# The Model and Metaphor in the Natural Approach*

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## I

The Natural Approach is designed by Tracy D. Terrell and Stephen D. Krashen to develop the student's communicative proficiency. Tracy D. Terrell has been engaged in language teaching and Stephen D. Krashen has proposed five hypotheses on second language acquisition. The approach stresses natural language acquisition by providing comprehensible input to the students in a natural communication-centered way without resorting to teaching grammar or using the student's first language. The present paper attempts to show that it is the instructor's and not the student's responsibility to make communication successful and that the student is not expected to play an active role in communication, by examining the language acquisition model and underlying metaphors of the model employed by the Natural Approach.

## II

The Natural Approach incorporates five hypotheses on language acquisition :

(1)  The acquisition-learning hypothesis which stresses the importance of

acquisition where the student unconsciously masters language, rather than learning based on conscious language study.

(2) The natural order hypothesis which claims that anyone acquires sentence structures and morphemes in the same order, regardless of their age and national differences.

(3) The monitor hypothesis which states that grammatical knowledge consciously learned affects the speaker's utterances and that the degree to which the monitor works depends on each student's personality.

(4) The input hypothesis which stresses the importance of giving comprehensible sentences to the students in a communication-centered rather than grammar-centered way.

(5) The affective filter hypothesis which recommends that the instructor create care-free classroom circumstances so that the students can be open to the input.

The Natural Approach with these hypotheses contends that natural language acquisition can be accomplished by supplying a sufficient amount of comprehensible input in care-free circumstances using only the target language.

The Natural Approach claims that natural language acquisition can be achieved by providing sentences at a level a little higher $(i+1)$ than the student's present level $(i)$. The point here is how the students who are at the $i$ level understand sentences of $i+1$. Krashen proposes to use context, extra-linguistic knowledge and other factors to help the students understand the sentences :

We acquire, in other words, only when we understand language that contains structure that is "a little beyond" where we are now. How is this possible? How can we understand language that contains structures that we have not yet acquired? The answer to this apparent paradox is that we use more than our linguistic competence to help us understand. We also use context, our knowledge of the world, our extra-linguistic information to help us understand language directed at us.[1]

The instructor can make the most of context and extra-linguistic knowledge possessed by the students by restricting his sentences to the "here and now" and by avoiding references to past events or

future plans. Krashen and Terrell remark on this point as follows :

> How can we understand language that contains structures that we have not yet acquired? The answer is through context and extra-linguistic information. Caretakers provide this context for young children by restricting their talk to the "here and now," to what is in the child's domain at the moment. Good second language teachers do this by adding visual aids, by using extra-linguistic context.[2]

For example, the instructor who incorporates the "here and now" into his classroom activity uses a picture which depicts a woman in the following way :

> Is there a woman in this picture?   (Yes)
> Is there a man in the picture?   (No)
> Is the woman old or young? (Young) (K & T : 79)

When the exchanges between the teacher and the students appear to be going smoothly, one might consider that extra-linguistic and visual aids seem to assist the students to understand the instructor's language. This expectation, however, does not always hold true. Barbara Hawkins ran several experiments to research how the communication between a native speaker and a non-native speaker failed even if visual aids were available. One of the experiments went as follows. A native speaker attempted to show the word "help" to a non-native speaker using a picture of a car smoking and a driver who was looking for someone who could help him. The native speaker recognized that the non-native speaker knew the word "car" when he responded "car, yeah" to the native speaker. When the native speaker introduced the word "water," he found that the non-native speaker had already known it. Then he demonstrated a gesture where a

drowning person was asking for "help" in the water as another occasion for using "help." As the non-native speaker did not recognize that his partner turned to the new situation for using "help," his attention was focused on the picture previously shown and took the meaning of "help" to be "shouting for water," associating "help" with the picture of a person looking for someone beside a car smoking.[3]

From a philosophical viewpoint, Ludwig Wittgenstein observes that ostensive definition is open to various interpretations on the part of the learner :

> Now one can ostensively define a proper name, the name of a color, the name of a material, a numeral, the name of a point of the compass and so on. The definition of the number two, "That is called 'two' "—pointing to two nuts—is perfectly exact. —But how can two be defined like that? The person one gives the definition to doesn't know what one wants to call "two" ; he will suppose that "two" is the name given to *this* group of nuts ! —He *may* suppose this ; but perhaps he does not. He might make the opposite mistake ; when I want to assign a name to this group of nuts, he might understand it as a numeral. And he might equally well take the name of a person, of which I give an ostensive definition, as that of a color, of a race, or even of a point of the compass. That is to say : an ostensive definition can be variously interpreted in *every* case.[4]

It deserves to be mentioned that although Wittgenstein's observation on ostensive definition is concerned with the idea of the "here and now" proposed by the Natural Approach, Wittgenstein stresses that the meanings of the utterances are open to the listener's interpretation.

Michael J. Reddy proposes a communication model which incorporates Wittgenstein's idea by describing how individuals who live in different circumstances make tools after receiving a drawing from another person. As shown in Figure 1, the persons A, B, C, D and others live in pie-shaped cells separately and they cannot visit one

another. Each person can only send drawings to one another through the channels set in the central hub.[5]
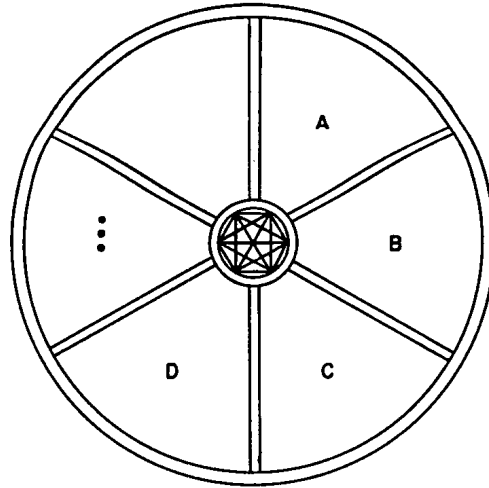


Figure 1    The Toolmakers Paradigm

The circumstances of each cell which differ considerably from cell to cell represent each person's repertoire, namely his internal feelings and thoughts which affect verbal communication, and sending a drawing to another person represents human communication.

Reddy goes on to describe an example of how communication is performed in this "radically subjective" situation (R : 292). He supposes that Person A, living in a place where there are many trees, sends a drawing of a rake which he has made to gather fallen leaves. He sends the blueprint to B who is living in a place where there are many rocks but no trees. B, who does not need to rake fallen leaves, makes the head of a rake out of a rock and uses the tool to dig in the ground, whereas A made the head of the rake out of wood (R : 293–94). This story describes how individual feelings and thoughts affect the interpretation of the message. Just as B interprets A's blueprint in

light of his environment, the listener builds his own meaning out of the speaker's sentences. Reddy argues that in communication meaning is not a substance but a product created by the listener's active interpretation. The obvious difference between the Natural Approach and Reddy's is that the former assumes that extra-linguistic knowledge promotes communication while the latter contends that it causes various interpretations of the speaker's utterances on the part of the listener.

<p align="center">III</p>

The five hypotheses of the Natural Approach are not presented independently but they are closely related to one another. The natural order hypothesis is supported by the empirical fact that morphemes and sentence structures are acquired in the same order by any second language acquirer if taught naturally without grammar instruction. The evidence, in turn, is consistent with Chomsky's theory that human beings are endowed with the language acquisition device. The natural order hypothesis, however, assumes that, unlike Chomsky, the language acquisition device functions even after puberty on the grounds that the natural order, according to Krashen, appears with adult second language acquirers as well as with young acquirers. According to Krashen, as the language acquisition device functions in second as well as in first language acquisition, it is thought to be possible to acquire a second language unconsciously in the same way that children learn a first language.

This idea will lend itself to the acquisition-learning hypothesis which supports natural language acquisition. The input hypothesis

relevant to natural language acquisition urges the teacher to supply as much comprehensible input as possible in the same way that a child acquires a first language by being exposed to comprehensible input, which activates the language acquisition device.

The affective filter hypothesis is concerned with the student's feelings which affect language acquisition. A successful acquirer has a good-self image which will enable him to obtain more input by extensive contact with native speakers out of the class and to get more input from them. Uneasiness and fear, on the other hand, function as a filter to allow only a portion of the input to reach the language acquisition device as Figure 2 illustrates. (K & T : 39)
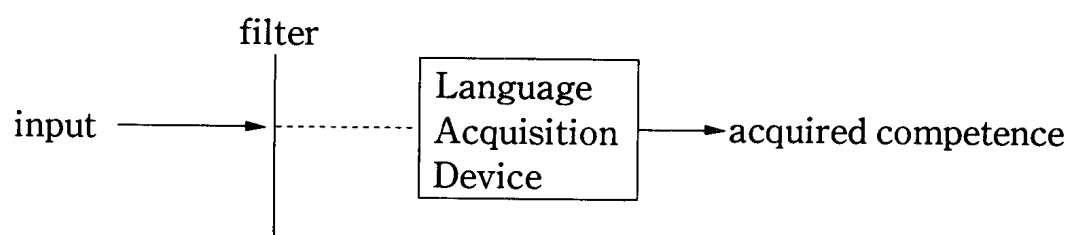


Figure 2    A Model of Second Language Acquisition

It is natural that output or speaking plays a very restricted role in the Natural Approach because the principal element in language acquisition is to get much comprehensible input. The monitor hypothesis, therefore, is endowed with a subsidiary role in the Natural Approach as the authors remark that "not only does learning have only the Monitor function, but research has also revealed that Monitor use itself is very limited," (K & T : 30) whose role is only to modify the forms of the student's speech and writing.

The five hypotheses envision the student to be the recipient of the

teacher's speech and the teacher to be the sender of input, as seen in the remark that

> the true causative variables in second language acquisition derive from the input hypothesis and affective filter—the amount of comprehensible input the acquirer *receives* and understands, and the strength of the affective filter, or the degree to which the acquirer is "*open*" to the input [Italics mine]. (K : 9)

The image of the acquirer as a recipient of input is clear from the words "receive" and "open" in this statement.

The language acquisition model built upon the five hypotheses is compatible with the model about communication. Michael J. Reddy proposes the conduit metaphor, which underlies the expressions on communication. According to Reddy, communication is conceptualized in the following ways :

> (6)  Language functions like a conduit, transferring thoughts bodily from one person to another.
> (7)  In writing and speaking, people insert their thoughts or feelings in the words.
> (8)  Words accomplish the transfer by containing the thoughts or feelings and conveying them to others.
> (9)  In listening or reading, people extract the thoughts and feelings once again from the words. (R : 290)

Based on these tenets, these expressions are used, where (10), (11), (12) and (13) correspond to (6), (7), (8) and (9) respectively :

> (10)  You still haven't *given me* any *idea* of what you mean. (R : 286)
> (11)  You have to *put* each *concept into words* very carefully. (R : 287)
> (12)  *Your writing* must *transfer these ideas to* those who need them. (R : 313)
> (13)  Can you actually *extract* coherent *ideas from* that *prose?* (R : 288)

As Reddy remarks that "a conservative estimate would thus be that, of the entire metalingual apparatus of the English language, at least seventy percent is directly, visibly, and graphically based on the conduit metaphor," (R : 298) the conduit metaphor dominates the thinking as to how communication is performed. The expressions using the conduit metaphor are so familiar to English speaking people that they are not thought to be metaphorical expressions. They are, however, metaphorical in the sense that one's idea is not actually brought to another person nor does the listener/reader actually receive an idea contained in words. In fact, the speaker/writer shares his knowledge, idea and feeling with the listener/reader, since the speaker/writer still has his idea after conveying it to the listener/reader (R : 286).

The Natural Approach is also based on the conduit metaphor as far as the approach is based on communication between the instructor and the student. Krashen and Terrell view language as something which goes from the instructor/speaker to the student/listener. This becomes clear in Statement   (14) :

   (14)   What appears to be crucial is whether the family *language* is *directed at* the child.[6] (K : 64)

The words in italics represent the idea that a message is put into language by the teacher/speaker and conveyed to the student/ listener :

   (15)   The best input is so interesting and relevant that the acquirer may even "forget" that the *message* is *encoded in* a foreign *language*. (K : 66)

(16) According to the Input Hypothesis, language acquisition can only take place when a *message* which is being *transmitted* is understood. (K & T : 165)

The student is seen as a recipient of the message and that student's task is only to extract it from the sentence :

(17) We will suggest tests which try to maintain the focus on *message receiving*. (K & T : 165)

(18) It is essential to test listening comprehension in some form if one of the goals of the course is that the student be able to *extract information from the language spoken*. (K & T : 171)

(19) The Natural Approach allows reading to begin as soon as the student knows enough of the second language to *derive meaning from* the *text*. (K & T : 131)

The conduit metaphor induces the instructor who employs the Natural Approach to see the student as the recipient of the message which is contained in his language.

IV

Reddy points out that the conduit metaphor will lead people to blame the speaker/writer for communication failures since the listener's/reader's task is only to receive and unwrap the package, namely words. Therefore, the following expressions are used to blame the speaker/writer for making unpacking difficult :

(20) That *remark* is completely *impenetrable*. (R : 289)

(21) Whatever *Emily meant, it's* likely to be *locked up in* that cryptic little *verse* forever. (R : 289)

The view of this kind of the role of the speaker/writer raises the

question : "What must the poor speaker do with his thoughts if he is to transfer them more accurately by means of language?" (R : 287) The Natural Approach also stresses the instructor's responsibility for student's language acquisition, since supplying comprehensible input is the essential part in language acquisition. The authors put it this way : " ... perhaps the main function of the second language teacher is to help make input comprehensible ...." (K : 64) The instructor is expected to keep the input at $i+1$ so that the students can understand his language.

Krashen shows two ways in which the teacher facilitates his speech. The first is the linguistic device of using simplified codes, in other words, the teacher puts the meaning into easier words. The characteristics of simplified codes are :

(22) slower rate and clearer articulation, which helps acquirers to identify word boundaries more easily, and allows more processing time ;
(23) more use of high frequency vocabulary, less slang, fewer idioms ;
(24) syntactic simplification, shorter sentences. (K : 64)

The teacher uses simpler speech following the ideas put forth in (22)— (24) when he finds that the students do not understand him. (23) and (24) suggest that meaning is independent of form in the sense that they presume that the same content can be conveyed by different forms.

In the conduit metaphor words are seen as vehicles to carry thoughts and feelings ; Reddy insists that "a good speaker knows how to transfer his thoughts perfectly *via* language [Italics mine]." (R : 287) The conduit metaphor supposes that meaning is separable from form, just as content is independent of the container, when it argues that the speaker's thoughts are transferred via language. This

holds true with the Natural Approach when Krashen and Terrell propose to change the form to facilitate communication. This view is reflected in many expressions used in the Natural Approach such as in the following remarks :

(25) In these methods [Asher's Total Physical Response Method and Terrell's Natural Approach], class time is devoted to providing comprehensible input, where the focus is on the *message* and not the *form*. (K : 30)

(26) The acquirer understands input that contains $i+1$, where "understand" means that the acquirer is focused on the *meaning* and not the *form* of the message. (K : 21)

As these expressions show, communication is successful when the meaning or message is understood by the student, who does not need to pay too much attention to form.

The distinction between form and meaning derives from the presupposition that the same meaning can be conveyed by different forms in the same way that an object can be transferred in different packages. The Natural Approach presents an example of this concept :

Parents attend far more to the truth value of what the child is saying rather than to the form. For example, Brown reports that a sentence such as *Her curl my hair* was not corrected by a parent in one of his studies since its meaning was clear in the context, while *Walt Disney comes on television on Tuesday* was corrected since Walt Disney actually was on television on Wednesdays. (K & T : 27)

Although this anecdote is concerned with the truth value rather than meaning, it is worth mentioning that incorrect form is permitted in this context. Just as one can convey an object not only in a perfect package but in a broken package as far as the broken package keeps

the content intact, incorrect expressions can convey meanings unless the expressions are so poor that the meanings are distorted.

As the conduit metaphor does not expect the listener/reader to interpret the words, the following expression is used :

(27)   You are *reading things into* the poem. (R : 289)

This sentence results from the conduit metaphor which advocates that the reader is only to extract the meaning out of the poem just like taking an object out of a box, and that the interpretation on the part of the reader is considered to be sneaking his thoughts into the poem.

The Natural Approach also downplays the student's interpretation since it sees him to be the receiver of the instructor's language. It follows that the student's task is to try to find the message in the speech or text. Therefore, the following expression is used :

(28)   We can influence the reader's *search for meaning in* a *text* by the sort of questions we ask. (K & T : 137)

This remark implies that the reader can understand meaning only when he succeeds in finding the meaning which the text contains. A foreign language is only noises when it is incomprehensible to the student :

(29)   The beginning student will simply not understand most of the language around him. It will be *noise*, unusable for acquisition. (K : 59)

Since the student╱listener is not considered to have the ability of interpretation, the message is noise when he fails to find the meaning.

Besides simple codes the instructor is to use pictures and gestures which is called "ostensive definition" in Wittgenstein's terminology. While Wittgenstein argues that ostensive definition is open to innumerable interpretations on the part of the student, the Natural Approach does not seem to take this view. The Natural Approach presumes that the student either sees a picture in the same way as the teacher or fails to do so. This presupposition derives from the conduit metaphor which will induce the instructor to consider visual aids to contain substantial meaning free from interpretation.

It can be said that the basic conceptualization on which the Natural Approach is built, namely, the conduit model╱metaphor has downplayed the aspect of the listener's interpretation of expressions. Following the conduit metaphor will lead the teacher to use easier expressions and╱or give other visual aid when he notices that the student does not understand him, since it is the teacher's responsibility to make communication successful. If one devises an approach on the basis of the toolmakers model, he would attempt to study how the students interpret the instructor's language.

## V

This paper attempted to show how the model and metaphors of a language teaching method and╱or approach affect language teaching, focusing on how the Natural Approach develops communication-centered instruction. I pointed out in Section II that the Natural Approach presumes that the student receives the

instructor's language correctly, and that this view is in sharp contrast with what Hawkins, Reddy and Wittgenstein observe. I devoted Section III to the study of the underlying model on which the Natural Approach is based and suggested the approach employs a model where the student is viewed as the receiver of the instructor's speech. The five hypotheses and the conduit metaphor work to develop this idea. In Section IV, I pointed out that the model and metaphor employed in the Natural Approach downplays the student's need for interpretation of the instructor's utterances. I hope that the present paper has clarified to some extent why the Natural Approach does not expect the student to interpret the instructor's speech.

The present study suggests that models and metaphors play a significant role in language teaching. It deserves to be mentioned that everyday metaphors like the conduit metaphor are deeply rooted in communication-centered language teaching such as the Natural Approach. It can be said that the Natural Approach would not have been developed as it is without the conduit metaphor. Metaphor is not merely a linguistic matter but conceptualizes abstract things like communication. By researching metaphors used in language teaching, we will be able to discover how metaphors affect theories and approaches.

## Notes

\*  This is an expanded and revised version of the paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Kansai Branch of English Language Education Society of Japan held at Kansai University, May 28, 1995.
1. Stephen D. Krashen, *Principles and Practice in Second Language*

*Acquisition* (New York : Prentice-Hall International, 1987), p. 21. Hereafter the references to this book will be made by putting the author's name which will be abbreviated to 'K' and the corresponding pages in parentheses.

2. Krashen, Stephen D. and Tracy D. Terrell, *The Natural Approach : Language Acquisition in the Classroom* (Oxford : Pergamon Press, 1983), p. 32. I will henceforth refer to this book with the authors' names abbreviated to 'K & T' and the corresponding pages placed in parentheses.

3. Barbara Hawkins, "Is an 'Appropriate Response' Always So Appropriate?" *Input in Second Language Acquisition*, ed. Gass, S. M. and C. G. Madden (Cambridge : Newbury Publishers, 1985), p. 169.

4. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford : Basil Blackwell, 1958), pp. 13-14.

5. Michael J. Reddy, "The Conduit Metaphor," *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 293. The references to his paper will be made by abbreviating his name to 'R' and the corresponding pages in parentheses.

6. As to (14), (15), (16), (17), (18), (19), (25), (26), (28), and (29) the italics are mine.