c. It aims to upgrade and refine the learners' use of the language through a comprehensive analysis of language options in the correction of the learners' approximate texts.

Learners who regularly engage in dictogloss lessons will gradually see a refinement in their global aural comprehension and note-taking skills. While these are not primary aims of the method, they are important by-products of it.

What happens in the dictogloss procedure?

There are four stages in the procedure:

1 Preparation, when the learner finds out about the topic of the text and is prepared for some of the vocabulary.

2 Dictation, when the learner hears the text and takes fragmentary notes.

3 Reconstruction, when the learner reconstructs the text on the basis of the fragments recorded in stage 2.

4 Analysis and correction, when learners analyse and correct their texts.

The four stages of dictogloss

1 Preparation

At this first stage, teachers should:

a. Prepare learners for the text they will be hearing by exploiting the warm-up suggestions in each lesson. This type of topical warm-up prepares learners for the subject matter and makes them more receptive to the listening in the next stage: people listen more effectively when they are able to anticipate what they will hear, when their interest in the topic has been aroused, and when they become personally involved in the discussion.

b. Prepare learners for the vocabulary of the text. The list in each unit is a suggestion only. Vocabulary should be pre-taught if the teacher suspects that it is unknown to the learners or difficult for them to infer.

c. Ensure that learners know what they are expected to do at each stage of the procedure.

d. Organize learners into groups before the dictation begins.

2 Dictation

As a standard procedure, learners should hear the dictation twice. The first time, they should not write, but allow the words to 'wash over them'. This way they get a global feeling for the whole passage. The second time, they should take down notes.

When the students take notes during the dictation, they should be encouraged to write down the type of word that will help them to piece together the text in the later reconstruction stage. Such words are content or information words, for example, *farmer*, *sold*, *horse*, that serve as memory cues or triggers. The grammar or function words, for example, *the*, *his*, *and*, are to be provided by the learners themselves as part of the productive process of reconstructing the text.

The text should be dictated at normal spoken speed. The general pace is comparable to that of a news broadcast on radio or TV. The dictating should not be conducted in the traditional way where the sentence is broken up into isolated word units. The semantic grouping here is the sentence. Between sentences, the pauses should be slightly longer than usual; a brisk count to five under one's breath is a good standard. As far as is possible the two readings should be identical.

3 Reconstruction

As soon as the dictation is finished, the learners, working in groups, proceed to pool their notes and work on their version of the text. It helps if each group has a 'scribe' through whom all suggestions are channelled. The scribe writes down the group's text as it emerges from group discussion. When it is complete, the group checks the text for grammar, textual cohesion, and logical sense.

The teacher's role during reconstruction is to monitor the activity but not to provide any actual language input. However, to facilitate the error analysis/correction stage to follow, it sometimes helps to pre-empt the problem of 'error clutter'. If a group's text is too cluttered with grammatical errors, it is difficult in stage 4 to focus attention on the areas of primary need. To prevent this, the teacher in the reconstruction stage should point out minor peripheral errors to learners while they are still drafting their texts. In other words, the teacher may unobtrusively contribute to the group's 'conferencing'. If a text has been chosen for its structural language point (for example past tenses) then the errors to be eliminated in the drafting stage would be in areas other than this, for example, articles or prepositions. This helps to clear the path so that the final error analysis can focus clearly on the main point of the lesson.

Expressed another way, the learners should not be stopped from committing errors in the chosen structural area, and peripheral errors should be cleared up, so that learning in the final stage of analysis and correction can be more concentrated and effective.

More guidance about the learner's role during the reconstruction stage is included in the section below: *Immediate task objectives*.

4 Analysis and correction

The last stage of the dictogloss procedure is the analysis and correction of the learners' texts. There are various ways of conducting this. Teachers will conduct this session in their own preferred fashion.

a. Using the blackboard, the students' texts are written up for all to see and discuss. This is best conducted on a sentence basis – sentence 1 of each group is analysed before moving on to sentence 2 of each group.

b. Instead of the blackboard, an overhead projector can be used.

c. Each text can be photocopied and the class can examine them, either as a total unit or on a sentence-by-sentence basis. If a sentence base is preferred, then it helps to cut and paste the texts into sentence groupings before photocopying.

d. Another technique (which can accompany any of the correction ideas listed here) is to keep a copy of the original text (as dictated) on an overhead projector and to 'scroll' it forward sentence by sentence after the students' versions have been examined.

Whichever correction procedure the teacher selects, students should be encouraged to compare the various versions and discuss the language choices made. In this way errors are exposed and discussed so that learners understand the hypotheses, false and otherwise, that underlie their choices. Ideally, the original text should not be seen by learners until after their own versions have been analysed.

Immediate task objectives

In the reconstruction stage, a group of learners should have in mind two immediate goals or objectives:

a. To maintain as much information as possible from the original text.

b. To produce a sound English text.

Maintaining informational content

In the reconstruction stage learners pool their fragments. These are not really notes in the note-taking sense of information that has been decoded, processed, and reassembled. They are merely bits or fragments of language written down as heard during the dictation. Groups should aim to maintain the informational content of the original. For example, take the sentence: 'The man in the grey suit carrying the black umbrella walked into the shop.' If this sentence were reconstructed by students to read 'The man walked into the shop,' then it is clear that it omits some of the original information. It should be noted, however, that the students' texts do not have to replicate the original. Continuing with the same example, the following reconstruction is perfectly acceptable: 'The man who was wearing a grey suit and carrying a black umbrella walked into the shop.' There are, of course, other versions that would be equally acceptable.

Producing a sound English text

The text produced should be sound in three senses. Firstly, it should be grammatically accurate, abiding by syntactic and structural rules of English usage. Secondly, it should be textually cohesive. This means it should hold together as a unit or chunk of language that is meaningful as an integral whole. A five-sentence text has a tight logical sequence; it is not a loose random collection of individual sentence-units. The use of connectives between sentences and of reference devices to interconnect ideas is crucial here. Thirdly, the text produced should make logical sense in terms of our knowledge of the real world. An example will clarify this. The sentence: 'The American University in Beirut is the oldest institution in the Arab world' is out of kilter with what we know about the world, and so it is illogical even while being structurally accurate.

Interaction

The key to the dictogloss approach to grammar is interaction. The method requires learners in the classroom to interact with each other in small groups so as to reconstruct the text as a co-operative endeavour. Working in this way, learners are actively engaged in the learning process. Through active learner involvement students come to confront their own strengths and weaknesses in English language use. In so doing, they find out what they do not know, then they find out what they need to know. It is through this process that they improve their language skills.