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USING DICTOGLOSS TO TEACH THE ENGLISH HYPOTHETICAL CONDITIONAL CONSTRUCTION: AN EXPERIMENTAL SUPPORT

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Abstract

The current study reports on an investigation into the effects of using dictogloss to teach the English hypothetical conditional construction. Twenty four Indonesian EFL learners (initially fifty) studying English as a compulsory subject at a local secondary school in Jakarta participated in an instructional treatment that is called dictogloss. An interpretation task and a production task were used in the pretest and posttest in this study to measure the learners' performance after the treatment. The findings revealed positive effects on both learners' interpretation and production abilities. The participants improved significantly in their abilities to comprehend and use the target construction. One reasonable pedagogical implication is that dictogloss is an effective language teaching method, and should be used if teachers want to vary their teaching techniques.

Keywords: dictogloss, Indonesian EFL learners, the English hypothetical conditional construction, pedagogical implications

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the twentieth century, various types of explicit grammar instruction dominate English classes (Macaro & Masterman, 2006). Researchers have argued that teaching grammar explicitly assists learners to master the target grammatical form (Doughty, 2003; DeKeyser & Juffs, 2005). However, it should also be accompanied with practice in order for learners to retain the form, allowing them to use it in communication (DeKeyser, 1998). Traditionally, teachers achieve their teaching objectives by explaining how a certain grammar form works through a teacher-oriented method then continue by providing learners with some mechanical drills in order to evaluate the learners' progress.

However, there are some flaws regarding this output-based learning practice. First, mechanical drills are not meaningful and do not enhance form-meaning connections (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). Moreover, Wong and VanPatten (2008) convincingly argued that drills are not needed for L2

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learners to acquire the target grammar. In addition, learners are not supplied with enough input because teachers are too focused on making them produce the target grammatical form without paying enough attention to their comprehension of the target grammatical form. As a result, learners produce output too prematurely because they have not got enough exposure to input (Benati, 2001).

Hence, alternative focus-on-form types of instruction have been introduced to replace the traditional method of teaching grammar because they are believed to be able to deal with the flaws within the traditional method. One focus-on-form type that provides meaningful output-based practice is Dictogloss (DG). DG is able to draw learners' attention upon the form and the function of the target grammatical form by encouraging learners to work in groups in order to produce the grammatical forms by reconstructing a text that is spoken orally beforehand (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). The present study reports the effectiveness of DG in teaching an English structure to adolescent Indonesian EFL learners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research has demonstrated that exposure to comprehensible input only is not sufficient, and output plays a significant role in second language acquisition (e.g., Harley & Swain, 1984; Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1991; Swain, 1985, 1993). The participants in these studies were immersion students and so exposed to abundant comprehensible input, but they remained inaccurate in using some L2 aspects. According to Swain (1985, 1993) the main reason was that the participants in such immersion programs did not produce enough output, especially language production that could advance them in the development of their interlanguage. She proposed three functions of output in second language acquisition: a noticing function, a hypothesis testing function, and a metalinguistic function. The noticing function posits that as learners are pushed to produce output, such as in writing or speaking, they become aware that they are unable to say what they want to say. In other words, they notice a hole or gap in their linguistic knowledge. The second function, the hypothesis testing function, proposes that output gives learners opportunities to test out what they know about expressing what they mean in the L2. The third function, the metalinguistic function, claims that enable learners to think about what they want to say and how to say it. These functions let learners know about their own language and linguistic problems they have in the L2.

From a sociocultural perspective, output can help learners from learn collaboratively from each other. One implementation of collaborative output

theory is pair work. As learners do pair work, they engage in their Zone of Proximal Development, which means, through collaboration they are pushed to move to a higher level of development (Vygotsky, 1978). In SLA, doing collaborative output tasks encourages them to reflect on and negotiate the accuracy of their language production. It also enables them to talk and argue about the language forms they should use to express meaning (Swain, 2005). One collaborative output task that serves this purpose is dictogloss.

Dictogloss is a comparatively new method in teaching grammar. It is defined as "a task-based procedure designed to help language-learning students towards a better understanding of how grammar works on a text basis" (Wajnryb, 1990). Vasiljevic (2010) adds that DG "offers a unique blend of teaching listening comprehension and the assessment of the student's listening ability".

DG is derived from the traditional dictation, yet it has different objectives and procedures. Firstly, DG emphasizes the meaning of a whole text rather than non-meaningful text as in the traditional dictation. DG trains learners to focus on the target grammatical form through meaningful contexts. While in the traditional dictation, it only focuses on form. Secondly, traditional dictation requires learners to write word by word while listening to the teacher. Learners' output should be the same as the teacher's text. However, in DG, learners listen to a short text read by the teacher at a normal speed while writing down important words related to text and then they work together in small groups to reconstruct the text as similar as possible to the original text by using the target grammatical form (Vasiljevic, 2010).

In this way DG is aimed to facilitate learners to produce output collaboratively and to assist form-meaning connections. There are some advantages of conducting DG. Firstly, DG promotes "verbal interaction in a realistic communicative context" (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Learners need to communicate with and help each other to reconstruct the text in order to complete DG. This method pushes learners to discuss in groups about what they know and to learn from each other. Secondly, through DG, learners can reflect on their output to find out how much they know about the language. At the end of DG, learners' awareness of the target grammatical form is expected to increase.

The Stages of Dictogloss

There are four stages of DG: preparation, dictation, reconstruction, and analysis with correction (Prince, 2013; Wajnryb, 1990; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). At the 'preparation' stage, learners are informed about the aim of DG and what they should do during DG. Learners are also introduced to the

topic of the text because learners listen more effectively when they can foresee what they will hear. The teacher also prepares a vocabulary activity for learners to anticipate confusion when listening to the text. Then, the teacher may also assign learners to sit in groups.

At the 'dictation' stage, learners listen to a short passage, containing the target grammatical form, twice. It is recommended to have the text read at a normal speed since each learner's proficiency is different. In the first listening, learners are advised to only listen in order to understand the whole text. When they listen for the second time, learners are encouraged to take notes based on what they hear; not writing word by word. In some cases, the teacher provides learners with some questions or outline to guide the learners in taking notes. The teacher needs to remind learners to only write words that will help them to reconstruct the text. These words, known as key information, serve as memory trigger when it comes to the 'reconstruction' time. There are two types of key information, content words (for example, *butcher*, *sell*, *meat*) and function words (for example, *her dog*, *has been*, *gone*).

Next, at the 'reconstruction' stage, learners work in groups to reconstruct the text based on their notes obtained from the previous stage and by using the target grammatical form. At this stage, learners are encouraged to have a discussion using the target language in order to practice their speaking skill. Learners may compare each other's notes in order to gather enough resources to reconstruct the text. The teacher's job in this stage is monitoring. The teacher may join the groups' discussion and provide feedback while they are constructing their writing. However, teacher may not provide any actual language input since it is learners' job to figure it. As an example, if the topic is about Simple Past Tense, the teacher may give correction upon articles or prepositions, but not about the target grammatical form itself. The teacher should also encourage learners to produce their best without being afraid of making mistakes.

Finally, at the 'analysis with correction' stage, learners are prompted to evaluate their writing as they compare their version with the original version. This stage allows them to notice and learn from their mistakes through meaningful activity. Learners then revise their work together with the help from the teacher. Lastly, learners address their problems during DG and the teacher will help them to overcome their linguistic problems by providing feedback.

Research has revealed that learners are actually not very concerned with grammatical features; their main concern is to reconstruct the text meaningfully (Mayo, 2002). Since DG is a teaching technique that focuses on form, learners also need to pay attention to form accuracy as a means to

convey meaning. One target construction whose forms are meaningful is the hypothetical construction. The next section will discuss in detail what this construction is and why it poses difficulty to English learners.

THE ENGLISH HYPOTHETICAL CONDITIONAL CONSTRUCTION

"Conditional constructions allow humans to negotiate between several logical scenarios and to be able to capture various consequences of their actions or of the circumstances humans find themselves in" (Jacobsen, 2012). Conditional constructions are used to make predictions about situations that did not happen in the past or have not yet happened. Therefore, the hypothetical conditional construction is used to talk about imaginary or impossible situations and their results at the present time.

(1) If the shoes were cheaper, I would buy it.
(2) I wouldn't be able to go home later if I still lived with my parents.

As mentioned in (1) and (2), a hypothetical conditional construction sentence consists of two clauses, *if* clause and main clause. Simple past is used in the *if* clause to express an imaginary situation in the present, not to talk about a past event. *Would* is very often used in the main clause to talk about the result of the situation. It is acceptable to begin the hypothetical conditional construction sentence with either *if* clause or main clause; however, a comma (,) should be used between two clauses if the sentence starts with *if* clause as shown in (1).

The grammatical form of English hypothetical conditional construction was selected for a number of reasons. Firstly, English grammar books that are used by learners do not provide thorough explanations of conditional constructions (Jacobsen, 2012). Most of the books tend to focus on explaining the form rather than meaning. Learners are only imitating the examples provided in the books without understanding the grammar form that they are imitating (i.e. why the grammatical patterns are the way they are is not explained). Thus, it is unlikely for them to be able to use the form meaningfully in everyday life.

Secondly, this form is chosen because it poses specific problems for the learners in general (Jacobsen, 2012). As mentioned above, the hypothetical conditional construction consists of two clauses, which may confuse the learners and require more time to acquire. Moreover, the presence of past tense in the hypothetical conditional construction and the "present" meaning that it implies is likely to cause confusion since their grammar books do not usually explain the reason in any meaningful way. Thirdly, studies revolving DG are limited in terms of target linguistic forms

and participants. With an exception of Qin's (2008) study, most previous studies did not specifically target grammar forms and their participants were mainly ESL learners (Jacob, 2003; Mayo, 2002; Toshiyo, 1996). The present study, therefore, aims to investigate if DG is effective in helping EFL learners acquire a target form on the construction level, namely the hypothetical conditional construction. Two research questions were formulated as follows to achieve the objective.

(1) What are the effects of DG in helping EFL learners comprehend the English hypothetical conditional construction?
(2) What are the effects of DG in helping EFL learners produce the English hypothetical conditional construction?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this section, the research methodology of the present study is discussed. The detailed information is presented in the following order: participants, data, research instruments, procedures, and data analysis procedures.

Participants

The participants of the current study were twenty four (initial pool = 50) high school learners in two intact classes. They had never received any instruction upon the English hypothetical conditional construction based on the questionnaire that they had taken prior to the study. The target structure was included in their curriculum therefore the instruction on this structure did not interfere with the course of the curriculum.

Data

The quantitative data collected in this study were participants' scores in the given pre-test and post-test.

Research Instruments

Teaching Material

The DG group material was the adapted version of Qin's (2008) research material. A text called *Lunch Break* was dictated by the instructor to the participants. There were six hypothetical conditional construction sentences used in the text (see Appendix 1H). The participants' task was to reconstruct the text after the dictation was over. The researcher also included a table, which summarized the six target sentences, to help the participants in reconstructing the text.

Pre-test and Post-test

The data were collected by using pre-test and post-test developed by the researcher using Qin's (2008) research as a guideline. A pre-test was used to eliminate the participants in order to ensure that the participants in the present study were similar in terms of their knowledge upon the English hypothetical conditional construction. A post-test was used to assess the participants' understanding and their ability to produce the English hypothetical conditional construction after treatment. Both tests consisted of one interpretation task and two production tasks (see Appendix for pre-test and post-test).

The interpretation task consisted of 10 items. The participants were asked to determine the meaning of the provided sentences by crossing option A or option B. For example, the participants read *if I knew Japanese, I would work for a big Japanese company*, after reading, the participants decided whether option A or B best described the sentence. The first production task consisted of 10 items. The participants were asked to combine two sentences into one sentence by using hypothetical conditional construction. As an example, the participants read *you are the CEO of a big company. / you attend a lot of meetings in other cities*, then the participants combined the two sentences into one by using the English hypothetical conditional construction. The second production task consisted of 10 items. The participants were asked to fill in the blank to complete the sentences by using hypothetical conditional construction. For example, the participants read *this small city does not offer good job opportunities. I am sure we _____ (have) a better job if the city _____ (be) bigger*, then the participants filled in the blank space with the appropriate verbs.

All of the instruments mentioned above had been piloted by the researcher and had been revised before the actual treatment. Some adjustments were made. The researcher decreased the number of the target sentences from 10 to 6 numbers. Moreover, the pre-test stayed the same since the participants did not encounter any difficulties. However, there were some words in the post-test that were replaced because either the participants were not familiar with them or for convenience reason.

Procedures

The researcher gave the pre-test a week before the treatment to the participants that lasted for 30 minutes. Secondly, the instructor, who was one of the school's English teachers, taught both classes for one meeting that lasted for 60 minutes. The instructor was informed on how to implement the two treatments beforehand. The researcher's role was to

observe the entire treatment process to make sure that the instructor conducted the lesson according to what she had been briefed.

The steps were based on Wajnryb's (1990). In the 'preparation' stage, the group received the explanation about the English hypothetical conditional construction. The participants received a metalinguistic explanation (see Appendix 1C for the PI group and 1G for the DG group). Then, in the 'dictation' stage, the text was read twice by the instructor (see Appendix 1H). In the first listening, the participants listened for understanding and in the second listening, the participants wrote down their own notes. In the 'reconstruction' stage, the participants sat down in groups to reconstruct the text based on their notes. In the 'analysis with correction' stage, the participants revised their writing by comparing it to the original text.

After the treatment was completed, the researcher collected the participants' worksheets and gave an immediate post-test that lasted for 30 minutes. Additionally, before doing the pre-test and post-test, the participants were informed about some vocabulary items that appeared in the tests. This was done to ensure that the results obtained were purely about the participants' knowledge upon the target grammatical form without the influence of other factors (i.e. vocabulary knowledge).

Data Analysis Procedures

After all the data had been submitted, the researcher checked and calculated the pre-test and post-test scores. As mentioned above, the tests consisted of three sections. Section A was interpretation task, whereas section B and C were production tasks. For the interpretation task (section A) and the second production task (section C), each correct answer was graded 1 point and each incorrect answer was graded 0 point. For the first production task (section B), a correct answer was graded 1 point if the sentences created by the participants were grammatically correct in both the *if* clause and the main clause. If the participants made mistake in the *if* clause and/or the main clause, then that answer was graded 0 point. To obtain the final interpretation task score, the researcher added up the correct answers from section A and to obtain the final production task score, the researcher added up the correct answers from section B and C. Finally, participants who scored above 70 on the interpretation task and the production task (only for pre-test scores) were eliminated from the present study.

RESULTS

The results from both groups' pre-test and post-test are presented in 2 tables. Table 1 shows the participants' scores for the interpretation task. Table 2 shows the participants' scores for the production task.

A Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was conducted on the group's pretest and posttest scores in the interpretation task to answer the first research question. The result shows that for the participants doing a dictogloss task, the mean posttest score on the interpretation task was significantly higher than the mean pretest score, z = -4.305, $p \leq 0.000$. It indicates a large effect size, r = -0.87.

TABLE 1
Descriptive Statistics for the Interpretation Task

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test		z
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
DG	24	48.3333	12.03859	84.5833	14.44003	-4.305

Another Wilcoxon Signed-Rank test was conducted on the group's pretest and posttest scores in the production task to answer the second research question. The result reveals that the mean posttest score on the production task are also significantly better than the mean pretest score, z = -4.204, $p \leq 0.000$. It also indicates a large effect size r = -0.85.

TABLE 2
Descriptive Statistics for the Production Task

Group	N	Pre-test		Post-test	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
DG	24	13.3333	15.22774	66.2500	30.11752

DISCUSSIONS

The first research question sought to investigate the effect of DG on the participants' ability to correctly interpret the hypothetical conditional construction. In this study the participants improved significantly in the interpretation task. One possible reason for this condition might be due to the nature of the DG task itself, which is meaningful (Wajnryb, 1990). Another possible reason may be the role of metalinguistic explanation in shaping the participants' explicit knowledge of the forms in the construction. The explanation they had received enabled them to recognize the forms and meanings the forms had in the test task.

The second research question asked about the effect of DG on the learners' production of the target construction. As indicated by the result, the

participants also improved significantly from pre to posttest. This should not come as a surprise since the nature of DG is output practice. However, this still requires some explanations. One explanation resides once again in the explanation stage in which the learners' attention was drawn to the rules. The learners' awareness of the forms was still maintained as they were doing the written output task. Another reason might be attributed to the learners' discussion during the reconstruction stage. As they negotiated the meaning they wanted to convey, they received input from their partner. This improved their understanding and awareness of the target construction. This lends support to Vygotsky's (1978) theory on collaborative learning. Finally, the learners might also benefit from the comparison phase at which they compared their text with the original one. They might have noticed the differences that led to errors and formed the correct hypothesis about the target forms.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The present study aimed to investigate the overall effect of DG on the learners' ability to interpret and use the hypothetical conditional construction correctly. Two measurements were used to achieve this goal, an interpretation task and a production task. The results showed that the DG group improved significantly in both of the tasks. Therefore, it can be concluded DG is useful in teaching high school learners the hypothetical conditional construction. This focus-on-form instruction has shown positive effects on learners' acquisition of the target grammatical form (participants in this study have received no previous instruction on the target grammatical form at all).

However, several limitations exist in this present study. The study had no control group, which is needed to avoid a test effect i.e. familiarity with the given tests. It is highly suggested that future studies incorporate a control group in the research. Additionally, it is also recommended to have another group that employs an alternative method, such as Traditional Instruction (this method is mostly used by the teachers). Lastly, the long-term effects of both methods are unknown due to the absence of a delayed post-test. The availability of a delayed post-test may offer additional insight. It would also be desirable for future studies to examine the effects of DG on learners' acquisition of different grammatical forms. In this study, DG had positive effects on the English hypothetical conditional construction; however, the results may have varied with other grammatical forms. Furthermore, it is suggested that a different type of test is recommended for future studies in order to prevent bias toward either method. For examples,

an oral test can be assigned for both groups in addition to interpretation and production task. This study has examined the effects of the two focus-on-form instruction on learners' acquisition of only one target grammatical form within limited time of treatment; therefore, future research should examine the effects of those two in a longer duration to maximize the results.

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Appendix 1: Handout

Hypothetical Conditional Construction

We use Hypothetical Possibilities to talk about **imaginary situations and their results** at the present time. ***Simple past*** is used in the ***if*** **clause** to express an imaginary situation in the present, not to talk about a past event. ***Would*** is very often used in the **main clause** to talk about the result of the situation.

See the examples below:

1. If I **had** more time, I **would join** two extracurricular activities.
   Fact: I DON'T have time to join two extracurricular activities.

2. If it **were** cheaper, I **would buy** it.
   Fact: The price IS NOT cheap so I WON'T buy it.

3. Children **would behave** well if the teacher **were** strict.
   Fact: The children behave badly because the teacher IS NOT strict.

4. I **wouldn't be** able to go home late if I still **lived** with my parents.
   Fact: I DON'T live with my parents so I can go home late.

Imaginary situation (if clause)	Result (main clause)
If I had more time,	I would join two extracurricular activities.
Simple Past	Would + V1

APPENDIX 1H – EXERCISE FOR DG GROUP

Name: _____

Listen to the story read by your teacher while looking at the table below!

Names	What did they want?	What would they do with that?
Anto	have another sandwich	be so grateful
Sarah	be Anto	not eat so many sandwiches
Anto	eat another sandwich	not hungry till the last lesson
Sarah	drink milk	no need to eat more
Anto	like it	buy it now
Anto	bring enough money	buy it

Reconstruct the story that your hear using the information in the table! Remember to use the Hypothetical Conditional Construction! The first one has been done for you.

One afternoon, a group of high school students sits down for lunch.
Then,_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
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Teacher's script:

Lunch Break

One afternoon, a group of high school students sits down for lunch. Then, Anto, one of the students, says (1) "**If I had another sandwich, I would be so grateful.**" The other student whose name is Sarah says, "Ah, you are always thinking about food. (2) **If I were you, I would not eat so many sandwiches.**" Anto then replies, (3) "**If I ate more sandwiches, I would not feel hungry until the last lesson.**" Sarah says, (4) "**If you drank milk, you wouldn't need to eat more.**" Anto says, "I don't like milk. (5) **If I liked it, I would buy it now.**" Joselyn asks, "Then why don't you buy another sandwich?" Anto replies, (6) "**If I brought enough money, I would buy it.**"

Appendix 2 – Test samples

A. Read the following sentences! Then, cross (X) A or B that best describes the sentences that you read!

1. If I knew Japanese, I would work for a big Japanese company.
a. I speak Japanese so it's possible for me to get a job in Japanese company.
b. I don't know Japanese so it's impossible to get a job in Japanese company.

2. If the company has its own building, it doesn't have to spend money on renting.
a. The company is still renting but there's a chance to buy a building.
b. The company is still renting and unable to buy a building.

3. If I had a good job, I would be much happier.
a. My current job brings me happiness.
b. My current job doesn't bring me happiness.

B. Combine the two sentences below into one sentence using "if"! (<u>Hint: change "You" into "I", "Your" into "My"</u>)

Part 1

No.	Imaginary situation	Result
1.	You are a CEO of a big company	You attend a lot of meetings in other cities
Your sentence:		
2.	Your meeting takes place in Denpasar	You see and visit beautiful places
Your sentence:		
3.	The hotel you are staying has a swimming pool	You swim every morning
Your sentence:		

C. Based on the context, complete the sentence using "if"!

1. This small city doesn't offer good job opportunities. *I'm sure we _____ (have) a better job if the city _____ (be) bigger.*

2. I had my interview two months ago and still haven't received any news. The HRD didn't gave me his number. *If I _____ (have) the HRD's number, I _____ (call) him.*

3. These days, people who speak both English and Chinese earn more money. I only speak English. So *if I _____ (speak) Chinese too, my salary _____ (be) higher.*