An Understanding and Application of the Natural Approach
to Second Language Acquisition

An Honors Project (ID 499)

by

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Muncie, Indiana

05/02/90

Expected Date of Graduation: May 1990
The following instructional unit on travel in a Spanish-speaking country, primarily Spain, is based on Tracy D. Terrell's Natural Approach Method to second-language acquisition. The Natural Approach, outlined as a "proposal for a new philosophy of language teaching" in 1977 (Terrell, 461), is a communicative approach to teaching, which, as the name implies, strives for communicative competence. Communicative competence is defined by Terrell as when "a student can understand the essential points of what a native speaker says to him in a real communication situation and can respond in such a way that the native speaker interprets the response with little or no effort and without errors that are so distracting that they interfere drastically with communication (Omaggio, 75)". In comparison with the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, Terrell's definition falls into the Intermediate level (ILR level 1/1+). At this level a student will have the following characteristics:

1. They can create with the language; that is they can express their own thoughts without relying exclusively on prefabricated or memorized responses to get their meaning across.

2. They are capable of asking questions as well as of answering them. They answer with longer phrases or full sentences and are capable of holding up their own
end of the conversation by making inquiries and offering more elaborate responses.

3. They have at least a minimal level of sociolinguistic competence in that they can handle everyday social encounters (greetings, leave takings, polite formulas, etc.) with some degree of appropriateness.

4. They can handle simple survival situations that one might expect to encounter while travelling or residing in the target culture.

5. Their discourse is characterized by simple sentences or phrases, normally limited to present time, with little use of cohesive devices or embedded sentence structure. Their speech is usually quite inaccurate and vocabulary is quite limited. (Omaggio, 16-17).

It is easy to see from these that the goal behind communicative competence is not for a student to be at the same level of a native speaker, but rather for the student to be able to survive in the target language culture. This also is the goal of the following unit. Its purpose is not to lead students to the native-speaker level (Superior level, 5 on the ACTFL Scale) but to the competence level needed simply to survive and communicate while travelling in a Spanish-speaking country. However, before the unit is begun, I feel that a deeper understanding of the Natural Approach is needed.

The Natural Approach is based on Krashen's Monitor Model of second-language acquisition. This is comprised of five hypotheses:
1. The Acquisition-Learner distinction states that there are two distinct and independent ways of developing competence in a second-language: acquisition, which is a sub-conscious process similar, if not identical, to the way children develop ability in their first language; and learning, which refers to the conscious knowledge of rules of grammar.

2. The Natural-Order hypothesis, which maintains that acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order when acquisition is natural (not formal).

3. The Monitor hypothesis, which states that acquisition is the sole initiator of all second-language utterances and is responsible for fluency, while learning (conscious knowledge of rules) can function only as an editor or monitor for the output.

4. The Input hypothesis, which maintains that we acquire more language only when we are exposed to comprehensible input—language that contains structures that are a little beyond our current level of competence (i+1), but which is comprehensible through our use of context, our knowledge of the world, and other extralinguistic cues. Acquirers go for meaning first, and as a result, acquire structure as well. Also, input does not have to be deliberately planned to contain appropriate structures, that is, i+1. If communication is successful and there is enough of it, i+1 is provided automatically. The final part to this hypothesis states that speaking fluency cannot be taught directly, but emerges naturally over time. Although early speech is not grammatically correct, accuracy will develop over time as the acquirer hears and understands more input.

The last part of this hypothesis has direct implications for a foreign language classroom in that it suggests that the correction of errors while acquisition is taking place is of no importance and does not help in the acquiring of a second language. This will be
discussed more in-depth later.

5. The Affective-Filter hypothesis states that acquisition only takes place when (i) the acquirer is motivated, (ii) the acquirer is self-confident and has a good self-image, (iii) a low anxiety level exists in the classroom. (Omaggio, 29-30).

These five hypotheses have direct implications in a second-language classroom where the Natural Approach is used. First of all, there should be a distribution of learning and acquisition activities. If communication is more important than the correct form, then classroom activities should be designed to evoke communication. This means that the entire period should be devoted to communication, especially in a beginning level classroom. However, the Natural Approach does not do away with grammatical and instructional explanations (learning activities) altogether. Terrell says that explanations must be clear enough so that time is not wasted in grammatical lectures or manipulative exercises. The practice of linguistic forms should be done outside of class, for the most part. It is suggested that teachers make specific assignments, collect the students' work, and provide some type of systematic feedback on that written work, just as long as the students realize that their primary responsibility is for the improvement in the quality of output, not how well they know the linguistic forms.
Also, to keep the affective filter low, students are permitted to respond in both their native language and the language being acquired, especially in a lower-level classroom. Here the emphasis is on the message and not necessarily the response. When striving for listening comprehension, the teacher uses comprehensible input. This is characterized by the following traits:

1. A slower rate, clear articulation, diminished contractions, longer pauses, extra volume.
2. Use of explanations, paraphrases, gestures, pictures.
3. Simplification of syntax through the use of simple propositions and redundancy.
4. The use of discourse techniques, such as yes/no questions, tag questions, either/or questions, and the provision of a possible answer with the question. (Omaggio, 75-77).

Finally, there should be no error correction in acquisition activities; however it is of some importance, or rather, not unnecessary, when used with cognitive-based learning of grammatical rules and structures. If used in acquisition activities, the correction of speaking errors will create affective barriers and nullify the Affective-Filter hypothesis, therefore hindering acquisition. The correction of speech errors plays no important role in the progress toward a student's model of grammar in any natural language-acquisition situation, and besides, it also tends to focus the speaker on form at the
expense of acquisition (Terrell, 474). This is reinforced by what Krashen stated earlier, that "accuracy will develop over time as the acquirer hears and understands more input". Accuracy will not develop through the correction of errors, in fact this will hinder, or even prevent, acquisition and therefore communicative competence, the goal of the Natural Approach, from taking place.

All this about no error correction, classtime being devoted mostly to communication, and allowing students to respond in their native language may draw, and in fact has drawn, criticism from users and supporters of more traditional approaches, such as the grammar-translation method. One of the major contentions why these people oppose a communicative approach is that they feel those who learn grammar inductively, through a communicative approach, fail to learn grammar as well as those who are taught grammar deductively. However, a study was conducted at two universities during four semesters that proves this contention to be wrong. In this study (Hammond, 409-410) there were eight sections of first-semester Spanish (experimental groups) who were taught using the Natural Approach. There were fifty-two sections (control groups) who were taught using a modified grammar-translation methodology. All sixty groups were
required to take the same mid-term and final exams. These were department-administered, traditional discrete point exams that tested students' ability to manipulate cognitively the grammatical structures presented during the course of the semester. They contained English to Spanish translations, dehydrated sentences, reading passages, a composition section, and a fill-in-the-blank section with appropriate verb forms, vocabulary items, possessive adjectives, relative pronouns, direct and indirect object pronouns, comparatives, etc. For a supporter of the grammar-translation method the results of this study are surprising, for on both tests the average scores of the experimental groups were in all cases higher than the average scores of the control groups in each of the four semesters.

**Mid-term**
- first semester: 87.4% to 83.8%
- second semester: 84.3% to 80.6%
- third semester: 85.2% to 80.3%
- fourth semester: 89.9% to 85.3%

**Final**
- first semester: 82.7% to 78.8%
- second semester: 80.7% to 78.3%
- third semester: 82.5% to 78.8%
- fourth semester: 77.7% to 75.9%

The results of this study are testament to the fact that those taught using the Natural Approach do learn grammar even when it is not emphasized in the course of the instructional period. Since the goal of the Natural
Approach is communication, and since grammar is acquired at the same time at an equal, if not better, level as a traditional method, then Natural Approach instruction has a definite advantage over traditional methods, for learning is not the objective, but rather acquisition.

There are many techniques that can be used to help in acquisition. Terrell has divided the Natural Approach into three stages of language instruction with each stage implementing different techniques. The first stage is the Comprehension, or Pre-production, stage. For a beginning class this is the stage where students are not required to speak in the target language. Their responsibility is to listen to try to understand what the teacher is saying. The teacher is to provide the listening comprehension experiences. Some techniques that one can use here are as follows:

1. The instructor makes use of students' names and descriptions. By referring to individuals in the class, the instructor makes comments on personal characteristics and descriptions using "teacher talk". The instructor then asks the class questions about who and what was talked about.

2. The instructor shows pictures while describing what is in the pictures, emphasizing the key lexical items. The pictures are handed out to the students and questions are asked. The questions addressed to the class consist of information about the picture which can be answered with the name of the person who is holding that particular picture.
3. Another activity can be used in which students learn each others names and at the same time acquire other information. Topics such as sports, classes, games, birthdays and work can be used. The instructor supplies the class with the target language equivalent and then asks questions about who does what, who is what, etc. The idea is that a particular topic is associated with a particular student (Terrell, 470).

4. This last one is TPR (Total Physical Response), developed by James Asher. The basis of this technique is that understanding and retention are best achieved through movement of the students' bodies in response to commands. TPR is unique in that it can be used at many levels of language instruction, not just in the beginning levels. In the beginning levels individual commands are given by the instructor to which the students are to physically respond. After individual commands, then commands in succession are given, both modeled by the instructor. After several times the instructor drops out of the action but continues to give the commands. After single word commands, full sentence commands are given. In levels higher than beginning (Comprehension level) other TPR activities are used, such as role-reversal, where the students give the commands. Other activities include skits and other problem-solving situations (Omaggio, 72-75).

After activities such as these used in the Comprehension stage, students will be ready to move on to the Early Speech Production stage. Students starting this stage will have about a five-hundred word vocabulary, should start shying away from their native language, and will be able to answer questions with one or two words or in short phrases. There are a number of activities that can be used at this stage. First of all there are yes/no questions, either/or questions, and tag questions where one word answers are sufficient. Students then move on to
answering in two words, giving lists for answers and finally to completing open sentences, open dialogues, or open interviews where either one-word or multiword responses are acceptable.

The next stage is the Speech-Emergence stage. Here students will start to respond in phrases and complete sentences. Like in the other two stages most of the activities presented are affective ones. Games and recreation activities focus the students on what it is they are doing and use the language as a tool for participating. Information and problem-solving activities are useful in preparing students to function in the country in which the language is spoken. Affective-humanistic activities explore the students' values, ideas, opinions, goals, feelings, and experiences. Finally, content activities use the target language to discuss topics in other areas such as history, art, literature, music, etc. (Terrell, 475).

It is in this final stage of language instruction where the following unit will take place. It is made for those students desiring to travel, or perhaps live, in a Spanish-speaking country; therefore, many of the activities will be taken from those presented in the Speech-Emergence stage, such as problem-solving situations. The students with whom the unit is used should be at or near the Intermediate level (1/1+) of the ACTFL Proficiency guidelines, whose
characteristics are once again:

1. Students can create with the language.

2. They are capable of asking and answering questions.

3. They have at least a minimal level of sociolinguistic competence.

4. They can handle a simple survival situation.

5. Their discourse is characterized by simple sentences or phrases in the present time.
Before the introduction of the unit itself, it must be noted that it is based upon the author's own personal experiences. The unit does not contain all the dialogue, all the questions, and all the activities that can be used in instruction of this kind. Although it can be used literally, it can also be used solely as a guideline. Therefore, those who use it can feel free to exchange their experiences with the author's, add their own comments and questions, and create new or more appropriate activities.

The unit is a progressive one in which activities move from being teacher-directed (parts 1-3) to student-directed (parts 4-7).

Part 1: **Listening Comprehension** This part implements the use of comprehensible input. The script should be used at a slower rate and stress the important words or structures. The use of realia such as maps, money, pictures, food, clothing, etc. is strongly suggested. This can be used only as a guide, so any variances are permissible. It is divided into five sections to differentiate between subjects. The sections can be used as a whole or as separate parts.

Part 2: **Questions** These questions refer to Part 1. They contain si/no questions and one or two-word answers. Teachers can elaborate on any of the questions.

Part 3: **TPR and Affective exercises** These activities also refer back to Part 1. These move in a progressive manner from teacher-directed to student-directed. However, to keep the affective filter low, students
should not be forced to participate in the student-directed phase.

Part 4: Situational activities. These will start to incorporate the vocabulary and structures acquired through the listening, TPR, and questions. The solutions will include multi-word answers and one or two phrase answers. The movement is now from teacher-directed to student-directed. However, the teacher should still stay involved, acting as a model or a reference for the students.

Part 5: Skits. Using as a guide the situational activities or by going out on their own, the students create skits to perform for the class. The length of the skits and the rules are up to the teacher, but the author suggests skits with a minimum of eight lines per person and a maximum of one-half hour of preparation. Students must continue to incorporate all previously acquired material.

Part 6: Problem-solving situations. The class should be divided into groups of five. Each group is presented with a problem and must discuss how to solve it. At the end they will share their problem and solution with the whole class. Logical sequence of events and the use of acquired material are important.

Part 7: This activity can be used as a final evaluation of the students' progress through the unit. When presented with a situation, the groups must figure out what must be done, organize it logically, and present the solution as a skit for the entire class. Since communication and organization are what is important, scripts can be used. The skits should be approximately ten minutes in length. All groups have the same situation. This not only allows students to see different results to the same situation, but also will help in the further acquisition of what they have acquired already in the entire unit through repetition.

Part 8: Vocabulary and exercises. A vocabulary list with words used frequently throughout the unit is presented. Three vocabulary activities follow the list. It is best to assign them as out-of-class work, but if any time is to be spent on them in class, it must be kept to a very brief explanation and not a detailed discussion. The learning of this vocabulary will act as a monitor for the acquisition of the material.
Part 1 Listening Comprehension

A. Para usar el Metro primero compra un billete. Segundo, mira el mapa y escoge a donde quieres ir. Espera el tren y cuando llegue, subes al tren. Cuando llegues a tu estación, bajas del tren.

using map Aquí está la Calle Corazón de María. para llegar a la estación del Metro Alfonso XIII, hay que seguir derecho, pasar por dos cuadras, cruzar esta calle, doblar a la izquierda aquí, y doblar a la derecha aquí. La estación está aquí.

Yo vivía aquí. Para llegar a la escuela, tenía que tomar el Metro. Subía en la estación Alfonso XIII y bajaba en la estación Velázquez. Andaba por la Calle Goya y doblaba a la izquierda en la Calle Castelló. La escuela está aquí.


using money C. El dinero de España es la peseta. Hay monedas de una peseta, cinco pesetas, diez pesetas, cincuenta pesetas, (etc.). Hay billetes de quinientas pesetas, mil pesetas, cinco mil pesetas, (etc.). Si una cosa vale noventa pesetas, y yo pago cien pesetas, me dan diez pesetas de cambio. Si una cosa vale ciento cuarenta pesetas, y yo pago doscientos pesetas, me dan sesenta pesetas de cambio.


E. Hay muchos cafés y restaurantes en Madrid. Se come el
desayuno en la mañana por las ocho. Se come el almuerzo por la una de la tarde. Por las seis de la tarde se suele ir a un café para comer tapas. Una tapa es una clase de aperitivo que se come entre el almuerzo y la cena. Se come la cena muy tarde en Madrid. Se la come por las nueve de la noche.

Part 2 Questions

A. 1. ¿Tenemos el equivalente del Metro en los E.E.U.U.?  
2. ¿Cómo se llama?  
3. ¿Lo has usado?  
4. ¿Crees que sería difícil o fácil usar el Metro?  
5. (refer to map) Si vives aquí y quieres ir aquí, ¿cuáles estaciones usas?

B. 1. ¿Tenemos el equivalente de Plazas en los E.E.U.U.?  
2. El Corte Inglés es un almacén. ¿Qué crees que se vende?  
3. ¿Qué necesitas para cambiar dinero en el banco?  
4. ¿Dónde obtienes una pasaporte?  
5. ¿Cuál es tu dirección?

C. 1. Un dólar americano es 120 pesetas. Si una cosa vale 200 pesetas, ¿es cara o barata?  
2. Si una cosa vale 5.000 pesetas, ¿es cara? Y 10.000 pesetas, ¿cuál es?  
3. ¿Cuánto crees que vale un coche nuevo en pesetas?  
4. ¿Cuánto crees que vale un par de zapatos Nike?

D. 1. ¿Tenemos plazas en los E.E.U.U.?  
2. ¿Te gusta ir a los parques?  
3. ¿Te gusta pasearte?  

E. 1. ¿Te gustaría comer la cena a las nueve de la noche?  
2. La comida española no es como la mexicana, ¿Qué crees que se come en España?  
3. ¿Sería fácil o difícil acostumbrarte a esta comida?
Part 3 TPR and Affective exercises

A. The first exercise is a true TPR exercise. The teacher gives directions to students in the form of commands. They are first given to one student at a time, then more students are gradually added. After one-word commands, commands in succession can be given.

examples of commands: camina, dobla a la derecha, dobla a la izquierda, para, cruza, sigue derecho, etc.

B. The next exercise will use the classroom as a model city. Assign several students as landmarks and give them nametags with the name of the landmark they represent. Arrange the desks to form streets. Then direct students through the streets to the landmarks.

C. This is a simple market activity. Supply the students with items to sell and some kind of currency, real or imaginary. Divide the class into two groups, the sellers and the buyers. Send the buyers around the room to the different sellers and have them purchase the items being sold. Tell the sellers to arrive at a good price for their products and tell the buyers to try to bargain with the sellers. You might suggest useful words such as cambio, billete, dinero, cuánto vale?, etc.

D. Once again assign students as landmarks. This time ask students what they want to do (eat, dance, walk, etc.) and where they will have to go to do this. Then direct them through the streets to their destination.

E. This is a restaurant activity. Break the class into groups of five and supply each group with a menu. The teacher will act as a waiter and go from "table" to "table" taking orders. Like the previous two activities one-word answers are the preferred response. Also, in this activity lists are possible.

Now all of the above exercises can be change to student-directed exercises where the role of the teacher is replaced with a student. Students will give the commands, ask the questions, etc.
Part 4  Situational Activities

1. Looking at a map of Madrid groups will discuss when and where they want to go and write it down in itinerary form.

Queremos tomar una jira por Madrid. ¿A donde quieres ir? Planeemos un itinerario y decidamos a cuáles sitios vamos.

2. This can be done individually or in groups.

Quieres ir de compras y decides ir al Corte Inglés. Haz una lista de las cosas que necesitas. Después escribe cuanto vale cada cosa en pesetas. ¿Tienes bastante dinero?

3. Discute con un amigo los planes para el día. Incluye lo que quieres hacer y lo que no quieres hacer, donde Uds. se reúnen y a donde van. Piensen Uds. en actividades interesantes que pueden hacer.

4. This can be done in groups.

Tú estás encargado de la comida. Pregúntales a tus amigos que les falta a Uds. y preparen una lista. Trata de recordar y usar la comida que has aprendido.

5. Dile a tu amigo como llegar a la estación del Metro Alfonso XIII desde la estación Serrano.

Part 5  Skits

Refer to page 12 for this activity.
Part 6 Problem-solving Situations

1. Referring to a map, you are at one side of Madrid and must get to the other side. You can walk and/or take the Metro. How are you going to get there?

2. You just ran out of money and need to exchange some at a bank. Remember what you need to exchange money. Also, the exchange rate is at 120 ptas. for 1 dollar. Decide how much you will have in ptas. when you exchange your American money.

3. You are at the Rastro (the large flea market in Madrid) and you want to buy a tablecloth as a gift for your mother. It costs 2000 ptas. but you think that is too much and you want the vendor to lower the price. What would you say?

4. A friend is lost somewhere near the Plaza Mayor. It is up to you guys to find him. Looking at a map decide how and where you are going to look for him. The airplane back to the United States leaves in two hours, so hurry.

Part 7 Refer to page 13 for how to use this activity.

Situation: Present a full day's events. You can include meals (what to eat and where), points of interest you are going to see, how you are getting there, how much money you will need, where you are going shopping, and anything else you can think of. Don't just present it as a monologue. Be creative and use your imagination.
**Vocabulario**

**verbos**
andar (caminar)- to walk  
bajar de- to get off of  
buscar- to look for  
cambiar (dinero)- to exchange (money)  
cruzar (la calle)- to cross (the street)  
dar un paseo- to take a walk  
doblar (a la izquierda)- to turn (left)  
\hspace{1cm} (a la derecha) - (right)  
pagar- to pay  
pasearse- to stroll, to take a walk  
pedir- to order, to ask for, to request  
reunirse- to meet (with someone)  
seguir derecho- to continue straight ahead  
subir a- to get on  
valer- to be worth  
\hspace{1cm} (vale)- (it is worth, it costs)

**Sustantivos**
acera- sidewalk  
almuerzo- lunch  
avenida- avenue  
bebida- drink  
billete- bill (paper money)  
café (al aire libre)- (outside) cafe  
calle- street  
cambio- change  
cena- supper  
centro- downtown  
cuadra- city block  
desayuno- breakfast  
dirección-address  
discoteca- discotheque  
esquina- corner  
estación- station (of the Metro)  
mercado- market  
monedas- coins  
pasaporte- passport  
postre- dessert  
restaurante- restaurant
Ejercicios de vocabulario

Llena el espacio con la palabra apropiada.

A. Yo subo al Metro en la ______ Alfonso XIII y ______ de él en Goya. Desde allí ______ derecho por la Calle Goya hasta la Calle Castello donde ______ a la izquierda. Allí en la ______ de Castello y Goya está el mercado.

B. En Madrid se come el ______ por las ocho de la mañana, el ______ por las dos, y la ______ por las diez de la noche. Se puede comer en un ______ o un ______ al aire libre.
C. Completa las siguientes frases y usa las palabras para llenar el crucigrama.

**horizontal**

1. Ten cuidado en _______ la calle.
2. Vamos a _______ en la Plaza de Colón.
3. Me gusta _______ un paseo por el parque.
4. Esta bolsa _______ 1500 pesetas.
5. Helado es un _______.
6. _______ son de papel.
7. Yo pago más que vale. Me dan _______.
8. Los negocios están en el _______.
9. Limonada es una _______.
10. El mercado está cinco _______ de aquí.

**vertical**

1. Necesitas tu pasaporte y dirección para _______ dinero.
2. Yo te _______ 1000 ptas. por la bolsa.
3. Bailamos en la _______.
4. ¿Qué vas a _______ para comer?
5. Tengo que _______ la casa de un amigo.
6. Hay _______ de una, cinco, diez, y cincuenta pesetas.
7. Una _______ es una calle grande.
8. No se camina en la calle sino en la _______.

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Notes


Bibliography


