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Natural approach in language teaching

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Annotation *The article is devoted to the natural approach which belongs to a tradition of language teaching methods based on observation and interpretation of how learners acquire both first and second languages in non-formal settings. Such methods reject the formal (grammatical) organization of language as a prerequisite to teaching. They hold with that an adult can effectively be taught by grammatically unordered materials and that such an approach is, indeed, the only learning process which we know for certain will produce mastery of the language at a native level. In the Natural Approach, a focus on comprehension and meaningful communication as well as the provision of the right kinds of comprehensible input provide the necessary and sufficient conditions for successful classroom second and foreign language acquisition. This has led to a new rationale for the integration and adaptation of techniques drawn from a wide variety of existing sources like Communicative Language Teaching. Furthermore, the Natural Approach emphasizes a stress-free environment, learner motivation, and practical activities that encourage gradual language development. It values authentic input and interaction, which are crucial in building communicative competence and long-term retention of language skills.*

Keywords *Language, teaching, natural, approach, communication, skill, comprehensible language, techniques, command-based activities*

Естественный подход в преподавании языка

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Аннотация *Статья посвящена естественному подходу, который относится к традиции методов преподавания языка, основанных на наблюдении и интерпретации того, как учащиеся осваивают как родной, так и второй язык в неформальной среде. Такие методы отвергают формальную (грамматическую) организацию языка как обязательное условие обучения. Они исходят из того, что взрослого можно эффективно обучать с помощью грамматически неупорядоченного материала и что именно такой подход является единственным процессом обучения, который, как достоверно известно, обеспечивает овладение языком на уровне носителя. В естественном подходе акцент делается на понимании и осмысленной коммуникации, а также на предоставлении нужных видов понятного материала, что создает необходимые и достаточные условия для успешного овладения иностранным и вторым языком в классе. Это привело к новой концепции интеграции и адаптации техник, заимствованных из различных существующих направлений, таких как коммуникативное обучение языку. Более того, естественный подход подчеркивает создание комфортной, лишенной стресса атмосферы, повышение мотивации* *студентов и использование практических заданий, которые способствуют постепенному развитию речевых навыков. Такой метод отличается гуманистическим характером и нацелен на долгосрочное усвоение языка.*

Ключевые слова *Язык, обучение, естественный, подход, коммуникация, навык, понятный язык, техники, упражнения на основе команд*

Til oʻqitishda tabiiy yondashuv

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Annotatsiya *Ushbu maqola tabiiy yondashuvga bagʻishlangan boʻlib, u norasmiy sharoitlarda oʻquvchilar qanday qilib ona tilini va ikkinchi tilni oʻzlashtirishini kuzatish va talqin qilishga asoslangan til oʻqitish metodlari anʼanalariga kiradi. Bunday metodlar tilni oʻqitish uchun grammatik tashkilotni zaruriy shart sifatida rad etadi. Ularning fikricha, kattalar grammatik jihatdan tartiblanmagan materiallar orqali samarali oʻqitilishi mumkin va bunday yondashuv, aslida, tilni ona til darajasida mukammal egallashni taʼminlaydigan yagona oʻquv jarayonidir. Tabiiy yondashuvda tushunish va mazmunli muloqotga eʼtibor qaratish, shuningdek, kerakli turdagi tushunarli materiallar bilan taʼminlash chet va ikkinchi tilni muvaffaqiyatli oʻzlashtirish uchun zarur va yetarli shartlarni yaratadi. Bu esa kommunikativ til oʻqitish kabi turli manbalardan olingan texnikalarni integratsiya qilish va moslashtirish uchun yangi asos yaratdi. Shuningdek, tabiiy yondashuv oʻquvchilarda motivatsiya va ishtirokni kuchaytirish, stresssiz muhit yaratish, amaliy topshiriqlar va real hayotiy muloqotdan foydalanishni taʼkidlaydi. Shu bois, u samarali va insonparvar metod sifatida qadrlanadi.*

Kalit soʻzlar *Til, oʻqitish, tabiiy, yondashuv, muloqot, koʻnikma, tushunarli til, texnikalar, buyruq asosidagi mashgʻulotlar*

Introduction

The Natural Approach to language teaching emerged as a reaction against the dominance of grammar-based methods that often failed to provide learners with communicative competence. Traditional methods emphasized memorization of rules, vocabulary lists, and repetitive drills, which frequently discouraged learners and did not result in real-life fluency. In contrast, the Natural Approach focuses on how people actually acquire languages in informal and naturalistic settings, such as through immersion, exposure, and interaction.

The method was first conceptualized by Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell in the late 1970s and early 1980s as part of the broader movement towards communicative language teaching. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis, successful acquisition occurs when learners are exposed to comprehensible input – language that is slightly above their current level but still understandable through context. This principle shifts the emphasis from consciously learning grammatical structures to unconsciously acquiring language through meaningful communication.

In the classroom, the Natural Approach prioritizes comprehension and encourages students to listen and understand before being required to produce language. Teachers create situations in which learners receive rich and varied input through stories, visuals, commands, and interactive activities. This way, the classroom becomes a simulation of real-life communication rather than a space for abstract grammar exercises.

Moreover, the Natural Approach aligns with the psychological principles of second language acquisition, recognizing that language learning should reduce stress and anxiety, thus fostering a low affective filter. When learners are comfortable, motivated, and engaged, their ability to acquire a new language improves significantly. This makes the Natural Approach not only an effective methodology but also a humanistic one that respects the natural pace and cognitive processes of learners.

The fact that the authors of the Natural Approach relate their approach to the Natural Method has led some to assume that Natural Approach and Natural Method are synonymous terms. Although the tradition is a common one, there are important differences between the Natural Approach and the older Natural Method which it will be useful to consider at the outset. The Natural Method is another term for what by the turn of the century had become known as the Direct Method. It is described in a report on the state of the art in language teaching commissioned by the Modern Language Association in 1901. The term natural, used in reference to the Direct Method, merely emphasized that the principles underlying the method were believed to conform to the principles of naturalistic language learning in young children. Similarly, the Natural Approach, as defined by Krashen and Terrell, is believed to conform to the naturalistic principles found in successful second language acquisition.

Unlike the Direct Method however, it places less emphasis on teacher monologues, direct repetition, and formal questions and answers, and less focus on accurate production of target language sentences. In the Natural Approach there is an emphasis on exposure, or input, rather than practice; optimizing emotional preparedness for learning; a prolonged period of attention to what the language learners hear before they try to produce language; and a willingness to use written and other materials as a source of comprehensible Input. Krashen and Terrell see communication as the primary function of language, and since their approach focuses on teaching communicative abilities, they refer to the Natural Approach as an example of a communicative approach. The Natural Approach "is similar to other communicative approaches being developed today" (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). They reject earlier methods of language teaching, such as the Audiolingual Method, which viewed grammar as the central component of language. According to Krashen and Terrell, the major problem with these methods was that they were built not around "actual theories of language acquisition, but theories of something else; for example, the structure of language" (1983).

Unlike proponents of Communicative Language Teaching, however, Krashen and Terrell give little attention to a theory of language. Indeed, a recent critic of Krashen suggests he has no theory of language at all (Gregg, 1984). What Krashen and Terrell do describe about the nature of language emphasizes the primacy of meaning. The importance of the vocabulary is stressed, for example, suggesting the view that a language is essentially its lexicon and only inconsequently the grammar that determines how the lexicon is exploited to produce messages. Language is viewed as a vehicle for communicating meanings and messages. Hence Krashen and Terrell state that "acquisition can take place only when people understand messages in the target language" (Krashen and Terrell, 1983; 19).

Yet despite their avowed communicative approach to language, they view language learning, as do audiolingualists, as mastery of structures by stages. “The input hypothesis states that in order for acquirers to progress to the next stage in the acquisition of the target language, they need to understand input language that includes a structure that is part of the next stage” (Krashen and Terrell, 1983; 32). Krashen refers to this with the formula “I + 1” (i.e., input that contains structures slightly above the learner’s present level). We assume that Krashen means by structures something at least in the tradition of what such linguists as Leonard Bloomfield and Charles Fries meant by structures. The Natural Approach thus assumes a linguistic hierarchy of structural complexity that one masters through encounters with “input” containing structures at the “I + 1” level. We are left then with a view of language that consists of lexical items, structures, and messages. Obviously, there is no particular novelty in this view as such, except that messages are considered of primary importance in the Natural Approach. The lexicon for both perception and production is considered critical in the construction and interpretation of messages. Lexical items in messages are necessarily grammatically structured, and more complex messages involve more complex grammatical structure. Although they acknowledge such grammatical structuring, Krashen and Terrell feel that grammatical structure does not require explicit analysis or attention by the language teacher, by the language learner, or in language teaching materials. Krashen and Terrell make continuing reference to the theoretical and research base claimed to underlie the Natural Approach and to the fact that the method is unique in having such a base. “It is based on an empirically grounded theory of second language acquisition, which has been supported by a large number of scientific studies in a wide variety of language acquisition and learning contexts” (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). The theory and research are grounded on Krashen’s views of language acquisition, which we will collectively refer to as Krashen’s language acquisition theory. Krashen’s views have been presented and discussed extensively elsewhere (e.g., Krashen, 1982), so we will not try to present or critique Krashen’s arguments here. (Gregg, 1984; McLaughlin, 1978). It is necessary, however, to present in outline form the principal tenets of the theory, since it is on these that the design and procedures in the Natural Approach are based. The Acquisition/Learning Hypothesis claims that there are two distinctive ways of developing competence in a second or foreign language. Acquisition is the “natural” way, paralleling first language development in children. Acquisition refers to an unconscious process that involves the naturalistic development of language proficiency through understanding language and through using language for meaningful communication, Learning, by contrast, refers to a process in which conscious rules about a language are developed. It results in explicit knowledge ”bout the forms of a language and the ability” to verbalize this knowledge. Formal teaching is necessary for “learning” to occur, and correction of errors helps with the development of learned rules. Learning, according to the theory, cannot lead to acquisition. The acquired linguistic system is said to initiate utterances when we communicate in a second or foreign language. Conscious learning can function only as a monitor or editor that checks and repairs the output of the acquired system. The Monitor Hypothesis claims that we may call upon learned knowledge to correct ourselves when we communicate, but that conscious learning (i.e., the learned system) has only this function. Three conditions limit the successful use of the monitor:

1. *Time*. There must be sufficient time for a learner to choose and apply a learned rule.
2. *Focus on form.*

The language user must be focused on correctness or on the form of the output. 3. Knowledge of rules. The performer must know the rules. The monitor does best with rules that are simple in two ways. They must be simple to describe and they must not require complex movements and rearrangements. According to the Natural Order Hypothesis, the acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order. Research is said to have shown that certain grammatical structures or morphemes are acquired before others in first language acquisition of English, and a similar natural order is found in second language acquisition. Errors are signs of naturalistic developmental processes, and during acquisition (but not during learning), similar developmental errors occur in learners no matter what their mother tongue is. Clues based on the situation and the context, extralinguistic in formation, and knowledge of the world make comprehension possible. Third, the ability to speak fluently cannot he taught directly; rather, it "emerges" independently in time, after the acquirer has built up linguistic competence by understanding input.

Just as child acquirers of a first language are provided with samples of "caretaker speech," rough-tuned to their present level of understanding, so adult acquirers of a second language are provided with simple codes that facilitate second language comprehension. One such code is "foreigner talk," which refers to the speech native speakers use to simplify communication with foreigners. Foreigner talk is characterized by a slower rate of speech, repetition, restating, use of Yes/No instead of Wh-questions, and other changes that make messages more comprehensible to persons of limited language proficiency.

Krashen sees the learner's emotional state or attitudes as an adjustable filter that freely passes, impedes, or blocks input necessary to acquisition. A low affective filter is desirable, since it impedes or blocks less of this necessary input. The hypothesis is built on research in second language acquisition, which has identified three kinds of affective or attitudinal variables related to second language acquisition.

1. *Motivation*. Learners with high motivation generally do better.
2. *Self-confidence*. Learners with self-confidence and a good self-image tend to be more successful.
3. *Anxiety*. Low personal anxiety and low classroom anxiety are more conducive to second language acquisition.

The Affective Filter Hypothesis states that acquirers with a low affective filter seek and receive more input, interact with confidence, and are more receptive to the input they receive. Anxious acquirers have a high active filter, which prevents acquisition from taking place. It is believed that the affective filter (e.g., fear or embarrassment) rises in early adolescence, and this may account for children's apparent superiority to older acquirers of a second language.

The Natural Approach "is for beginners and is designed to help them become intermediates." It has the expectation that students will be able to function adequately in the target situation. They will understand the speaker of the target language (perhaps with requests for clarification) and will be able to convey (in a non-insulting manner) requests and ideas. They need not know every word in a particular semantic domain, nor is it necessary that the syntax and vocabulary be flawless- but their production does need to be understood. They should be able to make the meaning clear but not necessarily be accurate in all details of grammar (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). However, since the Natural Approach is offered as a general set of principle applicable to a wide variety of situations, as in Communicative Language Teaching, specific objectives depend upon learner needs and the skill (reading, writing, listening, or speaking) and level being taught. Krashen and Terrell feel it is important to communicate to learners what they can expect of a course as well as what they should not expect. They offer as an example a possible goal and nongoal statement for a beginning Natural Approach Spanish class. After 100-150 hours of Natural Approach Spanish, you will be able to: "get around" in Spanish; you will be able to communicate with a monolingual native speaker of Spanish without difficulty; read most ordinary texts in Spanish with some use of a dictionary; know enough Spanish to continue to improve on your own.

The goals of a Natural Approach class are based on an assessment of student needs. We determine the situations in which they will use the target language and the sorts of topics they will have to communicate information about. In setting communication goals, we do not expect the students at the end of a particular course to have acquired a certain group of structures or forms. Instead, we expect them to deal with a particular set of topics in a given situation. We do not organize the activities of the class about a grammatical syllabus. (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). From this point of view, it is difficult to specify communicative goals that necessarily fit the needs of all students. Thus, any list of topics and situations must be understood as syllabus suggestions rather than as specifications.

As well as fitting the needs and interests of students, content selection should aim to create a low affective filter by being interesting and fostering a friendly, relaxed atmosphere, should provide a wide exposure to vocabulary that may be useful to basic personal communication, and should resist any focus on grammatical structures, since if input is provided "over a wider variety of topics while pursuing communicative goals". (Krashen and Terrell, 1983). From the beginning of a class taught according to the Natural Approach, emphasis is on presenting comprehensible input in the target language. Teacher talk focuses on objects in the classroom and on the content of pictures, as with the Direct Method. To minimize stress, learners are not required to say anything until they feel ready, but they are expected to respond to teacher commands and questions in other ways.

When learners are ready to begin talking in the new language, the teacher provides comprehensible language and simple response opportunities. The teacher talks slowly and distinctly, asking questions and eliciting one-word answers. There is a gradual progression from Yes/ No questions, through either-or questions, to questions that students can answer using words they have heard used by the teacher. Students are not expected to use a word actively until they have heard it many times. Charts, pictures, advertisements, and other realia serve as the focal point for questions, and when the students' competence permits, talk moves to class members. "Acquisition activities" – those that focus on meaningful communication rather than language form – are emphasized. Pair or group work may be employed, followed by whole-class discussion led by the teacher.

Techniques recommended by Krashen and Terrell are often borrowed from other methods and adapted to meet the requirements of Natural Approach theory. These include command-based activities from Total Physical Response; Direct Method activities in which mime, gesture, and context are used to elicit questions and answers; and even situation-based practice of structures and patterns. Group-work activities are often identical to those used in Communicative Language Teaching, where sharing information in order to complete a task is emphasized. There is nothing novel about the procedures and techniques advocated for use with the Natural Approach. A casual observer might not be aware of the philosophy underlying the classroom techniques he or she observes. What characterizes the Natural Approach is the use of familiar techniques within the framework of a method that focuses on providing comprehensible input and a classroom environment that cues comprehension of input, minimizes learner anxiety, and maximizes learner self-confidence.

There is a basic assumption in the Natural Approach that learners should not try to learn a language in the usual sense. The extent to which they can lose themselves in activities involving meaningful communication will determine the amount kind of acquisition they will experience and the fluency they will ultimately demonstrate. The language acquirer is seen as a processor of comprehensible input. The acquirer is challenged by input that is slightly beyond his or her current level of competence and is able to assign meaning to this input through active use of context and extralinguistic information. Learners' roles are seen to change according to their stage of linguistic development. Central to these changing roles are learner decisions on when to speak, what to speak about, and what linguistic expressions to use in speaking. In the pre-production stage students "participate in the language activity without having to respond in the target language" (Krashen and Terrell, 1983; 76). For example, students can act out physical commands, identify student colleagues from teacher description, point to pictures, and so forth. In the early-production stage, students respond to either-or questions, use single words and short phrases, fill in charts, and use fixed conversational patterns (e.g., How are you? What's your name?). In the speech-emergent phase, students involve themselves in role play and games, contribute personal information and opinions, and participate in group problem solving. Learners have four kinds of responsibilities in the Natural Approach classroom:

1. Provide information about their specific goals so that acquisition activities can focus on the topics and situations most relevant to their needs,
2. Take an active role in ensuring comprehensible input. They should learn and use conversational management techniques to regulate input.
3. Decide when to start producing speech and when to upgrade it. 4. Where learning exercises (i.e.) grammar study) are to be a part of the program, decide with the teacher the relative amount of time to be devoted to them and perhaps even complete and correct them independently.

Learners are expected to participate in communication activities with other learners. Finally, the teacher must choose and orchestrate a rich mix of class room activities, involving a variety of group sizes, content, and contexts. The teacher is seen as responsible for collecting materials and designing their use. These materials, according to Krashen and Terrell, are based not just on teacher perceptions but on elicited student needs and interests.

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