Second language grammar learning in refugee children

Is group dictation an effective teaching technique?

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This exploratory study aims to investigate the effectiveness of group dictation in primary school children with a refugee background. More specifically, running dictation was employed in the teaching of two grammatical phenomena in L2 Greek, tense and gender agreement. Two studies were conducted to investigate each grammatical structure separately. Each study consisted of a pre-test that investigated the pupils' performance on the grammatical structure, the teaching intervention via running dictation, and a post-test that explored its efficiency on pupils' accuracy. All pupils that participated in the studies were enrolled in formal Greek education and their L1s were Arabic, Farsi or Kurdish. According to the results from both studies, the children's post-intervention performance did not improve significantly. However, the pupils' accuracy on some of the grammatical forms tested as well as their error patterns indicated that running dictation helped the pupils notice the target grammatical phenomena and thus become more aware of them. Moreover, some data showed that older pupils benefited more from the target-activity than younger ones. Therefore, the present study provides evidence that running dictation may have a positive qualitative rather than quantitative impact on learners' grammatical development and is dependent on the pupils' age.

Keywords: L2 grammar teaching, running dictation, refugees, gender agreement, tense, Greek

1.   Introduction

During the last years, large numbers of refugees have fled their country of origin, arriving in Europe and the U.S., among other regions. The refugee population is largely composed of young children, who are expected to be educated in the language of the host country. Second language (L2) learning is highly valuable, so that migrant children are integrated into their new environment and succeed academically (Paradis, Soto-Corominas, Chen, & Gottardo, 2020; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2020; Whiteside, Gooch, & Norbury, 2017).

These newcomers bring with them rather distinct characteristics, as a result from all stages of their migration journey that may affect them on a psychological and subsequently academic level (Fraine & McDade, 2009), while teachers often face difficulties to meet their needs (e.g., Yaşar & Amac, 2018). For instance, refugee children often arrive in the new country with limited – if any – literacy in their first language (L1) (The Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture, 2007). After their arrival, they are expected to learn the majority language, while the development of their L1 is often abandoned. However, the L1 neglect and the incomplete development of it may negatively influence the L2 as well, the development of which is grounded on a lower cognitive maturity as well as more restricted language and learning abilities of the learners (see Pinter, 2011 for additive bilingualism).

To date, very limited research has been conducted in children with a refugee background, and thus little is known regarding their educational needs (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015). This understudied research area constitutes the focal point of the present study. The target population is primary school children who attend formal education in Greece, one of the countries that has experienced a great increase of enrolment of children with a refugee background (Jalbout, 2020). Our study focuses on grammar teaching, as grammar plays a key role in the L2 development (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). More specifically, we conducted an exploratory study in order to investigate the effectiveness of the teaching technique *running dictation* in the mastery of two grammatical phenomena, tense and gender agreement. Moreover, we explored the potential role of pupils' proficiency level, age, and period of school enrolment in the effectiveness of the teaching interventions. In what follows, we firstly provide the theoretical background of our study and subsequently we delve into its methodology, the results, and conclusions drawn.

1.1   Second language grammar teaching

One of the major matters in L2 grammar teaching is whether teaching should take place explicitly or implicitly (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). A grammar teaching

approach that has received great support from researchers is *focus on form* (FonF) (Long, 1991). It can be considered a liaison between the traditional approach *focus on forms*, which focuses on explicit teaching of grammatical forms, and the approach *focus on meaning*, based on which learners can deduct grammatical rules from the input. In contrast, FonF aims to the employment of activities that draw learners' attention to a certain grammatical form but within a meaningful context, and as a result, helps learners create form-meaning connections. In its initial versions, FonF was intended to occur in a "brief and occasional" (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011: 11) manner, only when errors occur. However, the functions of FonF were later expanded (e.g., Doughty & Williams, 1998), in that structured input can be also prepared from teachers in advance, as certain structures are generally expected to be demanding for L2 learners. Such proactiveness would assist learners overcome certain difficulties earlier and easier (see Ellis, 2016 and Nassaji & Fotos, 2011 for reviews).

Some of the most prominent activities that comply with the proactive version of FonF and aim to alter learners' grammar abilities are *processing instruction* (e.g., VanPatten & Uludag, 2011), *textual enhancement* (e.g., Simard, 2009), *corrective feedback* (e.g., Ellis, Loewen, & Erlam, 2006), *pretask modelling* (e.g., Kim & McDonough, 2011), as well as *reconstruction activities* and *group dictation* (e.g., Thornbury, 1997; Willis & Willis, 2007). The activity employed in the present study complies with the characteristics of group dictation, which is further elaborated in the following section.

1.1.1   *Group dictation*

Group dictation differs from traditional dictation in that the former entails collaboration among students (Wajnryb, 1990; Willis & Willis, 2007). Collaborative tasks entail crucial benefits for L2 learners, as they require interaction that provokes language production (see Sousa, Tiraboschi, Lago, & Figueiredo, 2019 for the importance of collaborative tasks in L2 learning). Through the interaction learners can notice certain features in the input, which can facilitate the learning process of new information (see Schmidt, 1990 for the Noticing Hypothesis). There are several varieties of group dictation, like dictogloss and running dictation (Scrivener, 2011).

Dictogloss includes a sequence of main phases (Kuiken & Vedder, 2002; Wajnryb, 1990): first the students read or listen to a text while they also keep notes, subsequently they reconstruct the passage individually or in pairs/groups, and finally they compare their version with the original one. Dictogloss can be applied in different ways; for example, the reconstruction of the text can involve either the whole text or part of it (see Jacobs & Small, 2003 for variations of dictogloss). In turn, the main phases of running dictation are the following

(Nurdianingsih & Rahmawati, 2018; Willis & Willis, 2007): First, copies of the target-text are hung on the walls of the classroom. Secondly, the students are divided into pairs/groups and provided with a document that they need to complete. Thirdly, within each group, one student is assigned with the role of the writer and the others the role of runners. Each runner takes turn and goes to the text hung on the wall, reads the part that they need to memorise and comes back to their team dictating it. When the reconstruction of the whole text has been completed, the pupils' version is compared to the original one. There are variations of this activity as well, as students can work with a whole text, sections of it, or even just words.

Whatever the version of dictogloss and running dictation, some major aims are, on one hand, to provide students with the opportunity to practice all language skills, and, on the other, to teach grammatical phenomena (Jacobs & Small, 2003; Nurdianingsih & Rahmawati, 2018; Qin, 2008; Yolanda, 2019). However, dictogloss does not require verbatim text reconstruction, and the original text is available only at the beginning and the end of the activity. In contrast, in running dictation, the students have access to the original text during the entire activity, which they need to reconstruct using the exact words. A common thing is still that they both involve a reconstruction stage within the dictation activity. It is important to note that there is some confusion in the literature regarding the terms for different FonF activities. In particular, some researchers may use the term 'text reconstruction' to refer to 'dictogloss' (e.g., Khezrlou, 2021). However, in contrast to dictogloss and running dictation, in a 'text reconstruction' activity, the students are given a text with function words and inflections missing, yet no gaps indicating their exact spot in the text. The students then need to find and complete the missing words so that they create a correct text (e.g., Alegría de la Colina & García Mayo, 2007; Storch, 2016). The main reason that has raised this confusion is the fact that both group dictation and text reconstruction activities entail a way of reconstructing a text. However, as stated above, we here focus on group dictation activities, presenting below previous research findings on them.

Regarding dictogloss, the text reconstruction phase encourages negotiation and thus languaging upon grammatical forms. This negotiation, in turn, induces learners to observe potential errors they make and to pay closer attention to the input they receive (Pica, 1994; Swain, 1995). Significant grammar gains have been observed on both comprehension and production through the employment of dictogloss, with the gains even remaining for long after instruction (Qin, 2008). Calzada and García Mayo (2020a) have demonstrated that children have positive attitudes towards dictogloss and in particular they enjoy the collaborative aspects of the technique. Calzada and García Mayo (2020b) have also found that dictogloss aids children who learn a foreign language focus on formal aspects of the

L2. There are some studies, however, that show no beneficial effects for dictogloss (Gorman & Ellis, 2019) or improvement only on a qualitative and not quantitative level (Kuiken & Vedder, 2002). As one reviewer suggested, no beneficial effects might be attributed to the implementation of dictogloss individually instead of collaboratively (as in Gorman & Ellis, 2019). However, collaborative activities like dictogloss might be rendered less beneficial also because some students may have the tendency to be in control of the work done within their group, hindering the participation of their peers (Jacobs & Small, 2003; Kagan & Kagan, 2009).

Moving to running dictation, its implementation is fairly easy and its procedure considerably entertaining particularly for children, who can consider this activity as a collaborative game. It encourages students to interact with their peers and aid each other within an environment in which everyone has equal chances to contribute. Such qualities of an activity can increase students' interest in the learning process (Nurdianingsih & Rahmawati, 2018; Zulraudah & Jufri, 2014). The study by Indah (2019) has demonstrated students' positive attitudes towards running dictation, with the main benefits of the activity being that it encourages teamwork, strengthens concentration, and renders learning a less tedious process, among others. Empirical findings show improvement through this activity in students' listening (Gustiani & Yulia, 2018) and writing abilities (Zakiyah & Husniah, 2017), while it can also effectively target speaking skills (Aisyah & Hidayani, 2018). Although, the afore-mentioned language skills have drawn particular attention in research, the effect of running dictation on grammar teaching is rather under-explored. The objective of the current study was thus to enrich and extend the evidence of the given task.

In the present study, as mentioned earlier, we focused on students with a refugee background, because they represent a numerous group in Greek reception classes (RC) and because the empirical research with refugee populations is still rather scarce. Given the rather low language abilities of refugee students (e.g., Paradis et al., 2020), we decided to implement the running dictation instead of the dictogloss activity. The former is less demanding than the latter, because the text reconstructing phase can be based on only words and the students can have access to the text during the whole activity. By reducing the demands of the task, the students could pay more attention to the target form. Also, running dictation facilitates the role delegation and rotation among the members of a team, since every member has a specific role (Jacobs & Small, 2003).

1.2   Grammatical phenomena under study

In the present study, two grammatical phenomena were taught through running dictation to explore whether or not its effectiveness is influenced by the gram-

matical phenomenon. We focused on tense and gender agreement; two phenomena that are expected to be particularly challenging when learning Greek as an L2 (Varlokosta & Triantafillidou, 2003). Concerning tense, it can be marked morphologically and lexically, it is tightly interwoven with aspect on a morphological and semantic level, and its formation varies depending on the morphophonological makeup of the given verb. When it comes to gender agreement, Greek is characterised by grammatical gender and a tripartite gender distinction, while the gender of a noun is largely non-predictable by the given noun's ending (Holton, Mackridge, Philippaki-Warburton, & Spyropoulos, 2012). The above-presented features thus render the two phenomena rather challenging for L2 learners as has been shown in several studies (see Clahsen, Martzoukou, & Stavrakaki, 2010 for the perfective past tense and Kaltsa, Prentza, Papadopoulou, & Tsimpli, 2017 for gender, a.o.). Additionally, the pupils' L1s, Arabic, Farsi, and Kurdish, encode tense and gender in a different way than Greek. Arabic is a semitic language, in which grammatical categories, such as tense, are realised in a templatic fashion (Badawi, Carter, & Gully, 2016), whereas Greek is a fusional language. Farsi and Kurdish are Indo-European languages like Greek but they belong to a different sub-family, the Iranian group. Moreover, Farsi does not have grammatical gender (Mace, 2016), while Arabic and Kurdish lack the neuter gender, which exists in Greek (see Section 1.2.2). The verbal system of Kurdish is characterised by ergativity, which also affects tense marking (Thackston, 2016). Furthermore, the given phenomena are included in the teaching curriculum of primary education, and the target group of pupils had been familiarised with them to some extent prior to their participation in the present study through texts but not through FonF activities. In what follows, we provide more detailed information regarding tense and gender agreement in Greek, describing and focusing only on the target forms of the teaching interventions.

1.2.1   *Tense*

Greek is a morphologically rich language. Verbal forms denote voice, aspect, tense, number, and person. Tense, which is the target verbal feature here, can be denoted not only morphologically but also in a periphrastic manner (Holton et al., 2012). Our teaching intervention involved only the perfective forms of past and future tenses because the use of the imperfective form is expected to be limited during the initial stages of L2 Greek acquisition, while the perfective form is firstly acquired (Dosi & Papadopoulou, 2019; Papadopoulou, 2005; Varlokosta & Triantafillidou, 2003, a.o.).

The perfective form of the past tense is formed by means of suffixes (six different suffixes for the two numbers and the three persons) which are attached to the perfective verb stem, as shown in (1).

(1) a. sçe'ðjas-a
         draw.PERF-PAST.1SG
         'I drew'.
     b. 'e-lis-es
         'e-solv.PERF-PAST.2SG
         'You solved.'

The stem stress also moves up to the third syllable from the end, while an extra syllable (the vowel έ- (é-), as in (1b)) is used for monosyllabic verbal stems (Holton et al., 2012; Spyropoulos & Revithiadou, 2009).

The future tense is formed periphrastically. The first constituent is the particle θα (*θa*), while the second constituent is a verbal form. In particular, perfective future includes the particle *θα* followed by the verbal form that is composed of the perfective stem and a present tense suffix dependent on the number and person, as shown in (2) (Holton et al., 2012).

(2) θa 'lis-i
     FUT solve.PERF-PRES.3SG
     'He will solve.'

All the verbs we employed in the present study were active and belonged to the 1st conjugation class. Moreover, the verbal stems were sigmatic perfective (see (1a) and (1b)) and tri- or quadri-syllabic, so that the prefix *é-* would not be used for past formation. We maintained the verbs used in the teaching intervention as homogeneous as possible to prevent any potential confounding factors. Additionally, all verbal forms were marked for 3rd person singular, as this person is usually found in narrative texts like the ones we employed in our study.

1.2.2 *Article-noun gender agreement*

The nominal system is also morphologically rich in the Greek language. Articles and nouns, among other nominal elements, are marked for gender, case, and number, and the two constituents need to agree in all features to form a grammatically correct structure. Greek has grammatical gender with three values, masculine, feminine, and neuter (Holton et al., 2012).

In our study, we used definite articles and nouns in the nominative case, in the singular number and in all three gender values. The three forms for the definite article are presented in Table 1 below.

As for the nouns, we selected six inflectional classes for the present study. The given inflectional classes belong to the most frequent inflections in the Greek language and have been shown to appear in the speech of L2 Greek learners with a low proficiency level (Holton et al., 2012; Varlokosta & Triantafillidou, 2003; for a theoretical analysis of gender in Greek also see Anastasiadi-Simeonidi, Ralli,

Table 1. The masculine, feminine, and neuter definite articles in the nominative singular forms in Greek

Gender	Greek definite article
masculine	ο (*o*)
feminine	η (*i*)
neuter	το (*to*)

& Chila-Markopoulou, 2003). More specifically, our material consisted of two inflectional classes for each gender type: masculine nouns ending in *-os* and *-as*, feminine nouns ending in *-i* and *-a*, and neuter nouns ending in *-o* and *-i* (Holton et al., 2012). Examples nouns of all classes are provided in Table 2 below.

Table 2. The inflectional classes included in the study together with examples

Inflectional class	Example noun	Article-noun agreement
Masculine in -os	κήπ**ος** (*'cip**os***) = the garden	**ο** κήπ**ος**
Masculine in -as	άντρ**ας** (*'adr**as***) = the man	**ο** άντρ**ας**
Feminine in -i	κόρ**η** (*'kor**i***) = the daughter	**η** κόρ**η**
Feminine in -a	γυναίκ**α** (*ji'nek**a***) = the woman	**η** γυναίκ**α**
Neuter in -o	μήλ**ο** (*'mil**o***) = the apple	**το** μήλ**ο**
Neuter in -i	αγόρ**ι** (*a'γor**i***) = the boy	**το** αγόρ**ι**

1.3 Factors affecting L2 grammar performance

As mentioned above, an additional aim of this paper was to explore whether the effectiveness of running dictation was influenced by factors such as the learners' L2 proficiency, age, and period of school attendance. Regarding proficiency, previous empirical findings have shown that learners with higher proficiency focus more on grammatical forms compared to learners with a lower proficiency level within the context of a collaborative activity and thus benefit more from teaching activities that enhance grammatical awareness (Leeser, 2004). Concerning the factor of age, evidence suggests that, after attending an intervention that is form-oriented, older learners are more likely to increase their grammatical awareness compared to younger learners (as summed up by Lyster, 2004). Consequently, it seems that greater age can facilitate a better grammar performance. Lastly, several studies have suggested a relationship between the quantity (and quality) of input and L2 performance (e.g., Daskalaki, Chondrogianni, Blom, & Argyri, 2019; Unsworth, Argyri, Cornips, Hulk, Sorace, & Tsimpli, 2014, a.o.). In the present

study, our aim was to explore whether more months of school attendance, that would entail more input in L2 Greek, was linked with greater grammar gains through the teaching interventions.

1.4   Research questions

Before delving into our study and bringing together all the information presented above, we introduce the research questions addressed:

1. To what extent is running dictation an effective technique for teaching L2 Greek tense and gender agreement to primary school students with a refugee background?
2. Is there an association between L2 grammar development in primary school students with a refugee background and factors related to their background and their general L2 proficiency level?

Two studies were conducted to investigate the effectiveness of running dictation when teaching tense (Section 2) and gender agreement (Section 3).

2.   First study: Tense

2.1   Method

2.1.1   *Participants*

Fourteen primary school students (7 females) with a refugee background participated in the present study. At the time of the study, they had been attending RC for a period of 10 months on average ($SD = 6.03$) in two school units in the region of Thessaloniki (Greece). Our group was heterogeneous, since pupils attending RC can be of various ages as well as proficiency levels. Six pupils were third graders, one pupil was fourth grader, three pupils were fifth graders, while four pupils were in the sixth grade (*Mean Age* = 10.63, $SD = 1.17$, range = 8.8–12.5).[1] Half of the pupils

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1. According to the Greek educational system, primary school includes six grades roughly corresponding to the ages between 6 and 12. However, when students with a migrant/refugee background enter education, there might be a discrepancy between their age and the grade they are being enrolled in. For instance, although the age corresponding to the sixth grade is 11–12, a migrant/refugee child one year older still has the possibility to be enrolled in that grade upon entering education. The same applies for the rest of the school grades (see for example Mitakidou & Tressou, 2005).

had Kurdish as their L1 ($N=7$), three Arabic, three Farsi, and one child had two L1s, Arabic and Kurdish.

Before implementing the teaching intervention, we employed a background test to explore whether the language proficiency level would correlate with the improvement of the children's grammatical skills. Based on the placement test (*Diapolis placement test*; Tzevelekou, Giagkou, Kantzou, Stamouli, Papadopoulou, & Anastasiadi-Symeonidi, 2013), the students achieved a mean score of 9.29 (out of 15; $SD=4.17$, range$=1.3–14$). Eight of them were at the A1 level, while the rest of them ($N=6$) achieved a score that would classify them into the A0 level.[2]

All students participated in the study after their parents read a detailed information sheet and signed a consent form, both translated into their L1. Prior to the beginning of data collection, the study received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the Greek Ministry of Education.

2.1.2   *Material*

Teaching intervention
As mentioned earlier, the teaching intervention involved a running dictation activity focusing on two tenses, past and future. Three novel texts were created to teach the given phenomenon. The common theme of the texts was *travelling*. More specifically, the main characters of the texts were three children from Zambia, Greece, and France, travelling together with their families, preserving the suitability of the texts for children but also their interculturalism. Moreover, all texts were rather short, with a length of less than 100 words. They included 12 incidences of the target tenses in total, equally divided across past and future.

For the implementation of the intervention, a complete and an incomplete version of all texts were constructed. All 12 incidences of past and future tense were removed in the incomplete versions. Removing the incidences of the target structure from the text would draw students' attention to the phenomenon without it being explicitly taught. It is important to highlight that any other verbal forms that were included in the texts – and were not removed from the incomplete versions – were either forms in the present tense or forms in the target tenses

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2. A1 learners have a basic knowledge of the given L2. It is the lowest proficiency level indicating creative use of a language but to a restricted degree. A0 level corresponds to a nonclassified level. Learners below the A1 level can only complete some easy tasks, like telling the time (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018).

but did not meet the criteria for verb selection we had set in advance. An example of the complete and incomplete version of a text is provided below:[3]

> **Complete/Incomplete version**
>
> Η Άντα είναι από τη Ζάμπια. Φέτος είναι διακοπές με την οικογένειά της στη Μαδαγασκάρη. Χθες η Άντα <u>γνώρισε</u> στην παραλία τη Μαρία και <u>γύρισε</u> στο ξενοδοχείο μαζί της. Αύριο η Άντα <u>θα ζωγραφίσει</u> με τη Μαρία. Μεθαύριο <u>θα διασκεδάσει</u> μαζί της σε μία συναυλία. Οι δυο τους είναι πολύ καλές φίλες.
> Anta is from Zambia. This year is on vacation with her family in Madagascar. Yesterday Anta <u>met</u> Maria on the beach and <u>returned</u> to the hotel with her. Tomorrow Anta <u>will paint</u> with Maria. The next day she <u>will have fun</u> with her at a concert. The two of them are very good friends.

Pre-/post-test

Before and after the intervention, the pupils completed a pre- and a post-test, respectively. The pre- and post-test consisted of two multiple-choice exercises that differed in their format. In the first one, the students had to fill the gap in each sentence by selecting the most appropriate verbal form, either the past or the future tense form (3). In the second exercise, the students were presented with short sentences and had to choose whether they referred to *yesterday* or *tomorrow* (4). The items of the pre- and post-test were different. However, the words' language level, frequency, and dispersion index in the pre-test did not differ significantly from those in the post-test (all $ps > .1$) (comparison based on the word lists for language learning *Kelly*, see Charalabopoulou & Gavrilidou, 2012; and the word frequency database *HelexKids*, see Terzopoulos, Duncan, Wilson, Niolaki, & Masterson, 2017). Moreover, the pre- and post-test items were different from the ones used in the intervention. It is crucial to mention, however, that all verbal forms included in both tests and the intervention complied with the verb selection criteria presented in Section 1.2.1. Each test was composed of 12 items in total, six per tense type, equally distributed across the two exercises, while there were no fillers. A sample of both exercises is provided below.

(3)   *Exercise 1*:
    Choose the correct answer.
    Tomorrow the boy .... a house out of wood.
    ☐ will build (*θα κατασκευάσει*)
    ☐ built (*κατασκεύασε*)

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3. No words were underlined in the complete version of the text. The underlined words here represent those that were removed in the incomplete version of the text. The same holds for the next study targeting article-noun gender agreement.

The day before yesterday the team .... the football match.
☐ will win (*θα κερδίσει*)
☐ won (*κέρδισε*)

(4) *Exercise 2*:
Choose the correct answer.
Tomorrow Yesterday

☐	☐	Naima will comb (*θα χτενίσει*) her hair.
☐	☐	Naima raised (*σήκωσε*) her hand in the classroom.

2.1.3 *Procedure*

A protocol was created prior to the intervention implementation which was followed in each school unit. The protocol was implemented by the researcher who also led the teaching intervention. Before the intervention started, the students had to complete the short pre-test within 20 minutes. Subsequently, the intervention would begin with the presentation of three pictures that introduced the topic of the texts. The pictures were three collages composed of images that depicted the places addressed in each text, i.e., Corfu, Madagascar, and Marseille. Based on the pictures, the students were led to a 5-minute discussion. After the end of the discussion, the researcher would split the students into groups of 2 to 3. The groups were formed based on students' preferences but also in agreement with the researcher. On one hand, it was important for the children to be happy with their teams and feel like they are in a friendly and safe environment, in which they are motivated to engage (Basta, 2011). At the same time, the researcher could consider relevant information, firstly, to evaluate who would be a good partner to whom and, secondly, to avoid off-task engagement within groups only composed of friends (García Mayo & Imaz Agirre, 2019). Regarding the former issue, if there were groups that only included students of A0 or A1 levels, then one group would automatically be in an inferior position in terms of reading or writing abilities. Concerning the latter issue, if the students would only pair up with friends, this could often lead to interaction among them that would not be related to the task they had to complete. The following 55 minutes were dedicated to a game revolving around the three novel texts, 18 minutes per text. More specifically, for each text the researcher would first stick the complete version of the text on the wall in as many copies as the groups formed. The incomplete version of the text would be then distributed to the student groups. The incomplete version of the text had been pre-recorded by a native speaker of Greek narrating it in a theatrical manner while music was playing in the background. This way the text became more attractive without revealing the gaps that the students had to fill. After hearing the text for 3 minutes, the pupils could familiarise themselves with the text for another

3 minutes. Finally, they had 10 minutes to fill the gaps in the text. This would be done in the following way: One member of the student group would be responsible for writing down the words missing. The other member(s) of the team would run to the complete version of the text, find the words needed, and communicate them back to the pupil responsible for writing down the missing words. The roles among the team members were alternated for the completion of each text, so that all children have been in charge of writing and running. The texts were presented in two pseudorandomised orders, which were set prior to the intervention implementation. The two pre-defined orders were applied interchangeably in the school units to prevent any potential confounding effect. The group that was the first to fill all the gaps of a text could win. Additionally, the accuracy of the words completed by the pupils was attested by the researcher. If there were any mistakes, then the researcher would inform them that there were errors and that they had to check again, without providing the students with further feedback regarding the location or the nature of the mistakes. Once there was a winning group for each of the three texts, the intervention phase ended. The students could then draw something relevant to the intervention's topic; an activity that both the children enjoyed and constituted a delightful ending to the teaching session. The intervention lasted two school hours in total. The teacher of the above intervention was the same as the researcher, while the class teacher was present all along, but the latter did not intervene. After one week, the pupils would complete the post-test that could be again completed within 20 minutes.

2.2   Results

The pupils' individual data for each tense type in the pre- and post-test is provided in Table 3 along with their overall performance. When statistical analyses were applied, non-parametric tests were employed given the small sample size of our participants (i.e., Wilcoxon test and Spearman correlation test). The statistical analyses were run in R (R Core Team, 2014).

As shown in Table 3, differences were observed between the past and the future tense. Students' performance on the past tense increased after attending running dictation. Prior to the intervention, the students had a mean correct responses' index of 0.67 ($SD=0.27$, range$=0.17$–1.00), while after the intervention the mean index increased to 0.77 ($SD=0.22$, range$=0.50$–1.00). However, this increase did not reach significance ($p=.07$). Regarding the future tense, the students already started with a rather high index in the pre-test ($M=0.75$, $SD=0.21$, range$=0.50$–1.00), which did not statistically improve ($p>.1$) after the intervention ($M=0.74$, $SD=0.23$, range$=0.17$–1.00).

Table 3. Individual scores (i.e., index of correct responses) of the pupils in the two tense types for the pre- and post-test along with some of their background characteristics

Child	Age	Months in school	Past tense Pre-test	Past tense Post-test	Future tense Pre-test	Future tense Post-test
C1	9;11	2	0.33	0.50	0.50	0.83
C2	11;3	11	0.50	1.00	0.83	1.00
C3	11;9	11	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
C4	11;8	1	0.67	0.50	0.83	0.50
C5	11;4	11	0.83	0.83	0.83	0.67
C6	12;3	11	0.67	1.00	0.50	0.83
C7	9;10	17	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.67
C8	12;6	17	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
C9	9;10	15	0.17	0.67	0.50	0.50
C10	9;10	4	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.17
C11	10;10	4	0.67	0.67	0.83	0.83
C12	9;10	12	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.83
C13	8;10	20	0.50	0.67	0.67	0.67
C14	9;2	5	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.83
			$M=0.67$	$M=0.77$	$M=0.75$	$M=0.74$
			$SD=0.27$	$SD=0.22$	$SD=0.21$	$SD=0.23$

We further explored whether there were individual differences in the effect of running dictation on children's performance. The data in Table 3 display that, for the past tense, the majority of the pupils showed either no change ($8/14=57\%$) in their post-intervention score or an improvement ($5/14=36\%$), while only one pupil's score decreased ($1/14=7\%$). In turn, for the future tense, there was a balance in the proportion of students who, after the intervention, displayed no change ($5/14=36\%$), a deterioration ($5/14=36\%$), or an enhancement ($4/14=29\%$). At the same time, discrepancies were also observed across tenses, as a student could show improvement in one tense type but no change in the other type. Examining also individual differences based on pupils' age and their duration of school attendance, as shown in Table 3, no particular pattens were extracted.

Correlation tests were also applied to examine potential associations between performance on Diapolis placement test, age, or period of enrolment, on one hand, and the degree of improvement after the intervention for each tense type separately, on the other hand. These showed no significant correlations (all

ps > .1). This result is also confirmed from the descriptive data per child provided in Table 3, as greater numbers in terms of age or months in school do not necessarily come along with higher test scores.

2.3   Discussion

In the present study, we aimed to explore whether running dictation can effectively help primary school students with a refugee background learn tense in L2 Greek. Taking into account the above-presented individual data, we found great discrepancies among and within individuals. These discrepancies in performance were translated into a non-significant post-intervention improvement, as the pupils overall showed similar performance before and after the teaching intervention. Although the same statistical outcome was revealed for each tense type, some descriptive differences were observed between the past and future tense. These differences become more apparent by the fact that in the pre-test the students scored better on the future tense (future: 0.75, past: 0.67), whereas in the post-test they scored slightly better on the past tense (future: 0.74, past: 0.77). We deem that the different performance on the two tenses is driven by the differentiation in the way each of them is marked.

The future tense is marked lexically via the particle $\theta\alpha$, which we think renders future tense marking more salient and promotes a better performance. This is why the pupils already had a rather high score before the intervention which did not yet change afterwards. In contrast, the past tense form is less noticeable compared to the future tense form, as it is only marked by means of suffixation. However, the pupils' performance improved after the implementation of the intervention by 10%. Even though this improvement was not statistically significant, in our opinion, it indicates that running dictation helped the pupils become more aware of the given tense, paying more attention to the verbal suffixation. Therefore, the data from the past tense imply that the intervention might have helped them notice the morphological formation of past tense.

3.   Second study: Article-noun gender agreement

3.1   Method

3.1.1   *Participants*

A different group of nine pupils (3 females) participated in the second study. Similarly to the first study, at the time of the study, they had been attending RC in two different school units within the region of Thessaloniki (Greece). The average

period of attendance was slightly lower here ($M=7$ months, $SD=5.27$) as well as the mean age of the students (*Mean Age*$=9.19$, $SD=1.62$, range$=7.3$–11.7). There were four pupils in the second grade, one pupil in the third, and another one in the fourth, while three pupils were in the fifth grade. Regarding children's L1s, Kurdish predominated here as well, as most of them had Kurdish as their L1 ($N=7$), one had Farsi, whereas the other pupil had two L1s, Farsi and Kurdish. The L2 proficiency level of the pupils varied between A0 ($N=6$ students) and A1 ($N=3$ students), attesting anew their rather low L2 abilities ($M=7.26$, $SD=4.33$, range$=2.1$–13.4; based on the *Diapolis placement test*; Tzevelekou et al., 2013). After receiving the research approvals, the parents of all children were informed about our study in their L1 and then provided their consent.

3.1.2   *Material*

Teaching intervention
In this study, the grammatical phenomenon taught through the intervention of running dictation was article-noun gender agreement. Three novel texts were again created and addressed fairytales, namely *Pinocchio*, *Aladdin*, and *Snow White*. The given fairytales were selected based on their renown as well as their interculturalism. All texts were again kept rather short, less than 100 words. More-over, maintaining the amount of input provided to the children similar to that in the first study, 6 incidences per gender (masculine, feminine, and neuter) were included in the three texts, adding up to 18 incidences in total. In turn, this entailed an equal appearance of all inflectional classes investigated (3 nouns per inflectional class: masculine nouns in *-os* and *-as*, feminine nouns in *-a* and *-i*, neuter nouns in *-o* and *-i*).

Two versions of each text were again created for the implementation of the intervention: a complete and an incomplete version. In the latter, target-articles and target-nouns were removed, drawing pupils' attention to the phenomenon we wanted to teach. As the texts contained 18 incidences of article-noun gender agreement, the article was removed in half of them, whereas the noun was removed in the other half. An example of the complete/incomplete version of a text is provided below:

Complete/Incomplete version

Ο Τζεπέτο μένει σε ένα χωριό και φτιάχνει πράγματα από ξύλο. <u>Το</u> χωριό του είναι μικρό και ο Τζεπέτο ζει μόνος του. Μια μέρα αποφασίζει να φτιάξει μία κούκλα, τον Πινόκιο. Το <u>αγόρι</u> είναι ξύλινο και <u>το</u> ρούχο του είναι χάρτινο. Η <u>κούκλα</u> είναι ψεύτικη, αλλά μετά γίνεται αληθινή. Ο Πινόκιο κάνει πολλές

 αταξίες και η μύτη του γίνεται πιο μακριά κάθε φορά που λέει ψέματα. Το παραμύθι είναι γνωστό και ο ήρωας Πινόκιο είναι αγαπητός σε όλο τον κόσμο. Geppetto lives in a village and makes things out of wood. The.NEUT village of his[4] is small and Geppetto lives alone. One day he decides to make a doll, Pinocchio. The boy.NEUT is wooden and the.NEUT cloth of his is made of paper. The doll.FEM is fake, but then it becomes real. Pinocchio does many mischiefs and the.FEM nose of his gets longer every time he lies. The fairytale.NEUT is famous and the.MASC character Pinocchio is much-loved all over the world.

Pre-/post-test

The format of the pre- and the post-test was similar, but they included different items. Similarly to the previous study, the words' language level, frequency, and dispersion index across the tests did not differ significantly (all *ps* > .1) (based on the tools *Kelly*, Charalabopoulou & Gavrilidou, 2012; and *HelexKids*, Terzopoulos et al., 2017). The test items were different from the teaching items, but they all fell within the same inflectional classes. In particular, the pupils had to complete the article of 18 words, equally distributed across gender types and inflectional classes, again without any fillers. A sample of the exercise is provided below.

(5) Write the word that best fits: ο (*o*), η (*i*), το (*to*).
    _____ ουρά (*tail.FEM*)
    _____ πρόσωπο (*face.NEUT*)
    _____ λαιμός (*neck.MASC*)

3.1.3 Procedure

The general procedure was identical to the one in the first study (see Section 2.1.3). It is only important to mention that the introductory stimuli that familiarised the students with the session's topic were three pictures depicting the main characters of the fairytales.

3.2 Results

We present below a descriptive and statistical analysis of the results similar to that in the previous study. According to the data for each inflectional class separately (see Tables 4, 5, 6), the mean indices across tests seemed rather similar. Subsequent wilcoxon tests attested that the difference between the mean indices of the pre- and the post-test was not statistically significant for any inflectional

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4. The correct translation would be *his village*. However, here a more literal translation is provided, so that it is easier for the reader to comprehend which particular word was removed in the incomplete version of the text. Similar cases in the text are *the cloth of his* and *the nose of his*.

class (all *ps*>.1 except for one comparison). Minor post-intervention reductions were manifested in the majority of the target-structures, yet a noteworthy finding was the exception of feminine nouns in -*a*, in which there was a 15% improvement (although still a non-significant one; *p*=.09). Another interesting descriptive observation was the differences across gender types. In the pre-test, a higher over-all performance was achieved for the neuter gender and a lower performance for the feminine nouns. The same pattern was revealed in the post-test as well, yet the numerical difference in the scores across the genders diminished due to mainly the decrease in neuter nouns' scores.

As in the previous study, here we also investigated whether there were discrepancies across students in the effect of running dictation. The individual data in Tables 4, 5, and 6 manifest that in most cases the students either performed similarly before and after the intervention or showed a deterioration, while an improvement was rarer. Discrepancies within individuals were also observed, as a student could show improvement in one gender type/inflectional class but deterioration in another. Finally, similarly to the previous study, no particular performance patterns could be drawn based on pupils' age or their duration of school attendance for almost all the inflectional classes. Exceptionally, regarding the class of feminine nouns in -*a*, it was observed that the pupils who showed an improvement (i.e., C1, C3, C4, C8) were the oldest ones.

Table 4. Individual scores (i.e., index of correct responses) of the pupils in the masculine nouns for the pre- and post-test along with some of their background characteristics

Child	Age	Months in school	Masculine nouns in -os Pre-test	Masculine nouns in -os Post-test	Masculine nouns in -as Pre-test	Masculine nouns in -as Post-test
C1	11;2	16	1.00	0.67	1.00	1.00
C2	8;1	11	0.33	0.00	0.33	0.33
C3	11;8	11	0.33	1.00	0.33	1.00
C4	10;1	7	0.33	0.00	0.33	0.00
C5	8;3	7	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
C6	7;8	2	0.67	0.67	0.33	0.33
C7	7;4	2	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
C8	10;4	2	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33
C9	8;2	1	0.33	0.33	0.67	0.33
			M=0.52 *SD*=0.29	*M*=0.48 *SD*=0.38	*M*=0.52 *SD*=0.29	*M*=0.52 *SD*=0.38

Table 5. Individual scores (i.e., index of correct responses) of the pupils in the feminine nouns for the pre- and post-test along with some of their background characteristics

Child	Age	Months in school	Feminine nouns in -i Pre-test	Feminine nouns in -i Post-test	Feminine nouns in -a Pre-test	Feminine nouns in -a Post-test
C1	11;2	16	0.67	0.67	0.67	1.00
C2	8;1	11	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
C3	11;8	11	0.33	0.33	0.00	0.33
C4	10;1	7	0.33	0.33	0.00	0.33
C5	8;3	7	0.67	0.33	0.33	0.33
C6	7;8	2	1.00	0.00	0.33	0.33
C7	7;4	2	0.67	0.33	1.00	1.00
C8	10;4	2	0.67	1.00	0.00	0.33
C9	8;2	1	0.00	0.33	1.00	1.00
			$M=0.48$	$M=0.37$	$M=0.37$	$M=0.52$
			$SD=0.34$	$SD=0.31$	$SD=0.42$	$SD=0.38$

Table 6. Individual scores (i.e., index of correct responses) of the pupils in the feminine nouns for the pre- and post-test along with some of their background characteristics

Child	Age	Months in school	Neuter nouns in -o Pre-test	Neuter nouns in -o Post-test	Neuter nouns in -i Pre-test	Neuter nouns in -i Post-test
C1	11;2	16	0.67	0.67	1.00	1.00
C2	8;1	11	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.33
C3	11;8	11	1.00	0.67	0.67	0.67
C4	10;1	7	0.33	0.00	0.67	0.00
C5	8;3	7	0.00	0.33	0.67	0.67
C6	7;8	2	0.33	0.33	0.67	1.00
C7	7;4	2	0.67	0.33	1.00	1.00
C8	10;4	2	0.67	0.67	0.67	0.67
C9	8;2	1	0.33	0.67	0.33	0.33
			$M=0.56$	$M=0.52$	$M=0.74$	$M=0.63$
			$SD=0.33$	$SD=0.29$	$SD=0.22$	$SD=0.35$

Spearman correlation tests were conducted to examine a potential relationship between students' performance on each inflectional class (see Tables 4, 5, 6), on one hand, and their performance on the background placement test they completed as well as their age and period of enrolment, on the other hand. According to the results, only one strong positive correlation was found for the feminine nouns. In particular, the performance on feminine nouns in -*a* seemed to significantly correlate with age (*rho*=0.86, *p*<.01). The given outcome indicates that older students showed greater gains, which is confirmed from the individual data presented above.

Additionally, we conducted an error analysis for each inflectional class separately in the pre- and the post-test. More specifically, we explored which gender value was most frequently overgeneralised in the erroneous responses. Given the fact that each test included 3 items per inflectional class, as well as that the students were 9 in total, the maximum number of responses for each inflectional class was 27. As shown in Table 7, the most frequently overgeneralised gender value was the neuter one both for the target masculine and the feminine nouns. This pattern applied for the pre- and the post-test, although in the latter the predominance of neuter diminished. Regarding the cases where neuter was the target gender, there seemed to be a rather balanced erroneous use of masculine and feminine articles instead of the correct one.

Table 7. Gender used per inflectional class for the pre- and post-test

Target gender	Pre-test			Post-test		
	Gender used			Gender used		
masculine	target gender	feminine	neuter	target gender	feminine	neuter
nouns in -os	$14/27$ *(52%)*	$3/27$ *(11%)*	$10/27$ *(37%)*	$13/27$ *(48%)*	$7/27$ *(26%)*	$7/27$ *(26%)*
nouns in -as	$14/27$ *(52%)*	$2/27$ *(7%)*	$11/27$ *(41%)*	$14/27$ *(52%)*	$4/27$ *(15%)*	$9/27$ *(33%)*
feminine	target gender	masculine	neuter	target gender	masculine	neuter
nouns in -i	$13/27$ *(48%)*	$3/27$ *(11%)*	$11/27$ *(41%)*	$10/27$ *(37%)*	$9/27$ *(33%)*	$8/27$ *(30%)*
nouns in -a	$10/27$ *(37%)*	$5/27$ *(19%)*	$12/27$ *(44%)*	$14/27$ *(52%)*	$2/27$ *(7%)*	$11/27$ *(41%)*
neuter	target gender	masculine	feminine	target gender	masculine	feminine
nouns in -o	$15/27$ *(56%)*	$4/27$ *(15%)*	$8/27$ *(30%)*	$14/27$ *(52%)*	$7/27$ *(26%)*	$6/27$ *(22%)*
nouns in -i	$20/27$ *(74%)*	$3/27$ *(11%)*	$4/27$ *(15%)*	$17/27$ *(63%)*	$5/27$ *(19%)*	$5/27$ *(19%)*

3.3   Discussion

Our objective in the present study was to investigate whether running dictation can aid primary school students with a refugee background learn article-noun gender agreement in L2 Greek. Similarly to the first study, here we also presented

great discrepancies among and within individuals. These discrepancies led to a non-significantly different performance of the pupils after the intervention imple-mentation in all inflectional classes. Only the feminine nouns in *-a* showed an improvement of 15% after the teaching intervention, yet without reaching statis-tical significance. This was also the only noun class for which the pupils' perfor-mance was found to have a strong relationship with their age.

According to the error analysis displayed above, the students seemed to over-generalise the neuter gender before the intervention. The neuter gender is char-acterised by a rather high frequency and is considered the unmarked gender in L2 Greek, with empirical findings also displaying its extensive use by L2 learn-ers (Anastasiadi-Simeonidi et al., 2003 a.o.). However, neuter overgeneralisation changed after the intervention in our study. The pupils continued to make mis-takes, but, in our opinion, they showed some indications that they were more aware of the gender and all available options. In other words, their error patterns shifted from a pre-dominant overuse of the neuter gender in the pre-test to a more balanced overuse of the other gender values (for similar results driven from the employment of *textual enhancement* see Agathopoulou, Papadopoulou, & Zmijanjac, 2008). Thus, although the students' scores in the post-test did not sig-nificantly improve after the intervention, we deem that this decrease of neuter overgeneralisation manifests a qualitative development on the target grammatical phenomenon advancing towards its acquisition.

4.   Conclusion

In conclusion, our study aimed at shedding more light into the effectiveness of running dictation as a second language grammar teaching technique. Given the fact that restricted research attention has been placed on the educational needs of refugee children as well as the fact that teachers working with them often find it challenging to meet their needs (Sirin & Rogers-Sirin, 2015; Yaşar & Amac, 2018), we decided our target population to be primary school students with a refugee background. Such research would arm L2 teachers with valuable knowledge in terms of instruction planning. At the same time, it would enrich and extend pre-vious empirical findings on L2 teaching, providing evidence on the effectiveness of group dictation activities that are so far better studied in student populations with different profiles or for different linguistic aspects.

All in all, the results from both the tense and the gender agreement study show that learners do not exhibit a significant increase in their test scores after the employment of the intervention. However, as observed in both studies, there are indications implying that the pupils might have learned to pay attention to the

target grammatical phenomena. L2 learners pass through several stages of development until they acquire and master a grammatical structure, and noticing is one phase along this continuum (Schmidt, 1990). Therefore, besides the scarcity of relevant research in the literature for running dictation, the present study provides empirical evidence that it may have a positive effect on grammatical development. The present findings are yet in accordance with previous ones highlighting that a group dictation activity may lead to improvement, which can be observed qualitatively rather than quantitatively (for similar results driven from the employment of dictogloss see Calzada & García Mayo, 2020c and Kuiken & Vedder, 2002). It is worth highlighting that this qualitative improvement has been attested in both tense and gender agreement, showing that running dictation may be beneficial for various grammatical phenomena.

Nevertheless, it is important to note certain limitations of our study that may have led to the non-significant effectiveness of running dictation. Firstly, the samples in both studies are rather small and heterogeneous, as our participant groups involve almost all primary school ages. We think that this may have affected the present findings, particularly since age positively correlated with the benefits from the intervention at least in one case of our data (i.e., feminine nouns in -*a*). Additionally, we believe – based also on what the researcher who conducted the interventions noticed – that the collaboration between children was impeded, as some children wanted to be the ones leading the activity, which can hinder the equal involvement of all students (Kagan & Kagan, 2009). Moreover, the teacher of the interventions noticed general collaboration difficulties among the pupils. They were not familiar with this kind of activities, leading to disagreements within the student teams and potentially concealing some benefits of running dictation. At the same time, we do not know whether other group dictation activities like dictogloss would have a more positive effect for the target population or not. However, it is crucial to highlight the fact that the present study was conducted in real circumstances addressing the actual difficulties confronted in this kind of classroom settings, which, we think, reinforces the significance of the findings.

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