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The use of dictogloss in the learning of a foreign language

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Abstract

The Communicative Teaching Method was a language teaching methodology very popular in the 70's and 80's of the previous century. Its main emphasis was on second language (L2) use and, therefore, the teaching of grammar was considered pedantic (Mitchell, 2000) and avoided because some researchers claimed that it would not benefit learners. However, studies on Canadian immersion programs showed that even after many hours of exposure to the target language in communicative situations, learners had problems with formal aspects of language and their accuracy levels were very low. Thus, a return to teaching grammar in the L2 was in order. Long (1991) argued for what he called a return to a focus on form, understood as integrating attention to formal aspects of language but always within a communicative setting. Dictogloss (Wajnryb, 1990) is precisely a task that meets those requirements, attracting learners' attention to form while they complete meaningful tasks in the L2 classroom.

The aim of the present paper is to present some of the theoretical arguments that support the use of form-focused tasks and to review a selection of research studies that have used dictogloss as a data-gathering tool. The research studies involve both adults and children as participants in English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) settings. The studies showed that dictogloss enables learners to focus on formal aspects of the target language, allowing them to develop their knowledge on the L2 while they complete communicative tasks. Moreover, dictogloss allows learners to work on the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and it seems a useful task to be incorporated in language learning classes with adults and children, as its content can be adapted depending on their proficiency level.

Keywords: dictogloss, second language acquisition (SLA), collaboration, L2 writing, focus on form (FonF)

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1. Introduction

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a branch of applied linguistics whose main aim is to provide an explanation of how second (L2) or additional languages are acquired both in natural and in formal (school) settings. SLA researchers study how communicative competence and its different components develop in an L2. This paper focuses on how to facilitate the acquisition of knowledge in one of those components, the grammatical system of the L2.

Both researchers and teachers have been interested in finding ways to foster knowledge of L2 grammar (Nassaji, 2017). In fact, the teaching of L2 grammar has been approached through many different perspectives. Krashen (1981) began a debate when he established a distinction between acquisition and learning, and argued that natural exposure to an L2 would be enough to acquire it. Understanding the distinction between explicit and implicit learning is crucial for that debate. Nassaji (2017) states that implicit learning refers to the learning that is done without awareness, which takes place when learners are exposed to meaning-focused input. Explicit learning, on the other hand, refers to the type of learning which is done with awareness, which takes place through explicit, formal instruction. Krashen (1981) maintained what is referred to as the non-interface position, which claims that there is no connection between explicit and implicit knowledge. He argued that grammar instruction leads to explicit knowledge, which cannot turn into implicit knowledge. In his opinion, grammar teaching is not important because simply being exposed to the L2 will trigger grammar knowledge. Formal grammar teaching was seen as something pointless from the point view of Universal Grammar (UG) (Chomsky, 1981) as well. Schwartz (1993), for example, claimed that L2 occurs when principles of UG interact with the input provided.

Thus, for some time, teaching grammar in a formal way was almost banned as it was considered pedantic (Mitchell, 2000). In the 1970s and 1980s the Communicative Language Teaching Method (CLT) (Savignon, 1991) emerged and the most important issue in any second/foreign language classroom was that the students could convey meaning. The CLT approach emphasizes real language, the exchanges among learners and their active participation as the focus of a CLT lesson, which uses different communicative tasks (Grimm, 2009). However, meaning-centered instruction led to low

levels of accuracy, as research in Canadian immersion programs showed (Lyster, 2007). Just focusing on meaning was not sufficient for a successful acquisition of an L2, as some skills such as speaking and writing were not developed to appropriate standards and grammatical problems were found among learners who had been exposed to the L2 for hundreds of hours. It is within this backdrop that the role of grammar in communicative teaching approaches. Long (1991) proposed his focus-on-form (FonF) approach which is based on drawing learners' attention to linguistic forms "[…] as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (Long, 1991, pp. 45-46).

Dictogloss (Wajnryb, 1990) is precisely a task that meets the needed requirements. A dictogloss is a type of text reconstruction task which is based on traditional dictation (García Mayo, 2018). In this task the teacher reads a text twice at normal speed. The first time the learners just listen to it. The second time the text is read, the learners are allowed to jot down some words that they consider important. Then, either individually or in pairs they are asked to reconstruct the text as faithfully as possible and submit a final piece of writing. Dictogloss tasks are short, meaningful texts that are seeded with a grammatical form that learners have problems with, as we will see in section 3. This task has been chosen by many SLA researchers over the past two decades and the results have been quite revealing in the sense that dictogloss has been shown to be a useful task to bring up a focus on formal aspects of the language.

This type of task has been argued to be very interesting for a second or foreign language class as it makes learners deal with form within a communicative context. They produce meaningful conversation while they also focus on more formal aspects, producing what has been referred to as Language Related Episodes (LRE) (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). LREs have been defined as "[...] any part of dialogue where the students talk about the language they are producing, question their language use, or correct themselves or others" (Swain & Lapkin, 1998:236). LREs are classified according to their type (meaning, form) and their outcome (resolved or unresolved). Example (1) illustrates a form-focused LRE that occurred while two learners are completing a dictogloss task:

(1) Form-focused LRE (spelling)

David: My favorite day, my favorite day of the week.
Raúl: of the week
David: it's T-H-R-U-S-D-A-Y
Raúl: is?
David: T-H-R-U-S-D-A-Y
Raúl: Thursday
David: Thru! Thru!
Raúl: Thursday
David: ok, ok. Yes. Excuse me!

(García Mayo & Azkarai, 2016: 251)

One of the learners, David, has a problem spelling the word 'Thursday' and his partner, Raúl, draws his attention to the problem and finally convinces David that he was wrong. This LRE would be classified as 'form-focused resolved'.

While performing a dictogloss, the learners practice four different language skills, namely, listening, when their teacher reads the text out loud, speaking, when they discuss the relevant grammatical aspects with their peers, writing, both when they write key words and when they write a final text to hand it to the teacher, and reading because they will read the text before submission. Moreover, SLA research has shown that learners activate several cognitive mechanisms facilitative of L2 learning when performing a dictogloss.

The aim of the present paper is to present the theoretical bases that support the use of the dictogloss technique and to briefly review some research studies that have used it with different populations. To this end, this paper is organized as it follows. Firstly, I present the theoretical background in order to frame the topic of the importance of grammar teaching within a communicative context. Secondly, I summarize a group of studies that have used the dictogloss, both in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). To conclude, I summarize the major findings and provide my own opinion about this particular technique.

2. Theoretical background

As mentioned above, research highlighted the importance of a coming back of grammar teaching but within a communicative context. Several arguments were put forward to support this movement. Thus, findings from research in Canadian immersion programs were quite revealing. Merrill Swain and colleagues carried out several studies with children who had been exposed to a large number of hours of meaningful input by the end of primary education (around 6000 hours). Although the learners were basically native-like regarding reading and listening skills, they were still grammatically inaccurate in certain aspects such as gender agreement, tense marking, and politeness markers (Swain & Lapkin, 1982).

On the basis of the results from several studies, Swain (1985) proposed the Output Hypothesis, which highlighted the importance of production in the process of L2 acquisition. In her hypothesis, Swain stated that learners need to have the opportunity to produce language as the learning takes place because it is only when a learner encounters a gap in his/her linguistic knowledge of their L2 that learning will occur. Furthermore, she added that output facilitates the development of syntax and morphology. Swain mentioned several cognitive processes that are triggered thanks to output. Precisely, Swain (1995, 1998), as cited in García Mayo and Alcón Soler (2013), argued that output plays three different functions in the learning of an L2. The first one is the *noticing function*. When learning an L2, a learner can 'notice a gap' when s/he notices that s/he has made an error thanks to the information provided by a peer or by a native speaker. Example (2) illustrates how a learner is able to notice an error just from the native speakers' recast (i.e. the repetition of a wrong utterance in an accurate way):

(2) Noticing a gap

Learner: Your picture how many cat your picture?
Native Speaker: How many cats are there in my picture?
Learner: Yeah how many cats?

(Mackey, 1999: 561)

A learner can also 'notice a hole' when s/he does not know how to produce a certain word in the L2. In example (3), the learner does not know how to say express the verb 'fall' in English:

(3) Noticing a hole

Learner: The dog which have the bottle in his head # how do you say caerse?
Researcher: fall
Learner: eh fall down.

(Martínez Adrián & Gutiérrez Mangado, 2015: 186).

The second function of output in L2 learning is that of *hypothesis formulation and testing*. This is based on the idea that learners use their output to test if their interlanguage is right or wrong. Consider example (4) where two Japanese learners of English are trying to produce the utterance '*on his knee'*. Hiroko provides the right possessive 'his' in the first turn but Izumi does not agree and uses 'him' wrongly. Hiroko insists that 'his' is the correct form until Izumi is finally convinced:

(4) Testing hypotheses

Hiroko: a man is uh drinking c-coffee or tea uh with uh the saucer of the uh uh coffee set is uh in his uh knee
Izumi: in him knee
Hiroko: uh on his knee
Izumi: yeah
Hiroko: on his knee
Izumi: so sorry, on his knee

(Gass & Varonis 1989: 80-81)

The third function of output is the *metalinguistic function*. The production of language makes learners aware of features they have just produced, i.e. they reflect about language after using it and establish relationships between meaning, forms and function. In example (5) we find two learners who are trying to correct a text. One of the wrong lines provided (in italics in the example) leads them to use language to talk about language:

(5) Metalinguistic function

Learner 1: *men are less incline* . . . it has to be an adjective … inclined to confess, you are inclined to do something . . .

Learner 2: to confession …

Learner 1: to confess . . .

Learner 2: but after a preposition . . .

Learner 1: to confess . . . what?

Learner 2: to is a preposition . . .

Learner 1: yeah . . .

Learner 2: so it should be followed by -ing

Learner 1: inclined to confessing . . .

Learner 2: yeah

Learner 1: no, because to is part of the second verb ... inclined to confess ... yeah

Learner 2: ok, I trust you

(García Mayo 2002: 329)

Just about the time when Swain proposed her Output Hypothesis, Long (1985) analyzed the interactions between L2 learners and native speakers of the language, and interactions between two non-native speakers, a topic that was quite original at that time. He documented that conversational adjustments such clarification requests (*Can you repeat please?*), comprehension checks (*Did you understand?*), confirmation checks (*Did you mean…?*) and repetitions were significantly more frequent when a non-native speaker was involved. On the basis of his study he proposed the Interaction Hypothesis (1991, 1996), which claimed that oral interaction among language learners (or among learners and native speakers) facilitated acquisition. When interacting, learners negotiate for meaning and form. Long defined negotiation as follows: "[…] the process in which, in an effort to communicate, learners and competent speakers provide and interpret signals of their own and their interlocutor's perceived comprehension, thus provoking adjustments to linguistic form, conversational structure, message content, or all three, until an acceptable level of understanding is achieved." (Long 1996: 451-52). Interaction, in short, provides learners with opportunities to receive positive input, produce output and also receive corrective feedback from their interlocutor, all of which have been claimed to facilitate L2 acquisition (García Mayo & Alcón Soler, 2013).

As shown above, SLA research has provided arguments for the need for learners to produce output and to interact in order to foster their L2 development within a communicative framework but also including a focus on the formal aspects of the language. More recently, research carried out by Storch (2013, 2019, 2021) has highlighted the important role of collaborative work, and specifically of collaborative writing, for L2 learning. Storch (2013) defines collaborative writing as a task in which two or more writers interact throughout the writing process to co-construct a single text. As pointed out by McDonough, Crawford and De Vleeschauwer (2016), collaborative writing tasks find support from both an interactionist perspective (Long, 1996) and from a socio-cultural perspective (Lantolf, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978) to L2 development. From the former perspective, and as I have already mentioned, collaborative writing elicits communication that creates opportunities from interactional adjustments, feedback, and output production. From the latter perspective, collaborative writing provides opportunities for what Swain (2006: 98) referred to as languaging, "the process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language."

To summarize: SLA researchers realized that attention to formal aspects of language was necessary within a communicative language context. That is to say, learners need to have attention drawn to formal aspects of the L2 they are learning. Attention to form can be achieved when learners perform communicative tasks that are seeded with specific target forms with which they are having problems. One of those form-focused tasks is dictogloss, which researchers have considered a useful technique as it fosters the four language skills and promotes collaborative work. In the following section I will briefly summarize some empirical studies that have used dictogloss as a data-gathering tool and will illustrate if it was beneficial for the learners involved in the studies.

3. Empirical studies using dictogloss

This section of the paper will be devoted to summarizing the different results that have been obtained in a selection of studies using the dictogloss. For this purpose, I have decided to organize them chronologically, first presenting research that has been conducted with adult participants to then consider research carried out with young L2 learners. Although there are studies in ESL contexts that have used dictogloss (Fortune, 2005), most of the studies I have selected have been carried out in foreign language contexts, as this context is the one in which I will be teaching English. Moreover, recent research has pointed out the need for effective grammar pedagogy in foreign language environments (Kasprowicz & Marsden, 2018), in which the exposure to the target language is limited.

3.1 Empirical studies using dictogloss with adult participants

Kuiken and Vedder (2002) used a dictogloss task that targeted passive constructions. The participants were a group of 34 Dutch high school students (aged 16-18), who had been learning EFL for five years. They were split into two main groups, an experimental group (n= 20), who was subdivided into small groups of three or four; and a control group (n = 14), who had to complete the same task but individually. They used two different texts containing many different passive structures with different levels of complexity. The findings from the quantitative analysis showed that interaction between learners in order to complete the task did not result in a better detection of the passives nor a more frequent use of that structure when writing the texts. However, the qualitative analysis showed that the opportunity to collaborate stimulated the noticing (Schmidt, 1990) of passive constructions. Example (6) illustrates how they discuss a passive construction, saying it out loud several times and using metalanguage at the end of their interaction before they arrive to the right form:

(6) Elaborate noticing of a passive.

Lovella: Okay. Ehm… '*She was supposed to* receive it as a wedding present in forty-one', right?

Fabe: Yes.

Hester: Ehm…

Lovella: Nineteen forty-one.

Fabe: Yes.

'But she…'

Lovella: 'But she got…'

Okay, but let's make first the whole sentence. What did i say? '*She was supposed…'*

Fabe: *'to…'*

Hester: Yes.

Lovella: Come on, say it!

Fabe: 'To get it', I think?

Hester: Yes.

Lovella: *'She was supposed… and she was supposed'*, no… *'She was supposed',* don't you think so? *'She was supposed'*.

Fabe: But… but… after 'to be' there is no…, there is always an infinitive.

Lovella: Oh yeah…

So… wait a moment, '*she was…'*

Fabe: '*She supposed…'*

Lovella: No, that's wrong. *'She was supposed… to…',* yes, okay, that should do.

(Kuiken & Vedder, 2002:351)

Furthermore, the findings indicated that the learners focused on language form as they aimed to produce the correct structure of the passive when writing the text, as we can also see in the example above. Kuiken and Vedder concluded that while the quantitative analyses of their data did not indicate any significant improvements, the qualitative analysis did show that when learners interacted they focused on the formal aspect targeted by the task, which was a promising finding.

Also, in an EFL context, García Mayo (2002) considered the potential benefits of five different form-focused activities which required learners to produce some type of output in a collaborative way. She wanted to assess how learners managed these different activities and then decide which of them would be for suitable for pedagogical purposes. The participants were 14 20 year-old EFL leaners majoring in English Studies at the University of the Basque Country, and, therefore, they were used to completing both oral and written tasks in English. The study used five different tasks, namely, cloze, multiple choice, dictogloss, text reconstruction and text editing, to assess which of them led to more attention to form. The participants were familiar with all the tasks but for the dictogloss and, therefore, they were trained previous to the experimental study. In order to complete the tasks, they worked in seven dyads.

The findings indicated that all the tasks led the learners to focus on formal aspects of the language, operationalized as LREs. The participants engaged in many discussions about their use of the language, testing different hypotheses in order to obtain the right answer. However, the task that generated the fewer number of LREs was the dictogloss, probably because of the learners' lack of familiarity with that task in comparison to the others. García Mayo argued that more research was needed with dictogloss in order to assess its actual potential for L2 learning.

A third study in a foreign language context was Lesser (2004). He carried out a study with 42 university-level students learning Spanish as a foreign language in the United States and following a content-based Spanish-American geography course. This researcher was interested in considering the impact of learner proficiency on the frequency, type (meaning, form) and outcome (resolved, unresolved) of LREs generated during a dictogloss task seeded with past and imperfect forms of verbs in Spanish. Moreover, he also wanted to show whether or not proficiency played a role in how the learners developed the task. Based on the proficiency ratings provided by the participants' teacher, the researcher created groups of higher and lower proficiency level learners. He then proceeded to establish three different types of dyads: the first type comprised two high proficiency learners (H-H); the second, one student of a high proficiency level and one with a low proficiency level (H-L). The third type of dyad comprised two lower proficiency learners (L-L). In total there were 21 dyads: eight of (H-H), nine dyads of (H-L) and four of (L-L).

The findings showed that while completing the dictogloss, these learners did focus on formal aspects of the language. Furthermore, Leeser noticed that proficiency had an impact on both the amount and type of form the learners focus on and on how successful they were completing the task. Learners who were more proficient in the language also produced more LREs than the other group of learners, which could be related to the difficulties lower proficiency learners had to understand the actual meaning of the passage. However, Leeser did not use any tool to measure how much of the text each learner comprehended, so he proposed that it would be interesting to see the relation between comprehension of a passage to the number and type of LREs produced.

Although in previous work on the importance of collaboration Storch (2001) had argued that it would be beneficial for all learners, Leeser observed that it was not the case in his study. While H-H dyads did clearly benefit, that did not seem to be the case for L-L pairs. His general finding was that dictogloss is a useful activity but that learner proficiency plays a clear role, with higher proficiency learners benefiting more. However, more recent research (to be reviewed below) will younger learners, with low proficiency in the target language, shows that even this group can benefit from using a dictogloss task. One shortcoming of the study by Leeser was that he should have measured the participants' proficiency with a standardized test.

Alegría de la Colina and García Mayo (2007) also used a dictogloss in their study with 24 low proficient first year university studies in a Maritime Studies degree. These students were taking an EFL course that dealt with specific maritime vocabulary in English. Although they had been exposed to English since primary school, their level, as attested in the Oxford Placement Test they took, was beginner. That is, they could be considered 'false beginners' because, although they had been taken English lessons since they were in primary school, they proficiency was low, except for vocabulary related to their specialty.

The researchers used three different tasks: a jigsaw (exchanging information with your partner until both complete the task), a text reconstruction (inserting function words and inflections to come up with a whole text), and a dictogloss. Each task was completed by four self-selected pairs. One interesting feature of the three tasks was that they were

all created around content related to the participants' area of specialization (Maritime Studies), which had not been done in previous studies.

After completing all these activities, the findings showed that learners were focusing on formal aspects of the language while talking about meaningful issues. The three tasks focused the learners' attention on form, although not all of them in the same way if LRE production is considered, that is, the more highly-structured task (text reconstruction) led to more attention to form. However, all of them led to learner collaboration, correctly solved LREs, and use of metalanguage. Consider example (7), when two students correctly solve a problem having to do with the use of the passive:

(7) A: And the verb here?
B: '*Check'...,* well, actually it's *'are not checked'*, passive, and '*remain*', the other one.
A: And id it is '*-ed*', isn't it *'has'*? Or is it '*are'*?
B: Let's see, the verb '*to be'* in the same form as it is and then the participle
A: OK. OK… are not checking… checked.

(Alegría de la Colina & García Mayo, 2007:105)

Except for the study by Leeser (2004) no other study had considered language learners taking some content subjects in the target language until Basterrechea and García Mayo (2013). These researchers carried out a study with 81 low-intermediate Basque-Spanish bilingual learners in their first year of post-compulsory secondary school (15-16 years old), 41 of which had taken different courses in a content and language integrated learning (CLIL) program. Dalton-Puffer (2011:183) has described CLIL as "[…] an educational approach where curricular content is taught through the medium of a foreign language, typically to students participating in some form of mainstream education at the primary, secondary, or tertiary level." The other 40 participants had been studying English in a mainstream program, that is, with less exposure to English (3-4 hour per week) than their CLIL counterparts (5-7 hours per week).

Basterrechea and García Mayo used a dictogloss that focused on the 3rd person singular present tense morpheme (*-s*) because research had shown that both Spanish as a first language (L1) speakers and Basque-Spanish bilinguals learning English had

difficulty producing in accurately in written and spoken discourse (García Mayo & Villarreal Olaizola, 2011). Some of the participants completed the dictogloss individually (CLIL *n* = 17, EFL *n* = 24) and other had to write the passage collaboratively (CLIL *n* =24, EFL *n* = 16).

The findings from the study showed that dictogloss did indeed focus the learners' attention to the target feature under study, the *–s* morpheme. Both CLIL and EFL learners discussed the target form, although the CLIL learners produced more LREs than their EFL counterparts. We should bear in mind that the participants focused on the target form even though they were not aware that the dictogloss was seeded with it. That is, the dictogloss used dealt with a topic of their interest (MySpace, a social network popular some years ago) so their use of the language was meaningful but they themselves drew attention to the target form in their conversation. What is more, attention to form was associated with the correct use of the target in writing when the learners produced the text submitted to the researchers. Example (8) illustrates how talk explicitly about the target form and, after some disagreement about what the subject of *meet* should be, they resolve the LRE correctly.

(8) Leaner 1: and interesting people, who meet in parties *por ejemplo (*for example)
Learner 2: who (*uttered while writing)*
Learner 1: meet in parties
Learner 2: she meets in parties
Learner 1: no who meet in parties
Learner 2: meets *no tiene que ser* (no it has to be) meets *porque es tercera persona* (because it's third person)

(Basterrechea & García Mayo, 2013:35)

Two more recent studies using dictogloss with adult EFL learners are Azkarai and García Mayo (2015) and García Mayo and Azkarai (2016). The participants in both studies were the same: forty-four EFL Spanish learners (mean age 24) who were enrolled in different degree courses at the University of the Basque Country. The Oxford Placement Test they took to have their proficiency level assessed indicated that 6 participants had an elementary level of English, 26 a lower intermediate level and 12 an upper intermediate level. The scores in the test were only considered to pair up the

participants in same-proficiency dyads. The researchers used four tasks: text editing, picture placement, picture differences and dictogloss, which were completed in pairs. Azkarai and García Mayo (2015) were interested in considering whether the modality of the task, that is, whether it was only a task with a speaking component (picture placement and picture differences) or also with a writing component (dictogloss, text editing) would influence L1 use. Previous research (Adams, 2006) had showed that tasks with a speaking component draw learners' attention to meaning, whereas if they include a writing component, like dictogloss, they will draw attention to form as well. Moreover, previous research had also argued that a balanced L1 use could be positive when learners interact because tasks can be more manageable (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998). Azkarai and García Mayo (2015) analyzed all the turns in which the L1 was used and they also considered the different functions the L1 played, namely, off-task (when the learners talked about issues not related to the task at hand), metacognitve talk (to organize the task itself), grammar talk, vocabulary and phatics (expressions such as 'ok', 'well' or 'right'). Example (9) illustrates the use of the L1 as metacognitive talk in the dictogloss task:

(9) Metacognitive talk

Julio: Ok, the painting … *¿Quieres escribir?* [Do you want to write?]
Antonio: The painting we are looking at now or *no sé ... ¿Cómo lo...?* [I don't know… How do you …?]
Julio: … is by a French painter …
Antonio: … it's a French painter.

(Azkarai & García Mayo 2015:557)

Azkarai and García Mayo (2015) concluded that L1 use and functions were task dependent, that is, their participants used the L1 more frequently in those tasks that incorporated a written component like dictogloss. The participants did not make an excessive use of the L1 in their interactions, though (15,41% of all the turns) and, when they did, it facilitated their work. Regarding dictogloss, the main L1 function in that task was off-task talk but the participants also used it for metacognitive and grammar functions.

García Mayo and Azkarai (2016) considered the impact of task modality on the LREs produced and the level of engagement of the same 44 EFL adult learners of the previous study when they interacted in speaking tasks and tasks that also included a written component such as dictogloss. The four tasks used were the same referred to above, namely, picture placement, picture differences, text reconstruction and dictogloss. The findings reported a higher number of LREs and of form-focused LREs in the two tasks that incorporated a written component, that is, text reconstruction and dictogloss. What is more, more LREs were correctly resolved in that type of task.

In summary, the studies reviewed above, which have used dictogloss with adult EFL learners, have shown that this task leads learners to use the target language in a communicative way while at the same time it draws their attention to formal aspects that they find problematic. Research with EFL adults has reported that proficiency plays a role in how learners attend to form in a dictogloss task and that, because this task incorporates a written product, it leads learners to not only focus on form, operationalized as LREs, but also to correctly resolve those LREs more frequently than in tasks that do not incorporate a written output. EFL learners also use their L1 more often in the dictogloss than in other 'speaking-only' tasks but that L1 use was shown not to be excessive or detrimental but, rather, helpful to complete the tasks.

3.2 Empirical studies with children

Research with children as participants in studies from an interactionist perspective (Long, 1996) did not start until Oliver's (2002) pioneering work in the Australian ESL setting. Oliver reported that children were able to negotiate for meaning and benefit from interaction, although not exactly in the same way that adults do. In fact, more recently, Oliver and Azkarai (2017) stated that child SLA and adult SLA is different in many aspects, and that child SLA has to be considered in its own right. Moreover, we should not forget that more and more children are exposed to a foreign language, mainly English, worldwide (Enever, 2018) and that it is very important to find ways to attract their attention to formal aspects of the language within communicative contexts. In this section I will review the very few studies that have considered the use of dictogloss with young learners.

Shak (2006) carried out a study with ESL children in Brunei Darussalam because she was interested in knowing what these young learners' attitude was towards dictogloss, Hers was a pioneering study as there was no previous one on the topic. The participants of this study were three different classes of the fifth year of primary from three different schools. A total of 78 children answered a questionnaire created by the researcher. Children showed an overall positive attitude, although there were differences depending on the stage of dictogloss completion: the listening stage, the noticing stage (cognitive load), the activity stage (interaction opportunities) and the writing stage (production load). Children enjoyed the stages which were cognitively stimulating to them and at the same time not too demanding, that is, the noticing stage where they simply had to listen to the text and take a few notes. Shak argued that proficiency played an important role in the children's attitudes, as for children with a lower proficiency it was quite demanding to have meaningful communication, as well as having great difficulties noticing and reformulating rules on their own. Therefore, teachers should consider that finding when implementing the task in the classroom.

In a follow-up study, Shak and Gardner (2008) used other focus-on-form tasks with children in Brunei Darussalam, again to assess what their attitudes toward this type of task. The tasks chosen were the following: consciousness-raising tasks, in which the learners are provided with some data on specific grammatical forms and they have to come up with a possible rule, dictogloss, grammar interpretation, in which learners have to notice a gap, by focusing on meaning and grammatical structures, and grammaring tasks, in which children are shown a set of pictures and some key verbs and then they have to be able to produce a story to tell their peers orally. All these tasks make children create or work with grammatical rules through meaningful conversations. The participants were the same that had taken part in the previous study (both studies were part of a larger project). The children completed the tasks and they also filled in an attitude questionnaire where they were asked about the different activities they had completed and later they were also interviewed in groups of 3-5. All these different tools helped the researchers to assess which activity was the most enjoyable for the children and why, which one was the most difficult.

The results showed that children thought these activities were useful and enjoyable. The researchers reported that the children were highly motivated and their overall performance was good. As we have seen in previous studies, they were influenced by tasks which were cognitively stimulating but at the same time not too difficult. In addition, and for the purpose of this paper, it is interesting that they evaluated the dictogloss in a positive way. Children saw the output they produced as a measure of their own success.

More recently, as part of a larger study with Spanish EFL children, Calzada and García Mayo have carried out several studies that have focused on dictogloss. Thus, Calzada and García Mayo (2020a) were interested in the attitudes of young learners towards this task. The participants were 32 L1 Spanish child EFL learners in 6th year of primary education (11-12 years old) who completed two dictogloss tasks, the first one to become familiar with the task and the second the actual experimental task, which focused on the third person singular *-s*. After they finished the task, they completed a questionnaire on attitudes. The findings supported the work by Shak (2006) in the sense that the children's attitude was very positive. Moreover, they also showed the same positive attitude towards writing in collaboration with their partners. Thus, this task proved to be suitable for this group of learners. The researchers state that collaborative writing in general is a practice which has been neglected in Spanish EFL classrooms but the findings from the study should lead to a reconsideration of the use of this type of task with young EFL learners.

Calzada and García Mayo (2020b) is the first study that uses a dictogloss task with young learners in an EFL setting in an experimental way and focusing on specific targets. The study analyzed the effects of completing a dictogloss task on the development of English grammar (3rd person singular *-s* and articles) in a foreign language primary school context. Fifty 11-12 year-old elementary EFL Spanish learners worked on a dictogloss task individually, in teacher-assigned dyads and small groups and the researchers measured their grammar gains by means of a pre- and post-dictogloss grammaticality judgment test. The analysis of the children's languaging showed that the task encouraged these young learners in pairs and groups to equally focus on form, although not only on the target features. Example (10) shows how both members of a dyad engage in a

discussion over the need to include the *-s* marker in the verb "to see". Finally, S12 resolves the problem uttering the target-like form "sees":

(10) S11: "To go to" no! She sees, she see… no, she sees…
S11 & S12: She sees her parents…
S11: Twice a year.
S12: Twice a… twice a week!
S11: A year! She see, she see.
S12: No, she "see" no! Jing sees…

(Calzada & García Mayo, 2020b: forthcoming)

In more recent research, Calzada and García Mayo (2020c) analyzed the oral production of 31 dyads of L1 Spanish young EFL learners (aged 11–12) while completing a collaborative dictogloss task in which the embedded target form was the 3rd person singular morpheme *–s* (see Appendix). The instances in which they deliberated about language were operationalized as LREs according to their focus and resolution. This time, the researchers also considered whether the children's deliberations during the LREs were incorporated into the collaborative written text. The findings showed that these children focused significantly more on form than on meaning, but they focused more on other grammatical forms than on the target *-s*. It was interesting to see that there were more correctly resolved LREs than incorrectly resolved or unresolved ones and that resolved LREs were mostly incorporated in the writing, regardless of their focus.

In summary, the studies reviewed above have shown that dictogloss seems to be a task that also draws attention to formal aspects of language when used with young learners in an EFL setting. The children do not focus precisely on the forms seeded in the dictogloss but on other formal issues they seem to have problems with. What is also interesting is to see that their attitude to the task seems to be positive, which is encouraging and should be have some pedagogical implications.

4. Conclusion

The main goal of this paper was to explain what a dictogloss is as well as pointing out its benefits to draw both adult and child L2 learners' attention to formal aspects of language. I have reviewed different research studies carried out with adult and young EFL learners that have indicated that this task seems to be a good pedagogical tool to be used in the foreign language classroom.

The different studies reviewed above have shown that incorporating a written component in a traditional dictation leads learners to pay attention to formal aspects of the language they are learning, although proficiency is a variable that needs to be considered when implementing it. Thus, including some vocabulary activity before the actual dictogloss to help learners remember some of the items to be used in the actual task could probably be helpful. Dictogloss also triggers collaborative attitudes among learners, both adult and young, and collaboration has been argued to lead to language learning (Storch, 2013).

One shortcoming that has been observed in some of the studies reviewed is that sometimes learners are not familiar with the dictogloss procedure and that is probably why the final findings may not have reflected the actual benefits of the task. Therefore, it would be interesting that learners could use the task as part of their classroom activities before any research study is carried out. Another interesting issue to be considered in further research is the use of tailor-made post- and delayed tests in order to assess the benefits of the tasks in the long run. As we have seen, some investigations have demonstrated that this task does not show immediate benefits in the form targeted in the dictogloss.

I believe that this review has shown several benefits of the dictogloss task and that, therefore, it would be a good idea for teachers to use it in their L2 classes. This type of activities help students to keep motivated while they work on grammar within a communicative framework. Before concluding, I would like to indicate that although I did not know much about this technique before starting to read the different studies to complete this paper, I have discovered many interesting findings which can be very useful for my future as an EFL teacher. Moreover, I am sure I will continue reading some articles

about this task and I could possibly be interested in carrying out an investigation dealing with this particular topic.

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Appendix

A sweet surprise

Next Sunday Mary's grandmother **celebrates** her birthday. Her grandmother always **cooks** delicious things for her but once a year Mary **likes** giving her a sweet surprise. She **wakes** up early in the morning and **buys** the ingredients at the supermarket. At home, first, she **puts** sugar and some flour in a bowl. Then, she **breaks** some eggs and **beats** them. She also **adds** some milk. Her brother Tom **helps** her to put the mixture in muffin cups and they bake them in the oven. Finally, she **pours** melted chocolate and sweets on top of the cupcakes, because her granny **loves** them. At 6 o'clock, Mary **visits** her granny and **gives** her the cupcakes. Her granny **hugs** her and they eat them together!

122 words, 15 instances of 3rd –s

(From Calzada & García Mayo, 2020c)