USING COLLABORATIVE LEARNING TASKS TO EXPAND VOCABULARY KNOWLEDGE

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There is more to collaborative learning than students simply sitting together working on the same task. There is also the requirement for interdependence amongst the learners. The dictogloss procedure (Wajnryb, 1990) is often given as an example of just this type of collaborative, integrated skills technique (Philp, Adams, Iwashita, 2014) where students are required to share opinions, listen to and help each other in order to complete a task. The procedure involves the exploration and reconstruction of a short text through its language features and contents by a group of students who interact orally through the sharing of their written notes. This study evaluated the effectiveness of using collaborative learning tasks as a tool to increasing students' breadth and depth of knowledge of business vocabulary in the faculty of business administration of a Japanese university. The study compared vocabulary learning under a reading only condition to learning that was aided by the dictogloss procedure. Three levels of vocabulary knowledge (form recall, meaning recall and meaningful use) were assessed using a 60-token vocabulary list. The results support a view that collaborative tasks provide learners with varied and multiple encounters with given words that highlight different lexical features, and which can aid to develop and strengthen their vocabulary knowledge.

Keywords: Collaborative learning, Task, Interdependence, Dictogloss, Lexical features.

Introduction

In 2003, The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT) launched an Action Plan to Cultivate ''Japanese with English Abilities.'' The changes, which incorporated the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) by MEXT in the Action Plan reflect its goal: "On graduating from junior high school and senior high school, graduates can communicate in English" (MEXT, 2003). Still, the Grammar-Translation method remains widely in use to teach English throughout the secondary education system in Japan despite efforts that have been in place for over a dozen years to reform the system. Bamford (1993) states "the tradition of using the 'grammar-translation' method is...practically synonymous with English education in Japan'' (p.63).

The dominance of translation and grammar-focused type questions on university entrance exams remains, resulting in a lack of willingness on the part of junior and senior high school English teachers to move towards a more communicative type of classroom. Nevertheless, as it stands, the six years spent studying English does not do enough to develop the communicative ability or instill a willingness to communicate in English within Japanese high school students (Watanabe, 2013). Most struggle to understand even basic conversation or to make themselves adequately understood in English. Crystal (1997) notes that English, with its status as a global language in this new knowledge age has made it

critical for university students to acquire English communication skills sufficient to engage in exchanges if they hope to be able to succeed on an international scale. Japanese graduates still trail behind other English learning nations (TOEIC Newsletter No. 89, special feature, 2005).

Once students reach university they have limited experience in actively using English as a means of communication in the classroom and are not accustomed to working collaboratively in pairs or groups in English. It is the exception rather than the rule to have students on task for the duration of an activity without sometimes or often using Japanese. Knowledge of grammar does not produce fluent speakers of a language. There are many learners who do well on grammar tests but have limited ability to comprehend or speak English. In contrast, native speakers who have not taught the language are often stumped when it comes having to explain the grammar rules of a language.

Dictogloss is an output-oriented focus on form communicative activity that requires students to utilize the four language skills and incorporate their knowledge of vocabulary to complete the task. Researchers make a distinction between "focus on form" and focus on forms" in second language instruction (Long, 1991; Long & Robinson, 1998). Focus on form refers to bringing grammar to the attention of language learners as a part of a CLT and learning practice. Focus on forms, on the other hand, is the deliberate teaching of grammar in order to produce understanding of the grammar, in hoping that understanding alone will allow the language learner to know how and when to use the form correctly.

Dictogloss is a tool that has helped the author to motivate a number of students to not only engage in the learning process and actively use English, but also to enjoy working collaboratively to complete form focused tasks. Littlewood (1981) points out "Indeed, it is when the results of successful listening contribute to some further purpose that the learners are most strongly and realistically motivated." (p. 68). Student comments below outline the sense of accomplishment they felt and the perceptions that their English skills improved as a direct result of the tasks.

- *I enjoyed the activity because I've the chance to talk with group members and exchange our ideas and finally made the sentences perfectly.*
- *My team helped me in the dictogloss very much.*
- *Dictagloss activity was a great experience to improve my listening and writing skill. Talking with my group members was very interesting.*
- *It was a bit hard. I sometimes felt disappointed myself but my friends helped me then.*
- *Since we must think about the sentence's meaning, I got a listening ability, reading ability and writing ability.*
- *Dictogloss activity was especially effective for improving listening skills.*
- *A fresh listening training type, it's good!*
- *It is very useful for me to improve my listening skill and remember many business words.*
- *I think dictagloss style activity really helps me to understand the meaning of the vocabulary well.*
- *I could learn a lot of business vocabulary, which I didn't know.*

Co-Operative and Collaborative Learning

Most often, teachers are highly trained in how to organize and utilize materials and curriculum, and with how to interact with students. However, it is not always the case that teachers spend enough thought or attention to how we can organize the class so that students can optimally interact with and learn from one another. Student interaction often becomes a neglected aspect of instruction.

Interaction patterns among students impacts their learning, their feelings toward the school, the teacher and other students, and their self-esteem (Johnson & Johnson, 1994). In a competitive setting, students work against each other to achieve a goal that only a few students can attain. In an individualistic setting, students work by themselves to accomplish learning goals unrelated to those of others.

Placing people in a room, seating them together and telling them to work as a group does not mean they will work in a collaborative manner. Collaboration means working together to reach shared goals. In cooperative and collaborative situations, individuals will seek outcomes that benefit all members of the

group. This type of learning involves the use of small groups so students work together to maximize not only their own but also their peers' learning. Students become engaged in discussion and are required to clarify both their own and others' ideas which can, in turn, lead to the development of critical thinking in the learning process. (Gokhale,1995; Totten, Sills, Digby and Rush, 1991).

Johnson & Johnson, (1989) explain that for a cooperative group to reach its full potential, to be healthy and be more effective than competitive or individualistic efforts, a set of conditions need to be present in the dynamic:

- Positive interdependence: the teacher must set a clear task and group goal to instill the feeling that the group either succeeds or fails together. Success depends on each member being connected to the group.
- Individual and group accountability: each member must be accountable for contributing his or her share of the work required to complete group goals. Individual students who need support are given aid. Students learn together so that they can perform higher as individuals.
- Face-to-face interaction: a group culture is formally established. Students are expected to help and encourage each other and to share resources. This includes explaining how to solve problems, teaching one another, checking for understanding, discussing concepts and connecting present with past learning. This promotes learning teams to become both academic and personal support systems.
- Interpersonal and small group skills: teachers have to teach teamwork skills just as they do academic skills. Students engage simultaneously in academically focused task-work and interpersonally geared teamwork. Group members must know how and when to show leadership, make decisions, communicate clearly, and defer conflict.
- Group processing: group members discuss how well they are achieving their goals and maintaining effective working relationships. Groups need to describe what actions are helpful and unhelpful and make decisions about what behaviors to continue or change. This feedback loop can help to ensure continued group success.

Dictogloss is an activity that naturally incorporates the above noted elements of cooperative learning. Grabe & Stoller, (1997) explain, "Cooperative learning requires that students work together (typically in small groups of four to six) to learn information and carry out a range of tasks. The purpose is to promote peer group support and peer instruction (cf. Vygotskian learning theory)." (p. 8). The successful performance of a dictogloss activity includes all of the above and more. Students commonly work in groups of three or four, transmit and learn new information while engaging in the task. Peer support and instruction, or scaffolding, are vital components of dictogloss.

Sociocultural theories emphasize the social nature of teaching through joint activity. Building on the work of Russian psychologist L.S. Vygotsky, researchers such as Bruner (1978) describe how children learn skills by participating in authentic activities with more able peers who participate with and assist the more novice learner to perform at a more complex level than he or she could on his or her own. The novice is then able to internalize ways of thinking and problem solving needed to scaffold their learning so that they can eventually succeed in tasks on their own (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011).

Dictogloss Procedure

Wanjryb (1990) is credited with developing a new form of grammar-focused dictation termed dictogloss. It was created as an alternative method of teaching grammar through a focus on form in the shape of a classroom dictation activity. Students listen to a short passage read, usually twice, at normal speed, and write down key words and phrases. They then collaborate in pairs or small groups to create a reconstructed version of the original text. Dictogloss incorporates the four language skills. Learners listen to a text, write what they hear then share what they have heard and written with partners by speaking and

listening. Students are able to ask questions about spelling and unknown vocabulary. In addition, they are encouraged to think grammatically to fill in missed information, a results of listening gaps. The standard steps to the procedure are illustrated next.

1. Preparation: the learners engage in some discussion about the topic in the upcoming text and do some preparatory vocabulary-work.
2. Dictation: students listen to a short text, usually between four to six sentences, read at a normal speed by the teacher, or played from an audio recording. Learners will typically hear the text twice; the first time with pens down listening for meaning, and the second time taking notes including mostly key, or content, words. Students should not try to write everything down.
3. Reconstruction: students work together in small groups to reconstruct the text, in complete sentences, from their shared resources. Students discuss and negotiate to cohesively reproduce the text. It should be as semantically and grammatically accurate as possible to the original text but need not be identical.
4. Analysis and correction: students read their final product to compare and evaluate their answers. They should finally sort out any errors, especially focusing on form, or the targeted grammatical structure and meaning, and make corrections compared to the original text.

Research Question

The author teaches English in the Faculty of Business Administration at a university in Tokyo and wanted students to receive explicit exposure to the vocabulary typically used in business English textbooks using dictogloss tasks. Dictogloss type activities have traditionally been used to get students to reflect on their own output and notice particular grammatical constructions (Wajnryb, 1990). A series of four modified dictogloss activities was created using textbooks familiar to the author in the hopes that students would reflect upon and notice both the lexical and grammatical features of their output. Based on the above, the following research question was formulated.

Q1: Does dictogloss contribute to improvement in participants' vocabulary breadth and/or depth?

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study were 183 non-English major undergraduate university students, 97 males and 86 females, at two universities in Tokyo, Japan. The study took place over an eight-week period in the first semester of the academic year. Participants took part in the study and data was collected during normal class hours, with each class period lasting 90 minutes. Students were not informed prior to the study that the focus of the experiment was vocabulary learning.

Class organization

A total of seven different classes took part in the study. The experimental group was comprised of four classes while three others made up the control. One class of 39 was made up of students in a first year requisite English class, while another 38 were in a second year requisite class. The third and fourth groups in the experimental groups were made up of elective classes, one a business writing class for third and fourth year students and finally a general English communication class. The control group was made up of a total of 65 students in three classes studying requisite first and second year English classes. The dictogloss tasks were conducted at the start of class and generally took 50 minutes to complete.

Procedure

Sixty tokens, shown in Figure 1 were collected from a variety of business English text books familiar to the researcher and then sorted into three groups using a free, online vocabulary profiler (see Cobb, T. n.d.). One third of the tokens were from the 01~1000 frequency list (labeled 1), another third from the 1001 ~ 2001 list (labeled 2) and the final third from the Academic Word List (AWL, labeled 3). Using the profiled vocabulary, a total of twenty sentences were written, each sentence containing three tokens. Finally, four treatments, labeled A through D, were created, with each treatment composed of five sentences. For a sample of the sentence correction sheet for Treatment A, see Appendix A.

An embedded pre-test activity in the form of a language background questionnaire entitled *Word Rating Sheet* was administered in class during the second week of the semester. The questionnaire collected information on a list of 60 business English vocabulary tokens. Students were instructed to record their answers related to their depth of word knowledge on the test sheet. Answers ranged from absolutely no knowledge of an item (a score of 1) to the ability to use the item with full control in a written sentence (a score of 4). For a sample of the instructions of the Word Rating Sheet and an example of how to complete the *Word Rating Sheet*, see Appendix B. Based on the results of the pre-test, 118 students from the four different classes were placed in dedicated groups of four, which remained unchanged for all four treatments. Treatments activities were introduced to each of the classes in a staggered manner so that in any given week, each class received a different treatment from any other class. The remaining 65 students, 35 male and 30 female, formed the control group. They completed only the pre and post-tests on the same schedule as the experimental group and were given a copy of the sentences on the answer keys to read alone for ten minutes each week in place of the dictogloss task.

TREATMENT A: meeting (1), signature (1), consider (1), profit (1), appointment (1), congratulate (2), formal (2), audience (2), confidence (2), reputation (2), respond (3), schedule (3), dynamic (3), export (3), terminate (3)

TREATMENT B: description (1), experience (1), introduce (1), losses (1), manufacture (1), information (2), polite (2), desk (2), loyal (2), repair (2), colleague (3), contract (3), invest (3), overseas (3), procedure (3)

TREATMENT C: suggest (1), exchange (1), report (1), propose (1), gains (1), apologize (2), frequent (2), promptly (2), request (2), staff (2), edit (3), brief (3), objective (3), analysis (3), chart (3)

TREATMENT D: possible (1), refuse (1), develop (1), market (1), opportunity (1), convenient (2), discuss (2), informal (2), advise (2), solve (2), document (3), function (3), previous (3), corporate (3), ensure (3)

Figure 1. List of 60 tokens

Preparation

All students participating in the study were familiar with how to complete the task as a preview dictogloss activity had been administered in the second week of classes, after the pre-test. The task was presented as a quick-paced classroom dictation activity. For the treatment, students sat in their dedicated groups and were told they would hear a series of five sentences containing some business vocabulary. They were not given time to preview or discuss in their groups. Students were instructed to put their pens down in preparation for the task. A CD was pre-recorded by the teacher at a slightly slower than normal speaking speed. This was done to ensure consistency of delivery across all of the treatments and for each of the treatment groups. The CDs contained all instructions, sentences and pauses from the start to the finish of the entire activity.

Dictation

Students were provided with a specially created sheet to write their answers on for each task. For the first listening opportunity of the task there is a fifteen second break between each sentence and students were told they could discuss what they heard in that time but not write anything. For the second listening, students were told to write down key words and phrases using a black or blue pen while listening. Again, there is a fifteen second pause between sentences, giving students time to write what they have heard.

Reconstruction and analysis

At the end of the second listening students had ten minutes to share what they heard and wrote with each other in their groups. When time is up, students listen a third time and add any missing information to their sentences. They have ten minutes after the final listening to reconstruct the sentences from their shared resources. They were told to reconstruct the sentences exactly as they heard them and that all answers must be exactly the same for every student in the group.

Correction and completion

Students were instructed to use a red pen for the correction phase. One answer key was provided to each group and students made corrections to their sentences. The focus vocabulary on the answer sheets was glossed and a Japanese translation provided. All task and correction sheets were collected by the teacher after ten minutes passed. This cycle repeated itself for all four dictogloss tasks from weeks three through six. No dictogloss tasks were done in weeks seven or eight of class.

Post-test and questionnaire

The post-test in the exact same format as the pre-test *Word Rating Sheet* was administered in class during the ninth week of the semester. The questionnaire collected information on the same list of 60 business English vocabulary tokens as collected in the pre-test. In addition, a post-test questionnaire that asked subjects to comment both in general on the activity and on perceived usefulness or benefits of the activities on their English learning and motivation was also administered.
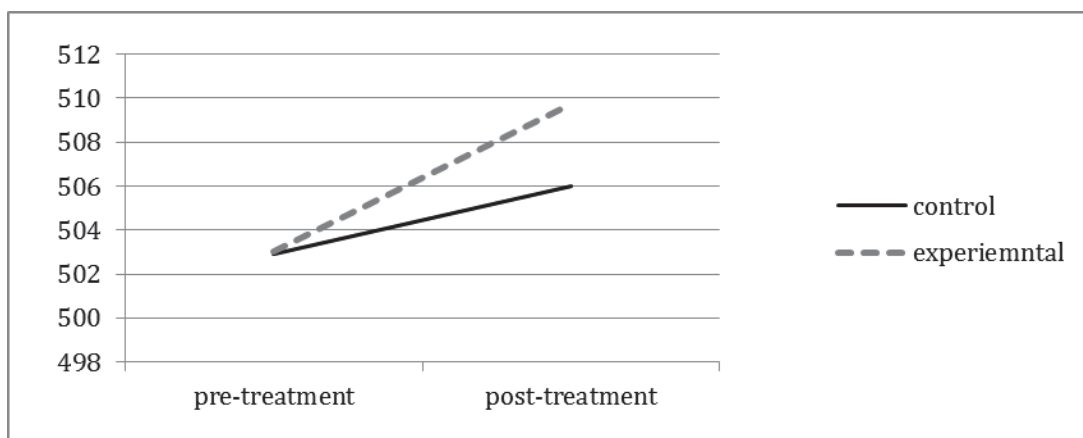

Figure 2. Vocabulary knowledge over time

Results

Figure 2 shows the results of the mean Rasch measures for pre-treatment and post-treatment scores for the experimental and control groups. Only the results of students who participated in both the pre and post-

tests and students who participated in all four dictogloss tasks scores were calculated in the final results. We can see that the control and experimental groups started out at similar levels of professed vocabulary knowledge but that over the eight week treatment there was a significant gain in vocabulary knowledge by the experimental group. A comparison of the groups pre and post test knowledge showed a significant difference at the 0.05 level. Adjustments for multiple comparisons was made using Bonferroni correction. Descriptive statistics of the measures are seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post test scores

	Experiment	Mean	SD	N
T1	1	503.03	6.927	96
	2	502.89	3.559	62
	Total	502.97	5.837	158
T2	1	509.75	7.857	96
	2	506.03	3.802	62
	Total	508.29	6.803	158

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that students can not only improve the breadth and depth of their business English vocabulary but that they involve themselves actively in the process and feel a sense of motivation doing dictogloss tasks in a collaborative setting with their peers. Dictogloss is a tool that embodies a variety of principles of language learning in both the affective and cognitive domains. Positive group interaction and interdependence can have an impact on student attitudes towards working together to reach a common goal. It can set the scene for a more active form of learning by encouraging students to communicate and collaborate while engaging in meaning focused interaction. Learners must pay attention to both meaning and form using the language they have at their disposal to successfully complete the activity. The only way the task can be completed is by using the target language in a deliberate way so learners have no choice but to communicate in English if they are to complete the task. Students come away with a sense of achievement and feelings of autonomy.

Research has found that dictogloss contributes to the improvement of learners' listening skills and increases learners' motivation for learning English. It is a desirable language activity, which is likely to influence both learners' English proficiency and their motivation to learn English positively (Iwanaka, 2013). This gives dictogloss, a challenging and rewarding activity, the potential to seriously enhance our students' language skills and attitudes towards using English to communicate in the classroom. Most importantly, according to survey feedback, the vast majority of students report becoming very engaged in the task. They cooperate and collaborate with their peers to achieve a common goal, and get a lot of satisfaction doing the activity. Finally, dictogloss if properly introduced by the instructor and effectively utilized can serve as a motivating factor for large groups and even an entire class of students.

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Appendix A

Sentence Correction Sample

DICTAGLOSS CORRECTION HANDOUT (A)

<u>Instructions:</u> Check your answers. Correct all spelling and punctuation mistakes and write down any missing words.

1.   Because this is a **formal** agreement, please write your **signature** on this sheet before I can **consider** offering you the position of manager.

formal:正式な   **signature:** 署名   **consider:** 考慮する

2. After the **meeting**, many participants **congratulated** the young CEO for making such a large **profit** for the company.

    meeting: 会議   **congratulate:** 祝う   **profit:** 利益

3. The **audience** listened carefully to the **dynamic** presenter as she carefully **responded** to all their questions.

    audience: 聴衆   **dynamic:**   動的な **respond:**応じる

4. I don't have much **confidence** that our order will arrive on **schedule** from the ABC Company since they don't have a very good **reputation**.

    confidence: 自信   **schedule:** 定刻 **reputation**: 評判

5. The company website said they had **terminated exporting** to Japan and if you needed to speak to a manager you must make an **appointment**.

    terminate:終了する   **export:** 輸出する   **appointment:** 予約

Appendix B

Word Rating Sheet Sample

Word Rating Sheet

Name: _____   Student number: _____

Class name / number: _____   Department: _____

このページとページの裏の単語を読み、どの程度その単語を知っているかを1〜4の番号で答え、3、4の場合は指示に従ってそれぞれ記入してください。

1＝その単語をまったく知らない。

2＝その単語を見たり聞いたりしたことがあるが、意味は分からない。

3＝その単語の意味を知っている。意味は_____である。（番号の右の欄に単語の意味を日本語で書くこと。）

4＝その単語の意味を知っていて、それを使って英文を作れる。（番号の右の欄に単語の意味を日本語で書き、「4」の欄にその単語を使った英文を書くこと。）

記入例：

単語	番号 (1, 2, 3 or 4)	3、4 単語の意味を日本語 で書きなさい。	4 その単語を使った英文を書きなさい。
sell	4	売る	I will sell my old comic books at Book-Off.
summary	2		
calculate	3	計算する	
applaud	1		

English Translation of Instructions

1 = I have never seen or heard this word and do not know the meaning.

2 = I have seen or heard this word but do not know its meaning.

3 = I know this word and can provide a translation of it in my language. (Fill in the space to the right of the knowledge scale number with the translation.)

4 = I know this word and can use it in a sentence in English. (Fill in the number 4 on the knowledge scale with a translation to the right and use it in an English sentence.)