Dictogloss: A Collaborative Writing Task to Improve Learners' Written Product

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Abstract

Writing is a challenging skill that demands an ongoing significant amount of practice and attention. Therefore, different teaching methods and procedures have been designed to reinforce learners' writing output and meet their needs. Being an alternative to traditional dictation, the present paper aims at exploring a collaborative writing task, named Dictogloss, designed to study language for a better understanding and practice of grammar and vocabulary. It describes the dictogloss task, offers a guide of its procedure and cites some empirical studies related to the use of dictogloss in language teaching and learning. Finally, it suggests that applying dictogloss in class can be an effective solution to diminish the production of students' lexical errors; henceforth, improve their written production.

Keywords: collaborative writing, Dictogloss, lexical errors, vocabulary.

ملخص

تعتبر الكتابة مهارة صعبة تتطلب قدرا كبيرا من الممارسة والاهتمام ولذلك تم تصميم طرق تدريس وإجراءات مختلفة لتعزيز كتابة المتعلمين وتلبية احتياجاتهم. كونه بديلا للإملاء التقليدية، يهدف هذا المقال إلى استكشاف "ديكتوغلوس" كوسيلة كتابية صممت لدراسة أفضل لقواعد اللغة ومفرداتها. وعلى هذا النحو يقوم هذا المقال بوصف عملية الـ "ديكتوغلوس" والخطوات المتبعة لتطبيقه ويشير إلى عدد من الدراسات التي استخدم فيها "ديكتوغلوس"

كوسيلة لتدريس وتعلم اللغة الأجنبية. وأخيرا يقترح أن تطبيق هذا الأخير يمكن أن يكون حلا فعالا للحد من أخطاء الطلاب المعجمية وتحسين كتاباتهم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: بناء عادة كتابية، ديكتوغلوس، أخطاء معجمية، تحليل الأخطاء**.**

Introduction

Compared to other language skills, writing is considered as one of the most challenging skills, especially for a foreign language learner. It is a skill that has to be built gradually, practised intensively and learnt through experience. Furthermore, it tests the ability of learners to use a language in addition to their ability to express thoughts and ideas by composing a piece of information in a form of paragraphs, essays, letters, memos or reports. To write effectively, foreign language learners need to reinforce their understanding of the basics of the English language; they need to possess knowledge about a given topic, vocabulary, accurate grammar and writing conventions. In addition, they need to organize their ideas, review and revise their written product. However, during their writing process, learners can be exposed to the production of different types of errors that can in turn prevent them from completing their writing tasks successfully. Considered, at one time, a sign of failure that has to be prevented, errors are now used to help understand how language acquisition proceeds, what phases it goes through and where it does not advance properly. Therefore, seeing errors as an evidence of foreign language learners' linguistic development, it is essential to bear in mind their role in putting forward any possible problematic learning area, so that instructors proceeds by providing any useful pedagogical design. Among the various deviations committed in students' written production, those of lexis are identified. Lexical errors have been usually viewed as quality indicators in writing and proof of low language proficiency, in general, and lack of lexical knowledge, in particular. Accordingly, to cope with their lexical errors production and write effectively, learners have to improve their vocabulary knowledge. One way to help learners enhance their vocabulary is via their exposure to some writing activities, like dictogloss, that maximize vocabulary learning and increase learners' opportunities to develop their lexical competence. As a result, they can minimize the

production of their lexical errors and ameliorate their writing performance. In this respect, the present paper examines the role of dictogloss in reducing the production of lexical errors and improving students' writing. First, it starts with a description of this writing activity and offers an overview of the four stages of its procedure application. Then, it demonstrates the value of the task in relation to common trends in FL/L2 education and refers to some empirical studies on the use of dictogloss in language teaching and learning. Finally, it ends up by estimating the effectiveness of applying dictogloss in writing classes on reducing students' lexical errors occurrence in their writing.

1.   Definition of Dictogloss

Also called "grammar dictation" or "dicto-comp", dictogloss is a collaborative writing task that has been developed in the early sixties as an alternative method for teaching language. It was introduced by Wajnryb (1990) as a task- based procedure designed to help language learning students to study language for a better understanding and practice of grammar to overcome their shortcomings and facilitate their comprehension of the target forms, as they work on a combination of meaning and form while constructing a text. According to her, dictogloss associates text dictation, as part of its name indicates, and text reconstruction. Compared to the standard dictation that has been widely used in the field of education and which requires writing verbatim what is said, the dictogloss task's procedure and objective are distinct. Dictogloss consists of reconstructing a text based on the learner's note taking and fragments, their ability to understand the meaning of the text read to them and their competence to use their own grammatical and linguistic resources. In other words, the concept of dictogloss involves reading a passage to the students and giving them the possibility to jot down notes or fragments so they can work together, in groups, collaboratively to recreate a reconstructed version of the text (ibid.). Accordingly, Riley (1972; quoted in Keh, 1989) defines and describes dictogloss as follows:

> The dicto-comp is a passage of one or more
> paragraphs that the teacher reads to the class

several times in its entirety. Then the students give it back as accurately as they can, using the identical words and constructions as far as they are able to and filling in with their own words only when their memory of the dicto-comp falters. To the extent that they reproduce the original passage, the students are writing a dictation. To the extent that they must use their own words to fill memory gaps, they are writing something akin to a composition. (p. 39)

According to Ellis (2003), dictogloss tasks were initially designed to stimulate noticing and production of the targeted structures. They encourage learners to focus their attention on the form of their TL and that focus arises from the "seeding" of the original text. On their part, Kowal and Swain (1997) believe that the dictogloss approach is designed for learners not just to focus their attention exclusively on the target structure but rather to deal with a large range of linguistic features. Further, for Gibbons (2002), the dictogloss is a valuable listening activity that combines listening with speaking, reading and writing; it provides opportunities for learners to listen, read, talk and write about content and the language itself. In this respect, Jacobs and Small (2003) claim that dictogloss is a multi-skill task for accuracy. It encourages learners to accentuate some attention on form while all the four language skills – listening (to both the instructor readings and group members discussion throughout the text reconstruction), speaking (group members' exchange of information during the text reconstruction), reading (shared note taking, and reviewing the group's final reconstruction) and writing (the text reconstruction) – are integrated.

2.   The Dictogloss Procedure

To begin with, the teacher has to choose a passage to read; this passage can be a single sentence, an article, a short story or an extract from a textbook that can be known to the students for the purpose of introducing new materials or reviewing previously taught ones. Along

the dictogloss procedure, interactive communication occurs through four stages: preparation, dictation, reconstruction, and analysis and correction.

2.1. Preparation (Warm up)

The first stage of a dictogloss procedure is like a warming up related to the topic. On the report of Wajnryb (1990), this stage consists of preparing the students for the task by involving them in a preliminary discussion and vocabulary presentation related to the topic to help them activate their former knowledge. For Smith (2012), to activate students' knowledge about a given topic, teachers may show a picture or do a role play and inquire them to talk about the subject matter. In addition to that, after introducing the task and making sure that students know what is expected from them to do at each phase of the procedure, the teacher organizes them into groups before the task begins.

2.2. Dictation

In this phase, students take fragmentary notes. The text is generally read two to three times at a normal speed making short pauses between sentences, as Wajnryb (1990) describes it, "a brisk count to five under one's breath is a good standard" (p.8). During the first reading, students should only listen without taking any notes to get a global understanding of the passage read by the teacher. The text's length and language depends on the students' proficiency level, needs and interest, and language preferences. Along the second reading, students jot down the type of words that help them remember the content so they can piece together the text. These words are content or information words like farmer, sold, horse…; they serve as memory hints to reconstruct the text in the later stage. With regard to the third reading, not all of dictogloss users apply it; however, it is conducted in the same manner as the second time. It is used when teachers feel that students need more help and support for the later phase (Wajnryb, 1990; Smith, 2012; Stewart, Silva & Gonzalez, 2014).

2.3. Reconstruction

In this phase, students work in groups collaboratively to reconstruct and produce their own version of the original passage on the bases of the fragments recorded. Accordingly, the members of the group discuss and negotiate the language and the best options for their shared information and notes to cohesively assemble them in an accurate written text. To facilitate the work, each group may have a "scribe" to write down the suggested text that represents the combination of the group discussion. Then, when finished, the group members check their product for grammar, textual cohesion and logical sense. In this stage, the teacher plays the role of a guide and does not provide the students with any language input. But when finished, the teacher may use what the students produced, as a recall for the original, like an evidence to decide whether additional instructions are needed (Wajnryb, 1990; Stewart et al 2014).

2.4. Analysis and Correction.

In this final stage, students' writings are corrected; the teacher may guide them to self-evaluation of their text by providing them with a check list of the individual sentences in the passage and help them by comparing different group versions and, then, referring to the original. This way, they will assume a more active role depending on their individual strengths to collaborate and correct each other. In analyzing their texts, students focus on the grammatical aspects, orthographic and semantic issues (Smith, 2012) . In her turn, Wajnryb (1990) states that there are various ways of conducting students' work, to share them one by one and discuss what is written, such as using the blackboard, a data projection, photocopies of the text, large printed papers on the wall. The committed errors related to language use, organization and content can be listed on the board to exchange more information in terms of form and meaning.

The following table summarizes the previously stated stages of dictogloss and the different roles assigned to both teachers and learners during the task.

Table 1. The Standard Dictogloss Procedure

Stages	Teacher's Role	Learners' Role
Preparation	- Group learners in pairs/ small groups. - Introduce the topic and unfamiliar words.	- Should be familiar with the phases of the task. - Understand the topic and the difficult words.
Dictation	- Read the text for the first time at a normal speed. - Read the text for the second/third time at a normal speed, as identical as possible.	- Listen to comprehend the general meaning of the text. - Listen for the second/third time to the text and take notes.
Reconstruction	- Monitor/manage the sub-groups contribution, discussion and interaction.	- Work together in pairs/groups. - Share notes/ fragments. - Reconstruct the text.
Analysis and correction	- Assist different groups to compare their writings with the original text. - Correct and explain students' mistakes.	- Take turn to present their texts. - Analyse and correct the reconstructed texts.

3. Dictogloss and Current Trends in Second Language Education

According to Jacobs and Farrel (2003), dictogloss designates an important shift from traditional dictation. Through its implementation, it comprises different principles of language teaching which cover learner autonomy, cooperation among learners, curricular integration, focus on meaning, diversity, thinking skills, alternative assessment and teachers as co-learners. These principles, according to them, arise from a general "paradigm shift"[51] that has existed in SL education. In their turn, Jacobs and Small (2003) review each of the prior eight trends in relation to dictogloss procedure as follows:

▪ **Learner autonomy:** it implies "the ability to take charge of one's learning… and to hold the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning" (Holec's 1981, p.3; in Borg and Al-Busaidi 2012, p.2). This includes the responsibility to determine the objectives, to choose methods and techniques to be applied, to monitor the process of acquisition and evaluate what has been acquired (ibid. 2012). Unlike the traditional dictation, in dictogloss, learners reconstruct the text after the reading phase. Also, they cooperate with each other to develop collective reconstruction of the text depending on their notes rather than the teacher for all the information. Furthermore, analyzing and correcting learners' texts reconstructions provide them with opportunities to identify their shortcomings and aspects of language they may need to ameliorate. To supplement further dimensions of learner autonomy to dictogloss, learners may inquire for a pause during the text's reading, select the topics of the texts or elaborate on it and estimate the ideas of the text.

▪ **Cooperation among learners:** for Jacobs and Small (2003), compared to the traditional dictation that is done and evaluated as an individual work, dictogloss retains working individually during the first two phases in which learners need to listen and take notes on the passage read by the teacher. However, throughout the text reconstruction, analysis and correction, they work together in groups of pairs or four members. They have the opportunity to

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[51]This term has been used as a way of thinking about alteration in education; this comprises seeing things from different perspectives to understand situations, raise questions, build links to guarantee predictions (Jacobs and Farrel, 2003, p.6).

share notes, discuss how well they performed during the task or even how they could work more efficiently the next time.

▪ **Curricular integration:** regarding the perspective of language teachers, curricular integration involves the incorporation of language education and other curricular areas. In other words, it implies the association of teaching content like social studies or physics with the teaching language such as writing skills and grammar. As such, with dictogloss, curricular integration is by far attained by the choice of the texts. For example, when the objective is to integrate language and chemistry to help learners learn essential terminology and grammar, teachers may use chemistry texts for the dictogloss task. As a result, the discussion preceding the reading phase may contribute to the building of the learners' knowledge about the text's topic. In addition, dictogloss also fosters integration within the language curriculum all over the use of all four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (ibid.).

▪ **Focus on meaning:** in literary education, the focus tends to be on aspects of form like grammar and spelling. In the present paradigm, even if form is still important, language learning occurs the best when the focus is above all on ideas (Littlewood, 1981 in Jacob and Small, 2003). Dictogloss, on the other hand, attempts to integrate a focus on both meaning and form. It is as Swain (1999) claims it "when students focus on form, they must be engaged in the act of meaning-making" (p.125-126).

▪ **Diversity:** diversity related to dictogloss is illustrated in the variation in ways of learning that result in different background information. For example, when learners work in groups, they take advantage of their differences; each student plays a particular role in the group. As such, those with wider range of vocabularies and larger content knowledge about the topic of the text can help along the phase of the text reconstruction, and those whose interpersonal skills are better advanced may help correlate the group's interaction. One way of using diversity to ease learners' roles in groups is to use a series of topics which less competent students know about. Another way is to provide the possibility for them to produce visuals to illustrate their text reconstructions;

accordingly, those whose illustration skills are generally better than their literacy skill have the occasion to be the helper of the group (Jacobs and Small, 2003).

▪ **Thinking skills:** in addition to being able to read and write, the definition of literacy covers also being able to think critically about what is read and about how writing is best framed. Discussing the text's ideas during the phase of sharing notes in order to construct the passage provides learners with opportunities to apply thinking skills as they challenge, defend, learn from, and elaborate on the ideas introduced during their team work and reconstruction task. Thinking also takes place during the analysis of the reconstructed passages when compared to the original (ibid.).

▪ **Alternative assessment:** dictogloss provides a context-rich method of assessing students' knowledge about writing and the topic of the text. During the text reconstruction, learners are provided with occasions to demonstrate their knowledge of the content of the text, its organizational structure and language features. During group discussion, teachers can listen and observe their learners' thinking. This way, teachers are provided with greater insight rather than looking at the final product. In addition to that, learners are involved in self-assessment and peer assessment (ibid.).

▪ **Teachers as co-learners:** in education, teachers are not just seen as "all knowing sages" but instead as fellow learners who accompany their students in the quest of knowledge. This knowledge serves to teaching and learning. Throughout dictogloss task, teachers can observe their students and apply what they learn from these observations for better teaching. They may also share with the students their interest regarding the topic chosen for the dictogloss text and some of what they have done or designed to do to learn more about it (Jacobs & Small, 2003) .

4. Previous Researches on Dictogloss

Former researches in the area of L2 learning reveal the effectiveness of dictogloss as a language learning task in promoting

L2 grammar, vocabulary and other language forms and skills. Swain and Lapkin (1998) carried out a research using both dictogloss and jigsaw story construction tasks. This latter provides large opportunities for meaning negotiations; it involves working in pairs to construct a story depending on a series of pictures. In every pair, each student looks at the pictures he or she holds and tries to exchange the information to assemble at the end a coherent unit and write the text collaboratively. In this study, the researchers' main concern was to compare both tasks to find out which type of task led learners to focus on form with greater frequency than the other. Expecting that the jigsaw task would evoke from their students a lesser focus on form than the dictogloss application, the results uncovered that the percent of form-based language-related episodes was alike in both tasks. According to them, such findings occurred because learners received a presentation of a lesson on the targeted structures before completing the tasks.

On their part, Kuiken and Vedder (2002) carried out a study to investigate the efficiency of interaction between ESL learners throughout a dictogloss task on the acquisition of the passive form. The essential target of the research was to know whether learning would be better achieved if learners worked individually or collaboratively in small groups along the text reconstruction phase of the dictogloss procedure. The findings, however, could not display that recognition and frequency in relation to the use of the passive form can vary based on the degree of learners' stimulation to interact with each other. The analysis exhibited that the incitement of interaction, generally, led to the composition of new linguistic structures. Nevertheless, in an extended inquiry, three groups of L2 learners were exposed to a dictogloss task; its main focus was on the grammatical and lexical complexity of the output produced by the learners and on the strategies they used during the text reconstruction phase. Kuiken and Vedder (2002) assert that the results did not demonstrate a positive effect of interaction.

Moreover, in his study, Mayo (2002) compared between dictogloss and text reconstruction tasks. In this latter, "a text is deprived of function words and inflections which students have to insert in order to come up with accurate product" (Colina & Mayo,

2007, p.97). The inquiry displays how these two form-focused tasks were adapted and accomplished by seven pairs of high-intermediate/ advanced EFL learners. Mayo's main concern was to explore the amount of attention each task would create in addition to the nature of that attention to form. The findings showed a significant difference between the two tasks. They indicated that the text reconstruction task generated more attention to form than the dictogloss task in which learners appeared to be more involved with the form and meaning of words and expressions. Mayo (2002) added that descriptive accounts of the way learners interact while performing these tasks are very necessary so that researchers can examine their efficiency for the different proficiency levels for which they are designed in addition to the distinct learning potentials each task tends to provide.

More recently, Smith (2012) has experimented a study using dictogloss on her Japanese students as the final test of their academic year. For their evaluation, she afforded to be less severe in grading each individual student and reported on the students' participation and achievement. In addition, having time of thirty minutes to perform the last writing phase, she was able to monitor and record her observations apropos of students' interactions. In her report, she claimed that her students were not as nervous as when they were tested individually and they were able to share their knowledge more than expected. She added that throughout the task, they were able to think and speak in English and they accentuated more about the structure of the text than in a typical listening comprehension test. They claimed that they tried hard to "get it right" to get a good grade. In addition, they declared that knowing exactly what to do in each phase, made them feel more in control, and as a writing test, it was the "most fun" test they had ever experienced.

Further, in their study on the use of cohesive devices to produce a coherent text, Kooshafar, Youhanaee & Amirian (2012) investigated the evaluation of explicit teaching and dictogloss among intermediate Iranian language learners to find out which one of these two teaching techniques is more adequate in helping them to enhance the coherence of their writing. The researchers divided their population in two groups: ten and nine students. The first group was introduced to the dictogloss procedure and was familiar with its four

stages for two months. Each week, a text that comprises some cohesive markers is presented. The second group followed an explicit instruction that is illustrated in writing classes in which the instructor selected some cohesive devices similar to those in the short texts used in the dictogloss groups. These markers were taught explicitly by mentioning some written examples or by formulating some statements using them in addition to some practice via exercises associated to conjunctions to make sure that the students assimilated their functions and usages. The results demonstrated that despite the effectiveness of both techniques, the dictogloss seemed to be more useful on a long term period since the second group learners' scores were not as higher as those of the first one.

Later on, in Mackenzie's (2013) study, the dictogloss task is used to promote cooperative learning and vocabulary acquisition. Her Japanese students collaborated over a period of four weeks to achieve a series of four tasks. The tasks' main intention was to enhance students' breadth and depth knowledge of business vocabulary and get them adapted to work collaboratively. In her findings, Mackenzie (2013) reported that along the task application, group interaction had a positive influence on students' attitudes about working as one to attain a common target. She noticed the occurrence of a more active form of learning to communicate and collaborate using the TL in order to complete the activity which provided them with a sense of achievement, satisfaction and autonomy. She added that the potential to boost learners' language skills and attitudes regarding the use of English to communicate in the classroom characterizes dictogloss as a challenging and beneficial activity. According to her, when dictogloss is appropriately introduced by the instructor and adequately applied, it can serve as a factor of motivation for learners to be involved in meaningful form focused tasks that can encourage them after all to become more active and collaborative members of the classroom learning community.

5. Methodology

5.1. Participants

The population of interest comprises 818 second-year students preparing for a "license degree" in English, at the Department of Letters and the English language at the University of Frères Mentouri, Constantine. A total of two groups (N=50) randomly chosen served as a sample in this study. They were our students for the whole academic year (2012-2013). They were asked to perform two writing tests (pre/post tests). Each test consists of writing a composition within one and a half hours. It took place in a classroom at the English Department during the lecture of Written Expression. The participants were asked to write an example essay made of five paragraphs (an introduction, three developmental paragraphs, and a conclusion). Between the pre-test and post-tests, a series of six dictogloss tasks were performed.

5.2.   The Adapted Dictogloss Procedure

A standard dictogloss task comprises four main stages: preparation, dictation, reconstruction, and analysis and correction. We adopted the standard phases with some modified instructions and steps; nevertheless, the participants had the opportunity throughout the adapted dictogloss stages to be introduced to the task, to listen to accurate TL, take and share notes, make changes and try out new forms and structures to their respective texts, analyse and correct them.

∗   *Stage one: Preparation/ warm up*

During this stage, we prepared our participants for the task. They were involved each time in a general discussion related to what their knowledge about short stories and tales, their best-loved tales and favourite stories read. After that, they were introduced to the task and informed of what was expected from them to do. Then, they were organized in groups of four or three students, depending on their seating.

∗   *Stage two: Dictation*

Throughout this stage, a story was read three times giving the possibility for our participants to take fragmentary notes. During the first reading, they were informed that they just had to listen, that they did not have to remember everything, but just to try to relax and understand what the story. They were told instructions like "*remember no writing, just concentrate, listen carefully and try to comprehend the story*". At the end of the first reading, all the groups were involved in a discussion about what they understood from the text; they interacted, shared ideas and negotiated discrepancies regarding the events of the story. Then, words related to proper names, places … and any new vocabulary items were written on the board to grasp their attention during the next reading and assist them in their reconstruction of the passage.

During the second reading, our informants were allowed to take notes. They were instructed that no time was available to write everything or to copy every word; they had to note only the important information, as they were listening. To help them grasp the meaning of the new lexical items from the context, gestures and mimes were used at first during the reading. At the end of it, students were involved in another discussion. They reviewed their notes, compared them with each other and negotiated the correct and wrong information. After that, each new vocabulary word was highlighted. On the board, they were provided with definition and synonyms. Undoubtedly, using synonyms can enlarge learners' vocabulary and spur them to start using more exact synonyms for items that are commonly overused in their writing. Further, we noted structures like phrasal verbs, prepositional phrases, collocations and frequent erroneous spelling words to draw their attention to some troublesome forms.

During the third reading, students listened and took further notes for the last time. Afterwards, they were allowed to discuss the content for few minutes before reconstructing the text to avoid any ambiguity related to it.

∗   *Stage three: reconstruction*

In this collaborative stage, learners were asked to reconstruct the story based on notes recording in the second and third readings. They were informed to produce an accurate text as faithful as possible to the original, without providing an exact replication of the lexical items. They were instructed and challenged to try to use synonyms or alternative language structures.

∗   *Stage four: analysis and correction*

During this stage, students analysed and corrected their texts. They were instructed to check grammatical aspects, orthographic and semantic issues. During their analysis, we helped during the correction, checked students' works and compared the different groups' versions. Then, the recurring deviations with a particular focus on the lexical ones were listed on the board for subsequent discussion regarding the form and content of the text. It is important to mention that this stage took an additional session. Regarding the number of students, we found that it would be impossible to manage the analysis and correction in the same lecture as in the former stages. Therefore, we devoted another one providing the participants with sufficient time for their errors analysis and correction without any rush to obtain, by then, efficient results.

5.3.   The Reading Materials

Dictogloss texts can be taken from authentic materials like newspaper articles, stories and tales, or extracts from a textbook. According to Wajnryb (1989), dictogloss texts tend to activate learners' knowledge of the TL to perform, by then, a language task through which they will analyse their performance and discover the limitations and shortcomings of their interlanguage. As such, they should be carefully selected to best serve their pedagogical function. As for our experiment, we opted for short stories as reading materials for the dictogloss task. The reason behind our choice is because we believe that telling stories cannot be separated from pleasure reading or pleasure listening; they are the type of materials that entertain and create a relaxed atmosphere for learners so they get involved in the task that keeps their interest and attention to the topic. In addition, they can be used as a means of improving one's grammar, vocabulary, reading and listening comprehension from the different language

structures, variety of lexis and different types of discourse they may contain.

5.4.   Target of Investigation

Our work is concerned with the analysis of lexical errors produced in FL Algerian learners' compositions to test the efficiency of using the dictogloss task for a whole semester. The taxonomy adopted for the analysis is the one suggested by James (1998). It is viewed from formal and semantic standpoints; in turn, each category has different subcategories. His taxonomy, is comprehensible and detailed; it exhibits different aspects of one's vocabulary knowledge and covers important features the Written Expression teachers take into consideration while assessing learners' compositions. This taxonomy comprises two main classes: 'formal errors' and 'semantic errors'.

Formal Errors

A formal error of lexis is named after an error of formal misselection (FM), misformation or distortion. They are described as follows:

- *Formal misselections*

Also called "synforms" (Laufer, 1991), this sort of errors comprises deviations of similar lexical forms; they include, as James (1998) claims it, "errors of malapropism type" where learners get confused of formally similar lexical items and use interchangeably pairs of words that sound and look the same. It compiles words that are different in *in **suffix** (sick/ sickness), **prefix** (place/ replace), **vowel** (meet/ meat) or **consonant** (save/safe).*

- *Misformations*

This type of errors results from the invention of a non-existing FL word. According to James (1998), they can be the result of the MT/L1 influence on learners' language production. In effect, they can be created from their MT/L1 or from the resources of the TL itself. Here are three types distinguished:

- ▪ *Borrowing:* it is generated when the learner uses a word from the L1 "without any attempt to tailor [it] to the target language" (Celaya & Torres, 2001, p.7) as in: *my grandmother forgot to take her medicament** (Fr. médicament/ Eng. medicine).

- ▪ *Coinage***:** this type of deviations consists of inventing a word from the L1 by adapting it to the TL as in: *My mother exerced* her job of teacher for over twenty years* (Fr. exercer/ Eng. Practised).

- ▪ *Calque***:** also referred to "literal translation", it occurs when learners translate a word literally from L1 as in : *My brother's favourite plate* is pasta with cheese* (literal translation from "plat" in Fr. / Eng. "dish")

- *Distortions*

They are frequently known as "spelling errors". They occur when learners violate the orthographic conventions of the English language. For James (1998), this type comprises errors that arise from letter **overinclusion** or **addition** (*untill/ until*), **omission** (*hapiness/ happiness*), **misselection** (*unclode/include*), **misordering** (*specailly/specially*) and **blending** (*bigg/ big + bigger*).

Semantic Error

Semantic errors or "conceptual errors" in lexis, on the other hand, occur when learners use TL forms that do not represent the meaning they tend to express (James, 1998). They are subdivided into two main categories, confusion of sense relations (CSR) and collocations.

- *Confusion of sense relation (CSR)*

According to James (1998), this category of errors occurs when there is a confusion of words related semantically. They are related in meaning, but they are functionally different by using a *general term instead of a specific* one *(superonym for hyponym)* or vice versa, applying a *wrong near synonym,* or an *inappropriate co-hyponym* as it is demonstrated in the following examples:

- *The flowers had a special smell* (scent/ perfume). (superonym for hyponym)*

- *The colonels* live in the castle (officers). (hyponym for superonym)*

- *A regretful* criminal sinner (penitent) .(wrong near synonym)*

- *A decision to exterminate* dialects (eradicate). (inappropriate co-hyponym)*

 - *Collocation errors*

     It is known that the term collocation refers to the common co-occurrence of words or phrases in a way that it sounds natural and correct for native speakers. According to James (1998), collocations refer to the other words any particular word normally keeps company with. He specifies three degrees of misapplication of collocation, namely, *semantic word selection*, *statistically weighted preferences* and *arbitrary combination* as it is exemplified in the instances below:

- *The new city is growing*. (growing for developing)*

- *Their army suffered big* losses (heavy losses is preferred)*

- *I am tired and sick* of your complains; if you do not like your job, you should leave it (sick and tired: irreversible binomial[52])*

5.5. Results and Discussion

     Throughout the analysis of students' writing samples, we have noticed a variety in the length of the participants' written compositions in both tests. This difference, accordingly, mirrors the frequency and variation of the errors committed. Therefore, in addition to recording the total number of each type of lexical deviations committed in students' papers, it was necessary to measure the relationship between the number of lexical errors and the number

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[52] A binomial is a frequent arrangement of pair of words belonging to the same grammatical category and linked by means of a conjunction (and/ or) or preposition like in *safe and sound, back and forth, fair and square, all or nothing, make or break, short but sweet, dollar for dollar (Carvalho, 2006)*

of words per composition by calculating error density or accuracy ratio. According to Kroll's (1991), accuracy ratio stays in correlative distribution with the percentage of lexical errors. In other words, they are considered as two opposite measures in the sense that the outcome of the former complements the one of the latter to refer to the same conclusion even interpreted otherwise. Table one displays the mean measure of lexical errors production and percentage, length of composition and error density at both data collection times.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Lexical Errors Production and Percentage, Length of Composition and Error Density at Both Tests

	Pre-test	Post-test
Errors production	15.62	11.28
Percentage of lexical error	5	3.5
Length of essay in words	299.12	322.24
Error density	24.2	31.4

In view of the findings presented above, we notice that there is an improvement in the students' written production regarding their lexical errors frequency occurrence. For the pre-test, the subjects produced 781 errors with an average number of 15.62 errors per composition. The totality of words in their compositions was 14956 words which account for samples with a mean length of 299.12 words. Further, regarding accuracy ratio, it is estimated at 24.2 which corresponds to a mean of 5% of errors occurrence per student's composition. In the post test, on the other hand, second-year students committed fewer lexical deviations (564) with an average number of 11.28 errors in each composition. They wrote longer essays that account for a mean length of 322.24 words. As a result, students' accuracy ratio increased to 31.4 and their errors' occurrence decreased to 3.5%.

Generally, before as well as after applying dictogloss, formal errors are more frequent than semantic lexical errors. The results indicate that there is a significant reduction in the production of formal errors, from 501 (10.02) to 349 (6.98). In addition, as it can be seen in Table. 3, semantic deviations decrease from the pre-test to the post-test, from 269 (5.6) to 215 (4.3), but not as much as formal errors.   In effect, using dictogloss had fruitful results on students' written product. Nevertheless, this improvement is highly noticed at the level of formal deviations frequency occurrence. This can be related to the nature of the lexicon since the formal aspects of words are easier to learn than the semantic ones.

Table 3. Comparison of Formal and Semantic Errors Occurrence in the Pre-test and Post-test.

Error Types	Pre-test (M)	Post-test (M)
Formal Errors	10.02	6.98
Semantic Errors	5.6	4.3

Regarding formal errors, there is a variation in the production of their subcategories.   Of all eleven subtypes, the production of misselections and additions reveal a high conspicuous difference in their means measures at both testing times. As it can be seen in table.4, misselections decrease from 3.48 to 1.58, as well as additions, from 2.14 to 1.08. Coming next in terms of errors frequency reduction are deviations related to omission and borrowing.   The decrease within the former subcategory goes from 2.02 to 1.08 while the diminution within the latter goes from 0.54 to 0.1. Apropos of errors of vowel type, coinage and prefixation, they represent the lowest difference in measures from the pre-test to the post-test, going from 0.34 to 0.12, 0.06 to 0.02, and 0.02 to no occurrence, respectively. Nevertheless, the frequency appearance of the remaining four subcategories -inappropriate suffixation, calque, consonant type and misordering- slightly increased after the treatment. Their occurrence

go from 0.92 to 1.44, 0.16 to 0.36, 0.12 to 0.28 and 0.26 to 0.32, respectively.

Table 4. Comparison of Formal Errors Subcategories in Both Tests

Formal Errors	Pre-test (M)	Post-test (M)
Misselection	3.48	1.58
Omission	2.02	1.08
Addition	2.14	1.08
Misorder	0.26	0.32
Suffix type	0.92	1.44
Prefix type	0.02	00
Consonant type	0.28	0.26
Vowel type	0.34	0.12
Borrowing	0.54	0.1
Calque	0.16	0.36
Coinage	0.06	0.02

Compared to formal errors, five out of eight subtypes were identified in students' compositions. Examination of Table 5. reveals that there is a significant decrease that goes from 1.2 to 0.32 in the production of deviations related to arbitrary combination. It shows also a small reduction in errors of semantic word selection, statistically weighted preferences and overly specific term; their mean measures go from 3.54 to 3.18, 0.64 to 0.5, and 0.02 to no occurrence, respectively. Last but not least, there is a slight increase from the pre-test to the post-test in the production of errors related to near synonyms, from 0.22 to 0.3.

Table 5. Comparison of Semantic Errors Subcategories in Both Tests

Semantic Errors	Pre-test (M)	Post-test (M)
Semantic word selection	3.54	3.18
Arbitrary combination	1.2	0.32
Statistically weighted preferences	0.64	0.5
Near synonyms	0.22	0.3
Overly specific terms	0.02	00

Conclusion

Results have revealed that learners' lexical errors production in writing decreased as we integrated dictogloss in Written Expression lectures. In other words, providing foreign language learners with an environment where they have regular access to accurate target language, interact and negotiate meaning and possible structures aids them to improve and enrich their vocabulary knowledge and use; thus, ameliorate their writing quality. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that not all lexical error subcategories seemed to demonstrate the same pattern of progress. The most noticeable changes in lexical error production refer to the considerable decrease of distortions, followed by collocations and misformations. More students made errors of formal misselections and confusion of sense relations, yet the difference is not significant. As such, it is presumed that discrepancies in lexical error frequency can mainly be related to the nature of the lexicon. Nevertheless, some aspects of language require specific measures, instructions and considerable time to be developed.

In the light of our results, writing in foreign language classes is a complex task that requires attention. As a writing task, dictogloss has provided learners with occasions to integrate the four skills (writing, speaking, reading and listening), and opportunities to demonstrate

their comprehension of texts, organize language features, discuss possible language structures and self-assess their own texts through a shared learning environment. It has allowed them to assume a more active role by relying on their individual linguistic strengths to write collaboratively, think critically and correct each other's works without ruining the positive atmosphere that dictogloss has created. Accordingly, learners appreciate their own and others' efforts in writing by engaging them in writing activities that they will be keen to complete. These activities will create opportunities for them to have a go with language, help them enjoy their work and take ownership of their writing. In this sense, learners will be motivated to write and develop their writing practices; as such, they will improve their proficiency level and increase the chances to reduce the presence of errors in their writing.

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