



RESOURCE
BOOKS FOR
TEACHERS

series editor

ALAN MALEY

GRAMMAR DICTATION

Ruth Wajnryb

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To the memory of Nelly Wajnryb

Contents

The author and series editor			1
Foreword			3
Introduction			5
How to use this book			20
<i>Activity</i>	<i>Topic</i>	<i>Structural focus</i>	
Section 1: pre-intermediate			
1.1 Marco Polo	Famous people Travelling	Past simple tense Prepositions: <i>from, to, about</i>	26
1.2 Earthquake	Natural disasters	Past simple tense Existential <i>there</i> Simple sentence structure Prepositional phrases	27
1.3 World English	English Language and communication	Present simple tense <i>Some</i> and <i>others</i> as pronouns Textual reference Gerunds	28
1.4 I'm Kate	Self-identification	Contractions Present simple tense Present perfect simple tense showing duration (<i>for</i>) Gerund after <i>like</i> Adverbial intensifier (<i>really</i>)	29
1.5 Dear diary	Diaries	Past simple tense Conjunctions: <i>and, because, so</i> Adverbs of degree: <i>too</i> and <i>very</i> Zero article Contractions Prepositions: <i>on</i> + weekday	30
1.6 Garlic, the great healer	Health and medicine	Time expressions Present perfect simple tense Past simple tense Causal connections	32
1.7 Child mother	Human interest story	Present perfect simple tense Past simple tense <i>Of</i> and <i>'s</i> genitives Adjectives	33

1.8 A record on wheels	Travel Breaking records	Infinitives Negation (<i>few</i>)	34
1.9 Bullet costs a thumb	Accidents	Past simple tense Interrupted past Genitive 's	35
1.10 Miracle plunge	Human interest story Accidents Domestic violence	Simple sentence structure Past simple tense Articles Prepositions and prepositional phrases	36
1.11 Passive smoking	Health Environment Rights	Present perfect simple tense Prepositions Articles	37
1.12 Road toll	Accidents Alcohol	Present perfect simple tense Passives Articles: definite and zero Substitution Simple sentence construction	38
1.13 Baby Hotline	Parenting	Present modals: <i>can, should</i> <i>Help</i> + infinitive without <i>to</i> Gerund after <i>about</i>	39
1.14 Girls step out	Education Sexism	<i>Will</i> for the future Present tense after conjunctions of time Articles: definite and zero	41
1.15 Book covers	Appearance People	Pronouns Modals: <i>may, should</i> Present simple tense Direct and indirect objects	42
1.16 Naturally healthy	Health Nature	Present simple tense for general statements Adverbs of frequency First conditional construction	43
1.17 The enemy, man	Wildlife Conservation	Present tense for general statements and regular activities Passive voice for process focus Zero article with plural nouns Preposition: <i>for</i>	44
1.18 Superstitions and you	Superstitions	Question forms: subject- verb inversion Gerunds after <i>about</i> Future conditional <i>would</i>	46

1.19	Daily print	Newspapers	Present simple tense for general statements Impersonal <i>you</i> Ellipsis Present modals: <i>can, may</i> Cataphoric (forward-pointing) reference	47
1.20	Man in space	Space exploration Famous people	Clauses in apposition Past simple tense Passives Verb + adjective compounds Ellipsis	48
<hr/>				
Section 2: intermediate				
2.1	The job race	Employment	Articles: definite, indefinite, and zero Simple sentence construction Textual cohesion	52
2.2	Intelligence: nature or nurture?	People	Subordinate clause structure Zero article Passives Past tenses	53
2.3	Freedom of speech	Politics Government	First conditional construction Passives Present modal <i>can</i> Impersonal <i>you</i>	54
2.4	Life on the outside	Prisons and prison life Change and adaptation	Gerund (as subject and complement) Present participle Preparatory object construction Prefixes	55
2.5	Pre-quake jitters	Natural phenomena Behaviour	Passives Present simple for general statements Word compounds Adverbs Time phrases	57
2.6	Battles on the home front	Parent-child relationships The family Behaviour	Question forms Idiomatic expressions Zero article	58

2.7 One in ten million	Accidents	Past simple tense <i>Had better</i> construction Interrupted past time Non-defining relative clause	59
2.8 Young hero	Accidents Heroism Families	Sequence of past tenses Infinitives of purpose Interrupted past Reported/indirect speech	61
2.9 Safe but sorry	Accidents Human interest story	Reduced relative clauses Passives Past perfect tense Articles: definite, indefinite, and zero	62
2.10 Race for space	The space race Technology	Passives Articles: definite, indefinite, and zero Present perfect simple tense	63
2.11 Rent strike	Housing and the law	Causative <i>have</i> structure Present perfect tenses (simple and continuous) Time conjunctions: <i>until</i> , <i>as long as</i> , <i>as soon as</i> Noun clauses	65
2.12 Chocomania	Food Behaviour	<i>Neither . . . nor</i> construction Second conditional construction Impersonal <i>you</i>	66
2.13 Koala suicide	Work stress	Past perfect tenses: simple and continuous Reported speech Time adverbs	67
2.14 Tips for travellers 1: planning a trip	Tourism	First conditional construction Clause complements after <i>know</i> Present modal <i>should</i> Future continuous tense Homophones: <i>weather/whether</i> Homonyms Cataphoric (forward-pointing) reference	69

2.15	Tips for travellers 2: getting around	Tourists, travel, and cities	Generic singular Lexical chain Present modal <i>should</i> Infinitive/gerund alternatives	70
2.16	Life in the twenty-first century	Predicting the future Life and society in the next century	Future simple and continuous tenses Future perfect tense (past in the future) Present modal <i>may</i> <i>What's . . . like?</i> construction	72
2.17	Alpine village	The environment Conservation Tradition and progress	Phrasal and prepositional verbs Imperatives Present simple tense for dramatic effect Textual cohesion through balanced connectors	73
2.18	Moody blues	Human behaviour Moods and attitudes	First and second conditional construction Comparatives Noun clauses Ellipsis	74
2.19	Teachers: an endangered species	The teaching profession Job satisfaction	Noun clauses Reported speech Reduced relative clauses Second conditional construction	76
2.20	The right to be left	Left-handedness	Complex sentences Subordinate clauses; possessive relative clauses Articles: definite, indefinite, and zero	77
<hr/>				
Section 3: advanced				
3.1	Locked out by print	Education Literacy	Reduced relative clauses Question forms Prepositional verbs	80
3.2	Uniformly individual	Human behaviour School Clothes	Substitution Noun clauses Second conditional Gerunds Prefixes	81

3.3 The best advice	Growing up Children and mothers	Reported speech Embedded questions Past perfect tense Substitution	82
3.4 Doctors under stress	Doctors Health Society	Defining relative clauses Adverb + adjective compounds Reflexive pronouns for emphasis Concessional clauses with <i>while</i> Zero article	84
3.5 Comfort food	Health People	Definite article Gerunds Reduced relative clauses	85
3.6 Phobia poll	Human behaviour and attitude Fear Male and female differences	Noun clauses Comparative constructions Gerunds	87
3.7 Jungle boy	Behaviour	Present participles Passives Perfect infinitive Reduced clauses Non-defining relative clauses	88
3.8 Whose aid?	International politics Economics	Present modals: <i>may, can</i> Connectors of cause and result Review of prepositions Textual cohesion through progressive connectors	89
3.9 Jet lag	Jet lag Travel The body	Complex sentences Subordinate clauses Reduced relative clauses	91
3.10 Leisure stress	Leisure and work Behaviour	Reduced relative clauses Defining relative clauses Clauses in apposition	92
3.11 Conserving family history	History Families Identity	Zero article Sentence connectors	93
3.12 Women's intuition	Women Behaviour	Causal connections Defining relative clauses Articles: definite, indefinite, and zero Adverbs	95

3.13 Middle children	The family Behaviour Society	Present participle clauses: stative and dynamic verbs Generics Compounds	97
3.14 The gun debate	Guns and the law	Complex sentences Clauses in apposition Defining relative clauses Textual cohesion: balanced contrast across sentences	99
3.15 Teen suicide	Adolescence Death	Connectors Articles: definite, indefinite, and zero Textual reference	100
3.16 Calling non-sleepers	Human behaviour Sleep patterns	Defining relative clauses Superlatives Participle clauses	102
3.17 Marriage returns	Marriage Relationships Society	Conditional perfect tense for speculation about the past Degrees of certainty Preparatory subject/object Prepositional phrase of concession: <i>in spite of</i> Future in the past Textual cohesion through balanced comparison and contrast	103
3.18 Life after death	Medical technology Attitudes to death	Complex sentence construction Compound nouns Emphasis indicators Substitution Passives	105
3.19 Child rationing	Population explosion The family in China Government	Participle clauses Clauses of cause and result Passives Complex sentence construction	107
3.20 Litigation lunacy	The law People and behaviour	Past perfect tense Reduced relative clauses Perfect infinitives Textual connectors	108
Thematic index			111
Structural index			122
Annotated bibliography			131

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Foreword

Grammar Dictation differs somewhat from other books in this series. Rather than offering a range of different techniques or activities focused on a particular area of interest, it presents one central idea which is exemplified in a large number of concrete instances.

It does, nevertheless, offer teachers a significant resource (rather than a course). The materials can be used flexibly to suit different groups at different stages of their development. Further, teachers can build upon this resource by applying the procedure to texts of their own choosing.

‘Grammar dictation’ is better known in some quarters as the ‘dictogloss’ procedure. Essentially it consists of asking learners to reconstruct a dictated text so as to capture as much as possible of its information content in as accurate and acceptable a linguistic form as possible.

This process requires learners to draw upon a nexus of interrelated skills. Initially learners engage individually in the creative reconstruction of text from memory and from their own linguistic resources. They then share this with others in a process of gradual approximation to a final product. With time and practice they learn to refine and develop their own linguistic resources but always in relation to what they already know. The contribution of individual and group effort are nicely balanced.

The approach is especially interesting for the way it reconciles certain apparent oppositions such as the new interest in grammar and the need for interactive learning; and the achievement of accuracy through fluency activities. The final product is important (in part as input to further analysis), but the individual and group process is integral in moulding and shaping it. Individual learner perceptions of wants are reconciled with teacher perceptions of learner needs.

Grammar Dictation offers teachers and learners a powerful and effective tool for learning. We recommend you try it.

Alan Maley

Introduction

Grammar dictation and dictogloss

The title *Grammar Dictation* describes a language teaching procedure known in those areas of the world where it is already extensively used, as ‘dictogloss’ or ‘the dictogloss procedure’.

Since many teachers may not be very familiar with the procedure, it was felt that the title *Dictogloss* might prove somewhat awesome. The title *Grammar Dictation* contains two of the basic ingredients of the dictogloss procedure. As you work your way through this book, you will discover others.

However, for practical purposes the term ‘grammar dictation’ and ‘dictogloss’ are used synonymously.

What is dictogloss?

Dictogloss is a relatively recent procedure in language teaching. It borrows a little from traditional dictation (hence part of its name) but in fact is quite distinct from dictation in both procedure and objectives. In dictogloss, a short text is read at normal speed to a class of learners who jot down familiar words as they listen. At the end of the dictation stage, most learners have only a small number of isolated words (or fragments) which together make up a very incohesive, ‘battered text’. In small groups, the students then pool their resources to reconstruct their version of the original text. In the final stage the various versions that the students have produced are subjected to close analysis and comparison. Through both the task of reconstruction and the following error analysis, students refine their understanding of the language they have used.

The procedure may be summarized as follows:

- a. A short, dense text is read (twice) to the learners at normal speed
- b. As it is being read, the learners jot down familiar words and phrases
- c. Working in small groups, the learners pool their battered texts and strive to reconstruct a version of the text from their shared resources
- d. Each group of students produces its own reconstructed version, aiming at grammatical accuracy and textual cohesion but not at replicating the original text