at the questions asked in the introduction and see if at this point we can start answering them: students and teachers can change the roles while dictating, the pace can be controlled by both but before defining that it is important to set the aims for the activity; to quote Davis and Rinvoluceri (1986, p. 12) “...it is the reader who controls the speed of the dictation”, however, the students who are writing can interrupt some activities taking the control of dictation (for an example of an activity like that, see DAVIS and RINVOLUCRI, 1986, p. 12) , the text can be either written by students or the teacher or can be an extract taken from a book or even a recorded voice, the length will also depend on the purpose and on the level, the amount of information students have to write will depend on the information they have to have to fulfil the task.

In my opinion it is a good idea to implement dictation activities in our classes because if teachers do them in an interesting way, students can get involved very easily because they can participate in the whole process.

Davis and Rinvoluceri (1988) expand on ten good reasons to use dictation.

1 – “The students are active during the exercise”

When using dictation students can be the “subject” of the lesson because they can be actively engaged in decoding the dictation, and all the students are involved at the same time.

2 – “The students are active after the exercise”

Students can correct their own work and also help on peer correction. This practising of self and peer correction can lead students to reflect on their writing production.

3 – “Dictation leads to oral communicative activities”

Students can comment their opinions about what has been dictated. While the sentence or text is being dictated “the inside self thinking that has taken place during the dictation phase leads naturally into

comparing experiences with other members of the group.” (DAVIS and RINVOLUCRI, 1986, p.5)

4 – “Dictation fosters unconscious thinking”

As I said before, while listening to what is being dictated, students are making images in their minds, it is what Davis and Rinvolucri call ‘incubation phase’ for the story making. “Their minds are unconsciously working around the implication of the words in the set, building up a powerful base for the story creation (...) dictation is ideal for occupying the conscious mind while stimulating the unconscious into action.”

5 – “Dictation copes with mixed ability groups”

Teachers can vary the activity making it more challenging for better students and can help weaker students by explaining any new words as well as text comprehension. Advanced students can dictate and help beginners as well.

6- “Dictation deals with large groups”

“...dictation is one of the few approaches to teaching and learning in the large group context that has a reasonable chance of engaging the students in active language use.” (DAVIS and RINVOLUCRI, 1986, p.6)

7 – “Dictation will often calm groups”

Everyone in the class will have their attention focus on one point – the activity proposed.

8 – “Dictation is safe to non-native teachers”

Teachers have time to prepare the language in advance.

9 – “For English it is a technically useful exercise”

In English sounds and letters are sometimes different. “Decoding the sounds of this particular language and recording them in writing is a major learning task” (DAVIS and RINVOLUCRI, 1988, p.7)

10 – “Dictation gives access to interesting texts”

It can be either the students or the teacher’s choice.

## GRAMMAR DICTATION OR DICTOGLOSS

Dictogloss borrows a little from traditional dictation but in fact it is

quite distinct dictation in both procedure and objectives. “In dictogloss, a short text is read at normal speed to a class of learners who jot down familiar words as they listen. At the end of the dictation stage, most learners have only a small number of isolated words (or fragments) which together make up a very cohesive, ‘battered text’. In small groups, the students then pool their sources to reconstruct their version of the original text. In the final stage the various versions that students have produced are subjected to close analysis and comparison” (WAJNEYB, p.5)

From my experience I could notice that, by doing dictogloss, students get more concentrated and the group work more precise. They start developing their awareness of how to be more cohesive and coherent.

## **HOW DICTATION CAN BE DONE TO DEVELOP THE FOUR SKILLS**

When dealing with dictation activities we are indirectly developing other language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In receptive skills (listening and reading) the amount of practice while doing the activity is relevant

Writing skills: students need to pay attention to spelling and accuracy while they are writing what is being dictated. In dictogloss, for example, while reconstructing a text, they have to pay closer attention to coherence and cohesion. That is why these activities on accuracy can be related to dictation.

Listening skills: teacher can develop listening strategies, for instance, ask students to listen for specific information or listen for details and write only what is necessary for the moment. Teachers can guide students to be more aware of the different kinds of listening strategies to reach their aim in any dictation activity which involves listening comprehension.

Speaking skills: while correcting their work in pairs or groups, students are using the language proposed during the dictation activity. Students can also dictate parts of the texts and in some activities be

free to ask questions to solve doubts. To quote Harmer<sup>2</sup> (1991, p.119) “teachers frequently complain that their students have nothing to say”. However, you can start a speaking activity with a sentence dictated in which students have to complete something, and then you have something to work with, because “little dictations can get the process moving...” (HARMER, 1991, p.119). Students think consciously about what is being dictated.

Reading skills: While writing students are reading. They read to dictate and to correct their work.

## **HOW TO IMPROVE PRONUNCIATION, VOCABULARY, AND SPELLING USING DICTATION**

Ur (1991, p.57) explains that “dictation is of course an excellent technique...” to practice and understand pronunciation. She gives some teaching ideas on how to improve pronunciation, and they are: Dictation; discrimination and prediction (UR, 1991p.58). All the three related directly to dictation techniques.

When it comes to vocabulary, Ur (1991, p. 72) explains that a dictation activity “tests aural recognition and spelling only. However, if learners can recognise and spell an item correctly they probably know what it means: it is extremely difficult to perceive, let alone spell, words you do not know.” In this activity teacher dictates words and students write example using the words dictated. (example 6 and 7, p. 70)

Students can check the spelling of words when dealing with dictation, in texts, sentences or single words.

## **A CLASS ACTIVITY – CHRISTMAS POSTCARDS**

### **GROUP PROFILE**

A late elementary group of ten students ranging from the age of eleven to thirteen years old who have been studying English for two years.

<sup>2</sup> Jeremy Harmer (1991) mentions two activities which can be done using dictation as a technique to develop speaking skills: ‘Beautiful things’ and ‘Poetry dictation’.

## AIM

The aim of the lesson was to practise reading, writing, listening and speaking skills through a dictation activity. The group also discussed cultural aspects about Christmas in Britain, Australia and Brazil.

## THE ACTIVITY

This activity exploits the *running dictation*<sup>3</sup> idea of two postcards detailing Christmas celebrations in Britain, Australia and Brazil. Students dictated to each other and there was evidence of involvement and engagement.

## PROCEDURES

I stuck two postcards (you can choose the postcard according to the topic students are studying) on a wall outside the class, in an easy way to be accessed and read. I divided the class in pairs and asked students to choose to be either the runner or the writer. Then I explained what the students were supposed to do in a running activity like this one. I had to make it clear that the runners were not allowed to write and the writers were not allowed to leave their seats. When they finished I asked them to read and correct any mistakes they thought there were in the text.

Students had to answer some questions (prepare the questions according to the postcards chosen) about the postcards. The pairs mingled so that students could exchange information about the postcard they had read. Afterwards there was an open discussion about Christmas day in Brazil, Australia and Britain. I stuck the postcards in the classroom for correction of both texts dictated and questions. I told the students that the postcards shown were written last year and that they had to write a postcard to either Nicole or Paul and say something about Christmas in Brazil, using the postcards shown as a model.

<sup>3</sup>A simple variant of a normal dictation. Students work in pairs and one person is a writer and the other is a runner. The text to be dictated is usually stuck on a wall outside the classroom. The writers stay seated while the runners run to the text, read what and return to the writers to dictate. This process is repeated until the whole text has been dictated.

## **EVALUATION OF THE ACTIVITY**

Students were engaged into the activity because of some reasons:

- They had already studied some facts about Australia in the coursebook they use, so it was a good opportunity to talk more about what they had already seen.

- I observed that they felt responsible for the activity because of the fact that the dictation was done by them and so the pace depended on them.

I believe that the 'unconscious thinking' mentioned by Davis and Rinvolutri was present while the dictation was taking place because the students were engaged to talk about the topic, using appropriate vocabulary, and write a postcard at the end of the activity.

## **POSITIVE OUTCOMES AND SOME REFLECTIONS**

By doing an activity which involved dictation I could notice how much we can do with it. The students dictated and it promoted interest. They were also responsible for the correction of the text, which made them feel engaged into the activity. My students were active during and after the exercise, this dictation activity led to a communicative task, because they had to use the language from the postcards to compare Christmas in the three countries mentioned. Listening, writing, speaking and reading were present in the lesson I gave. There was sight of learning and students enjoyed the activity.

## **CONCLUSION**

I would like to consider the importance of trying to understand the principles behind dictation activities. By trying to implement dictation activities and also by reading more about them, I become more aware of how to do it and also when to do it. Referring back to the questions asked by Davis and Rinvolutri, I now know the importance they have, and the principles behind them, because they can change the whole

dictation activity, making them more interesting to the students and making the learning more effective.

As I said before, the questions asked in the introduction are extremely important to understand and change the process in a dictation activity. For me, dictation is a valuable tool, like many others teachers have, and if well prepared and conducted, can promote learning and help to develop skills, integrating them in a lesson.



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