

Dictogloss as a Tool for Self-Study of Conjunctions

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Self-employed

Reference Data:

Ayako Taguchi (2026). Dictogloss as a tool for self-study of conjunctions. In B. Lacy, M. Swanson, & H. Yoder (Eds.), *Language S: Learning, Teaching, Assessing – JALT 50 Years – Challenges and Perspectives*. JALT. <https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTPCP2025-23>

This study examines whether dictogloss, a task usually used as collaborative group work (Wajnryb, 1990), can be effective for a single learner. Focusing on English conjunctions, an adult Japanese learner participated in three instructional sessions combining explicit grammar instruction and individual dictogloss tasks. Three variations of individual dictogloss were compared to explore how reflective processing can occur without peer interaction. Data from a written grammar test, oral production tasks, and interviews showed clear improvement in grammatical accuracy, with accuracy scores increasing and fewer sentence fragments in oral production. The findings indicate that encouraging learners to verbalize their understanding during dictogloss tasks can function similarly to peer negotiation (Swain, 1985). These results demonstrate how dictogloss can be adapted in one-on-one lessons where group work cannot be conducted, as well as in independent self-study.

本研究は、通常は協働的なグループワークとして用いられるディクトグロス (Wajnryb, 1990) が、学習者が一人で取り組む場合にも効果的であるかを検討するものである。英語の接続詞に焦点を当て、日本人成人学習者1名が、明示的な文法指導と個別ディクトグロス課題を組み合わせた3回の授業に参加した。他の学習者とのやりとりを伴わない状況において、学習者の内省がどのように行われるかを探索するため、3種類のディクトグロスと比較した。文法の筆記テスト、口頭産出テスト、およびインタビューのデータから、文法の正確さが向上し、正答率の向上や口頭産出における不完全文の減少が確認された。この結果は、ディクトグロス中に学習者が自身の理解を言語化することを促すことで、他の学習者との意味交渉 (Swain, 1985) と同様の機能を果たし得ることを示している。本研究の成果は、ディクトグロスが一対一の個人授業や、一人での自習にも活用可能であることを示唆している。

Dictogloss is a task in which learners listen to a passage and reconstruct it from notes they take (Wajnryb, 1990). It was originally designed as a group activity in which learners share their notes and collaboratively reconstruct the passage, allowing them to analyze and correct their errors. Although it is said that dictogloss is a collaborative activity done in groups to help each other to produce grammatically correct sentences, I investigated its effectiveness when conducted without group work. Three treatment sessions consisted of explicit instruction on conjunctions, which were the target grammar, and a dictogloss activity. To investigate how dictogloss could be conducted for a single learner, three types of dictogloss tasks were evaluated using interviews and test results.

Literature Review

Previous studies on coordinating and subordinating conjunctions such as *but*, *because*, and *when* as well as explicit instruction, input and output, and the dictogloss task are described below.

Conjunctions play an important role in enabling smooth conversation. They make the logical relationships in writing clearer, as they help convey details of what the writer wants to say. Larsen-Freeman and Celce-Murcia (2015) described types of conjunctions, noting that they join two or more constituents of the same category, such as words or phrases. Takahashi (2017) categorized the meaning and usage of conjunctions into five types for solving questions in the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC): conjunctions for presenting time such as *when*, contradictory conjunctions such as *but*, those presenting reasons such as *because*, those adding conditions such as *if*, and correlative conjunctions such as *either or*.

Explicit instruction involves an explanation of target grammar rules, while implicit instruction does not. Goo et al. (2015) conducted a meta-analysis comparing 34 explicit and implicit instruction conditions and concluded that explicit instruction is more

effective for L2 learning overall. Spada et al. (2014) investigated the appropriate timing for form-focused instruction with explicit explanation. The form-focused instruction was provided either separately from or during communicative practice, and although the effects differed, both timings benefited learners' performance. Alawerdy and Alalwi (2022) investigated whether explicit instruction on a target grammar structure would benefit the writing skills of 43 university students. Participants were divided into control and experimental groups. The results showed that the experimental group, in which the target grammar was explicitly taught through five 30-minute sessions, outperformed the control group.

Although traditionally explicit instruction of grammar was considered to be sufficient to master a second or foreign language, Swain (1985) argued that both comprehensible input and opportunities for output are essential for language learning. Nemoto and Beglar (2019) also suggested that in addition to explicit form-focused instruction, both input and output are necessary for successful grammar acquisition, highlighting that learners should produce output using their own knowledge in meaningful contexts. However, when an activity involves both input and output simultaneously, it is difficult for learners to process them, even though both are important. Ellis (2006) stated that understanding target grammar features and using them in communication are different.

Dictogloss was originally developed by Wajnryb (1990). It is a task-based approach to grammar instruction with four stages: preparation, listening, reconstruction, and analysis and correction. The preparation stage includes an introduction to the speech topic and relevant vocabulary. Vocabulary instruction should be completed beforehand so that the learners are familiar with the lexis in the listening text used in the next stage. In the listening stage, learners listen to a speech once without taking notes; the text is then read again, and learners take notes on key words. Next, learners share their memos with group members and reconstruct the original text. In this reconstruction stage, learners' sentences need not be identical to the original text; rather, the goal is to convey the same meaning. Finally, the reconstructed writings are analyzed in class in the analysis and correction stage. Grammar should be focused on and discussed.

Jabbarpoor and Tajeddin (2013) investigated the benefit of group work in a dictogloss activity. Participants were 90 university students, and the subjunctive mood was the target grammar. Compared with participants who reconstructed a text individually, those who did the same activity in collaboration with group members achieved higher posttest scores. Additionally, in terms of motivation, dictogloss with peers is considered superior to individual practice (Kopinska & Azkarai, 2020). In their study, 64 elementary school students answered a motivation questionnaire, and their task motivation when

doing the task individually versus collaboratively was compared. Kopinska and Azkarai (2020) suggested that although some learners reported liking working alone because they could make their own decisions, for many students, pair work significantly helped, and collaborative work yielded better overall results than individual work.

According to Wajnryb (1990), dictogloss is conducted as group work because learners can identify grammatical errors through collaboration with peers. However, in this study, I investigated whether dictogloss is effective when conducted by a single learner, so that it can be used for self-study. The research questions are as follows.

- RQ1. Is dictogloss effective in teaching conjunctions when it is conducted by a single learner?
- RQ2. What factors do teachers need to pay attention to when a single learner engages in a dictogloss activity?

Methodology

Participant

A Japanese male, Taku (pseudonym), volunteered for this study. He was 52 years old at the time of the study. He has studied English from junior high school to university as a compulsory subject. He said that he might have passed the second grade of the Eiken English proficiency test, which is set at the high school graduation level, corresponding to CEFR B1 (Eiken Foundation of Japan, n.d.). However, because it was long ago, he did not remember. He uses English infrequently in his work environment. He works at an inquiry desk that deals with inquiries from domestic and foreign researchers and when he receives e-mails in English, he must read and write English. He explained that using AI translation is not prohibited, so he often uses it when dealing with English. Also, he sometimes goes to soccer games and he often meets foreign supporters. Because they support the same team, it is easy to initiate conversation, but he said it is difficult to sustain it. He explained that he always feels nervous about mistakes that he must be making. After making some simple sentences, he cannot keep talking and gives up on the conversation.

Pedagogical Materials

PowerPoint presentation slides for explicit instruction were prepared for this study. The slides were original materials created for this study. The first part of the slides is an explicit explanation of the target grammar in Japanese. Some slides have blanks for the

learner to fill in to check whether he understood the target grammar. From the second instructional session, the slides also included a review section to warm up and assess what he remembered from the previous session.

The second part of the slides was for the dictogloss activity. An explanation of how to do dictogloss was first delivered. Sentences the learner had to reconstruct were shown as blanks, and other sentences were presented. Because the listening materials consisted of conversations between two speakers, the speaker's gender was indicated to indicate who said each line.

Assessment Instruments

There were three assessment materials for both the pretest and posttest: an interview, multiple-choice questions, and oral production tests. The interview was conducted before treatment on the first day of the study, and the multiple-choice questions and oral production tests were administered on the second day. On the final day, multiple-choice questions which are the same but reordered, an oral production test which is equivalent to the pretest, and an interview were administered as posttests.

Interview questions addressed his experience learning and using English, his reflections on the language, and his goals for its use. At the end of the second interview, Taku was asked for his opinion on the sessions and whether he had noticed any changes in his English output.

The 10 multiple-choice questions had four options and followed the same format as TOEIC Part 5. There was a blank in a short sentence, and Taku chose the best answer from the four choices. There was no time limit for this test. The questions were taken from the TOEIC practice book (Takahashi, 2017). I selected questions from this book because the vocabulary is high-frequency, and Taku would have no difficulty understanding it, allowing him to focus on the target grammar. For the posttest, the same questions were presented in a different order.

The oral production test had three parts. The first oral production test was a speech. I asked Taku to introduce himself in English for the pretest and for the posttest to introduce one of his friends. No time limit was set, but I encouraged him to speak for around one minute. The second test was a picture description task. Taku was shown pictures and asked to describe them. The pictures were retrieved from the webpage of Kumamoto Prefectural Board of Education (2020), and they are for preparation for Eiken Grade 3 test. The Eiken test (Test in Practical English Proficiency) is one of the most widely used tests in Japan, and in the test, a passage related to a picture is given to test

takers, who answer questions regarding it (Eiken Foundation of Japan, n.d.). However, I did not ask questions; I used the pictures solely for a picture description task. The other test was a summarizing task. Taku listened to a paragraph, and he wrote a summary of the story. The reading was an excerpt from *TOEIC Score Booster for the TOEIC L & R test* (Hayakawa & Kishi, 2019), and he listened to the audio accompanying the drill. The recordings were played three times, and he produced a summary.

Procedures

This exploratory study consisted of six sessions. Before the three treatment sessions began, the interview and the pretest were conducted on the first and second day, respectively. The sixth day was for the posttest and the interview. Each session is described below.

First, the interview was conducted to learn about Taku's English learning history, his frequency of using English, his thoughts on his current English proficiency, and what he wants to do with English. We then discussed which aspects of grammar to focus on in the upcoming sessions. After talking for a while, I realized that his proficiency level was much higher than expected, so I decided not to give the pretest that day but to conduct it the next day.

On the second day, I administered two pretests. Before the test began, I explained how I would use the personal information in this study using PowerPoint slides and asked for permission to record his speech. First, he completed 10 multiple-choice questions so that I could assess his knowledge of conjunctions. There were short sentences with blanks, and he chose the best answer from four options. I explained that there was no time limit for this test, although I recorded the time for comparison between the pretest and posttest. Without any break, oral production tests were administered. A self-introduction, a picture description, and a summarizing task were administered. First, I asked him to introduce himself in English, explaining that the speech time should be around one minute. Taku had 20 seconds to prepare his speech for the picture description task. I showed him the picture on my computer, and he began speaking. The preparation time was the same as that when test takers are given a card containing a passage and a picture in the Eiken test (Eiken Foundation of Japan, n.d.). After that, I explained the summary task, stating that he would listen to the audio three times and write a summary of what he heard. I asked him to listen to the audio once, and to take notes the second and third times. There was no time limitation for this task. The audio was played when he said he was ready, and he could use time for writing a summary.

I provided him with no feedback after the pretest but stated that I would present the results after the posttest.

The treatment sessions began on Day 3. The session was conducted on Zoom and began with an explanation of how to use conjunctions, presented via PowerPoint slides. After confirming that he had no problem with how to use conjunctions, I started the dictogloss activity. First, I showed him a vocabulary list of ten words, explaining that they were related to the topic of the listening text and that not all of them would be in the listening text. I asked him to write a note if there was a word that he did not know. Next, I presented the beginning of a speech and asked him to listen and reconstruct the remainder. On this day, I asked him to listen to the audio once and take notes for the second, third, and fourth times. I ensured that he did not write a summary of the contents but instead reconstructed sentences. I did not speak with him during the task, except to advise him to focus on the conjunctions in the sentences. I told him this before the fourth listening, which was the last time the audio was played. After he finished writing, I showed him the answer, and he reviewed his own writing.

This session began with a review of the previous session on Day 4. Taku filled in the gaps in a test and explained how conjunctions are used. He was given a list of 15 conjunctions and asked how many he knew. After explicit instruction about conjunctions, he was shown vocabulary related to the listening text. Unlike the last session, he answered three comprehension questions after listening to the same audio twice. After reviewing his answers, he listened to the same audio three more times for the dictogloss task. He was allowed to take notes at any time. I told him that conjunctions appeared in the speech before the final listening. After reconstructing the speech, the original text was shown to him, and he reviewed his writing.

Day 5 was the final day of the treatment. Dictogloss, including vocabulary preparation and listening, was conducted as on Day 3. The difference was that between each listening, I asked him to tell me what he heard. I did not provide feedback. He explained what he did and did not understand in the listening passage.

On the last day, I administered a set of posttests, a written grammar test, an oral production test, and an interview. Questions for the written grammar test were the same as the pretest, but the order was different. There was no time limit for answering the questions, and after he completed the grammar items, I proceeded to the oral production tests. I asked him to introduce a friend, describe a picture, and summarize what he had heard, as he did in the pretest. After that, I asked him for his opinions on the sessions, including his views on dictogloss and which version of dictogloss he found more effective.

Analysis

The results of the interview, multiple-choice test, and three types of oral production tests were analyzed for both the pretest and posttest. Correct answers received 1 point, while incorrect answers received 0 on the multiple-choice questions. For the oral production test, the use of conjunctions, total word count, and the length of speech were recorded, and words per minute were calculated. Additionally, the number of fragments was counted, with one incomplete sentence—such as a sentence missing a verb—counted as a fragment.

Results

The pretest and posttest results were compared, and the interview data were used to provide additional descriptive insights. Table 1 displays the results of the multiple-choice test. Taku's score increased from 30% to 80%. The time taken to answer all questions was longer in the posttest. In the explicit instruction section, I introduced 15 conjunctions; he recognized all of them. However, for incorrect answers, he marked prepositions instead of conjunctions.

Table 1

Written Multiple-Choice Test Results

	Correct answers	Percentage correct	Time required (sec.)
Pretest	3/10	30%	180
Posttest	8/10	80%	355

The three oral production test results are shown in Table 2. The table below shows the number of times conjunctions were used in Taku's speech, the number of words he produced, speaking duration, words per minute, and the number of sentence fragments. Taku produced one more conjunction on the posttest, and no improvement was observed in word count, time, or WPM. Investigating his speech in detail, the number of fragments decreased, and as a result, he produced more complete sentences on the posttest. The sentence fragments he made in the pretest and posttest were the omission of the copula *be*. For example, he produced *In the sky three birds flying* rather than *In the sky three birds are flying*.

Table 2
Oral Production Test Results

	Conjunctions used (n)	Word count	Time (seconds)	WPM	Sentence fragments (n)
Pretest					
Introduction Speech	1	27	100	16	0
Picture Description	0	39	61	38	2
Summary	1	35	—	—	0
Total	2	101	161	—	2
Posttest					
Introduction Speech	0	40	88	27	0
Picture Description	2	40	101	24	0
Summary	1	20	—	—	1
Total	3	100	189	—	1

An interview about the dictogloss task was conducted in Japanese, Taku's first language. His overall impression was that the dictogloss task was challenging and that a dictation activity would be easier. However, rather than merely presenting on a topic, the picture description, summary, and dictogloss tasks proved effective because they helped him articulate his ideas clearly. He said he cannot think of what to say during free speech. The dictogloss task was helpful because he could check his answers and identify which parts were correct and which were incorrect.

Discussion

The first research question asked whether dictogloss, used to teach conjunctions, works when conducted by a single learner. The multiple-choice question score increased from 30% to 80%, which showed that his grammar accuracy improved after the treatment sessions. In addition, he stated that the dictogloss task was meaningful because he could see the correct answer after producing output. I noted the difficulty of practicing speaking alone because learners cannot receive feedback and are unsure

whether their production is correct. Taku strongly agreed. However, he showed little improvement in conjunction use, with only one additional conjunction used correctly in the posttest. Also, the conjunctions he used in the pretests and posttests did not connect clauses, although all example sentences in the explicit instruction connected two clauses. He used conjunctions at the beginning of sentences or he connected words. Because every treatment session included explicit instruction before the dictogloss activity, the results were partly attributable to this instruction.

The second research question asked what factors teachers need to pay attention to when a single learner engages in a dictogloss activity. Based on the reconstructed sentences, the interview on the last day, and Taku's comments during and after each session, the third approach—where he explained what he heard between listenings—seemed to be most useful. He reconstructed sentences the most accurately in this case, and after explaining what he did and did not understand, he listened again and added words. He was organizing the information he had noted when speaking between the listening tasks. This suggests potential parallels to collaborative group work, in which participants discuss what they heard and add or correct the words they had written. Wajnryb (1990) stressed the importance of negotiation of information among participants. Therefore, when conducted by a single learner, it may be effective to generate many ideas and consider them when reconstructing sentences. Regarding the second type of dictogloss, in which Taku answered questions, he said that he focused on answering them and did not attend to the overall content. Because Taku told me that he had a vague understanding of the content while listening to the audio, I prepared guiding questions. He said that concentrating on listening was easier for remembering and reconstructing sentences.

The limitation of this study is that it included only one participant. Although the findings suggest that the dictogloss is effective for a single learner, further research with a larger number of participants is needed to confirm its effectiveness. In addition, future studies should explore whether the task may be effective for learners with various levels of English proficiency, so that it can determine whether its benefits extend across a wider range of learners.

Conclusion

A dictogloss task was conducted for a single learner to investigate whether it is effective for self-study. The task resulted in an improved score for the grammar test measuring the accuracy of conjunction usage. Although beneficial side effects such as

an increase in words per minute were not produced in the oral production tasks, the frequency of usage of conjunctions slightly increased. During the interview, Taku stated that the dictogloss task was meaningful because it had a correct answer that could be checked. In other words, Taku could compare his own production and the original text by himself. In that sense, dictogloss can be a powerful tool even for a single learner. Regarding variations of dictogloss, the participant succeeded in reconstructing the most when he had time to explain what he had listened to during the task. An explanation of the listening content might have worked like negotiation within a group. Although dictogloss is often conducted in groups, it can be a powerful tool for self-study.

Bio Data

Ayako Taguchi is a lecturer teaching English classes including TOEIC preparation and Medical English at several universities in Japan. Her research interests include English language education, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and language assessment. <three-seconds@fuji.waseda.jp>

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