



## A COMPARISON OF THE EFFECTS OF DICTOGLOSS AND ORAL DIALOGUE JOURNAL TECHNIQUES ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS' ACQUISITION OF REQUEST SPEECH ACT

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aimed at comparing the effect of dictogloss and oral dialogue journal on the Iranian EFL learners' pragmatic competence in terms of acquisition of request speech act during an eight weeks instruction period. To begin with, the two experimental groups were homogenized by a proficiency test and then pretested by a request speech act test. The results obtained through a written DCT administered to 120 Iranian EFL learners indicated that both group's request speech-acts effective, but dictogloss were group was significantly better than that of oral dialogue journal group. Taguchi (2006) rating scale of pragmatic competence was used to rate the learners' performance on the pretest and posttest. According to this classification, the development process involved 5 steps. Eventually, the EFL learners answer sheets were assessed by allocating a score to each step. It is hoped that the findings of this study could add to the body of knowledge in pragmatics in general and to our understanding of EFL context in particular.*

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**Keywords:** Dictogloss, Oral dialogue journal, Request speech act, Iranian EFL learners.

### Contribution/ Originality

This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the request speech acts acquisition by prioritizing teaching techniques. Its primary purpose is to compare the effects of dictogloss and oral dialogue journal as effective techniques on improving speech- acts used by EFL learners.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper begins with an overview of dictogloss (DG) and oral dialogue journal (ODJ), moves on to discuss studies related to request speech act, and ends by concentration on analyzing Iranian's EFL learners. The first part of the study gives an overview of DG that is a classroom

dictation activity where learners listen to a passage, note down key words and then work together to create a reconstructed version of the text. According to Wajnryb (1990) the original dictogloss procedure consists of four basic steps: warm-up, dictation, reconstruction, and analysis. The second part gives a review of literature of ODJ that emphasizes on students' identity. According to Henry (1994) the students who use the oral dialogue journals discuss on a specific topic through which they can express their own views and insights freely. The third part tries to provide an understanding of request speech act that is one part of pragmatic competence. The necessity and importance of teaching pragmatics has been highlighted by many researchers (e.g. Brown and Levinson (1978)). The last part contains analyzing the effect of DG and ODJ on Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of the request speech act. In this part, Taguchi (2006) rating scale of pragmatic competence applies to evaluate the learners on the basis of appropriate and correct production of speech according to the specific situations.

## 1.1. Literature Review

### 1.1.1. Dictogloss

Dictogloss as a multiple skill and system activity consists of listening, writing, and speaking and relies on students' knowledge of semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic systems of the target language to complete the task with focus on grammatical competence. According to Wajnryb (1990) this method gives students a more precise understanding of English grammar than do other approaches and consequently leads to higher accuracy in language use. Compared to other more traditional approaches to teaching grammar the value of dictogloss is in its interactive approach to language learning that promotes both the negotiation of meaning and the negotiation of form. He argues that through active learner involvement students come to confront their own strengths and weaknesses in English language use. Consequently, they find out what they do not know, and then they find out what they need to know.

There are some important issues that teachers and learners need to be careful about with regard to dictogloss's implementation. According to Vasiljevic (2010) the teachers should be careful about socio-cultural context, work-group composition, and student assessment. He also argues that the learners should recognize the benefits of collaborative learning. As Nunan (1988) discuss, no curriculum can be learner-centred unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions about the learning process are taken into account. Moreover, according to Johnson and Johnson (1999a) the learners are given two responsibilities: to maximize their own learning and to maximize the learning of all other group members. They also add that heterogeneously grouped teams bring more benefits than heterogeneously formed teams. Finally, the learners need to be assessed fairly with teachers' feedback and coaching. As Johnson and Johnson (1999b) argue, cooperative learning groups can be seen as windows into students' minds.

Vasiljevic (2010) investigated the dictogloss as an interactive method of teaching listening comprehension to L<sub>2</sub> learners. It revealed that the procedure of dictogloss technique entails both language decoding (dictation) and its encoding (reconstruction) and, as a result, enhances both students' listening and communication skills. According to him, the dictogloss pushes learners to produce a meaningful and accurate text and to reflect on their own choices. He added that this task

provides students with a sense of achievement and personal accountability and encourages them to think about the process of language learning and how to approach it more effectively.

### 1.1.2. Oral Dialog Journals

According to [Vygotsky \(1978\)](#) and [Cazden \(1979\)](#) the written dialogue journal is a special kind of journal which pairs a student and a mentor, usually the teacher, who then correspond in a conversational manner. As [Staton \(1984\)](#) argues, the dialogue journal provides an interaction that can encourage scaffolding, a process which enables the student to build on the cognitive processes of the mentor. Journal writing activities, according to [Cole et al. \(1998\)](#) have become an accepted forum for the expression of ideas within the process of teaching development, because they can be implemented easily in a variety of forms. Most common among them are: diaries, learning logs, dialogue journals, and collaborative journals.

According to [Akef and Nossratpour \(2010\)](#) oral dialogue journals are one type of dialogue journals and benefit from the same features as the written dialogue journal except that in the former, the dialogues are audio-recorded instead of being written. According to [Allen \(1991\)](#) cited in [Akef and Nossratpour \(2010\)](#) the oral dialogue journals can be a useful tool for providing delayed feedback. He argues that there are four stages of oral dialogue journal. First, the student records a 10-minute talk from her notes rather than reading from a text; then the student listens and tries to note any mistakes and recording comments on them at the end of the tape. Next, the teacher listens and notes down errors for the students. These can be categorized according to Allen, to pronunciation, syntactic, or lexical errors. Finally, the teacher records comments on a representative sample of these as well as making a personal response to the content of the tape.

According to [Pennington \(1996, cited in Akef and Nossratpour \(2010\)\)](#) after commenting, the teacher or a peer gives back the tape to the first student who reacts to the feedback in a continuing dialogue during the course. The student and his/her partner should keep all of the recordings, and listen to older segments of the tape in order to monitor the improvement. Therefore, through this technique, the student gains detailed information on his/her performance.

There are some researches around the effect of oral dialogue journal on EFL learners. [Akef and Nossratpour \(2010\)](#) investigated the impact of keeping oral dialogue journals on EFL learners' oral fluency. Result of this study revealed that the participants in the experimental group had a significantly higher oral fluency compared to the ones in the control group.

In another study, [Sutude Nama and Ramazanzadeh \(2011\)](#) examined the effect of oral dialogue journals on Iranian EFL learners' communicative competence. The results of this study revealed that the experimental group outperformed the comparison group significantly. Moreover, this technique was significantly more beneficial for the low proficient speakers of English than the high ones though useful for the high ones, too.

### 1.1.3. Request Speech Act

The studies of request speech act are considered in this study. According to [Uso-Juan \(2010\)](#) requests are considered one of the most face-threatening acts since they express the speaker's intention to get the hearer to perform some action and put imposition on the hearer. Both the

requester and responder faces are threatened in the performance of requests. As he put it, due to the face-threatening nature of requests and their high frequency in our daily interactions and the importance of this speech act for language learners, requests have received a great deal of attention in the field of interlanguage pragmatics by researchers and practitioners.

According to [Brown and Levinson \(1978\)](#) the request act is usually seen as imposing on the hearer and therefore categorized as a face threatening speech act (FTA). They proposed that when confronted with the need to perform a FTA, the individual must choose between performing the FTA in the most direct and efficient manner or attempting to mitigate the effect on the hearer. They also indicated that the seriousness of a FTA is determined by: (1) the social distance; (2) their relative power relation; and (3) the absolute ranking of imposition in the particular culture.

[Tajeddin and Hosseinpour \(2014\)](#) investigated the impact of deductive, inductive, and L1-based consciousness-raising tasks on acquisition of the request speech act. The results of this study showed that the deductive task was the most effective one and the consciousness raising instructional tasks could be utilized in raising students' sociopragmatic awareness and be applied in helping them develop their interlanguage pragmatics.

Moreover, according to [Ellis \(1994\)](#) requests are subject to modifications taking the form of downgraders. There are some researches around teaching request downgraders. [Ahmadi et al. \(2011\)](#) studied the effectiveness of input-based and output-based tasks in teaching English requestive downgraders. The findings of their study showed that both groups maintained the positive effects of treatment and time were not significant on pragmatic tests. Other similar study in investigating the requestive downgraders performed by [Ghafar Samar and Ahmadi \(2014\)](#) claims that the dictogloss as a written output-based task raises learners awareness of the requestive downgraders. The results of this study also revealed that neither the effects of instructional treatment nor the effects of time were significant between the participants on the perception and production measures.

## 1.2. Research Questions

The analysis will be guided by the following questions:

- 1) Do dictogloss and oral dialogue journal instructional tasks affect Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of request speech act?
- 2) Which instructional task (dictogloss or oral dialogue journal) is more effective for EFL learners' acquisition of the request speech act?

## 2. METHOD

### 2.1. Participants

As many as 120 participants from six intact classes were selected to participate in this study. They consisted of female students in advanced level of two English language institutions and their ages ranged from 18 to 28 years. Furthermore, the majority of the participants declared that they occasionally or rarely spoke English with native speakers and none of them had been to English-speaking countries.

## 2.2. Instruments

A written discourse completion test (DCT) was performed as the pretest and posttest to assess the ability of participants to produce appropriate request speech acts for the target situations. Each written DCT used in the pretest and posttest of this study contained 10 scenarios.

As to treatment, dictogloss and oral dialogue journal tasks were employed as treatment materials for sixteen sessions. All the instructional materials were an attempt to raise the learners' imposition in making requests.

## 2.3. Data Collection Procedures

The study was conducted for sixteen sessions in eight weeks. The participants in both groups named the DG and ODJ had two classes each week. Each class session lasted one hour and 20 minutes. During the study, the student studied the book *Top Notch 3* written by [Saslow and Asher \(2011\)](#). The participants took the pretest in the first session and the posttest in sixteenth session. The topics of scenarios were the same for both experimental groups. The two groups were homogenous in terms of their production of the request speech act. A brief instruction was given to participants to make them familiar with this type of task and the procedures for completing the written DCT. The participants were supposed to read each situation and provide an appropriate answer in English. The two groups were taught by the same teacher.

In order to prevent the possibility of the researcher's bias and the rater reliability, one other rater scored the learners' essays. The reliability of inter-raters was measured by using the Pearson correlation formula, and the final scores of DCTs were the average scores of the raters.

## 2.4. Data Analysis

[Taguchi \(2006\)](#) rating scale of pragmatic competence was used by the researcher to rate the participants' performance on the pretest and posttest. Table 1 illustrates the 6-point rating scale ranging from "no performance" (0) to "excellent" (5) in each situation. Each point of scale shows the participants' level in production of speech act. The reliability of written DCT had already been confirmed by [Takahashi \(2001\)](#) and [Jalilifar \(2009\)](#).

**Table-1.** Appropriateness rating scale for the pragmatic speaking tasks ([Taguchi, 2006](#))

Ratings	Descriptors
5 Excellent	- Expressions are fully appropriate for the situation. - No or almost no grammatical and discourse errors.
4 Good	- Expressions are mostly appropriate. - Very few grammatical and discourse errors.
3 Fair	- Expressions are only somewhat appropriate. - Grammatical and discourse errors are noticeable, but they do not interfere appropriateness.
2 Poor	- Due to the interference from grammatical and discourse errors, appropriateness is difficult to determine.
1 Very Poor	- Expressions are very difficult or too little to understand. There is no evidence that the intended speech acts are performed
0	- No performance

### 3. RESULTS

The reliability of inter-raters was measured by using the Pearson correlation, and the result yielded an acceptable level of agreement for inter-raters reliability ( $r = .97$ ). Both numerical (i.e. skewedness and Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and graphical methods (i.e. Quantile Quantile plot) were used to test the normality of data distribution of pretests and posttests of DG's and ODJ's group. It was revealed that the data distribution was normal.

#### 3.1. Effect of DG and ODJ on EFL Learners' Acquisition of Request Speech Act

In order to answer the first research question, a paired sample t-test was conducted between the gain scores of the pretests and posttests of both DG and ODJ groups. According to Table 2, the obtained sig. (2-tailed) for both treatments are .00, which are less than the specified  $\alpha$  value of .05. Accordingly, there was a significant difference in the request speech act acquisition of both experimental groups at pretest and posttest.

Table-2. Paired Samples t-test of DG & ODJ

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	DG1 - DG2	-3.733	1.376	.178	-4.089	-3.378	-21.014	59	.000
Pair 2	ODJ1 - ODJ2	-2.650	1.260	.163	-2.975	-2.325	-16.293	59	.000

#### 3.2. A Comparison of the effects of DG or ODJ on EFL Learners' Acquisition of the Request Speech Act

In order to answer the second research question, an independent samples t-test was conducted between the gain scores of two experimental groups (DG and ODJ posttests). Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics.

Table-3. Descriptive Statistics of DCT gain scores of the DG and ODJ group

groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
DG	60	16.87	2.258	.292
ODJ	60	14.88	2.285	.295

As the table indicates, the DG group outperformed the ODJ one. Table 4 shows the t-test results.

Table-4. Independent Samples t-test for posttests of DG's and ODJ' groups

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.039	.843	4.781	118	.000	1.983	.415	1.162	2.805
Equal variances not assumed			4.781	117.983	.000	1.983	.415	1.162	2.805

As the results show, the Levene's test was not significant, so the two groups' equal variances were confirmed. The results of the t-tests show that the mean and in fact speech act acquisition of the DG group after using dictogloss task is significantly higher than the ODJ group after using oral dialogue journal ( $t = 4.781, p < .05$ ). In fact, the results showed that there is a higher effect between practicing dictogloss and request speech act acquisition of EFL learners.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results suggest that the ODJ task cannot be equally effective as DG task in the short-term acquisition of request speech act. In fact, it is believed that doing the DG did indeed highly improve students' DCT results. Moreover, practicing DG helped the teacher know the students more and understand their learning problems that caused obstacles in the way of communication. In this way, the teacher emphasized on those aspects of language and tried to help them to enhance their competence in conveying their meaning. This paper shows both DG and ODJ are completely applicable and utilizable in improving the pragmatic competence specially request speech act. However, the results do indicate that the difference between two experimental groups (DG&ODJ) are statistically significant, the obvious fact is that the learners which took apart in DG method achieve better mean score than ODJ group.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

This study was motivated by the fact that DG method is the integrated skill which is applicable in improving not only four language skills and grammar but also pragmatic competence. Dictogloss is the effective method to facilitating effect of a pedagogical approach addressing the EFL learners to focus on form and meaning when they are learning the foreign language. The target of this study was to juxtapose whether or not DG method in compered to ODJ method is utilizable. The finding of this study did statistically confirm what has been found that differences in types of treatments direct in learning language and caused to increase learners' awareness of specific L2 forms and meaning. This paper found dictogloss to be significantly more superior to ODJ task within eight weeks period. Moreover, it seems clear from the way EFL learners behaved very creatively during the DG tasks. In this direction, DG tasks in comparison with ODJ tasks are very creative and reflective that makes the EFL learners promote collaborative dialogues. To sum up this paper, it is believed that dictogloss is powerful and robust implement for learning the request speech act and the learners can subdue every problem in a short run as fast as possible.

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