Concordance Programs in the EFL Classroom

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Abstract

There are a number of corpora that can be easily accessed and people can check large amounts of language data quickly in these days. However, how corpora can be applied to second or foreign language teaching and learning contexts, and which corpora should be selected for particular learners are controversial issues. Despite of the convenience, users need to have knowledge and skills to analyze the data effectively. To achieve this, analysis of learners' needs should be considered as one of the most important starting points. There are a number of merits in using concordance such as increasing the amount of exposure, awareness of appropriateness and association between lexical items and grammar. In addition, explicit learning can speed up learning especially in terms of formality and accuracy (McEnery & Xiao, 2011). In this paper, the issue of using invented and authentic data were introduced, and the advantages and disadvantages of using a concordance program in the EFL classroom were compared. Finally, the students and their needs in one particular EFL context, which is Japanese EFL learners, were described, and some corpus-based exercise were suggested and analyzed how the materials can be used in the English classes for Management course in Konan university.

Introduction

The corpus-based approach in linguistics has been highlighted over the last four decades (Leech, 1997). In terms of dictionaries, all English monolingual dictionaries are created based on a corpus (Schmitt *et al.*, 2004). There are a number of corpora that can be easily accessed and people can check large amounts of language data quickly in these days. However, how corpora can be applied to second or foreign language teaching and learning contexts, and which corpora should be selected for particular learners are controversial issues. In addition, as McCarthy and Carter (2001) point out, corpus is convenient but not a panacea in language teaching and learning contexts. Therefore, how the language data can be used effectively is left to corpus users.

In terms of selection of language data in EFL classroom, whether teachers should choose authentic data or invented data has often been discussed. There appears to be only two simple choices at a first glance. Nevertheless, it seems that there are complicated background issues such as the vague definition of "native speaker" and the backwash effects of the language-learning environment. When considering the use of concordance in EFL classroom, these points should not be ignored. In addition, learners' background and their needs may also have to be considered when discussing the selection of concordance and its application.

In this paper, the issue of using invented and authentic data will be introduced first. Secondly, the advantages and disadvantages of using a concordance program in the EFL classroom will be compared. Finally, the students and their needs in one particular EFL context, which is Japanese EFL learners, will be described, and some corpus-based exercise will be suggested and analyzed how the materials can be used in the English classes for Management course in Konan university.

1. Invented or Authentic Data in the EFL Teaching Context

The selection of concordance in the EFL classroom is a controversial issue. Since English is spoken by many individuals as their second language while it is the official language in some countries, the definition of native speakers has been evolving and becoming vague. The degree of interactivity between concordance and intercultural communication seems to be a debatable issue.

First of all, from the viewpoint of English as a lingua franca, authentic data could include not only native speakers' data but also the data from learner corpora, because unless the data are produced and collected in a natural environment, learner corpora could also be authentic data. However, when invented and authentic data are discussed, learner corpora are often ignored, and authentic data would refer only to native speakers' data. A few researchers suggest the use of learner corpora for error analysis in the EFL classroom. However, Granger (1997) points out that using learner corpora in class is a highly controversial issue. Thus, the selection of data may not simply be between invented and authentic but among invented, authentic native speakers' data and authentic data that include both native and non-native speakers' data.

Seidlhofer (2001 & 2003), a proponent of teaching English as a lingua franca, points out that situations involving communication between non-native speakers are increasing, therefore, learning English as a global language may motivate learners. In justifying the definition of authentic English data as a global language, she points out that non-native speakers overuse and underuse words (e.g. third person's 's') and varying expressions should be accepted and not be treated as errors. She also states that appropriateness rather than correctness should be focused on. However, her viewpoint seems to be extreme. Regarding communication and motivation, it may be worth emphasizing less on correctness, but data as a model in the EFL class may be neither correct nor appropriate.

Lasagabaster and Sierra (2005) and Oakey (2010) point out that some students prefer to learn English produced by native speakers, because they believe that native speakers are better than non-native speakers in terms of pronunciation and have a wider range of vocabulary terms and cultural information. Jenkins (2006) states that many Asian curriculum designers, teachers and students like native speakers, and their corresponding ministry of education employs many native speakers. Nevertheless, although many Asian educators and students think that native speakers' English is authentic and believe it to be an appropriate model, almost all the English textbooks in Japan contain invented data. Jenkins (2006) claims that there is no definition of Standard English, thus, invented data is neither authentic nor standard.

From the viewpoint of pedagogy, Sinclair (1997) claims that if that is what language is like, only authentic data should be taught in class. Language can be learned effectively only when it is in its habitual environment (Beatty, 2003). Sinclair (1997) and Granger (2002) point out that invented text is faulty because it is impossible to create naturalness. In addition, Johns and King (1991) and Chapelle (2003) state that learners need to learn not only correct language but also inductive ability and metacognitive strategies with authentic data. In contrast, Granger (1999), Widdowson (1991) and Meunier (2002) state that authentic data is not pedagogical. Ishikawa (2005) claims that authentic data does not match the teaching objectives, thus, it cannot be used as it is. Since it is claimed that invented data tends to contain one target element while authentic data often includes other elements as well, learners can learn co-occurrent items as well (Bloch, 2008). Seidlhofer (2001) points out the non-native English teachers' lack of confidence to use authentic data because of their insufficient knowledge of authentic data.

Learners may be motivated if authentic data is taught in class, but it may also be true that some learners would be confused because of the ambiguity in authentic data. It would be too harsh to say all authentic data is ambiguous or all invented data is not worth learning. Using both data could enable inhibiting each other's weakness and thus foster correctness and appropriateness in learners' aptitudes.

2. Critical Concern of Using Concordance Program
According to Leech (1997), the use of corpora has been more indirect than direct. The indirect use of corpora refers to the use of corpora for creating dictionaries, syllabus design, materials development, creating tests, error analyses and teacher development while the direct use of corpora refers to the use of corpora for data-driven learning (Leech, *ibid.*). In this section, critical accounts of the direct use of corpora and dictionary use will be discussed.

The benefits of using a corpus in teaching are being able to obtain student-centered classes, open-ended, automatic and tailored data. Bloch (2008) also states that students can learn strings of words, word frequency, collocation and concordance. However, despite of the usefulness of using concordance, he also points out that concordance is not always appropriate. Although corpora and concordance are easy to access, they are difficult to analyze (Schmitt *et al.*, 2004; McEnery & Xiao, 2011). Aston (1997), Meunier (2002) and Yoshimura (2004) claim that many teachers and students may be overwhelmed to use concordance because of its ambiguity as well as because it is time consuming, requires preparation time for teachers and lacks clear strategies. In addition, a number of teachers do not know how to retrieve, analyze and apply concordance. Therefore, teachers need to learn how to use corpus effectively in pre- and in-service (Meunier, *ibid.*). The main benefits of the use of corpora and concordance could be divided into two categories: frequency and exposure, and collocation and memory.

According to McEnery and Xiao (2011), frequency is often regarded as the most important advantage of using corpora, because frequency significantly affects learning (Kennedy, 2003). However, Widdowson (1991) argues that frequency data is not automatically and pedagogically useful. Moreover, frequency is varied and changeable. Although frequency data seems to be unstable, there are many vocabulary learning materials that are created based on the rank of frequency for TOEFL and university entrance examinations' preparation. In addition, the research of Biber and Conrad (2001) shows that the 12 most common verbs occur in conversation about 45% of the time among all verbs, but occur only 11% of the time in the academic context. Granger (2003) suggests that learners can learn how the language is used in different contexts such as spoken and written, and formality by comparing them. Frequency and the amount of exposure seem to be related in language learning. However, EFL learners tend to have less exposure and this may lead to little experience of implicit learning. How to maximize the exposure is one of the important issues in the EFL context (Kennedy, 2003). In fact, the use of concordance could be authentic exposure for the learners.

As Kennedy (2003) stated, learning collocation affects students' fluency, especially in speaking. Collocation is a common error that is often made by non-native speakers (Nesselhauf, 2003; Schmitt *et al.*, 2004). Collocation seems to enable teachers and learners to connect grammar and vocabulary terms that have often been taught separately. In terms of memory, memorizing chunks of words and phrases, such as collocation and phrasal verb, leads to a fast language processing, and affects learners' fluency (Aston, 1997; Kennedy, *ibid.*).

In terms of practical issues, it may be difficult for all students to use computers for analyzing a corpus (Yoshimura, 2004). To avoid this situation, teachers should select data beforehand and prepare handouts. In addition, when authentic data is used, especially up to high school level, there would be another issue involving the policy and ethics set by the school or the ministry of education. Therefore, teachers need to select and examine concordance carefully before it can be applied to their students. However, the selection of concordance could be biased by a teacher. Thus, it may be necessary for concordance to be selected by more than one teacher.

Finally, concordance can be used as an example in vocabulary or grammar teaching. Students can learn the nuance of the usage or meaning from concordance (Bloch, 2008). From the viewpoint of fluency, amount of exposure, acquisition of collocation and memory, corpora and concordance appear to be highly useful and beneficial sources. In addition, corpora and concordance can represent both qualitative and quantitative data. However, as Widdowson (1991) points out, data is not a guaranty for an effective pedagogy. Therefore, the development of teaching methods seems to be required.

3. Concordance Program in the EFL Classroom
3.1 The Needs of the Learners
Corpora can be used for analyzing students' needs. One of examples is error analysis. To examine students writing and speaking abilities, researchers, teachers and even students themselves can realize their weaknesses or tendencies especially in terms of accuracy and appropriateness. In the ESL context, researchers and teachers can also compare students who have a different first language, and

try to find an appropriate method for each student. In addition, corpus based material analysis would be highly beneficial. If a student's need is to learn English to study or work in an English speaking country, textbooks may be tailored accordingly by comparing corpora such as the British National Corpus (BNC). If the students' goal is to pass English examination, their textbook and the test could be compared to check whether the textbook includes contents that would be tested in the examination. An appropriate pedagogy requires matching specific learners' needs with local conditions of relevance (Seidlhofer, 2002). Leech (1997) also emphasizes the importance of knowing the specific purpose of learning to achieve the goals or to meet the students' needs, because the linguistic characteristics of language such as lexical frequency, collocation and grammatical structures vary according to the targets.

According to Granger (2003), the teachers should teach what students would be likely to encounter. However, Biber and Conrad (2001) and Kennedy (1998) point out that there are some textbooks in which 20% of the 1000 most frequent words used do not appear as frequent words in Collins Birmingham University International Language Database (COBUILD). As mentioned before, authentic data from corpora may not correspond to the teaching objectives (Ishikawa, 2005). One Japanese textbook (Ishida *et al.*, 2010) for English communication class at high school, which is selected by the largest number of high schools in Hyogo prefecture in Japan, contains many words that are related to school life and Japanese culture, but these words tend to be of low frequency in the Brown reference corpus (Appendix 1). This may be because textbook writers focus on students' everyday life where the topics and words would sound authentic and familiar to students. It may be true that topics that happen in, or are related to, foreign countries are not familiar to students, thus, the textbooks writers were trying to make textbooks more familiar for the students and many contents are related to Japanese students, such as welcoming international students to their school. However, English is one of the most powerful subject that can connect students to the world and expand their point of view, thus limiting the context of textbooks only to the Japanese society would not fully beneficial. How corpora should be used in classroom depends on students' proficiency and needs (Yoshimura, 2004). Therefore, to foster students' awareness of polysemous and appropriateness of language, and deepen the knowledge of words would be the teaching and learning objectives of the corpus based learning.

3.2 Choices of Exercises
In this section, three corpus-based approaches will be introduced. First of all, Appendix 2 shows a word-collocation associated list (Touno, 2005). This list would normally be used for individual studying. The author analyzed the 50 vocabulary terms with several corpora and found 24 top frequent and useful collocations. Some merits of using this list are that learners can learn appropriate collocation that is the source of one of the most common mistakes of ESL and EFL learners. For example, the words between "a big house" and "a large house", and "a small house" and "a little house" appear to be similar words but their meanings are different. However, the Japanese translation of "a small house" is *"Semai Ie"* and the most common English word that is often used by Japanese for *"Semai"* is "narrow". Thus, Japanese learners often say "a narrow house" to describe a small house. As Nesselhauf (2003) points out, learners should be aware of the differences between their first language and the target language. In contrast, a weakness of this material is that it does not contain any examples of sentences. As discussed before, learning the usage of language should be taught within specific contexts. For CUBE English 1 & 2 classes, if those target words were taught with specific contexts it would be beneficial, but as it is, this learning material may not suit the objectives of the class. However, one possible activity is to ask students to find some examples sentences with the target words from corpora and ask them how those words are used.

The second material is a parallel corpus (Appendix 3). There are some corpora that show both Japanese and English and can be used to check natural translation. When students translate English sentences into Japanese, some students tend to use the first definition of the words and write unnatural Japanese sentences. In addition, there are some grammatical structural mismatches between English and Japanese, and one common error is the usage of the passive when one expresses his feeling. For

instance, many Japanese learners say, "I am boring" instead of "I am bored", because the expression "It is boring" is more natural than "I am bored" in Japanese. Therefore, a parallel corpus can be suggested for some ideas of natural translation, and awareness of the differences between two languages can be fostered. Since all English classes are taught in English with English materials and they are not required to produce any Japanese output, thus, it may not fit into our course, however, it can be introduced to the students for their individuals study.

The last exercise is the concordance use for comparing some confusing vocabulary terms and grammar. As regards vocabulary terms, some words look very similar and difficult to distinguish such as "affect" and "effect", and some words have a similar meaning and can be translated only into one word in Japanese or do not match the differentiation between similar words in Japanese and English. For example, "trip", "tour", "journey", "travel" and "voyage" can be translated into only two Japanese words "tabi" and "ryokou", and these two words are freely interchangeable. In addition, some English and Japanese words correspond partially and the other part could be matched with another word. For instance, the English word "tell" can be translated into Japanese words "tsutaeru", "iu", "oshieru", and so on, while "oshieru" can be translated into the English word "teach". Thus, Japanese students often say "Could you teach me the way to the station?" instead of "Could you tell me the way to the station?" To foster awareness of these mismatches between students' first language and the target language, checking the difference by referring to concordance would be helpful, because concordance contains context as well. In addition, there are some phrasal words where verbs are subordinates to different prepositions and refer to similar meanings but not correspond. For example, "agree to" and "agree with" can be analyzed by students themselves using concordance. In terms of grammar, the differences between "which" and "that", "must" and "have to", "stop ~ing" and "stop to ~", "progressive" and "gerund", "passive" and "present perfect", and "passive" and "used to ~" are confusing grammar for many Japanese students. Some grammar textbooks for junior high school students provide such definition as "must ≒ have to", thus many students do not know the difference between them. This activity could be inductive learning and the biggest merit is that it can create a student-centered learning environment that is very rare in Japanese high school. In our course, this activity can be individual work, pair work or group work, and since students are required to encounter a number of concordances to analyze, the amount of input would be increased. In addition, the activity that requires students to write or speak some sentences or paragraphs on the basis of a pre-analyzed topic would be highly effective in deepening their knowledge and making that specific topic memorable.

Conclusion
Although corpora have been applied in linguistic research, the corpus-based approach in the EFL classroom has been the subject of various discussions recently and has become a notable topic. There are many corpora that we can access to obtain large amounts of data quickly these days. However, despite of the convenience, users need to have knowledge and skills to analyze the data effectively. In addition, EFL teachers should always be careful in their selection of the appropriate corpus and concordance, and the effective methods of using the data. To achieve this, analysis of learners' needs should be considered as one of the most important starting points. One of the controversial issues is that the selection of authentic or invented data may not be as simple as it seems to be. But since both data contain pedagogical benefits and analysis deficiencies, teachers should make their selection on the basis of the best each methodology can offer rather than focusing on a single one.

There are a number of merits in using concordance such as increasing the amount of exposure, awareness of appropriateness and association between lexical items and grammar. In addition, explicit learning can speed up learning especially in terms of formality and accuracy (McEnery & Xiao, 2011), and can push up especially advanced learners who have already had a good command of English (Wilson, 1997). There are various ways of using concordance and comparing between complicated vocabulary terms and grammar by looking at concordance lines may be one of the effective methods. However, the use of corpus and concordance is still not common in EFL classroom and even for English teachers in many countries. Therefore, more research and application of effective teaching

strategies and teachers' education seem to be needed.

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Appendix 1

The keyword list below contains all the words in the textbook that are at least 10 times more numerous in your text than in the Brown reference corpus.

(1) 415.00 flea
(2) 346.00 soccer
(3) 311.50 animation
(4) 242.33 programmer
(5) 207.67 kilometers
(6) 173.00 cellular
(7) 155.75 keyboard
(8) 155.75 skirts
(9) 155.50 guitarist
(10) 155.50 rebuttal
(11) 155.50 sushi
(12) 155.50 video
(13) 148.29 castle
(14) 145.40 wanna
(15) 143.17 false
(16) 138.33 cartoon
(17) 129.75 delicious
(18) 122.73 singer
(19) 114.20 hints
(20) 104.00 equinox
(21) 104.00 disagrees
(22) 104.00 astronaut
(23) 104.00 audio
(24) 104.00 eraser
(25) 104.00 curry
(26) 104.00 blackboard
(27) 103.86 shrine
(28) 103.80 terrific
(29) 103.75 sliced
(30) 103.75 affirmative
(31) 103.67 thinly
(32) 103.67 cinema
(33) 103.67 dryer
(34) 95.85 computer

(35) 83.00 headache
(36) 82.51 listening
(37) 77.75 melodious
(38) 77.75 sized
(39) 71.85 potatoes
(40) 69.33 soda
(41) 69.33 crafts
(42) 69.33 seaweed
(43) 69.33 announcer
(44) 69.33 seafood
(45) 69.33 chess
(46) 69.17 tracks
(47) 68.00 movie
(48) 64.88 embarrassed
(49) 64.88 stops
(50) 63.85 tips
(51) 62.30 pork
(52) 62.20 chat
(53) 59.29 lexington
(54) 59.29 dessert
(55) 59.29 calories
(56) 57.67 salad
(57) 57.67 pants
(58) 55.92 unfair
(59) 52.00 bruce
(60) 52.00 evenly
(61) 52.00 math
(62) 51.90 champions
(63) 51.90 sore
(64) 51.90 tastes
(65) 47.18 korean
(66) 45.44 chores
(67) 44.43 phones
(68) 44.43 tablespoons

(69) 43.25 workshop
(70) 43.25 thank
(71) 42.76 tokyo
(72) 41.60 bookkeeping
(73) 41.60 reed
(74) 41.60 delhi
(75) 41.60 adventurous
(76) 41.60 photographer
(77) 41.60 shine
(78) 41.50 hello
(79) 39.52 shame
(80) 38.94 ticket
(81) 38.26 traveling
(82) 37.98 favorite
(83) 37.73 integrated
(84) 36.65 economics
(85) 34.67 sleepy
(86) 34.67 mechanic
(87) 34.67 headaches
(88) 34.67 osaka
(89) 34.67 tablespoon
(90) 34.62 dishes
(91) 34.60 onion
(92) 34.60 flag
(93) 34.60 outfit
(94) 34.60 drums
(95) 34.60 dentist
(96) 34.58 accounting
(97) 34.58 someday
(98) 34.56 barber
(99) 34.56 vinegar
(100) 33.75 tool

Appendix 2

『出る順マスター：日常会話編』(Tono, 2005).

Keyword 002 house ／家

Check Box 1 2 3

家を持っている	☐☐☐	have a house
新しい家	☐☐☐	a new house
古い家	☐☐☐	an old house
家を買う	☐☐☐	buy a house
家へ行く	☐☐☐	go to the house
持ち家	☐☐☐	one's own house
家を出る	☐☐☐	leave the house
家にやってくる	☐☐☐	come to the house
豪邸	☐☐☐	a big house
家を建てる	☐☐☐	build a house
家を手に入れる	☐☐☐	get a house
広い家	☐☐☐	a large house
家に住む	☐☐☐	live in a house
家の外で	☐☐☐	outside the house
家の価格	☐☐☐	a house price
小さい家	☐☐☐	a small house
家を売る	☐☐☐	sell a house
こじんまりした家	☐☐☐	a little house
安売り店	☐☐☐	a discount house
家が(…に)位置している	☐☐☐	a house stands in
家を見る	☐☐☐	see a house
民家	☐☐☐	a private house
家の中で	☐☐☐	inside the house
家を借りる	☐☐☐	rent a house

Appendix 3

English-Japanese Parallel Corpus (Ishikawa, 2005)