

RESOURCE BOKS FOR TEACHERS

series editor
ALAN MALEY

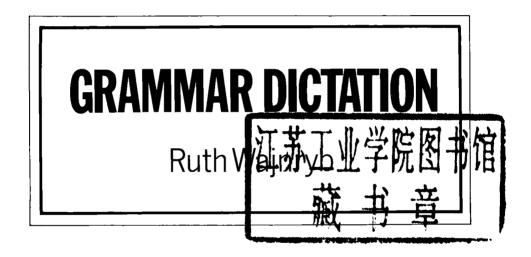
GRAMMAR DICTATION

Ruth Wajnryb

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To the memory of Nelly Wajnryb

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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