

Mixing Ancient and Modern: Dictation and Internet Media Combinations

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Dictation helps to hone various language skills, but particularly listening, because it raises learners' awareness of what they tend *not* to hear. Despite the efficacy of dictation, it is absent from many communicative language classrooms. One possible reason for this is that some teachers are unaware of the variations on the traditional dictation that they remember from their own school days. After looking at the merits of dictation and points for the teacher to be aware of when conducting it, I describe six ways in which dictation can be effectively combined with Internet media resources, specifically YouTube videos and radio-podcast clips. Examples of these D-AV combos (dictation-audio/video combinations) are illustrated, including those used in EMP (English for Medical Purposes) classes.

ディクテーションはさまざまな言語スキル、特にリスニングのスキルを磨く手助けになる。なぜなら学習者に何が聞き取れないかを意識させるからである。ディクテーションには効果があるにも関わらず、多くの会話を学ぶ言語の授業において実施されていないのは、ひとつの可能性として、教師が自分の学校時代に経験した伝統的なディクテーションしか知らず、さまざまなやり方があることを知らないからではないだろうか。本稿では、ディクテーションの利点に触れたあと、ディクテーションをインターネット上のメディアソース、特にユーチューブのビデオや、ラジオのポッドキャストのクリップなどと、効果的に組み合わせる6つの方法について紹介する。このディクテーションとメディアソースの組み合わせの例を、医学英語の授業において用いられた事例を含めて示したい。

DICTATION HAS been defined as the reading aloud of a passage “to students . . . with pauses during which they must try to write down what they have heard as accurately as possible” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 157). Many language learners probably hold a less than positive image of this activity. For me, at least, in my 1980s London comprehensive school, dictation marked the nadir of every French lesson, a subject for which I received the lowest mark possible in the national exams. Compounding the association of dictation with my failure in French was the connotation of the word itself. In history lessons we heard about *dictators* and learnt that Germans referred to the 1919 Treaty of Versailles in derogatory terms as the *Diktat*. When I became an English teacher it was perhaps not surprising that dictation did not find its way onto my lesson plans. Yet, after attending conferences and seeing the way other teachers were using dictation, my prejudices dissipated and I started to incorporate it into my classes. At around the same time as I was adding dictation to my classes, I was also beginning to experiment with listening activities created using clips of Internet radio podcasts. Gradually I started to combine dictation with these clips. Later I started using YouTube videos.

JALT2014 CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS



Described in this paper are six of the many D-AV combos (dictation-audio/video combinations) I have used in the classroom. Some of these combos should have wide appeal and could be slotted into a variety of lessons. Others were created for pharmacy students and will be of particular interest to EMP (English for medical purposes) teachers. Nevertheless, readers can take from these content-based activities general principles to conceive their own original D-AV combos.

Merits of Dictation

A browse through a selection of EFL resource books attests to the various ways in which dictation can be used. Dobbs (2001), for example, offered three dictation activities in her volume on using the classroom blackboard. In addition to its versatility, dictation has several pedagogical merits (see, e.g., Montalvan, n.d.). First, it is effective in helping to develop listening and writing skills, and when students take turns reading and dictating to each other, all four skills can be developed in an integrative way. Alkire (2002) suggested that dictation can also develop working memory because phrases or whole sentences must be retained before they are committed to paper. This aspect of dictation means it can potentially provide students with useful practice in taking notes.

Dictation is an illuminating activity in that students can receive immediate feedback if, for example, the transcript is projected on a screen. In this way learners can, as Underhill (2005) succinctly put it, “begin to discover what it is about spoken English that they tend not to hear” (p. 202). Teachers too, by monitoring students as they engage with the dictation, can receive immediate feedback on the proficiency of individual students and on the class as a whole (Montalvan, n.d.). Finally, because keeping up with the dictation requires concentration, the technique mandates engagement. Its attention-grabbing nature also serves a unifying role in the class, an attribute that is particularly valuable when a teacher wishes for a large class to be brought together (see also Norris, 1993).

Dictation Procedures

Although various procedures for teacher-led dictation have been suggested, teachers tend to develop their own dictation style. Wajnryb (1990) instructed teachers to read the whole text twice, with students desisting from writing during the first reading so they obtain “a global feeling for the whole passage” (p. 8). Except with dictogloss, which will not be dealt with in this paper, I omit an initial reading of the whole passage, but rather read each phrase, sentence, or other meaningful unit two or three times. Following this, I read the whole passage to the students, so they can make a final check of what they have written.

While enunciating as clearly as possible, I try not to slow down my speech excessively in order to preserve the features of connected speech. Also, rather than remaining stationary when reading, I move around the classroom. This allows me to ascertain how the students are coping with the dictation and helps me to make necessary adjustments in reading speed or number of repetitions. I have also observed that such teacher monitoring adds an extra element of pressure that propels into action the pens of the more recalcitrant students.

D-AV Combos in Practice

What follows is a description of, and where necessary, a commentary on a small selection of the D-AV combo activities that I have incorporated into my lessons. Some of the slides used in the classroom for these activities have been included with the hope of adding to the clarity of the descriptions. All the AV resources are saved on my computer desktop, allowing the activities to live on even if the video or audio disappears from the Internet. At the time of writing this paper all the links given remained live. To really appreciate the potential of these activities, readers are encouraged to follow these links and listen to and watch the Internet resource accompanying the dictation passage. For convenience, links to online resources have been placed in the main text.

Activity 1: Explanation Dictation

Instructions for an activity can become the dictation script. With its attention-grabbing potential, dictation is useful when the whole class needs to be given the same information. As well as instructions for upcoming activities, I have also dictated listening comprehension questions and details of assessments. The following activity was created as a lesson add-on before Christmas.

First, I showed Figure 1 to the students (I could also have written it on the board) and told them they had to use each punctuation mark on the slide at least once.

For this dictation pay attention to **punctuation**.

Use these punctuation marks:

- Full stop (period) .
- Colon :
- Comma ,
- Question mark ?

Figure 1. Instructions for upcoming dictation.

Next, I dictated the contents of Figure 2.

It's just about a month before Christmas. If you could receive any Christmas present, what would you like to get? There is only one condition: the present you get has to start with the letter *p*.

Figure 2. Dictation transcript for explanation dictation.

Students then compared their dictations. Next, I showed (on the classroom screen) Figure 2 to the students so they could check what they had written or, as Thornbury (2001, p. 73) put it, “access . . .

their own feedback.” Then I gave a brief explanation of the role of the four punctuation marks, particularly the colon. I chose some students to share their responses to the dictated task (some wishes included a puppy, peace, and PlayStation). Then I set the following simple task before students watched the video: “Watch this British commercial. What thing beginning with *p* does the boy get for Christmas?”

- Link to video: Google search “john lewis penguin advert”+youtube
- URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=icccscUFY860>

Activity 2: The DVD Sequence

In this activity, a video was sandwiched between a dictation and a dialogue. The *Dictation* introduced and provided background information to the *Video*, and the *Dialogue* encouraged students to reflect back on what they had seen. The following DVD sequence was integrated into a lesson on aspects of toxicology, but it could be linked to numerous other topics.

Pre-Dictation (Raising Students' Interest)

First, I showed a slide with the photographs of the following three famous people: Prince William, David Beckham, and Yao Ming. I asked students if they knew who they are and what they do. Then, I showed a screen shot (Figure 3) of the opening of the upcoming video, and elicited responses to the question on the slide (“Why are they appearing together in a video?”), a task that encouraged students to make predictions.



Figure 3. Pre-dictation prediction task for WildAid Video.

Dictation

I dictated the passage in Figure 4. (For high-level classes, this passage could be a previously unseen one. That is, their first contact with the text would be aural. To encourage post-dictation pair or group work with such high-proficiency students, they could be told to leave a gap in their dictation each time the teacher makes a sound, for example a clap of hands or click-clack of castanets. Students then work together to figure out suitable words to fill the gaps.)

What are Prince William, David Beckham, and retired Chinese basketball player Yao Ming doing together in a soccer stadium? The answer is that they are appearing together in a video that urges people not to buy rhino horn. **Poachers continue to hunt the rhino for its horn**, which is used in traditional Chinese medicine. Some species of rhino are on the verge of extinction.

Figure 4. Dictation transcript for the “Rhino Horn” video.

A variation on the standard method of reading a passage as yet unseen by the class, and one that I use most often in the DVD-sequence, is what I have called the “divulged dictation.” Divulging means that students have a chance to preview the script before I dictate it. With the passage projected on the classroom screen, I go through the text with the students, explaining key vocabulary and, where necessary, background information. Once I feel students understand the gist of the passage, I turn the projector to AV/mute (blank)—so I can see the script on the monitor, but it is not projected onto the classroom’s screen—and use the same text for the dictation.

Divulging before dictating reduces the cognitive load on the students, but it should not necessarily be thought of as an easy option. Having already seen the text, learners often exert great effort to recall what had been on the screen some minutes earlier. Practised regularly, divulged dictation also primes students to focus more on all texts covered in class, because they never know when they may be called upon to do a dictation based on earlier classroom input. Underhill (2005) inventively went a step further than the divulged dictation: He announced to students that a dictation was impending and asked them to identify any words that they predict may cause problems. This “humane dictation,” as Underhill called it, “helps [students] sharpen their awareness of the kinds of mistakes they each make, and to take responsibility for preventing it” (p. 202).

To give students further support, certain words or phrases can be shown while the dictation is being read. After the dictation, the transcript was projected on the screen once more. During this feedback stage, I directed students’ attention to the sentence in bold and asked students to consider the difference between it and the following: “Poachers continue to hunt *rhinos* for their horn.” This provided an opportunity for an explicit focus on articles, and illustrated how dictation passages and other scripted materials are “useful for presenting specific language items economically and effectively” (Swan, 2012, p. 24). The video was then played.

- Link to video: Google “beckham rhino advert”
- <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/video/football/video-1083513/David-Beckham-Prince-William-campaign-save-wild-rhinos.html>

Dialogue

Having viewed the video, students formed pairs and practiced the dialogue, which was on their class handout (see Appendix A). A short class discussion followed, in which students shared their ideas on how to stop rhino poaching. I then showed some slides illustrating things that are actually being done, including supplying each of the remaining northern white rhinos with armed guards, dehorning the rhinos, and—this is where the link to toxicology was developed in the lesson—poisoning the horn.

Extension: Outside Class Dictation

Students were also provided with a transcript of the video on their class handout. A number of words on the transcript were gapped and, with a link to the video included on the handout, students watched the video in their own time and filled in the gaps. The complete transcript is in Appendix B.

Dictations for Content-Based Lessons

Teaching medical English, I have found dictation an effective way to impart key information and increase content knowledge. The examples that follow were created for EMP (English for medical purposes) classes.

Activity 3: Half-and-Half Board Dictation

In this activity, I draw a vertical line down the middle of the board and call two students to the board. Each student is assigned one

half of the board onto which he or she writes the dictated passage. While the board dictation is in progress, the other class members are instructed to either watch the two students or do the dictation themselves. Once the passage has been read, I project the dictation script on the screen and give feedback, comparing and contrasting the two dictations on the board. Corrections for the board dictations are also elicited from other students in the class. Although I do not “sell” this activity as a race, an element of competition often develops between the two students at the board.

The following dictation (Figure 5) on strokes complemented a textbook-based lesson on conditions of the nervous system (see Unit 6 of Inoue & Ihara, 2007). With whole-class feedback, students can be made aware of a major obstacle to comprehending spoken English: “[students] are so familiar with the citation . . . form of words that they have learned that they don’t recognize them in a stream of speech” (Thorn, 2012, p. 66). For example, although pharmacy students know *waste* and *product*, two words in the dictation passage (Figure 5), they often fail to correctly transcribe them in this activity. One student, for example, wrote on the board *wasproductks*, a mistake that provided an opportunity for me to point out to the class that when the sounds /t/ or /d/ occur between two consonant sounds, they will often disappear completely from the pronunciation in natural spoken English.

A stroke occurs when blood flow is interrupted to part of the brain. Without blood to supply oxygen and nutrients and to remove waste products, brain cells quickly begin to die. When a stroke strikes it spreads like a fire in the brain. The longer it goes undetected, the more damage is done. To spot the signs of a stroke you have to think and act FAST.

Figure 5. Dictation transcript for the “Stroke Signs” video.

After correcting the two dictations on the board, the whole class was asked what they think *FAST* stands for (I gave verbal and non-

verbal clues to help elicit suggestions). Students then watched the video and checked their answers. (The video was made by the British National Health Service to help improve the outcome of people who have had cerebral strokes.)

- Link to video: Google search stroke+fast+nhs+youtube
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CpR5_LQCyzk

Readers who watch the video will notice that its narration has been incorporated into the dictation passage. In this way, the dictation serves to preview the language and support comprehension of the upcoming video. Not revealing the source of the dictation passage beforehand means students are likely to be pleasantly surprised by how much they comprehend of the narration. After watching, the meaning of each element in the FAST acronym is reviewed (see Appendix C).

Activity 4: Decaword Dictation

Whereas in the previous activity the dictation primed students for the following video, in the decaword dictation it is the video that sensitizes students to the content of the dictation. The following combination was incorporated into a lesson on medications for smoking cessation.

Students were told to write down any 10 words (hence the coin-ing “decaword”) they heard in the video. The video was played twice. On the board the headings “Content Words” and “Grammatical Words” were written. Several students were asked to give the words they managed to catch and to write them under the appropriate heading (for example, *blood* under content words; *and* under grammatical words). After this the students listened to a dictation passage (Figure 6). The passage was simply a repetition of the video’s narration. After the dictation, I replayed the video to demonstrate

how what was almost incomprehensible for many on the first hearing (few in my class managed to catch the required 10 of the 34 words in the voice-over) could be comprehended once they became aware of the discrepancies between natural speech and the written representation of the same words.

Every time you smoke, blood that’s thick and dirty with toxins circulates through your body in seconds, increasing your chances of a heart attack or stroke. If you could see the damage, you’d stop.

Figure 6. Dictation transcript for the stop smoking “Toxic Cycle” advert.

Activity 5: Detective Dictation

In this activity it was not enough for students just to write down what they were being read; they also had to attempt to simultaneously judge the veracity or plausibility of what they were hearing. Students were shown the following instructions (Figure 7).

If you hear—detect— a word that doesn’t sound right (that **jars** with you), scratch your head, but write it anyway.

Figure 7. Instructions for *Detective Dictation*.

The following D-AV combo was included in a lesson on the causes of epilepsy and its treatment. The dictation served to inform students of basic first aid for epileptic seizure. I pretaught the necessary vocabulary. After the dictation (Figure 8), I asked students which words or phrases jarred with them. Then I played the video and told students to check their answers and correct the errors. Finally, I displayed the feedback slide with the corrections shown (Appendix D).

If someone has an epileptic seizure, the first thing you have to do is protect the person from sharks. You must not restrain the person. Reassure the person by saying something such as, “I’m going to stay with you until it’s Christmas.” After the seizure, you should roll the person onto their side. You should also tilt the person’s head back. Check the person is laughing. If necessary, call 999.

Figure 8. Dictation transcript for *Detective Dictation*.

- Link to video: Google search “everyday first aid”+epilepsy+youtube
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dLzGz3koNU>

Activity 6: Broadcast Dictation

In this activity students vocalized the passage that was dictated. The example on Ebola that follows complemented a textbook unit about another deadly virus, SARS (Unit 6 in Noguchi, Kagota, & Nishikata, 2009). In preparation, students were told about the BBC World Service and its “Public Health Broadcast on Ebola” to West Africa, an extract of which was used in the following passage that was dictated to the students (Figure 9).

Here’s the advice from health agencies on what you should be looking out for. Most common symptoms include: Fever, headache, joint and muscle aches, weakness, diarrhea vomiting, stomach pain, lack of appetite, and abnormal bleeding. If you suspect an Ebola case, please contact the nearest health facility. Don’t try to treat suspected Ebola cases yourself. The best protection, however, is making sure you do not come into contact with the virus.

Figure 9. Dictation transcript for the “Public Health Broadcast on Ebola.”

- Link to Audio: Google Search: ebola public broadcast+bbc world service+13 august
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p024q0h3>
- Location of clip on audio file: From 1 minute 15 seconds to 1 minute 52 seconds

After the dictation, students were played the audio clip of the same text as it was read on the broadcast. Readers who listen to this part of the broadcast will hear how the presenter, through word stress, speed of delivery, and pronunciation features, conveys the gravity of the information. Students were instructed to underline the words that were emphasized by the presenter. Next, students were given the task below (Figure 10). They take turns reading to each other in pairs or small groups, preferably using the read-look-say technique (this involves students reading silently a manageable chunk of text and holding it in working memory, looking up at their partner, and then saying the remembered text out loud). The audio clip is then played once again. Students found that it was much easier to comprehend what they themselves had voiced. Output eases input, or, as I remind students on a slide with a photograph of a roaring lion, “saying is taming.”

Be a news reader

Now practice reading the transcript to your group members. Imagine you are broadcasting on the BBC World Service. Your message could save lives!

Use stress and intonation to convey your message more effectively.

Figure 10. Post-dictation production task.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to illustrate the potential of partnering dictation, a technique that has been a staple in language classrooms since at least the 16th century (Stansfield, 1985, p. 121), with audio podcasts and online videos—resources that have been widely available for only a few decades. There are probably as many ways to combine Internet media resources with dictation as there are creative teachers, and in this paper I have given just a glimpse of what can be done. I have not, for example, touched on written-spoken dictation (an activity that raises students' awareness of features of spoken grammar by dictating a passage written in "cleaned-up" Standard English, but based on an audio clip rich in features of spontaneous, natural speech that is later played and analysed). Moreover, although all the dictations in this paper have been teacher led, there are also various D-AV combos that involve students dictating to each other. Enjoyable and pedagogically effective, such student-to-student activities will be a topic for my presentation at JACET 2015.

The Internet is a vast repository of authentic video and audio, and one that is constantly expanding—300 hours of video are uploaded to YouTube every minute (How YouTube changed the world, 2015). These resources have the potential to transform the activities we do in class. At the same time, as illustrated in the DVD-sequence's extension activity (see Activity 2: The DVD sequence), the Internet is also freeing activities from the confines of the classroom and making possible a "shift away from the whole-class format . . . toward greater reliance on self-study" (Field, 2012, p. 214). Moreover, the ease with which AV media can be controlled (paused, rewind, replayed, and so forth) means that almost all we hear can be heard again. Listening, as Vandergrift and Goh (2012, p. 218) described, is becoming increasingly a recursive activity akin to reading. However, perhaps *recursive dictation* is a contradiction in terms; might it be most appropriate to define dictation as an exercise in which the writer has no direct control over the reading of the passage? By

using pretaught expressions such as "Could you slow down a bit, please?" or "Please repeat the last sentence," students may indirectly modulate how the teacher reads the passage. This, however, is not the same as being able to directly control with a click of a mouse or a touch of the finger the number of times a sentence is repeated on, for example, a downloaded sound file. How dictation is defined in the computer age seems an apt topic for future discussion.

Bio Data

Mark Rebeck has taught English in London (the city of his birth), Korea, and Japan. He holds an MA in Japanese Studies from Sheffield University and an MA in TEFL from Birmingham University. His areas of interest include materials development using authentic resources, particularly in the field of medical English.

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Appendix A

Dialogue for the DVD-Sequence

- A:** What did you think of that video showing how few rhinos there are left in the wild?
- B:** _____¹
- A:** I hope that it'll help to put pressure on governments in the countries where rhino horn is used as medicine.
- B:** I agree, if there wasn't such a demand for rhino horn, poachers wouldn't see killing rhinos as a way to make money.
- A:** I think that the only way to stop poaching is to send soldiers to protect the rhinos.
- B:** But it would be difficult to protect every rhino in national parks that cover many thousands of kilometers.² The situation is desperate, so desperate measures are needed.

- A:** Do you have any ideas?
- B:** No, but let's try to come up with something in the next 5 minutes.

In pairs, come up with a way to stop rhinos being poached.

Your idea _____

Notes

- You can use expressions such as "I found it really depressing/interesting" or "It should make people more aware of the plight of the rhino and other wild animals."
- For example, Kruger national park in South Africa is 20,000 km².

Appendix B

Dictation Transcript for WildAid Video

DB: Imagine if all the people in the world could fit into one stadium.

PW: Sadly, all the wild rhinos in the world can— with room to spare. For some species it's almost too late. There are only seven northern white rhino left.*

YM: But we can fill this stadium and many more, if we can stop the illegal trade.

DB: Ask your friends and family never to buy rhino horn.

PW: And together, we can save our wild rhinos.

PW+DB: When the buying stops, the killing can too.

*At the time of revising this paper (February, 2015), this number had dropped to five.

Appendix C

Review of the FAST Acronym (From the Stroke Signs Video)

FACE: Has their face fallen on one side? Can they smile?

ARMS: Can they raise both arms and keep them there?

SPEECH: Is their speech slurred?

TIME: Just like a fire, it's time to call 999 if you see any single one of these signs.

The faster you act the more of the person you save.

Appendix D

Feedback Slide for Dictation Detective

If someone has an epileptic seizure, the first thing you have to do is protect the person from ~~sharks~~ **injury**. You must not restrain the person. Reassure the person by saying something such as, "I'm going to stay with you until it's ~~Christmas~~ **over**." After the seizure, you should roll the person onto their side. You should also tilt the person's head back. Check the person is ~~laughing~~ **breathing**. If necessary, call 999.