

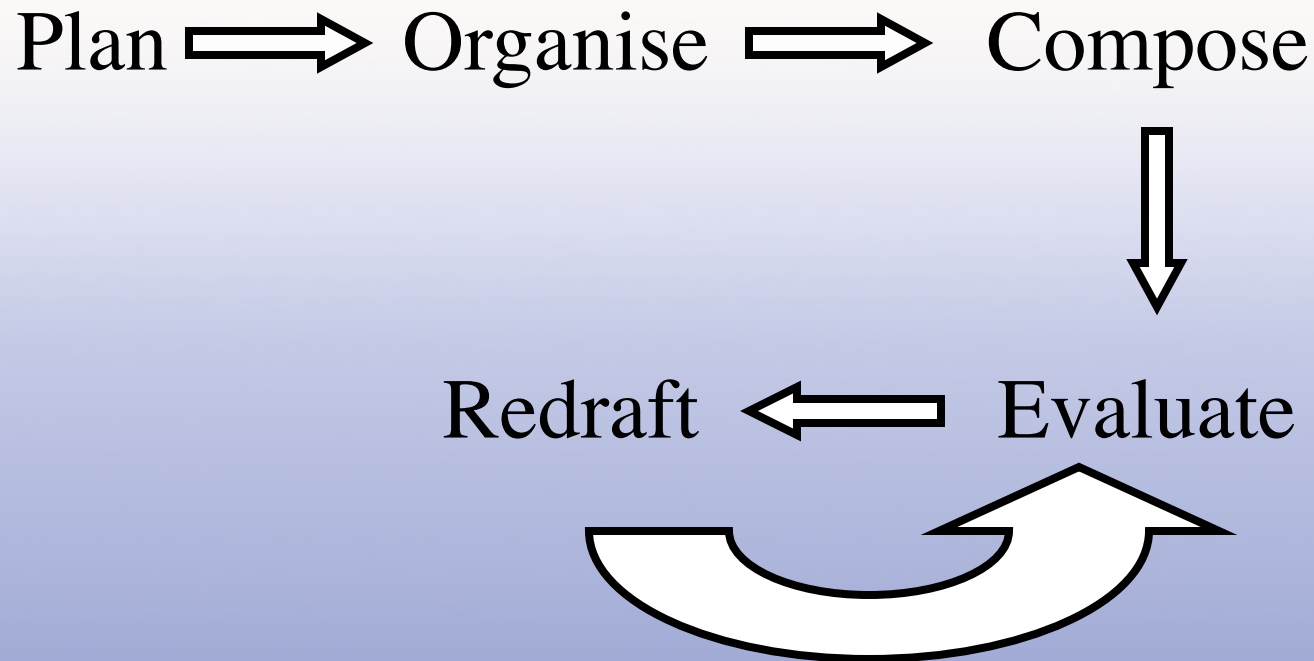
Using on-line corpora to develop students' writing skills

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Process writing approach



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Methods of evaluating students' written work

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
1. Teacher reformulation of ss' writing.	Ss receive specific & reliable feedback on problem area.	Time consuming Little cognitive processing expected from Ss.
2. Peer assessment of ss' writing.	Reduces T's workload. Ss have a wider audience for their written work. More cognitive processing expected.	Suggestions can be a) wrong; b) less helpful than a teacher's.
3. Minimal marking (marking codes; underlining problem areas, etc.)	Reduces T's workload. More cognitive processing expected.	May not provide ss with the support they need to resolve the problem.

Free on-line corpora

BNC

- 100 million word collection.
- Written/spoken English.
- Can't search sub-corpora.
- Up to 50 randomly selected instances.
- Slower query response time (approx. 10 seconds)
- Key word or phrase not highlighted in concordance lines.
- Harder for Ss to use.

COBUILD

- 56 million word collection.
- Written/spoken English.
- Option to search sub-corpora (British; USA; spoken).
- Up to 40 randomly selected instances.
- Faster query response time (approx. 4 seconds).
- Key word or phrase positioned centrally in concordance lines.
- Easier for Ss to use.

The investigation: Can on-line corpora help ss in the re-drafting process?

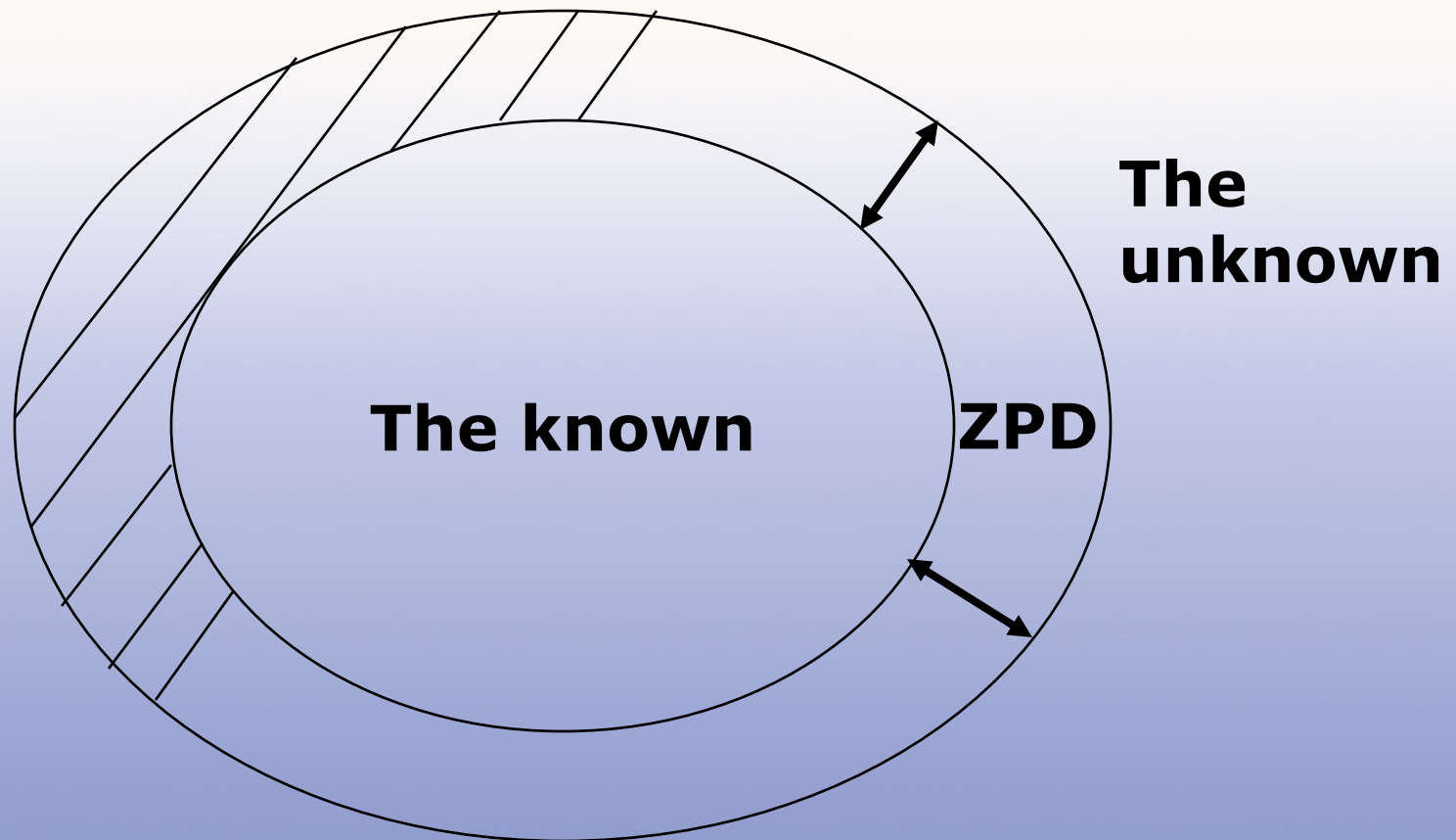
- 45, 2nd year Japanese university students on a compulsory writing course.
- 1st draft: factual report on 'obsession'.
- Problem areas in texts highlighted by teacher.
- 30 minute training session on using on-line corpora.
- Ss (in pairs) evaluated 1st drafts in computer room using both BNC & COBUILD.
- Re-drafting process completed in ss' own time.
- 1st & 2nd drafts assessed for naturalness of ss' writing (blind rating by 2 NS teachers).
- Ss commented on usefulness of on-line corpora.

Student training session

Typical Ss errors analysed using BNC & COBUILD:

- Since then, he started to go.
- ...but we cannot make it worth.
- My confidence changed.
- ... died for a car accident.

Students working in their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)



Assessing naturalness of ss' writing

Student Writing Samples

The following extracts are taken from university students' academic essays. Please indicate which version you consider to be more natural by placing a cross next to it, for example:

I started to associate with my girlfriend a year ago. ___

I started going out with my girlfriend a year ago. X

No difference ___

If you do not consider one to be more natural than the other, please put a cross next to 'No difference X'.

Thank you very much for your help with this research.

KO (051324)

1. Today, his fantastic activity allow himself to be the children's hero. ___

Today, his fantastic plays make himself be the children's hero. ___

No difference ___

Results of NS blind rating

- Total number modifications 1st → 2nd draft = 350 (Range:1-17 per essay)
- Improved = 67.3%
- No difference = 27.4%
- Worse = 5.3%

Example modifications

Improved:

1st draft: He became popular in the USA not only Japan.

2nd draft: He became popular not only Japan but also in the USA.

No difference:

1st draft: Her activity will attract people as before.

2nd draft: Her activity will attract people same as before.

Worse:

1st draft: Underage smoking was prohibited in Japan, so she couldn't avoid
fired.

2nd draft: Underage smoking was prohibited in Japan, so she couldn't
evade displacement.

Student feedback

Are on-line corpora useful?

Yes = 95%

“I think it is very useful for me because I can know the native speaker’s sentences. In my dictionary there are many sentences but they are not natural sentences”.

No = 5%

“If I don’t know what I should type, I can’t find out”

“Corpus is not useful for me because it is complicated”.

Student feedback

Which on-line corpus do you prefer & why?

COBUILD = 84.5% of Ss

“It is easy to use and I can familiar with it soon”

“I can find easily the word which I reserch”.

BNC = 15.5% of Ss

“Sometimes I can't find good sentence in
COBUILD”.

“BNC has more words than COBUILD”.

Conclusions

- On-line corpora were seen as a useful resource by the majority of Ss.
- After only a 30 minute training session, Ss were able to significantly improve the naturalness of their writing.
- COBUILD Corpus Concordance Sampler preferred by the majority of Ss since it is faster & easier to use.
- Substituting on-line corpora for the teacher as the 'knowledgeable other' reduces our workload & increases learner autonomy.