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Purposeful Listening for ESL Students

by Yoshihiro Nakamura

In reality, the listener listens with a purpose. He/She may turn on the radio to get weather information or attend a lecture to learn how a micro-computer can be used. No matter what the purpose may be, it affects the listener's speech perception. That is, the listener does not listen for every detail. Instead, the listener listens for meaning that is relevant to a purpose, paying much less attention to or ignoring irrelevant information.

In many ESL classes, however, teachers tend to assign listening exercises with no guidance as to what students are supposed to listen for. Students are expected to understand every detail. The result is that listening comprehension becomes unnecessarily difficult and sometimes even painful for students. Thus, students may give up even before they finish listening to a whole text when they do not understand certain of its words or sentences.

The teacher needs to encourage students to listen for and extract only the most important information. To accomplish this, the teacher must carefully prepare listening exercises which guide the students in their listening tasks. This article is meant to provide some general guidelines for ESL teachers regarding what to consider in the preparation of such listening materials.

Linguistic Factors to be Considered in the Preparation of Listening Exercises

Informal spoken English. Even students who understand classroom English (e.g., teachers' instructions and questions) very well are often unable to understand everyday conversation, radio and TV programs, etc. The main reason for their lack of comprehension stems from their lack of training in informal spoken English. Whether modeled by the teacher or recorded on tape, explicitly and precisely pronounced formal spoken English is what students are usually exposed to.

However, once students step out of the classroom or the language laboratory, they no longer hear English produced clearly word by word, phrase by phrase, and sentence by sentence. In informal speech,

> when the speaker is concentrating on what he is saying, and not how he is saying it, he will tend to articulate in the most efficient manner--he will make articulatory gestures that are sufficient to allow the units of his message to be identified but he will reduce any articulatory gesture whose explicit movement is not necessary to the comprehension of his message (Brown 1977:53).

For instance, "give me" and "want to" may be heard as "gimme" and "wanna" respectively. Students need opportunities to become accustomed to this type of informal spoken English as well as formal English.

Variations in English. Interaction in English takes place not only with native speakers but also between non-native speakers. Students trained only in explicitly pronounced formal English may have difficulty in understanding informal English spoken by native speakers of other languages. Further, the spoken English of speakers from different educational backgrounds and occupations often exhibits numerous idiosyncratic features. Students need to be exposed to these many varieties of English also.

Noise. When students listen to English in the classroom or the language laboratory, the acoustic environment is usually excellent. However, in the real world, learners are often required to understand what is said against background noise. For example, they need to comprehend announcements made at airports or bus/train stations over loud speakers. In many such cases, the sound signal is far from clear and listening becomes extremely difficult for students. It can be argued, then, that students should also be trained to listen in a situation where comprehension is made difficult due to external interference.

Speech Rate. ESL students often claim that they do not understand a spoken message because the speaker speaks too fast. Natural speech rate varies from speaker to speaker with 160-220 words per minute considered to be average. Rates above 220 wpm and below 130 wpm are considered abnormally fast or slow (Rivers 1981:173). Within this range, however, English spoken at different rates of speed (fast speech in particular) should be provided for student practice.

Pedagogical Perspectives

Exercise or Memory Test? Listening activities can be divided into three stages: pre-listening, listening and post-listening. In the ESL classroom, the teacher often puts too great an emphasis on the listening and post-listening stages. Typically, the teacher plays a recorded text for students once or twice. Then students are asked to answer questions verbally or in writing. Questions are such that they cannot be answered without detailed information. As a result, listening exercises are primarily a test of memory. If the purpose of listening exercises is to train students to listen and extract the important information, they should be designed and conducted for that purpose.

Pre-listening. Students need to prepare for listening. As Brown (1978:278) points out, "if an adult native speaker of English switches on the radio in the middle of a talk, he may have to listen for several sentences before he 'gets his ear in', and before he could tell you what was the topic which the speaker was discussing." Thus, it stands to reason that the teacher cannot expect ESL students to instantly comprehend a taped conversation.

It should also be noted that we perceive partly in terms of what we want and expect to hear. Even before we listen, we have certain knowledge of who is going to talk, with whom, about what topic, and in what situation. Therefore, students need to be provided with such information prior to actually listening. For instance, if the teacher is going to play a taped lecture on the latest developments in the treatment of cancer, it may be necessary to tell stu-

dents what the topic is, who the speaker is, and more importantly what information students are to extract. The teacher may have to provide a list of medical terms with which students are not familiar and explain what these terms mean. Without such preparation, students cannot be expected to listen effectively.

Listening. At this stage, students complete a given task while listening, not after listening. In this manner, students do not have to jot down and/or try to remember every detail. Instead, they can concentrate on listening and getting the important information which is relevant to the task. After all, isn't that what we do in real life when we listen? If we need every detail

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on a topic, we refer to books, reports, etc. Why should students be expected to understand and remember every detail when they listen?

Post-listening. The post-listening stage should be an open forum between the teacher and students. For both the teacher and students, this is the time to discuss as openly as possible what has not been completed, what has been done incorrectly, and why. Further, the teacher should consider what remains for students to learn in order to improve their listening skills. Students should be encouraged to express freely what they think they need to be taught. They may even come up with useful ideas for future listening exercises.

Task-based Listening
Comprehension Exercises

One of the best ways to make listening purposeful is to include tasks in the exercises. In this task-based approach, students are required not only to understand messages

but also to work out and accomplish given tasks.

Commonly used exercises involve matching or sequencing a set of pictures. Although somewhat contrived and unrealistic, these activities can still provide meaningful listening practice. For instance, the teacher gives students pictures of two apples, five apples, six oranges and three oranges. Then the teacher says "Tom bought six oranges and two apples." Students are required to pick out corresponding pictures. Another activity is to give students a set of pictures. Then the teacher reads a short story. The student's task is to sequence the pictures in accordance with the story.

Other familiar exercises are to draw a map or a picture as instructed, or to locate things and people (e.g., finding a hidden diamond or a thief at large in a maze). In any case, the important point is that students are required to complete given tasks while listening rather than after listening.

It was earlier noted that students need to practice listening to announcements made over speakers at airports and bus or train stations. In order to get authentic materials, the teacher should try to record actual announcements made at such places. If it is not possible to do this, the teacher may have to simulate announcements-- including background noise. Littlewood (1981:72) presents a good example of how to structure this type of exercise:

Destination	Time of Departure	Platform	Calling at
Bristol			
		8	
	13:17		

Students listen to a series of station announcements and fill in the missing information about train schedules.

Various types of recorded materials from TV and radio broadcasts are also valuable. For instance, news programs usually report sports results. The teacher can play a pre-recorded news broadcast and have students note the important information. For example,

Sport	Teams	Score
Baseball		
Volleyball	Japan - U.S.A.	10-15
Soccer		

The teacher can also utilize conversations taped from various talk shows. These programs are very useful because they exhibit informal English spoken by different people and cover a wide variety of topics. They can also serve as take-off points for task-oriented listening exercises.

Dictation, note-taking and listening for pleasure are other valuable listening exercises. They are not discussed here, however, since most teachers are already familiar with them.

Final Remark

Listening has been considered a passive skill. This notion has misled many classroom practitioners to think that students will improve their listening skill naturally if they are merely exposed to spoken language. However, current studies on listening comprehension suggest that listening is an active skill and students need to be trained to listen actively. Therefore, the teacher is required, more than ever, to consider what is involved in the process of listening comprehension, what is necessary to develop students' listening skills, and how they might be developed effectively in an actual classroom setting. The task-based approach to listening comprehension is one way this can be done.

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The Relative Intelligibility of British and American English

by J. Donald Bowen and Don Porter

American teachers of English overseas are frequently confronted with the claim that American English is more difficult to understand than British English. This opinion is understandable given the extensive British experience in English teaching around the world. British English (BE) will often be more familiar and by that reason alone should be easier to understand. There is also the undoubted prestige of BE that contributes to its value on the world market.

But is BE *inherently* clearer and more intelligible than AE? The opposite opinion has been voiced, by British as well as other speakers of English, including non-native-speakers, citing complexities of phonological structure and of stress patterns that could very well make BE comparatively harder to comprehend.

The relative intelligibility of AE and BE needs investigation and discussion. The question can be put to test by developing an examination with a central oral component, voicing it separately in standard British and standard American English, and giving both versions of the test to numerous categories of subjects (native/non-native, students of English who have had pedagogical contact with teachers that are British/American, or students whose teachers studied with British or American speakers).

The present paper offers data that attempt to confirm or modify the claim of greater clarity for BE. We have utilized as our instrument to evaluate the alleged dialect contrast a test developed by one of the present authors, designated the "Integrative Grammar Test," or IGT (Bowen, 1976). It is a test given orally (on tape) with a brief student response in written form. The task is to identify and write down the second word in each recorded sentence.

Answers are thus simple and the test is efficient, presenting an item each six or seven seconds, so a hundred-item test can be administered in about thirteen minutes (plus about four minutes for initial test instructions). The test has a successful research history; data from seven hundred administrations have posted a validity coefficient of .866 when compared to the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency, with a reliability coefficient of .968 on test-retest data.

METHOD

Identical forms of the IGT were voiced separately in British 'Received Pronunciation' and Standard American Pronunciation. Interpretations were recorded at the same level of formality and were comparable in speed and pacing, loudness, and general clarity.

Each subject included in the present study took the test twice--once in each voicing. Comparable groups were matched, or groups were divided into random halves, with one half taking the American version first, the other the British version first. This procedure allows us to compute group mean scores separately for the performance of dialect[1] groups and sequence groups.

The results are given in Table 1. Eleven groups of subjects are listed, reporting 259 administrations yielding two scores for each subject; 126 took the American and 133 the British voicing first.

The table lists the groups, the major dialect of their training, whether they are native speakers of English or not, the date they were tested, the number of examinees, and mean scores for the British and American forms of the IGT (corrected for sequence) and for the sequence order (corrected for dialect).

Table 1. Data Summary[2]

Group	Dialect of Training	English Status	Date Tested	N	Combined Performance Data				Correlations by Group	
					AM	BR	1st	2nd	AM1-BR2	BR1-AM2
ITEP 79	BE	NNS	6-79	31	39.3	40.0	35.5	43.7	.92	.90
ITEP 80	BE	NNS	6-80	23	44.3	39.1	37.7	45.6	.96	.95
ITEP 81	BE	NNS	6.81	33	48.3	46.9	43.0	52.2	.87	.98
Northrup	AE	NNS	7-78	32	20.2	19.2	17.4	22.0	.80	.82
Reading	BE	NNS	6-81	12	30.0	27.0	25.3	31.8	.99	.64
CUECOS	BE	NNS	6-81	31	14.2	12.5	11.9	14.8	.87	.87
WELC	BE	NNS	7-81	11	24.3	20.2	19.1	25.4	.33	.78
LSL HH-H	BE	NNS	7-81	12	13.4	11.3	11.3	13.5	.69	.90
Misc Teen & Adult	BE	NS	7-81	14	89.0	89.4	85.2	93.2	.77	.71
UCLA Grad Students	AE	NS	2-82	13	93.2	89.2	88.6	93.8	.55	.24
UCLA ESL Students	AE	NNS	4-82	47	39.1	34.7	33.1	40.7	.95	.91

SUBJECTS

The groups tested include: ITEP (Italian Teachers of English Program)--groups of about thirty-five secondary and middle school English teachers sent to UCLA for special summer training courses from 1979 to 1982; Northrup, a university sponsored by a well-known aviation technology corporation, whose students can be considered semi-academic; Reading University, England; CUECOS (Cardiff University English Centre for Overseas Students)--a program that includes short-term and vacation students; WELC (Windsor English Language Centre)--a commercial language school, as is LSL HHH (Language Studies Limited, Heath House, Hampstead). The British native speakers are an ad hoc group gathered mainly from Slough, a small city west of London. The UCLA graduate students are enrolled in a postgraduate program in TESL. The students in the UCLA ESL group are at the high intermediate level, the highest level of instruction required of foreign students entering the university with a language deficiency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are several notable features of these scores to call attention to:

1. There is considerable diversity in the mean scores, ranging from 11.3 points for the lowest group to 93.8 for the highest. This reflects the diversity of the subjects examined, who range from students in advanced academic standing to casual students in commercial language schools.

2. The mean scores show a range that is comparable to previous administrations of

the test in that native speakers score in the eighties and nineties and non-native speakers are spread, presumably on the basis of their competence in English, in groups with mean scores ranging from 11.3 to 46.9. The performance of native speakers is clearly distinguished by much higher scores than non-native speakers normally achieve.

3. For all groups it is noted that variation in dialect scores is smaller than the variation in sequence scores. This seems to indicate that relatively little importance is attached to dialect differences, but that subjects learn rapidly and achieve substantially better

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scores with test experience. Variation in dialect scores ranges from .4 to 5.2 points, with a mean range of 2.5. On the other hand, there is a consistent gain for sequence ranging from 2.2 to 9.2 points with a mean range of 6.5, almost three times greater than the mean range for dialect variation.

4. Coefficients of correlation between performance on the two versions of the test are very high: mostly in the .80 to .90 range for the non-native speakers, though somewhat lower for the native speakers, whose lower correlations in large part are due to the limited spread between the maximum and minimum performance in these native-speaker groups.

The conclusion one draws from these data is that dialect variation is relatively unimportant in the testing situation: one can expect a similar score whether the test is given by an American voice or a British voice. Native speakers usually do a little better in their own dialect than they do in the other dialect. However, the difference for British speakers is a very small four-tenths of a point. It will be noted, however, that non-native subjects overall tend to score better on the American-voiced test, a result which we will address later in this paper.

Comparison of British and American Responses

It is instructive to look at the differences in British and American performance, which we have done by means of an evaluation of the individual items in the two sets of test scores.[3]

Most interesting for our purposes are items that one dialect group, American or British native speakers, finds more demanding than does the other.

Some of the British-voiced items are more difficult than the same items when American-voiced. A conspicuous example is:

What's been done to improve this class?

In BE *been* is pronounced /biyn/, making it similar to *being,* pronounced informally /biyən/, which would require the auxiliary verb *is* instead of the intended *has (What has been done . . .* vs *What is being done . . .).* Interestingly, the American voice is here more accurately interpreted by subjects from either dialect!

Another item involves a postvocalic *r*-sound that in British is a centering glide. With this substitution American *Heard 'er come in just a few minutes ago* is pronounced in British English *Hudda come in . . .*--with the result that the American listener is confused.

Was their other car really a Rolls Royce pronounced by a British voice proves difficult for both American and British subjects.

Apparently six *r*'s in one short sentence, some of which are retained, some glided, creates complexity that leads to confusion.

Another item *So they're always gossiping over the back fence* involves an introductory adverbial connector, easily overlooked when doing the test task of identifying the second word, which also includes a linking *r*. This combination seems to be difficult for a British subject listening to an AE voice.

In another item there are three *r*'s voiced in sequence: *Clair 'r Ralph will come, but Bill can't.* This proves to be difficult whenever BE is involved, either as the voicing for the test or as the dialect of the subject.

But not all the harder items are associated with BE. Voicing proves troublesome for American subjects in one item: *When sh' we plan to finish* the project? Americans hear the same form of *shall* that British speakers do (in either dialect), but interpret *should,* no doubt due to their preference for this form.

Another item that favors BE is: *Whaddaya got left to do before you can go home?* The internal schwa in *whaddaya* is consistently (and correctly) interpreted *have* by British speakers who are on familiar terms with the expression *have got.* Almost half of the American subjects, however, realign this as if it were *Whaddaya have left to do . . .* or maybe even *Whaddaya hafta do before . . .,* and the internal /ə/ is incorrectly interpreted as *do.*

Two other items have an intonation feature which renders them more difficult for American subjects listening to the British voicing. The two sentences are: *How'd 'e ever be able to come even if he wanted to?* and *How'll 'e ever get this job done by five o'clock?* In the AE voicing the initial *how* in both sentences is given a strong stress and is pronounced on pitch level three. In the BE version the *how* gets a weak or at most a mid stress and pronounced on pitch level one. This has the effect of obscuring the expression for the American listener, though not for the British:

How'd 'e ever be able to come . . . in AE is realized as

How'd 'e ever be able to come . . . in BE.

Comparison of Native and Non-native Responses

It is instructive to compare native and non-native performance. For a sample comparison we have selected the combined British-American native speaker groups (N=27) and the ITEP-79 group (N=31). These native speakers, British and American, are typical of native performance, with a weighted mean score of 86.8 on their first test, which compares to 91.0 for seventy-nine tests of native speakers between 1974 and 1976. The ITEP-79 subjects (N=31) scored 35.5 on their first test, 4.2 points over the average performance (31.3) for 1200 widely spread non-natives tested between 1974 and 1976.

To address one of the objectives of our study, to see if non-native speakers would reflect an affinity to the native-speaker dialect with which they were trained, co-efficients of correlation between test scores for the British-American native-speaker group and the ITEP 79 scores were cal-culated. Surprisingly, the various correla-tions all failed to show a meaningful relation-ship. Looking at the BE-voiced tests (line b. and line d. of Table 2) we see that the cor-relations with British voicing are .384 and .266. The correlations with American voicing (lines a. and c.) are .311 and .457. All of these correlations are too low to have any significance.

Table 2. Correlations for Native & Non-Native Speaker Performance on IGT

	r
a. Am subjects AE voicing	.311
b. Am subjects BE voicing	.384
c. Br subjects AE voicing	.457
d. Br subjects BE voicing	.266

Comparison of Dialect Intelligibility

There is one important question that has not yet been answered. Table 1 shows that while the scores are close, the test in AE yields overall higher scores than the test in BE for all groups except the British native speakers, where BE surpasses AE by a skimpy .4 of a point, and the ITEP-79 group, where BE is ahead by a still narrow .7 of a point. The other six groups, where exposure to BE has been primary, still score higher on the AE test, by a weighted difference of 2.9 in favor of AE (31.4 minus 28.5).

It is interesting to speculate on what may account for this difference, since at first glance it makes no sense for AE to outperform BE here, especially when the American-influenced non-native groups post an average of 3 points better on the AE test and the native-speaking Americans an average of 4 points. Following are explanations we have thought of, though of course not all are equally attractive:

1. Our sample was not sufficiently large or unbiased.

2. British and American English are both too widely available to prevent research contamination.

3. The recordings of our instrument were not equivalent in clarity.

4. There is not enough difference between BE and AE to show up consistently in performance scores, perhaps because listeners adapt to dialect differences very readily, at whatever level of performance.

5. There is too much spread within groups.

6. Comparing groups without affinity for each other possibly introduces too many vague influences that we don't understand.

7. Or just maybe AE is more readily interpretable than BE, though we can cite no phonological evidence to support this hypothesis. For every complicating factor in one dialect we can cite a commensurate complication in the other. For example, where AE has /vízhənèriy/ and /mʃʃən-

èriy/, BE has the reduced forms /vízhən-riy/ and /míshənriy/. But on the other hand, where British English pronounces /ǽjàyl/ and /dàyvə́rsətiy/, American English pronounces /ǽjəl/ and /dəvə́rsətiy/, flapping the /t/ in *diversity* for good measure. For every advantage one dialect offers there seems to be a trade-off somewhere in the other.

CONCLUSION

It should be borne in mind, of course, that the test task in this investigation was highly constrained, and that only two speakers were involved, one for each pronunciation. This latter point suggests that further investigations might profitably be undertaken with a variety of speakers for each pronunciation, and comparing the relative intelligibilities of different varieties of British and American pronunciations. But for now, the findings presented here, suggesting greater intelligibility of AE, at least for certain groups on certain tasks, is provocative.

NOTES

1. While we use the term 'dialect' to describe the British and American differences treated in this paper, a case could be made for referring to these forms as 'accents' or even 'pronunciation,' since the differences are quite limited. However, the term dialect is frequently used to designate language variants that are limited in scope, and we follow that usage.

2. *Ed. note: Tables have been abbreviated to meet* TESL Reporter *production requirements. Performance data (means and standard deviations) by groups are available from the authors.*

3. *Item analysis data on all fifty IGT items are available from the authors.*

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The Natural Approach:
Approach, Design, and Procedure
by Uinise T. Langi

This analysis and examination of Tracy D. Terrell's Natural Approach (NA) to language teaching/learning will be conducted within the framework developed by Richards and Rodgers (1982). This framework provides criteria by which one can readily evaluate a teaching proposal in terms of its approach, design and procedure. Approach is defined as the theoretical principles which form the basis of a particular method. Design is concerned with the selection and organization of (course) content. Procedure deals with pedagogical considerations and the implementation of this content in the language learning classroom.

The NA will be examined in detail with respect to the interrelationships between approach, design and procedure. The examination is based on Terrell and Krashen's book, *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom* (1983). All references to Terrell are from this book.

Approach

The Nature of Language

Although Terrell does not explicitly state what his theory of language is, one can infer that it is based on a structural model. That is, a language is made up of structures and forms that need to be internalized. Though Terrell repeatedly stresses the need to focus on meaning and build communicative competence in learners, that competence is based on the assumption that language is a system of structural components put together to convey meaning. Teaching a language then means enabling learners to internalize and use these structures.

The Nature of Language Learning

The aim of Terrell's method is the development of communicative competence in learners. His theory, following Krashen, rests on five hypotheses which make up his

theoretical model of language learning. These are (1) the acquisition-learning hypothesis, (2) the natural order hypothesis, (3) the monitor hypothesis, (4) the input hypothesis and (5) the affective filter hypothesis.

The acquisition-learning hypothesis. Krashen posits two distinct ways of developing language skills: learning and acquisition. Learning is characterized by conscious, explicit knowledge of the rules and grammar of the target language. One learns a language by focusing on the forms and structures of the language. Learning is normally fostered through formal classroom teaching.

Acquisition, on the other hand, is similar to first language learning. In language acquisition, the language is "picked up," and forms and structures are acquired subconciously. One also develops an implicit knowledge or a native-like intuition of correct and incorrect use of the language. Formal teaching or undue attention to forms and grammar merely frustrates and hinders this acquisition process.

Children seem to acquire their first language subconciously and with relative ease. Terrell posits that the ability to acquire a language is not lost when we become adults. Rather, an adult can and will acquire a language, given that all the requirements which make acquisition possible are provided for. Basically, acquisition focuses on meaning (the message) while learning focuses on forms and structures (components of the language system). Terrell claims that acquisition, rather than learning, will better enable learners to be communicatively competent in the target language. Fostering acquisition, in other words, is the whole thrust of the method.

The natural order hypothesis. This hypothesis states that the structures of a language can be arranged on a hierarchy of

difficulty. That is, certain structures tend to be acquired early and others later. A second, qualifying component of the hypothesis allows for individual differences; not all learners will acquire the structures in the exact same order.

The monitor hypothesis. This hypothesis posits that when acquired language is produced, it is monitored or edited by one's learned knowledge, conditions permitting. Explicit knowledge of the rules and structures of the language (gained through learning) is used to correct or edit what has been produced. This explicit knowledge of the rules of a language does not promote communicative competence but serves only as a monitor and makes repairs. As Terrell puts it:

> When we produce utterances in the second language, the utterance is "initiated" by the acquired system, and our conscious learning only comes into play later (p. 30).

For the monitor to operate, however, three requirements need to be met:

1. The performer has to have enough time. For this reason, monitor use is typically restricted to the writing mode.
2. The performer has to be focusing on structure and form, instead of concentrating on the meaning of an utterance.
3. The performer has to have a conscious knowledge of the rules and grammar of the language. Strictly speaking one cannot monitor or make repairs on production unless one knows what rule has been violated and how one goes about making corrections.

Individual learners manifest different types of monitor use. *Over-users* are learners who monitor or self-correct constantly. These learners are so concerned with grammar and the correct way of saying things that they constantly edit and make repairs. *Under-users* are learners who never edit or monitor production. A seeming disregard for correctness characterizes their performance. *Optimal-users* are learners who edit and make repairs appropriately. They are characterized by an awareness of when and where to make repairs. In Terrell's

Natural Approach, helping learners to develop optimal use of the monitor is of primary importance.

The input hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, acquisition takes place only when comprehensible input is provided. Comprehensible input is indispensable for the activation of the acquisition process and the eventual internalization of the structures and grammar of the target language. Specifically, acquisition is facilitated "by understanding input that is a little beyond our level of acquired competence" (p. 32).

To enable NA learners to comprehend novel utterances, context and extra-linguistic information are provided. This is similar to first language acquisition, where "caretaker" speech deals with the "here and now" and topics of interest and relevance. According to the NA, teachers should not only provide students in second language learning classrooms with input that is a little beyond their level of acqiuired competence but also use visual aids and realia to provide context, and thus make the subject matter interesting and relevant. Terrell explains the importance of providing contextualized material for learners in these terms:

> . . . by hearing everything in a clear context, the student is able to follow the communication without necessarily understanding all of the language *per se*. When this goal is attained, students will believe they can understand a new language. This is an important psychological barrier which must be broken through if the students are to be successful in language acquisition (p. 75).

The affective filter hypothesis. This hypothesis states that "attitudinal variables relating to success in second language acquisition generally relate directly to language acquisition but not necessarily to language learning" (p. 38). It recognizes the learner as a total human being, and acknowledges that acquisition or learning is not confined to the brain and mental processes but that affective factors are also involved. Stevick's "Psychodynamic Spiral" (1976:115) elaborates on this. Basically, the Psychodynamic

Spiral states that affective factors determine to a great extent, the depth or penetration of teacher-initiated interaction. Stevick explains,

> . . . this same "depth" factor, far from being an additional, minor consideration to be taken into account only when weightier factors are equal, is in fact more to be reckoned with than technique, or format, or underlying linguistic analysis . . . .
>
> The deeper the source of a sentence, the more lasting value it has for learning a language. But an utterance can only come from as deep within the student as the student himself has allowed the language to penetrate. Performance, whether it is productive or reflective, depends on the quality of previous learning. There is, I think, a terribly important difference between learning that is defensive, and learning that is receptive (1976:110).

To facilitate acquisition, learners should not only be receptive to input but be in a position to use it to interact confidently with speakers of the target language. Success in the acquisition process depends, to a large measure, on how "open" or receptive the learners are to input. Terrell hypothesizes that unless measures are taken to reduce learners' feelings of anxiety, threat, frustration, etc. the acquisition process is hindered. When these feelings (affective factors) are reduced, students are more open to input, thus facilitating the acquisition process.

These five hypotheses form the theoretical framework which is the basis of the NA. In developing teaching strategies that approximate first language acquisition, the NA posits that if the learner is provided with comprehensible input and if an evironment conducive to receptive learning is assured, then the acquisition of a second language can be made more successful with less pressure and fewer demands on the learner.

Design

Terrell is careful not to specify what the specific goals for each language course may be. These are to be decided by the teacher, depending on the learners' needs. However, several criteria should hold constant for all NA teaching and be considered when course syllabi are being designed:

Communication skills. Every course should be taught with the primary goal of teaching learners to use the target language communicatively. With this in mind, classroom activities should be geared more toward developing communication skills instead of grammatical knowledge. The assumption is that students will use the target language with more grammatical accuracy if emphasis is put on communication rather than on grammar (forms and structures).

Comprehension precedes production. The ability to use the target language communicatively depends on the understanding of input. This understanding comes through the development of listening comprehension. The comprehension of input lays the foundation for successful acquisition.

Production emerges. Student production should not be forced, but rather it is expected to emerge on its own as the acquisition process progresses. When the language is produced, overt corrections should not be made. The acquisition theory states that learners will develop a "feel for" or intuitive knowledge of what is grammatically right and will monitor production accordingly. Correcting production errors and calling undue attention to surface form correctness hinders acquisition and fosters feelings of inadequacy and inhibition.

Acquisition activities are central. The language learning classroom is seen as a very good place for fostering acquisition. Class time should be devoted to providing activities that help this process. Learning activities may be used, but these are not to play as prominent a role as acquisition activities. Learning exercises are best incorporated as homework so that precious class time is not spent on them.

Lower the affective filter. The language teacher should always try to incorporate or use activities which lower the

affective filter since acquisition cannot take place if the filter is high.

The Syllabus

Traditionally, a syllabus is a set of specific features of the language—whether grammatical, phonological, or lexical—predetermined by the teacher, the department of education, a textbook, etc. The syllabus is often determined by what administrators or teachers think is right for the learners without actually taking learner needs and interests into consideration.

In the NA, syllabus design is based on the results of needs analyses. That is, learner needs determine how and what is to be taught in the classroom. Needs analysis

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determines the topics learners are most interested in, the situations they use the target language in, etc.

In the Natural Approach, the syllabus is also communicatively oriented. Topics and situations where learners use the target language most are presented in games, role-plays, dialogs, etc.

Assuming a class of beginning learners, Terrell identifies three levels of acquisition activities one should use in syllabus design. The first is the personal-identification stage. Activities selected for this stage lower the affective filter and provide comprehensible input. Opportunities for learners to know and get along with each other are also provided. At the next stage, provision is made for the generation of input according to experiences. Activities are chosen mainly on the basis of their ability to provide input and let learners use the target language. Learner production at this stage may include sentences and short discourse as compared to no production or one- or two-word

responses in the previous one. The final stage is the "stating opinion stage." Activities for this level encourage learners to use the target language for voicing opinions about politics, civil rights, marriage, etc. Production usually consists of longer and more complex discourse.

The Role of Learners

The role of learners is primarily determined by the stage of the acquisition process they are at. At the initial (preproduction or silent) stage, learners assume a passive role, absorbing and digesting input. Class activities include responding to teacher commands with action or working with pictures, enabling learners to identify objects and items the teacher is referring to. An important component of this stage is the building and expansion of basic vocabulary since comprehension depends to a large extent on vocabulary recognition. Learner participation in these activities may involve single individuals, pairs, small groups, or the class as a whole--depending on the nature of the activity.

Since the content of learning activities is based on learners' needs, the learners, to some extent, control the topics and the situations used in classroom activities. The learners' progress in the acquisition process is self-determined, and they evaluate their own progress. They are primarily responsible for monitoring production, for generating and initiating input, and for acquiring vocabulary and constructions in the target language.

The Role of Teachers

The teacher's role is multi-faceted, ranging from that of input provider, to material constructor, to activity supervisor. Another important role the teacher assumes is that of reducing and alleviating feelings of stress, tension and anxiety.

The teacher's role may also vary depending on the stage of the acquisition process the learners are at. At the "preproduction stage," the teacher is primarily a provider of input. S/he has to make sure that the in-

put is understood by the learners and that it "includes a structure that is part of the next stage." Another primary role the teacher takes is to gradually build learners' knowledge and recognition of vocabulary since this is important in serving as a basis for the acquisition of new forms and structures. In the classroom, the teacher is the director, manager, and central focus of activities. S/he decides the content of learning and how it is to be presented.

At the "early production stage," the teacher is still the central source of input. In addition to what s/he does in the pre-production stage, however, the teacher also provides activities and visual aids that not only supply context but also encourage the use of acquired structures. Still, learners are allowed to produce speech only when they feel they are ready, without being forced.

At the "extending production stage," the teacher provides input through games, role-plays, dialogs, etc. These are all teacher-produced. By providing students with activities that reduce teacher-frontedness and require more student involvement and production, the teacher takes a more peripheral role than is assumed in earlier stages.

In addition, the teacher has to make sure that the activities lower instead of raise learners' affective filters. The teacher also has to be aware of individual variations in age, interest, progress, and needs. It can be seen that the demands on the teacher are tremendous. With no ready-made materials or exercises, there must be a lot of teacher preparation. Though Terrell offers many suggestions for carrying out activities in the classroom, these are not specific enough to be offered without teacher adaptation and supplementation. Stevick (1980:265) agrees that such preparation is critical.

I think that all three of the "ways" we have looked at would agree that sticking entirely to preexisting materials limits the depth of the goals at which one can aim, and that this shallowness in turn limits both the quality and the quantity of learning. But as we move away from ready-made materials the demands on the

teacher increase, and it is also true that as we aim for deeper goals the demands on the teacher increase. Any of the methods at which we have been looking, therefore, asks of the teacher a level of craftsmanship which must be unusually high, and which must be maintained day after day.

The Role of Materials

NA materials are often teacher-produced but must always be appropriate for the acquisition stage learners are at. They should also be interesting and relevant to student needs. Pictures, visual aids and realia provide context and extra-linguistic information for the acquisition activities. They accompany teacher-produced input and encourage learner output.

Procedure

As has already been mentioned, classroom activities are basically games, dialogs, role-plays, etc., accompanied by visual aids. The topics and situations used for these are determined by learner needs. However, activities will vary according to the stage in the acquisition process students are at.

Preproduction: Developing Listening Comprehension

Activities at this stage include the use of Asher's Total Physical Response (TPR) method where the teacher gives commands and the learners respond accordingly.

Another activity that may be used at this stage is the elicitation of responses through the use of pictures. In such exercises, the teacher describes the picture to the learners. After this initial description, specific questions are asked and the learners point to or identify the particular objects.

Throughout these activities the teacher concentrates on giving comprehensible input. The teacher does not prod the learners to use the target language until they are ready to do so. The use of these activities is expected to "provide comprehensible input, maintain focus on the message and help lower the affective filter" (p. 79).

THE NATURAL APPROACH
(continued from page 15)

Early Production

Activities at this stage encourage learners to use the target language. Production at this stage is often marred by errors, but these shouldn't be corrected. Focus is on meaning instead of form. Activities involve using pictures and asking *yes-no* questions. The teacher may move on to use *either-or* questions when assured students are comfortable with using the language. Later, simple *wh*-questions requiring short answers can be employed.

> What do you see in this picture? (Man). Yes, there is a man. Where is he? (Beach). Yes, he is sitting on the beach. What is in front of him? (Students do not know the word). That's a sailboat. Is it large or small? (Small). Is it in the water or on the beach? (In water). Yes, it is floating (new word, use mime to explain) in the water. Can stones float? (No). Can people float? (Some). Right. If you know how to swim (new word, use mime), you can float (p. 80).

Other activities employ charts or graphs for problem solving.

> This is a chart of the schedule of classes for four students. What are the names of the students on this chart? (Natalia, Abdul, Helmut, Ito). What time is the morning break? (9:45). Right, the morning break is at nine forty-five. Do classes begin at 8:30? (Yes). Is that earlier or later than our classes begin? (Earlier) (p. 81).

Extending Production

Learner production at this stage is extended to longer discourse. Activities include, among other things, open-ended dialogs, prefabricated patterns, and open sentences. The main objectives of activities at this stage are to promote fluency and communicative competence. Several types of activities may be used:

Open-ended sentences
In this room there is a _____ .
I am wearing a _____ .
In my purse there is a _____ .
In my bedroom I have a _____ .
After class I want to _____ .

Open dialogs
Where are you going?
To the _____ .
What for?
To _____ .

Prefabricated patterns
I like to _____ .
You like to _____ .
He likes to _____ .
She likes to _____ .
(pp. 84-85)

Students progress after the "extending production" stage is encouraged and developed through the use of acquisition activities where attention continues to be focused on the content of the utterance instead of on the form.

Although the above activities stress the learning of the speaking/listening skills, the reading and writing skills can also be developed using the NA. When these skills are taught, developing an unconscious knowledge of the rules of the language and making the learning experience natural and uncomplicated for the learners continue to be stressed.

Evaluative Comments

In the incessant search for the "right method," an all too common tendency is to get caught up and swept along with what, at the moment, appears to be the most appealing method. However, a more circumspect approach should be followed. Tantalizing though Terrell's method may be, one needs to consider a number of points before wholeheartedly embracing the Natural Approach.

One point in Terrell's favor is that the NA gives the language teacher the opportunity to adapt, develop, and implement materials according to students' needs. More often than not, material producers assume they know exactly what is best for students in terms of materials and teaching procedures and then proceed to dictate these to the teacher without allowing for variation, in teachers, classes, and students. Nevertheless, flexibility is not the same as individualization. Assuming that all learners in a group

will progress at the same rate and reach Terrell's three stages (preproduction, early production, and extended production) at the same time, the NA does not allow for individual learners' differences.

A further limitation is that, although Krashen and Terrell provide much explicit guidance for using the Natural Approach with beginning-level learners, they say very little about how or what to teach at the intermediate and advanced levels.

Another question that remains to be answered relates to the level of teacher-produced input. In NA theory, comprehensible input is critical for acquisition, yet how does one know which structures the learners are to be provided with? From the examples of "teacher talk" provided in the book, communication interactions seem to be guided by the topic of conversation rather than by the structures of the language. The decision of which structures to use appears to be left to some mysterious sort of intuition, which many teachers may not possess.

The claims that the NA produces better results than other methods need to be taken with a grain of salt. Although the NA claims to be based on research evidence, much of this research (and the interpretation of its findings) remains open to question. For instance, the successes reported anecdotally may be due to teachers' and students' emotional involvement rather than NA methodology. Only one study claiming that the NA produces superior student performance reports empirical research evidence. This study needs to be examined in detail and its results replicated in other, true experimental studies. It would also be useful to examine each of the components of the NA in an experimental fashion to determine which of them contribute most to student success. In the meantime, although Terrell's teaching strategies are practical, classroom-oriented, and interesting, we are still left with the questions: Does the Natural Approach really work? Does it work better than other methods?
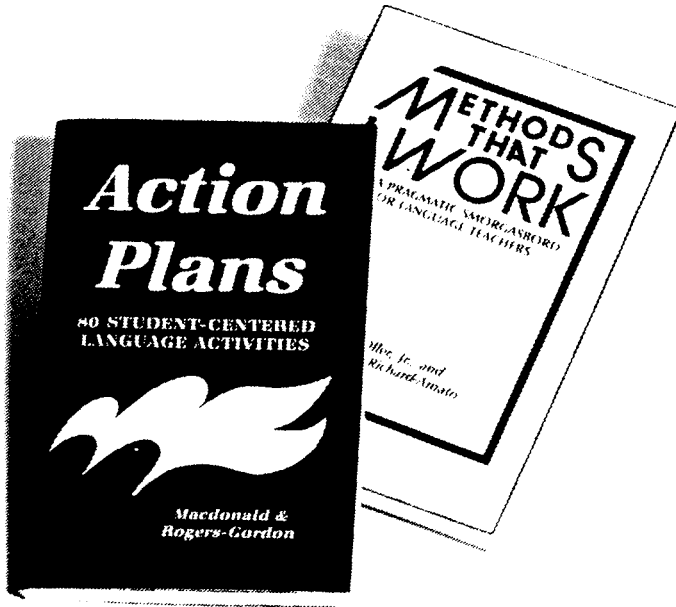
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Conference Announcements

"Language, the Key to Learning" is the theme of the twelfth annual Illinois TESOL/BE convention, which will be held April 6-7, 1984 in Chicago. Contact: Richard A. Orem, 101 Gabel Hall, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, Illinois 60115.

The Western Humor and Irony Membership (WHIM) announces its third international conference on linguistic humor. The conference will run from March 28 to April 1, 1984 at the Phoenix Townehouse, the theme being "Contemporary Humor." Contact: Don L. F. Nilsen, Chair, WHIM Conference, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona 85287.

336,985 Foreign Students in U.S. in 1983

"The enormous increase of foreign students which the United States experienced during the Seventies has reached at least a temporary plateau in the worldwide economic recession of the early Eighties," according to Dr. Richard Krasno, President of the Institute of International Education (IIE), the largest U.S. higher educational exchange agency. Dr. Kranso announced the results of the 1982-83 IIE census of foreign students at U.S. colleges and universities. The survey, published annually as *Open Doors,* is conducted with financial assistance from the U.S. Information Agency.

The 1983 total of 336,985 foreign students represented a 3.3 percent increase over the 1982 figure of 326,299. During the latter half of the seventies the rate of growth never fell below 10 percent and twice exceeded 16 percent, but has been decreasing since.

Dr. Krasno attributed the smaller increase largely to the worldwide economic recession, which has particularly affected the developing nations where over 80 percent of foreign students originate. A recent IIE survey of changes in higher education's policies towards foreign students suggests that a second factor in the declining growth rate may be more stringent admissions requirements by American colleges and universities.

Actual declines in foreign student numbers that varied from 6 to 10 percent occurred in the Middle East, Central and North America (Canada). Numbers from Africa, Oceania, and the Caribbean increased minimally (from 0.5 to 2.5 percent).

Increases above 3.3 percent occurred only in Asia, Europe, and South America (where the increase was accounted for almost entirely by one country, Venezuela). The Asian region, which includes several especially populous nations and relatively stronger economies, accounted for most actual foreign student growth. Asian students numbered 119, 650 in 1983 (106,160 in 1982), a 12.7 percent increase.