

Accepted Manuscript version of a Published Work that appeared in final form in *Language Learning in Language Learning and Teaching: A Collection of Empirical Studies* (pp. 19–40) (2020), edited by Wataru Suzuki and Neomy Storch in the series *Language Learning & Language Teaching*, 55, published by John Benjamins ©.

Child EFL grammar learning through a collaborative writing task

Asier Calzada

Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

María del Pilar García Mayo

Universidad del País Vasco/Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

Abstract

The present 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, and in teacher-assigned dyads and small groups. Their grammar gains were measured by means of a pre- and post-dictogloss grammaticality judgment test. The analysis of the children's languaging showed that the task encouraged learners in pairs and groups to equally focus on form, although not only on the target features, which did not improve. There was, however, a slight advantage of pairs over small groups and individuals. A number of research implications, drawn from these results, are discussed.

Keywords: Children; Focus on Form; L2 writing; Collaboration; Dictogloss

Introduction

Focus on form (FonF) can be understood as “a set of techniques deployed in a communicative context by the teacher and/or the learners to draw attention implicitly or explicitly and often briefly to linguistic forms that are problematic for the learners” (Ellis, 2016, p. 411). Although FonF may well occur in both input and output based tasks, the literature shows that production encourages greater form-meaning connections than comprehension (Manchón & Williams, 2016). This holds especially true in the case of writing, as its inherent characteristics (the slower pace and the possibility of monitoring output, among others) make it especially suitable for drawing learners’ attention to form.

One possible way to do so is by means of collaborative writing tasks (Storch, 2001 *et passim*). Supported by the main tenets of the Noticing Hypothesis (Schmidt, 1990) and the Output Hypothesis (Swain, 1995) as well as Sociocultural Theory (SCT) (Vygotsky, 1978), collaborative writing can be described as an ideal site for second language (L2) learning. In the process of co-authoring a written text, students engage in discussion over language (*languaging*, Swain, 2006) which can help them gain or consolidate L2 knowledge (Storch, 2016).

From a SCT framework, several studies have been devoted to analyzing the effectiveness of different types of collaborative writing tasks in the co-construction of new L2 knowledge (Alegría de la Colina & García Mayo, 2007; García Mayo, 2002; Swain & Lapkin, 2001), and among them dictogloss (García Mayo, 2018; Wajnryb, 1990) has been

claimed to be effective in focusing learners' attention on target forms (Basterrechea & García Mayo, 2013; Kuiken & Vedder, 2002).

Nevertheless, in recent years, research has shown that the extent to which a learner can make linguistic gains as a result of collaborative writing is dependent on other variables, such as the learner group size (Fernández Dobao, 2014, 2016). On the other hand, it has to be noted that the vast majority of the studies on L2 collaborative writing has had adult or adolescent participants, and little is still known about how these tasks fare with young learners. This dearth of research contrasts with the latest education policies, which advocate an early introduction of foreign language instruction in the education system (Enever, 2018).

In order to address this research gap, the present study explores how dictogloss can contribute to the acquisition of grammar knowledge (3rd person singular -s and articles) in an early English as a Foreign Language (EFL) setting.

Theoretical Background

Writing-to-learn

In L2 teaching, writing has been traditionally considered a final product or outcome of what has been previously acquired in the L2 and it has generally been used as an evaluation instrument to assess learners' knowledge. This view, also referred to as the *learning-to-write* approach (LTW), contrasts with an emerging field of research known

as the *writing-to-learn* approach (WTL). There is, indeed, a growing body of literature on the applications of L2 writing to develop L2 knowledge (Manchón, 2011).

The theoretical underpinnings of WTL can be found in two major theories of second language acquisition (SLA). Back in the 1990's, Swain (1995) stated the need to produce output as a means to further L2 learning in her Output Hypothesis. This came as a response to the Comprehensible Input hypothesis (Krashen, 1981), where input was regarded as the only requisite to gain new knowledge. Swain identified three principal advantages in output: (i) it promotes noticing 'the gap' between what learners want to say and what they can say in the target language, (ii) it involves hypothesis formulating and testing, as learners try out new language forms and, as a consequence, can modify their interlanguage (IL) (Selinker, 1972), (iii) it raises metalinguistic awareness by making learners employ language to reflect on their own language use.

Besides, from a psycholinguistic perspective (Williams, 2012) the advantages of the writing mode as compared to oral are manifold: its slower pace, the permanence of the production, allowing for planning, monitoring and reviewing, as well as the possibility to resolve any communication problems immediately by consulting experts, reference materials, or simply reflecting on explicit knowledge during the composing process itself. These inherent traits of writing are claimed to trigger cognitive processes and interactive moves which are thought to further language acquisition.

Despite the fact that individual writing may also lead to these processes, there are two main reasons why collaborative writing is claimed to enhance them. First, conjoint writing possesses a reprocessing function (Manchón, 2011), because what has been

previously built in collaboration becomes available for individual L2 use (Swain & Lapkin, 2002); and secondly, metatalk is considered to provide more opportunities for deeper levels of noticing (Storch, 2008).

Collaborative writing

Adding collaboration to L2 writing is justified by the main tenets of SCT (Vygotsky, 1978), in which learning is considered a socially situated activity and a connection is established between higher mental processes and language as a mediating tool. When learners collaborate to produce a single piece of writing, they engage in *linguaging*, which Swain (2006, p. 96) referred to as “a dynamic, never-ending process for using language to make meaning”. In collaboration, learners can assist and scaffold (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976) one another creating a Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a metaphorical space between the learner’s level of current ability to solve a particular problem and the potential one, which can be achieved with the careful assistance of someone else. The original belief was that such assistance could only take place between a “novice” and an “expert” in a unidirectional way from the latter, who was understood as the teacher or instructor. However, this definition was revisited (Ohta, 2001) and it is now argued that scaffolding can occur both ways in interactions between true peers who may or may not have great expertise. In other words, peers can constitute a reliable source of feedback that can complement teachers’ (for a review, see Yu & Lee, 2016).

The following example from our database illustrates an instance of linguaging and peer feedback. Participants S1 and S2 discuss the correct verb form of ‘do’ with a 3rd person

singular subject. The explanation provided by S1 leads the dyad to find the correct form 'does':

(1)

S1: She do, no, *pon ahí* 'she', she does... (She do, no, put there 'she does')

S2: No.

S1: *Sí*, she does... (Yes, she does)

S2: She do...

S1: *No, porque es chica, o sea, 'she does'... ¡es 'does'! Porque con 'he', 'she' and 'it' se pone '-s', y 'do', es 'does'.* (No, because she is a girl, that means 'she does', it's 'she does'! Because with he, she and it, you have to put '-s', and 'do' is 'does')

S2: *Vale.* (Ok)

S1: *Y 'do' es 'does', 'does'* (And it's does, does)

S2: [giggles] She does lessons in the morning and training in the afternoon.

The studies that have looked at the languaging generated by collaborative writing tasks have operationalized those instances in the form of Language Related Episodes (LRE). LREs have been mainly classified according to their focus (lexical or grammatical) and outcome (resolved [target-like or non-target-like] or not resolved) (Alegría de la Colina & García Mayo, 2007; García Mayo & Azkarai, 2016; Leeser, 2004).

LREs can also be classified according to the level of engagement which they generate amongst the participants of the task (elaborate, limited, and limited + limited) (Storch, 2008). Elaborate (E) engagement occurs when the members who are collaborating get

actively involved in the discussion of a form (e.g. by asking for a confirmation, clarification, etc.). Limited (L) engagement refers to those instances when one of the participants makes a suggestion and engages actively, while the other does not respond or responds with a phatic utterance. Finally, the category Limited + Limited (L+L) refers to those instances when one learner states the linguistic item, without delving much into it, and the other one simply repeats it, hence both of them engaging superficially. Example (1) would be thus categorized as a target-like resolved 3rd-s focused LRE, with Elaborate (E) engagement, since the participants discussed the language items, sought and provided confirmation and explanations, and alternatives. More examples illustrating the different types of LREs are provided in the Results section.

As research has shown, different collaborative writing tasks can also generate different sorts of LREs. These tasks can be distinguished in terms of whether they are meaning focused or grammar focused (Storch, 2016), and among the latter, the dictogloss task has proved to be effective in drawing attention to form in the case of adult learners (Alegría de la Colina & García Mayo, 2007) and teenagers (Basterrechea & García Mayo, 2013; Kowal & Swain, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 2001).

Yet Shak (2006) is the only study that has explored its application with child participants, analyzing their attitudes towards the task. Shak's aim was to determine what aspects of the task stimulated young English as Second language (ESL) learners' interest. In order to do so, three intact classes of Upper Primary (n= 78; age 9-12) from Brunei Darussalam were selected. Learners' proficiency level in English was classified as high, middle or low, and they were unevenly mixed amongst the three classes. Children generally showed a favorable attitude towards the task, especially after they became more familiar with the

task procedures. These positive results motivated the selection of dictogloss for the present study.

Learner group size

As mentioned above, the benefits of a collaborative writing task may be influenced by variables other than the task itself. One of the main concerns of researchers or instructors who use collaborative writing tasks is to determine the way their participants should be grouped. Recent research has compared the written output of learners working individually and in pairs (Kim, 2008; Nassaji & Tian, 2010), and also of those working in pairs or in groups (Fernández Dobao, 2014). What these studies address is whether the number of participants influences the outcome of the written output, and all of them agree that collaborative work yields more gains than individual work and that small groups benefit more from interaction than dyads. According to Fernández Dobao (2014), these results are congruent with SCT, as groups can pool more individual resources to solve linguistic problems encountered than pairs.

The Study

The present study analyzes the potential of the dictogloss task to draw the attention of child EFL learners to form. The forms selected were the 3rd person singular marker -s and articles, which are problematic for Spanish learners for different reasons. The third person singular marker (-s), deemed to be an “easy” form in terms of teachability (Krashen, 1982), is, however, one of the last morphemes to be acquired in English as an L2 (Dulay & Burt, 1973). Even for rich verbal inflection language speakers, as Spanish L1 learners,

it takes time to fully acquire this morpheme due to its low semantic load, redundancy (as English has overt subjects) and low saliency in speech (Goldshneider & DeKeyser, 2005). In the case of articles, the difficulties for their acquisition by Spanish L1 learners derive from form meaning mismatches, for example in the way generic interpretation is wrongly transferred from the L1 to the L2 in the case of “the” followed by plural NPs (**The lions are dangerous/ Lions are dangerous*) (Ionin & Montrul, 2010).

The three main research questions were as follows:

1. What aspects of language do children (aged 11-12) focus on while engaged in a dictogloss task in pairs and small groups? Do they focus on the target 3rd -s and articles?
2. What is the outcome and level of engagement of the languaging about 3rd -s and articles in pairs and small groups?
3. Does EFL grammar knowledge about the target 3rd -s and articles improve as a result of a dictogloss task in individuals, pairs and small groups?

Participants

The participants in this study were 50 Spanish EFL learners (33 females and 17 males) from three parallel classes of 6th year of Primary Education (A, B, C) of the same school, located in a city in the north of Spain. Their age ranged from 11 to 12 (mean: 11.18). Before the data collection, 62 students took the Movers A1 proficiency test (Cambridge Young Learners English Assessment, 2014), corresponding to a basic command, and a language exposure questionnaire, but only 50 were selected in the end, as 9 did not pass

the language test and 3 did not provide the consent form to take part in the following experimental stages.

Those 50 learners were randomly assigned to either the individual group, dyads or small groups. The composition of the pairs and groups was based on consultations with their respective class tutors. Following the procedure used by Mozaffari (2017), the criteria upon which pairs and small groups were set up was perceived as collaborative performance, that is, tutors set up pairs and small groups who worked well together in their regular classes. In total, there were 16 individuals, 8 dyads and 6 small groups. All the small groups consisted of three students, so that they would offer adequate opportunities to all members for participation. As can be seen in Table 1, as a result of this distribution, participants were similar across groups regarding language exposure (average years of English study and average hours of English instruction per week) and proficiency obtained in the Movers test. In addition, MANOVA tests confirmed that the three groups were statistically the same: average years of English instruction ($F(2,48)=2.385, p = .10$); average hours of English per week ($F(2,48)= 0.758, p =.47$), and proficiency ($F(2,48)= 2.058, p =.14$).

Table 1

Participant Details

	Individuals (n= 16)		Pairs (n= 16)		Small groups (n= 18)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Avg. years of English	7.06	1.95	6.31	0.70	6.28	0.67
Avg. hours of English per week	6.63	1.02	7.19	1.11	7.06	1.43
Proficiency test (over 10)	7.73	1.15	8.45	1.31	7.57	1.47

Design and procedures

The experiment had a pretest-posttest design and it was carried out over a period of two weeks. Before the actual data collection procedure started, the researchers obtained written permission both from the school headmaster and teachers, and from the children's parents. In Week 1 the pretest and the dictogloss task were administered on different days. The pretest was carried out individually in their classroom during their English class. For the dictogloss task, participants from the same 6th year class were withdrawn from their regular English class and completed the task in a different classroom individually, in pairs or in small groups (depending on their experimental condition). The interaction of pairs and small groups was recorded with voice recorders placed on each of the tables. During the same week but prior to the experimental dictogloss, the English teacher agreed to use in her lessons a sample individual pilot dictogloss task (see Appendix A), designed by the first author, so that students could get acquainted with the task procedures (Shak, 2006). Finally, the posttest was provided 6 days after the dictogloss task, in Week 2, and had to be completed individually. The pretest and the posttest, both consisted of a grammaticality judgment task (GJT), including 36 items with 8 items (4 correct, 4 incorrect) targeting the use of the 3rd person singular *-s*, 8 items (4 correct, 4 incorrect) targeting the use of articles and finally 20 filler items. The results of the sixteen target items were converted to a percentage score.

The experimental dictogloss task (see Appendix A) followed the prototypical procedure (Wajnryb, 1990): students first listened to the text read by the researcher; during the second listening, they were allowed to write down some notes with the main ideas; finally,

they got together with their partners and each individual, dyad or group had to elaborate a faithful reconstruction of the text they had just heard. The text used for the dictogloss had 153 words, and contained nine instances of 3rd -s and other nine of articles (an/an, the, Ø). Learners working individually were given 10 minutes to write the text, whereas those working in pairs and groups were given 15-20 minutes, as it was expected that they would spend some time on task management aspects, such as deciding who was going to write what. They were free to use the language they preferred at this stage.

Moreover, taking the specificities of young learners into account (Shak, 2006), before they listened to the text the first time, they were provided with a worksheet with some pictures (see Appendix B) which referred to words appearing in the text. Then, the researcher posed general questions to create a short discussion (e.g. “How old do you think the girl is?”, “Where do you think she’s from?”, “Have you been to the Eiffel tower?”), and in this way some vocabulary was elicited. As shown in the study by Basterrechea and García Mayo (2013), providing learners with some lexical items can lessen the cognitive load and, as result, focus learners’ attention on grammar.

Data coding and analysis

The primary data source in the study consisted of (i) 14 recordings (8 pairs and 6 small groups) of oral interaction from the collaborative dictogloss task, totaling 3 hours 18 minutes and 7 seconds and (ii) 50 pretests and posttests.

For the first and second research questions, the oral interaction was transcribed and languaging was operationalized in the form of LREs. Those LREs were categorized according to the following classification:

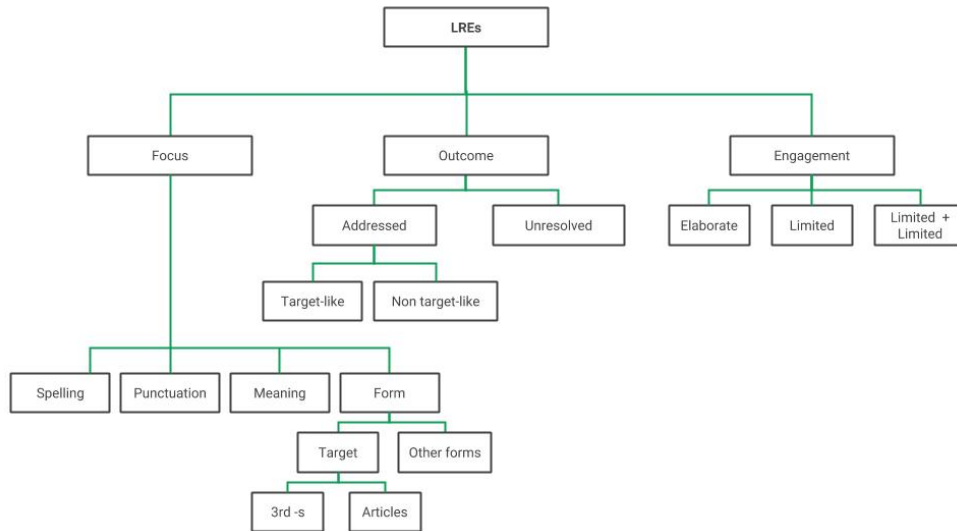


Figure 1. Classification of Language Related Episodes (LREs) according to focus, outcome and engagement

Each author coded the complete set of transcripts independently and inter-rater reliability reached 94 % after two rounds of discussion. The discrepancies found were solved after considering each case individually. For the third research question, the pretest and posttest results were analyzed. Finally, all the data were transferred on to SPSS 24 (IBM Corp., 2016) to run statistical analyses, and the statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$.

Results

Research question 1: What aspects of language do children (aged 11-12) focus on while engaged in a dictogloss task in pairs and small groups? Do they focus on the target 3rd -s and articles?

The analysis of the oral interaction of pairs and small groups during the dictogloss task showed that pairs generated more languaging about grammar than small groups, while the opposite was true for languaging about meaning, spelling and punctuation. However, the independent samples t-test did not render any statistical differences between the two groups, as displayed in Table 2:

Table 2

LREs Focus/Group

	Pairs (n= 8)			Small Groups (n= 6)			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Total	M	SD	Total	M	SD		
Punctuation	13	1.62	1.92	17	2.83	2.04	-1.13	.28
Spelling	16	2	1.51	18	3	3.52	-0.73	.48
Meaning	12	1.5	1.31	16	2.67	1.63	-1.49	.16
All grammatical forms (target and non-target)	44	5.5	2.83	27	4.5	2.59	0.68	.51
<i>3rd -s</i>	17	2.12	2.1	9	1.5	1.38	0.63	.54
<i>Articles</i>	7	0.87	0.99	1	0.17	0.41	1.64	.13
<i>Other grammatical forms</i>	20	2.5	1.77	17	2.83	1.83	-0.34	.74
Total LREs	85	10.5	4.81	78	13	6.39	-0.84	.42

The following examples illustrate the aforementioned categories. In (2) students are discussing the need for a colon; in (3) two participants of a small group are focusing on

the spelling of the word ‘week’; in (4) they are searching for the English equivalent of ‘lejos’ (far); and in (5) two participants of a small group are deliberating about the use of the 3rd person singular possessive pronouns ‘his’ and ‘her’:

(2) *Punctuation-focused LRE*

S3: No, she, eh, *bi points*, two points. (No, she, eh, two points [colon], colon)

S4: *¿Cómo que* two points? (Why colon?)

S3: Dos puntos, she like going to Paris... (Colon, she like going to Paris)

(3) *Spelling-focused LRE*

S5: Week *es con* ‘k’. Week *es con* ‘k’. (Week is with ‘k’. Week is with ‘k’)

S6: *¿Aquí?* Week. (Here? Week)

S5: Sí, mira... (Yes, see...)

S6: *Es que se me había borrado.* (I had erased it)

(4) *Meaning-focused LRE*

S7: Because he lives very, eh... *¿cómo se decía lejos?* (Because he lives very, eh... how do you say ‘lejos’ [far]?)

S8: In a lot of... kilometers, one to the others. *Viven a muchos kilómetros uno de otros.* (In a lot of... kilometers, one to the others. They live many kilometers away from one another)

S7: Lives...

S8: Too lot of kilometers.

(5) *Other form-focused LRE*

S9: She only see her parents two times in a year, and on Sunday, her free day... his free day... his free day... his free day...

S10: ¡Her! ¡Es una chica! (Her! It's a girl!)

S9: His... ¡Ah!

Analyzing specifically the languaging about the two target forms (3rd -s and articles), the total number in both experimental conditions shows that children tended to concentrate on the 3rd person -s more than on articles. However, as the paired samples t-test showed, the comparison between the means of the two targets did not render any statistical significance neither within pairs ($t(7) = 1.3, p = .23$), nor within small groups ($t(5) = 2, p = .10$). Hence, their languaging for 3rd -s and articles can be considered similar.

Example (6) shows how both members of the 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”:

(6)

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...

In Example (7) the discussion in a small group revolves around the use of the indefinite article ‘a’. S13 notices the absence of this element and requires S14, who is in charge of writing the text, to write it. Meanwhile, the third participant remains silent, following the typical interactional pattern of small groups, as will be explained in the second research question:

(7)

S13: A student of kung fu...

S14: In China... She...

S13: *No, aquí pon esto. ¿Has puesto ‘a’? Pon aquí ‘a’.* (No, put here this. Did you put ‘a’? Put here ‘a’)

S14: Ah!

S13: A student of kung fu in China... China.

Research question 2: What is the outcome and level of engagement of the languaging about 3rd -s and articles in pairs and small groups?

Tables 3 and 4 show how child learners solved their languaging about 3rd -s and articles in each of the experimental conditions, together with the statistical results for the independent samples t-test:

Table 3*Outcome of 3rd -s LREs/Group*

	Pairs (n= 8)			Small Groups (n= 6)			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Total	M	SD	Total	M	SD		
Target-like	11	1.37	1.41	5	0.83	0.75	0.85	.41
Non-target-like	3	0.37	0.74	0	0	0	1.43	.19
Unresolved	3	0.37	0.74	4	0.67	0.82	-0.69	.49

Table 4*Outcome of article LREs/Group*

	Pairs (n= 8)			Small Groups (n= 6)			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Total	M	SD	Total	M	SD		
Target-like	4	0.5	0.53	1	0.17	0.41	1.32	.21
Non-target-like	3	0.37	1.06	0	0	0	0.86	.41
Unresolved	0	0	0	0	0	0	-	-

Both in 3rd -s and articles, child learners generated more target-like resolutions, as illustrated in Examples (6) and (7) above, which show the interaction of a dyad and a small group, respectively. In fact, there were no differences between the pairs and small groups. Yet, on other occasions children in both conditions resolved the LREs in a non-target-like way, as the dyad in Example (8), or they left them unresolved, as the small group in Example (9).

(8)

S15: On Friday, Jing and her friends eh... listen to music and play video games.

S16: A video games, *eso*. On Friday... (A video games, that's it. On Friday)

In (8), S15 first utters the correct construction “play video games”, however, S16 corrects him suggesting a wrong alternative including the indefinite article “play a videogames”.

(9)

S17: He visit... he visites her parents two days a year...

S18: He visit, no, she visit...

S17: She visites...

S18: No, she lives in the school...

In Example (9), S17 is languaging about the form of the verb and the 3rd person marker. At first, one of the participants from the small group, S18, contributes by offering a solution (“he visit, no, she visit”). When S17 finally provides the nearly correct form, S18 utters the alternative sentence “she lives”, leaving the problem unresolved. As in the case of target-like resolved LREs, there were no statistically significant differences between pairs and small groups in non-target-like or unresolved LREs. However, given the low frequency of LREs related to these two target forms and the small sample size, these results should be interpreted carefully.

Finally, looking at the level of engagement in resolving LREs, Tables 5 and 6 display the results according to their focus together with the statistical results for the independent samples t-test.

Table 5

Engagement in 3rd-s LREs/Group

	Pairs (n= 8)			Small Groups (n= 6)			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Total	M	SD	Total	M	SD		
Elaborate	8	1	1.6	5	0.83	0.75	0.23	.82
Limited	5	0.62	0.74	2	0.33	0.82	0.69	.49
Limited+Limited	4	0.5	1.07	2	0.33	0.52	0.35	.73

Table 6*Engagement in article LREs/Group*

	Pairs (n= 8)			Small Groups (n= 6)			<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	Total	M	SD	Total	M	SD		
Elaborate	2	0.25	0.46	0	0	0	1.53	.17
Limited	5	0.62	1.06	1	0.17	0.41	0.99	.34
Limited+Limited	0	0	0	0	0	0	--	--

It should be noted that to assess the engagement of small groups, we followed the same criteria as in pairs, given the lack of examples where all three members interacted in a single LRE (as seen in examples (3), (5) and (7), above). That is, to label E engagement it was enough if at least two of the three members actively took part in the languaging, and the same goes for L+L, where at least two learners contributed superficially. The fact that one member remains silent is typical of small groups, and even so, this behavior is not an obstacle for making linguistic gains (Fernández Dobao, 2016).

Child learners in pairs and small groups displayed more E engagement in the case of 3rd -s and a more L engagement in articles, without significant differences. In example (6) above, for instance, both members of the dyad actively discuss the need for the -s marker with a 3rd person singular subject until they agree to use the grammatical form. Nevertheless, as in Example (7), only one of the members shows an active engagement, whilst one of the peers answers with a phatic utterance (“Ah!”) and the third participant remains silent, a situation which falls under the category of L engagement.

Another category of engagement which also occurred to a lesser extent during the interaction among young learners was L+L, which as explained above, refers to a superficial engagement from all participants. Likewise, there were not significant

differences between the two conditions. In Example (10) below, two participants from a small group attend to the verb (“practice/practices”) form only by repeating it, both showing a limited engagement, while the third participant, once again, remains quiet:

(10)

S19: She lives in China and she practice...

S20: Practice...

S19: Practices...

S20: Practice kung fu...

Research question 3: Does EFL grammar knowledge about the target 3rd -s and articles improve as a result of a dictogloss task in individuals, pairs and small groups?

In order to answer this research question, the results of the pre- and post-GJT of the three experimental groups (individuals, pairs and small groups) were assessed. The results are displayed in percentages in Table 7.

Table 7

Pretest and Posttest results/Group

	3rd -s				Articles			
	Pretest		Posttest		Pretest		Posttest	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Individuals (n= 16)	70	16	64	20	65	16	56	17
Pairs (n= 16)	82	21	85	16	71	14	72	17
Small groups (n= 18)	64	22	68	22	63	17	56	15

By looking at the different mean scores, it can be observed that in the case of 3rd -s, pairs and small groups scored higher in the posttest than in the pretest, whereas individuals’

scores declined. In contrast, for articles, pairs showed the only slight increase in the mean score.

After running a repeated measures ANOVA, we found no effect of time and no interactions (all p s > .05). However, we did find a significant main effect of target feature ($F(1, 44) = 7.611, p = .008$) and group ($F(2, 44) = 7.646, p = .001$). Therefore, we performed a series of ANOVAs for each target form as well as their corresponding post-hoc Tukey tests. The tests revealed that, at $p < .05$, pairs were significantly different from small groups in the 3rd -s pretest. In the 3rd -s and articles posttest, pairs were still significantly different from small groups, as well as from individuals.

Discussion

Given the fact that the dictogloss task offers the possibility to predetermine the linguistic forms which are to be employed during the text reconstruction stage (Basterrechea & García Mayo, 2013; Storch, 2016), we expected that young learners would mainly focus on the target forms seeded in the text (3rd -s and articles). However, as Storch had already put forward (2013), even structured tasks such as a text reconstruction or dictogloss may well lead to a great amount of languaging about non-target forms. In our study, the higher amount of languaging devoted to other grammatical forms and, to a lesser extent, to spelling, punctuation and meaning support this view. However, unlike previous studies (Eckerth, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 2001), the lack of a tailor-made posttest prevents us from determining to what extent those discussions produced gains in the learners' interlanguage.

Furthermore, the fact that child learners were languaging more about grammar than other linguistic aspects differs from previous findings with adult learners. Leeser (2004), for instance, concluded that adult learners' low command of Spanish as a Foreign Language (SFL) was an obstacle to attend to grammar, as most of their discussions revolved around meaning. Leeser suggested that the difficulties in understanding the dictogloss passage could account for the difference with the high proficiency counterparts, who focused more on grammar. In our study, presenting child learners with a topic and vocabulary that was familiar to them (i.e. school routines) could have possibly enabled them to engage in grammar discussions more. Similarly, the vocabulary elicitation stage included at the beginning of the task could have also been an aid in this respect.

García Mayo and Azkarai's (2016) study, with adult EFL learners that compared the potential of dictogloss and other task types to generate LREs, found that dictogloss was not as successful as other collaborative writing tasks, such as text editing, due to the aural input and complex task procedures. In the present study, familiarizing child learners with the task by implementing an individual dictogloss prior to the experimental one could have boosted the task's potential to draw the learners' attention to language. Yet, given the lack of studies analyzing child languaging about EFL with other collaborative writing tasks, we should be cautious when considering the dictogloss as successful based on the number of LREs generated by the learners in our study.

Turning now to LREs related to the target forms, we can see that the mean rates were generally low. Despite having the same number of the two target forms seeded in the original text, there were on average more LREs focused on 3rd person -s than on articles.

This may be due to the fact that primary school learners are more frequently given explicit instruction and corrective feedback on the absence of the -s marker in their production than on their article choice. Indeed, the National Curriculum of Education of Spain (Spanish Parliament, 2013) includes mastering the present simple agreement as one of the syntactic-discursive objectives of the EFL module in Primary Education but not distinguishing the use of articles (a, the, ø). These goals are reflected in the contents of the textbook the learners in the present study were using at the time (Ormerod & Reas, 2014). In fact, no module was devoted to articles, but a whole unit addressed the correct use of the agreement in the present tense. Besides, the grammatical rule for the use of the -s is more straightforward than the complex lexical abstract meanings governing article choice in English (Master, 1997). As a result, it was much easier for learners to engage in languaging about the correct verb form with a 3rd person singular subject than it was to discuss article choice.

The results of the type of engagement during the LREs also reflect this imbalance in attention to the two target forms. E engagement was more frequent when focusing on the 3rd -s, whilst in the case of articles it was L engagement that prevailed. Even so, we should note that children, most frequently found target-like solutions for their linguistic problems surrounding the target forms, which provides support to the idea that low proficiency learners can be a reliable source of information and corrective feedback (Brooks & Swain, 2009; Sato & Viveros, 2016).

Looking now at the variable of learner grouping, we had hypothesized that small groups, due to the higher number of actors involved, would have more opportunities to co-construct new knowledge as compared to pairs (Fernández Dobao, 2014). However, in

our study, although there were no significant differences between these two experimental groups in terms of LRE focus, outcome and engagement, pairs did generate a higher total number of LREs. What is more, as pretest to the posttest scores indicate, participants in pairs maintained their initial advantage over learners in small groups, and increased it over those in the individual condition.

Yet, both pairs and small groups show great variability in languaging, as indicated by the standard deviation figures. This variation has also been observed in other studies analyzing collaborative writing (Fernández Dobao, 2014; Storch, 2001; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Although differences within the same range of proficiency (A1 level) could account for it, other authors (Sato, 2016; Watanabe & Swain, 2007) are of the opinion that these variations are more due to affective factors, such as the mindset or collaborative orientation of dyads and small groups.

Regardless of the grouping condition, the low number of LREs devoted to the target forms may also explain the lack of a significant improvement shown from the pre- to posttest. However, we also wonder whether one-time studies, as the one presented here, are powerful enough to generate changes in child learners' grammar knowledge, especially in the case of more complex grammatical concepts such as articles. Furthermore, and as mentioned before, it could also be the case that the measuring instrument, a non-tailor-made GJT, is not capturing the changes occurring in the children's grammar knowledge.

Conclusions

We set out to answer whether dictogloss, a collaborative writing task, was effective in focusing children's attention to form, and specifically on the target forms 3rd -s and articles, taking into account the learner grouping condition (pairs and small groups).

The task proved to be effective in drawing young learners' attention to form, but not necessarily to the targeted ones. Including a vocabulary elicitation pre-task and a previous dictogloss familiarization stage seem to have helped child learners focus more on form than on meaning and other mechanical aspects of language (spelling and punctuation). However, one of the preselected forms, articles, seemed to be beyond their metalinguistic awareness, and therefore future studies should more carefully select the forms to be included in the dictogloss text.

The difficulty to predetermine forms in a dictogloss point to the need of using tailor-made posttests. Such tests would include only those lexical and grammatical forms discussed by the learners during the collaborative writing activity, and thus, they can better capture any change in their interlanguage (Swain & Lapkin, 2001). What is more, including a three-tiered temporal structure (i.e. not only pre-, post-test, but also a delayed posttest), could also provide more information about any changes in the interlanguage in the long term (Masuda & Iwasaki, 2018).

Regarding setup conditions, the small number of learners in our study who worked collaboratively (n= 34), whether in pairs (n= 16) or in small groups (n= 18), makes it difficult to establish clear differences between the performance of pairs and small groups.

In fact, contrary to what we had expected, the qualitative analysis of small groups' languaging showed that there were no instances where all three members participated, as LREs tended to be discussed at any one time by only two members of the group. To obtain a better insight of any possible advantages of one condition over the other, future studies should include a larger database. Finally, due to the high variability in generating LREs observed in both pairs and small groups, it would also be worthwhile analyzing interactional patterns and other affective factors which might affect languaging and, thus, linguistic gains.

Funding

This work was supported by grants FFI2016-74950-P (Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness, National Research Agency and European Regional Development Fund-AEI/FEDER/EU) and IT904-16 (Basque Government).

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and contributions to this chapter. We would also like to thank the school that allowed access to the students and, of course, the students themselves as, without their participation, the study would have not been possible.

References

- Alegría de la Colina, A., & García Mayo, M. P. (2007). Attention to form across collaborative tasks by low-proficiency learners in an EFL setting. In M. P. García Mayo (Ed.). *Investigating tasks in formal language learning* (pp. 91–116). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Basterrechea, M., & García Mayo, M. P. (2013). Language-related episodes during collaborative tasks: A comparison of CLIL and EFL learners. In K. McDonough & A. Mackey (Eds.). *Second language interaction in diverse educational contexts* (pp. 25-43). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Brooks, L., & Swain, M. (2009). Languaging in collaborative writing: Creation and response to expertise. In A. Mackey & C. Polio (Eds.). *Multiple perspectives on interaction in SLA* (pp. 58-89). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Cambridge English Language Assessment (2014), *Cambridge English Movers (YLE Movers)*. Volume 1. Available at <<http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/exams-and-tests/movers/preparation/>> (22 July, 2019).
- Dulay, H. C., & Burt, M. K. (1973). Should we teach children syntax? *Language Learning*, 23(2), 245-258.
- Eckerth, J. (2008). Investigating consciousness-raising tasks: pedagogically target and non-target learning gains. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 18(2), 119-145.
- Ellis, R. (2016). Focus on form: A critical review. *Language Teaching Research*, 20(3), 405–428.
- Enever, J. (Ed.). (2018). *Policy and politics in global primary English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Fernández Dobao, A. (2014). Vocabulary learning in collaborative tasks: A comparison of pair and small group work. *Language Teaching Research*, 18(4), 497-520.
- Fernández Dobao, A. (2016). Peer interaction and learning: A Focus on the silent learner. In M. Sato & S. Ballinger (Eds.). *Peer interaction and second language learning: Pedagogical potential and research agenda*, (pp. 33-62). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- García Mayo, M. P. (2002). The effectiveness of two form-focused tasks in advanced EFL pedagogy. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 12(2), 156-175. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1473-4192.t01-1-00029>
- García Mayo, M. P. (2018). Dictogloss technique. In J. I. Lontas, T. International Association, & M. DelliCarpini (Eds.). *The TESOL encyclopedia of English language teaching* (pp. 1-5). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0181>
- García Mayo, M. P., & Azkarai, A. (2016). EFL task-based interaction: Does task modality impact on language-related episodes? In M. Sato & S. Ballinger (Eds.). *Peer interaction and second language learning: Pedagogical potential and research agenda*, (pp. 241-266). <https://doi.org/10.1075/llt.45.10gar>
- Goldshneider, J., & DeKeyser, R. (2005). Explaining the ‘natural order of L2 morpheme acquisition’ in English: A meta-analysis of multiple determinants. *Language Learning*, 55(1), 27-77.
- IBM Corp. (2016). *IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows*, Version 24.0. Armonk, NY: IBM Corp.
- Ionin, T., & Montrul, S. (2010). The role of L1 transfer in the interpretation of articles with definite plurals in L2 English. *Language Learning*, 60(4), 877–925.
- Kim, Y. (2008). The contribution of collaborative and individual tasks to the acquisition of L2 vocabulary. *The Modern Language Journal*, 92(1), 114-130.

- Kowal, M., & Swain, M. (1994). Using collaborative language production tasks to promote students' language awareness. *Language Awareness, 3*(2), 73–93.
- Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Krashen, S. (1982). Acquiring a second language. *World Englishes, 1*(3), 97–101.
- Kuiken, F., & Vedder, I. (2002). The effect of interaction in acquiring the grammar of a second language. *International Journal of Educational Research, 37*(3-4), 343–358.
- Leeser, M. (2004). Learner proficiency and focus on form during collaborative dialogue. *Language Teaching Research, 8*(1), 55–81.
- Manchón, R. M. (2011). Writing to learn the language: Issues in theory and research. In R. M. Manchón (Ed.). *Learning-to-write and writing-to-learn in an additional language* (pp. 61-82). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Manchón, R. M., & Williams, J. (2016). L2 writing and SLA studies. In R. M. Manchón & P. K. Matsuda (Eds.). *Handbook of second and foreign language writing*. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Master, P. (1997). The English article system: acquisition, function and pedagogy. *System, 25*(2), 215–232.
- Masuda, K., & Iwasaki, N. (2018). Pair-work dynamics: stronger learners' languaging engagement and learning outcomes of the Japanese polysemous particles *ni/de*. *Language and Sociocultural Theory, 5*(1), 46-71.
- Mozaffari, S. H. (2017). Comparing student-selected and teacher-assigned pairs on collaborative writing. *Language Teaching Research, 21*(4), 496–516.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168816641703>

- Nassaji, H., & Tian, J. (2010). Collaborative and individual output tasks and their effects on learning English phrasal verbs. *Language Teaching Research*, 14(4), 397-419.
- Ohta, A. (2001). *Second language acquisition processes in the classroom: learning Japanese*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Ormerod, M., & Reas, C. (2014). *Tiger 6th Primary pupil's book*. Madrid: Heinemann.
- Sato, M. (2016). Interaction mindsets, interactional behaviors, and L2 development: an affective-social-cognitive model. *Language Learning*, 67(2), 249-283.
- Sato, M., & Viveros, P. (2016). Interaction or collaboration? Group dynamics in the foreign language classroom. In M. Sato & S. Ballinger (Eds.). *Peer interaction and second language learning. Pedagogical potential and research agenda* (pp. 91-112). Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129-158.
- Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 10(3), 209-241.
- Shak, J. (2006). Children using dictogloss to focus on form. *Reflections on English Language Teaching*, 5(2), 47-62.
- Spanish Parliament (Congreso de los Diputados) (2013), *Organic Law for the improvement of the quality of Education, (Ley Orgánica 8/2013, de 9 de diciembre, para la mejora de la calidad educativa, LOMCE)*. Available at <<https://www.boe.es/buscar/act.php?id=BOE-A-2013-12886>> (22 July 2019).
- Storch, N. (2001). How collaborative is pair work? ESL tertiary students composing in pairs. *Language Teaching Research*, 5(1), 29–53.
- Storch, N. (2008). Metatalk in a pair work activity: level of engagement and implications for language development. *Language Awareness*, 17(2), 95–114.

- Storch, N. (2013). *Collaborative writing in L2 classrooms*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Storch, N. (2016). Collaborative writing. In R. M. Manchón & P. Matsuda (Eds.). *Handbook of second and foreign language writing* (pp. 387-406). Boston/Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.
- Swain, M. (1995). Three functions of output in second language learning. In G. Cook & B. Seidlhofer (Eds.). *Principles and Practice in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 125-144). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Swain, M. (2006). Languaging, agency and collaboration in advanced language proficiency. In H. Byrnes (Ed.). *Advanced language learning: the contribution of Halliday and Vygotsky* (pp. 95-108). New York: Continuum.
- Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (2001). Focus on form through collaborative dialogue: Exploring task effects. In M. Bygate, P. Skehan & M. Swain (Eds.). *Researching pedagogic tasks. Second language learning, teaching and testing* (pp. 99-117). London: Longman.
- Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (2002). Talking it through: Two French immersion learners' response to reformulation. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37(3-4), 85-304.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Wajnryb, R. (1990). *Grammar dictation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Watanabe, Y., & Swain, M. (2007). Effects of proficiency differences and patterns of pair interaction on second language learning: Collaborative dialogue between adult ESL learners. *Language Teaching Research*, 11(2), 121-142.
- Williams, J. (2012). The potential role(s) of writing in second language development. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 21(4), 321-331.

- Wood, D., Bruner, J., & Ross, G. (1976). The role of tutoring in problem-solving.
Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines, 17(2), 89-100.
- Yu, S., & Lee, I. (2016). Peer feedback in second language writing (2005–2014).
Language Teaching, 49(4), 461-493.

Appendix A: Dictogloss texts

Pilot dictogloss text

Most big cities in the world have a zoo. People go there to see the animals, fish and birds that come from different parts of the world. A lot of children go to zoos to see the lions and tigers or the elephants and giraffes because they are very beautiful.

The film “Madagascar” tells the story of some animals from the New York Zoo. The New York Zoo is right in the middle of Central Park, the most famous park in the city. John, my American friend, visits the park every Saturday with his grandmother. His grandmother feeds the birds and he likes watching the penguins and the monkeys. His favorite monkey, Sam, eats lots of bananas.

It is good for us to learn about our world, and all the animals in it, and zoos help us to learn more.

(140 words)

Experimental dictogloss text

Jing is 16 years old and she is a kung fu student in China. Kung fu students usually have lessons in the morning and kung fu training in the afternoon and evening. There are about 4.000 students in her school! Her day starts at 5:00 in the morning and ends at 9:30. She sleeps in the school. She only sees her parents twice a year, because they live very far from the school.

On Sundays, her free day, she talks to her friends, plays video games and listens to music. She has got a lot of friends in the school, they are a big family. She loves her school because they do kung fu every day. In the future, she wants to travel around the world, and visit the important cities in Europe. Her dream is to visit the Eiffel tower in Paris. She also wants to make kung fu films one day.

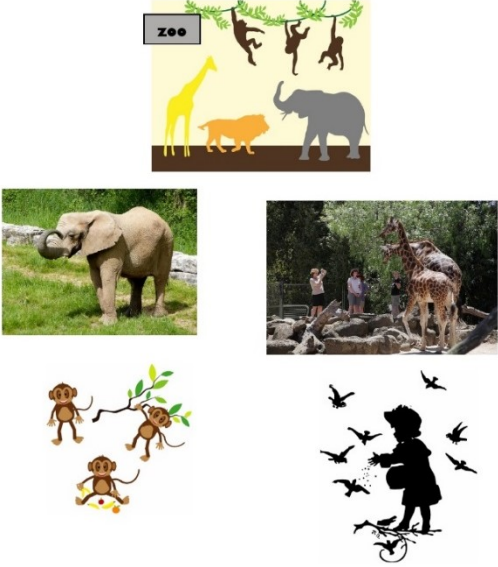
(153 words)

Appendix B: Preparatory stage worksheets

Pilot preparatory stage worksheet

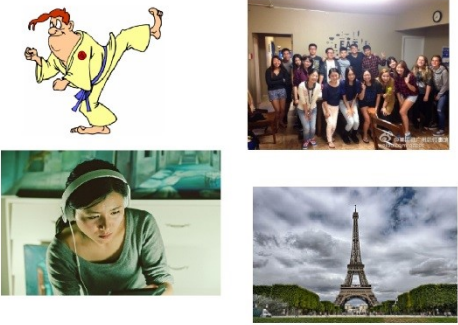
DICTOGLOSS TASK – PÁGINA 1/SHEET 1

Estas son algunas cosas que van a escuchar en el texto. ¿Las reconoces?
These are some of the things you will hear in the text. Do you know what they are?



DICTOGLOSS TASK – PÁGINA 1/SHEET 1

Estas son algunas cosas que van a escuchar en el texto. ¿Las reconoces?
These are some of the things you will hear in the text. Do you know what they are?



Experimental preparatory stage worksheet