

The natural approach

[Linguistics, Language Acquisition](#)



THE NATURAL APPROACH Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition " Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill." "

Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language — natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding." "

The best methods are therefore those that supply 'comprehensible input' in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are 'ready', recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing and correcting production." "

In the real world, conversations with sympathetic native speakers who are willing to help the acquirer understand are very helpful." Introduction Stephen Krashen

(University of Southern California) is an expert in the field of linguistics, specializing in theories of language acquisition and development. Much of his recent research has involved the study of non-English and bilingual language acquisition. During the past 20 years, he has published well over 100 books and articles and has been invited to deliver over 300 lectures at universities throughout the United States and Canada. This is a brief description of Krashen's widely known and well accepted theory of second language acquisition, which has had a large impact in all areas of second language research and teaching since the 1980s. The Natural Approach (NA) is a product of Stephen Krashen, an applied linguist at the University of Southern California and Tracy Terrell, a teacher of Spanish in California. Krashen's

work on second language acquisition and Terrell's teaching experiences form the bases of the Natural Approach. The principles and practices of this new approach have been published in "The Natural Approach" (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). The book contains theoretical sections prepared by Krashen and sections on implementation and classroom procedures prepared mostly by Terrell. The most striking proposal of the NA theory is that adults can still acquire second languages and that the ability to 'pick up' languages does not disappear at puberty. Thus, Krashen's contribution to Chomsky's LAD proposition is that adults follow the same principles of Universal Grammar. The theory behind the NA implies that adults can acquire all but the phonological aspect of any foreign language, by using their ever-active LAD. What makes adults different from children is their abstract problem solving skills that make them consciously process the grammar of a foreign language. Therefore, adults have two paths to follow: Acquisition and learning. However, children have only one: Acquisition. In their book, Krashen and Terrell refer to their method of picking up ability in another language directly without instruction in its grammar as 'the traditional approach'. They consider their approach as a traditional one whereas many methodologists consider Grammar Translation Method as the traditional method. For Krashen, even Grammar Translation Method is not as old and traditional as the method of acquiring a language in its natural environment, a method which has been used for hundreds of thousands of years. The term 'natural' emphasizes that the principles behind the NA are believed to conform to the naturalistic principles found in successful second language acquisition. One may think that the Natural Approach and the Natural

Method are similar. The Natural Method (or the Direct Method) and the Natural Approach differ in that the former lays more emphasis on teacher monologues, formal questions and answers, and error correction. Krashen and Terrell note that " the Natural Approach is in many ways the natural, direct method 'rediscovered'[and] it is similar to other communicative approaches being developed today". The Natural Approach, like TPR, is regarded as a comprehension-based approach because of its emphasis on initial delay(silent period) in the production of language. What is novel is that the NA focuses on exposure to input instead of grammar practice, and on emotional preparedness for acquisition to take place.

II. THEORETICAL BASIS OF THE NATURAL APPROACH

II. 1. Theory of Language

Krashen regards 'communication' as the main function of language. The focus is on teaching communicative abilities. The superiority of 'meaning' is emphasized. Krashen and Terrell believe that a language is essentially its lexicon. They stress the importance of vocabulary and view language as a vehicle for 'communicating meanings' and 'messages'. According to Krashen, 'acquisition' can take place only when people comprehend messages in the TL. Briefly, the view of language that the Natural Approach presents consists of 'lexical items', 'structures' and 'messages'. The lexicon for both perception and production is considered critical in the organization and interpretation of messages. In Krashen's view, acquisition is the natural assimilation of language rules by using language for communication. This means that linguistic competence is achieved via 'input' containing structures at the 'interlanguage + 1' level (i +1); that is, via 'comprehensible input'.

II. 2. Theory of Language Learning

(1) The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Krashen, in his theory of second

language acquisition (SLA) suggested that adults have two different ways of developing competence in second languages: Acquisition and learning. " There are two independent ways of developing ability in second languages. 'Acquisition' is a subconscious process identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language, ... [and] 'learning' ..., [which is] a conscious process that results in 'knowing about' [the rules of] language" (Krashen 1985: 1). The Acquisition-Learning distinction is the most fundamental of all the hypotheses in Krashen's theory and the most widely known among linguists and language practitioners. According to Krashen there are two independent systems of second language performance: 'the acquired system' and 'the learned system'. The 'acquired system' or 'acquisition' is the product of a subconscious process very similar to the process children undergo when they acquire their first language. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concentrated not in the form of their utterances, but in the communicative act. The 'learned system' or 'learning' is the product of formal instruction and it comprises a conscious process which results in conscious knowledge 'about' the language, for example knowledge of grammar rules. According to Krashen 'learning' is less important than 'acquisition'. Krashen believes that the result of learning, learned competence (LC) functions as a monitor or editor. That is, while AC is responsible for our fluent production of sentences, LC makes correction on these sentences either before or after their production. This kind of conscious grammar correction, 'monitoring', occurs most typically in a grammar exam where the learner has enough time to focus on form and to

make use of his conscious knowledge of grammar rules (LC) as an aid to 'acquired competence'. The way to develop learned competence is fairly easy: analysing the grammar rules consciously and practising them through exercises. But what Acquisition / Learning Distinction Hypothesis predicts is that learning the grammar rules of a foreign/second language does not result in subconscious acquisition. In other words, what you consciously learn does not necessarily become subconsciously acquired through conscious practice, grammar exercises and the like. Krashen formulates this idea in his well-known statement that "learning does not become acquisition". It is at this point where Krashen receives major criticism.

(2) The Natural Order Hypothesis According to the hypothesis, the acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predicted progression. Certain grammatical structures or morphemes are acquired before others in first language acquisition and there is a similar natural order in SLA. The average order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes for English as an 'acquired' language is given below: -Ing-----Aux-----Irregular-----Regular Past Plural-----> Article----> Past-----> 3rd Sing. The implication of natural order is not that second or foreign language teaching materials should be arranged in accordance with this sequence but that acquisition is subconscious and free from conscious intervention (Ellidokuzoglu, 1992).

(3) The Input Hypothesis This hypothesis relates to acquisition, not to learning. Krashen claims that people acquire language best by understanding input that is a little beyond their present level of competence. Consequently, Krashen believes that 'comprehensible input' (that is, $i + 1$) should be provided. The 'input' should be relevant and 'not grammatically sequenced'. The 'input' should also be in

sufficient quantity as Richards pointed out: "... child acquirers of a first language are provided with samples of 'caretaker' speech, rough - tuned to their present level of understanding, ..[and] adult acquirers of a second language [should be] provided with simple codes that facilitate second language comprehension." (Richards, J. 1986: 133) (4) The Monitor Hypothesis As is mentioned, adult second language learners have two means for internalising the target language. The first is 'acquisition' which is a subconscious and intuitive process of constructing the system of a language. The second means is a conscious learning process in which learners attend to form, figure out rules and are generally aware of their own process. The 'monitor' is an aspect of this second process. It edits and make alterations or corrections as they are consciously perceived. Krashen believes that 'fluency' in second language performance is due to 'what we have acquired', not 'what we have learned': Adults should do as much acquiring as possible for the purpose of achieving communicative fluency. Therefore, the monitor should have only a minor role in the process of gaining communicative competence. Similarly, Krashen suggests three conditions for its use: (1) there must be enough time; (2) the focus must be on form and not on meaning; (3) the learner must know the rule. (5) The Affective Filter Hypothesis The learner's emotional state, according to Krashen, is just like an adjustable filter which freely passes or hinders input necessary to acquisition. In other words, input must be achieved in low-anxiety contexts since acquirers with a low affective filter receive more input and interact with confidence. The filter is 'affective' because there are some factors which regulate its strength. These factors are self-confidence, motivation and

anxiety state. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION - LANGUAGE LEARNING The expression " language learning" includes two clearly distinct, though rarely understood, concepts. One involves receiving information about the language, transforming it into knowledge through intellectual effort and storing it through memorization. The other involves developing the skill of interacting with foreigners to understand and speak their language. The first concept is called " language learning," while the other is referred to as " language acquisition." These are separate ideas and we will show that neither is the consequence of the other. The distinction between acquisition and learning is one of the hypotheses (the most important) established by the American Stephen Krashen in his highly regarded theory of foreign language learning. LANGUAGE ACQUISITION Language acquisition refers to the process of natural assimilation, involving intuition and subconscious learning, which is the product of real interactions between people where the learner is an active participant. It is similar to the way children learn their native tongue, a process that produces functional skill in the spoken language without theoretical knowledge; develops familiarity with the phonetic characteristics of the language as well as its structure and vocabulary, is responsible for oral understanding, the capability for creative communication and for the identification of cultural values. Teaching and learning are viewed as activities that happen in a personal psychological plane. The acquisition approach praises the communicative act and develops self-confidence in the learner. A classic example of language acquisition involves adolescents and young adults who live abroad for a year in an exchange program, attaining near native fluency, while knowing little about

the language in the majority of cases. They have a good pronunciation without a notion of phonology, don't know what the perfect tense is, modal or phrasal verbs are, but they intuitively recognize and know how to use all the structures. LANGUAGE LEARNING The concept of language learning is linked to the traditional approach to the study of languages and today is still generally practiced in high schools worldwide. Attention is focused on the language in its written form and the objective is for the student to understand the structure and rules of the language through the application of intellect and logical deductive reasoning. The form is of greater importance than communication. Teaching and learning are technical and governed by a formal instructional plan with a predetermined syllabus. One studies the theory in the absence of the practical. One values the correct and represses the incorrect. There is little room for spontaneity. The teacher is an authority figure and the participation of the student is predominantly passive. In the teaching of English, for example, one studies the function of the interrogative and negative modes, irregular verbs, modals, etc. The student learns to construct sentences in the perfect tense, but only learns with difficulty when to use it. It's a progressive and cumulative process, normally tied to a preset syllabus that includes memorization of vocabulary and seeks to transmit to the student knowledge about the language, its functioning and grammatical structure with its irregularities, its contrasts with the student's native language, knowledge that one hopes will become the practical skills of understanding and speaking the language. This effort of accumulating knowledge becomes frustrating because of the lack of familiarity with the language. Innumerable graduates with arts degrees in

English are classic examples of language learning. They often are trained and theoretically able to teach a language that they can communicate in only with extreme difficulty. INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACQUISITION AND LEARNING AND ITS IMPLICATIONS The clear understanding of the differences between acquisition and learning makes it possible to investigate their interrelationships as well as the implications for the teaching of languages. First, we ought to consider that languages, in general, are complex, arbitrary, irregular phenomena, full of ambiguities, in constant random and uncontrollable evolution. Therefore, the grammatical structure of a language can be too complex and abstract to be categorized and defined by rules. Even if some partial knowledge of the functioning of the language is reached, it is not easily transformed into communication skills. What happens in fact is a dependency predominantly opposite: to understand the functioning of a language as a system and to understand its irregularities is a function of familiarity with it. Rules and exercises only will make sense when we have already developed solid intuitive control of the language in its oral form, that is, when we have assimilated it. On the other hand, Krashen admits that the knowledge obtained through formal study (language learning) can serve to monitor speaking. Krashen, however, doesn't specify the language that would be the object of study, but he was probably using the study of Spanish as the basis for his inferences and conclusions because it is the dominant foreign language in the United States, and particularly in the state of California, where Professor Krashen lives and works. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the degrees of irregularity and difficulty of the target language and how that affects Krashen's theory. THE

DEGREE OF PHONETIC SIGNALING IN THE LANGUAGE AND THE INEFFICIENCY OF LEARNING: It's also easy to assess the degree of phonetic signalling of languages and understand the importance that that aspect has. If we analyse and compare Spanish and Portuguese with English, we conclude that there is a significant difference, being English considerably more economical and compact than the Romance languages. This means a greater difficulty in achieving oral proficiency in the target language when going from Portuguese or Spanish to English than going the opposite direction. It also means that more time needs to be devoted to the practice of the spoken language (especially listening) and less time spent on the study of text and grammatical items. | Let's-work. (2) | (5) Va-mos-tra-ba-lhar. | | I-like-be-er. (4) | (7) Eu-gos-to-de-cer-ve-ja. | | A-brick-house. (3) | (8) U-ma-ca-sa-de-ti-jo-los. | | Help-me-please. (3) | (7) A-ju-de-me-por-fa-vor. | | How-old-are-you? (4) | (7) Quan-tos-a-nos-vo-cÃª-tem? | | Where-is-the-bath-room? (5) | (8) On-de-fi-ca-o-ba-nhei-ro? | | I-want-cof-fee-with-milk. (6) | (8) Eu-que-ro-ca-fé-com-lei-te. | | Did-you-watch-that-mo-vie? (6) |(10) Vo-cÃª-as-sis-tiu-Ã-que-le-fil-me? | | Third-world-coun-tries-are- |(24) Os-pa-Ã-ses-do-ter-cei-ro-mun-do- es-tÃ£o- | | fac-ing-e-co-no-mic-pro-blems. (13) | en-fren-tan-do-pro-ble-mas-e-co-nÃ'-mi-cos. | | TOTAL: 46 sÃlabas | 84 sÃlabas | | 35, 3% | 64, 6% | | ac-cess / a-ces-so | me-thod / mé-to-do | | a-gri-cul-ture / a-gri-cul-tu-ra | mu-sic / mÃº-si-ca | | air-plane / a-vi-Ã£o | na-ture / na-tu-re-za | | ca-len-dar / ca-len-dÃ¡-rio | o-cean / o-ce-a-no | | cho-co-late / cho-co-la-te | po-li-tics / po-lÃ-ti-ca | | ci-ty / ci-da-de | prin-ter / im-pres-so-ra | | com-pu-ter / com-pu-ta-dor | pro-cess / pro-ces-so | | cre-a-tive / cri-a-ti-vo | pro-ject / pro-je-to | | de-part-ment / de-par-ta-men-to | psy-

cho-lo-gy / psi-co-lo-gi-a | | dif-ference / di-fe-ren-Ã§a | pu-blic / pÃº-bli-co
 | | gram-mar / gra-mÃ¡-ti-ca | qua-li-ty / qua-li-da-de | | im-por-tant / im-
 por-tan-te | stu-dent / es-tu-dan-te | | in-tel-li-gent / in-te-li-gen-te | te-le-
 phone / te-le-fo-ne | | ma-chine / mÃ¡-qui-na | trans-port / trans-por-te | |
 mo-dern / mo-der-no | ur-gent / ur-gen-te | WORD STRESSING: The

unpredictability of word stressing in English and the absence of any
 indication of stress from spelling is another element to demonstrate that
 Krashen's arguments acquire even greater strength. There are many other
 points of contrast between English and Spanish that show the greater degree
 of irregularity and difficulty of English. The fact is that even with a target
 language with a large degree of regularity such as Spanish, the contribution
 of learning will only be effective and durable if the student simultaneously
 develops familiarity and skill with the language in natural environments. |
 (stress on the last syllable) | hotel, control, police, improve, exchange, etc.
 (only two-syllable | | | words) | |(stress on one before the last) | video,
 English, important, united, revolution, etc. | |(stress on two before the last) |
 excellent, hospital, government, photograph, photographer, etc. | | stress on
 three before the last | approximately, significantly, intelligible, objectionable,
 etc. | | double stress | approximation, refrigerator, characteristic, category,
 necessary, | | | dictionary, fundamental, introductory, etc. | -----
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