THE INPUT HYPOTHESIS
AND SECOND-LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THEORY

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ABSTRACT

Among the language teaching methods and approaches is the Natural Approach, which claims that the SL learner acquires the language as in first language acquisition if necessary conditions are provided.

The Input Hypothesis , which has been developed based on the principles of the Natural Approach, relates to acquisition, not learning. This hypothesis, which claims that acquisition is realized if the learner understands the input given to him, makes it essential that the teacher, the source of the input in a classroom setting, should not be dependent on a method based on mechanical drills. Otherwise, there would not be an acquisition environment for the learner in the classroom. Providing that the classroom activities are natural, appropriate for the learners' interest and comprehensible, the learners's natural acquisition mechanism will operate. Therefore, this hypothesis suggests that the main goal of the teacher be to provide the learners with comprehensible input.

ÖZET

Dil öğretim yöntemleri ve yaklaşımları arasında, ikinci dil öğrencisinin dili, gerekli koşullar sağlandığı takdirde, anadil edinimindeki gibi edindiğini iddia eden yaklaşım, Doğal Yaklaşım diye adlandırılır.

Doğal yaklaşım ilkelerine dayalı olarak geliştirilen Girdi Varsayımı, öğrenme değil, edinim kavramı ile ilgilidir. Edinimin ancak öğrenciye verilen girdinin anlaşılmasıyla gerçekleşeceğini iddia eden bu varsayım, sınıf ortamında girdi kaynağının öğretmen olduğu düşünülürse, öğretmenin mekanik alıştırmalara dayalı bir yönteme bağlı kalmamasını gerekli kılar. Aksi halde, sınıf içinde öğrenci için dil edinme ortamı oluşmayacaktır. Sınıf içi etkinliklerin doğal, öğrencilerin ilgi alanına uygun ve anlaşılır olması halinde, öğrencinin doğal edinim mekanizması çalışmaya başlayacaktır. Bu yüzden, bu varsayım, öğretmenin ana hedefinin öğrencilere anlaşılır girdi sağlamak olması gerektiğini önerir.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to present the theory of learning in relation to the principles of the Natural Approach. I will briefly review what researchers so far have hypothesized about how second languages are acquired and learned according to the Natural Approach. The focus will be on the Input Hypothesis, which has a crucial importance to Pedagogy, and which is the central part of an overal of second language acquisition.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE NATURAL APPROACH

In 1977 a teacher of Spanish named Tracy Terrell proposed a new approach to language teaching, which was called 'the Natural Approach'. Stephen Krashen, an applied linguist at the University of Southern California, also agreed with Terrell and they co-operated to elaborate a theorectical basis of second language acquisition.

Krashen and Terrell have identified the Natural Approach with the approaches defined as based on the use of language in communicative situations. They also relate this approach to the Natural Method, which had become known as the Direct Method, discussing that "traditional approaches have been called natural, psychological, phonetic, new, reform, direct, analytic, imitative and so forth" (Krashen and Terrell, 1983:9). Sandra Savignon defines the Natural Method as follows (1983:307):

> A language teaching method advocated in the nineteenth centry,
> so called because its proponents claimed to follow the
> way in which children learn their native language, through
> conversation; characterized by a repudiation of books and
> grammar rules and the active demonstration of meaning
> through mime, gestures and physical objects.

Here, it should be stated that the Natural Approach to language teaching has three properties, but has different emphases on the classroom activities. Unlike the Direct Method, this approach places less emphasis on teacher monologues, direct repetition and formal question and answer. There is also less emphasis on accurate production of target language sentences. In Natural Approach, the main focus is the exposure, that is, input. According to Acquisition Theory, on which the Natural Approach is based on , "communicative competence, or functional ability, in a new language arises from exposure to the language in meaningful settings and in such a way that meaning expressed by the language is comprehended" (K.J. Krahnke, 1985:591). This comprehensible input will be taken on in the later sections in detail in relation to the method based on the Natural Approach. Richards and Rodgers (1988:129) state that there is a special emphasis on "optimizing emotional

preparedness for learning, a prologed period of attention to what the language learners hear before they try to produce language; and a willingness to use written and other materials as a sourse of comprehensible input". In other words, "it stresses the importance of emotional rather than cognitive factors in learning and of mastering vocabulary rather than grammatical rules" (D. Crystal, 1987:375). The effect of input to the emotional attitude of the learner will be discussed later. Simply, in the natural approach to language learning and teaching, the aim is to establish an ability to understand the basic content of a communication in informal settings. At this point, it would be fruitful to have a look at the principles of this approach and also its hypotheses.

III. THE PRINCIPLES OF THE NATURAL APPROACH

The Natural Approach has some particular principles on which the hypotheses of the learning theory are based. They can be clarified as follows:

i. Comprehension precedes production. Listening comprehension precedes speech abilities. This comes from the hypothesis that acquisition is the basis of productive ability and therefore the acquirer must understand messages.

ii. Production proceeds from response by nonverbal communication to more complex discourse. The students are not forced to speak if they are not ready. Also there is no formal correction.

iii. Syllabus consists of communicative goals. This means that the focus of each classroom activity is organized by a topic the students will find interesting, but not a grammatical structure because it is considered that grammar will be effectively acquired if goals are communicative.

iv. Activites must encourage a lowering of the affective filter of the students.

These principles, as can be seen, constitute a central part in the Natural Approach. Based on these principles, a number of hypotheses, which will be presented in the following section , have been developed.

IV. FIVE HYPOTHESES OF THE THEORY OF LEARNING
1. THE ACQUISITION-LEARNING HYPOTHESIS

This hypothesis claims that there are two distinctive ways of developing competence in a second or foreign language. Acquisition is the natural way, similar to first-language development of a child. Learning, by contrast, refers to a conscious process in which the learner has explicit knowledge about the form a language. This hypothesis is based on the first principle.

2. THE NATURAL ORDER HYPOTHESIS

The Natural Order Hypothesis should be considered in reference to the second principle of the Natural Approach mentioned above. According to this hypothesis, the acquisition of grammatical structures progresses in a predictable order. Errors are regarded as signs of naturalistic developmental processes.

It has been observed that different foreign language learners make similar errors regardless of their language background. A 1981 study by Krashen has shown that grammatical morphemes such as {-ing} and plural {-s}, for example, are learned in the first stage.

3. THE MONITOR HYPOTHESIS

This hypothesis states that the acquired linguistic system is said to iniate utterances when we communicate in a second or foreign language. Conscious learning is a process which monitors or edits the progress of acquisition and guides the performance of the speaker. The learner can use the monitor to make changes in his utterance only after the utterance has been produced by the acquired system.

There are three conditions that limit the successful use of the monitor:

a. Time is important for the learner to choose and apply a learned rule.

b. The language user must be focused on the form of the output.

c. The language user must learn the rules.

4. THE AFFECTIVE-FILTER HYPOTHESIS

This hypothesis states how affective factors relate to the second language acquisition process. The reason that affective factors are hypothesized to be directly related to acquisition is that they appear to relate to second language achievement when communicative-type tests are used, tests that involve the acquired rather than the learned system. (Krashen and Terrell, 1983:38). It impedes the necessary input. The Affective – Filter Hypothesis states that acquirers with a low affective filter seek and receive more input, interact with confidence and are more receptive to the input they receive.

5. THE INPUT HYPOTHESIS

The main focus of the Natural Approach , the Input Hypothesis, claims to explain the relationship between what the learner is exposed to of a language and language acquisition. It states simply that we do not learn, but aquire language by understanding input that is slightly beyond our current level of competence. According to this Hypothesis, listening comprehension and reading is of primary importance in the language program. Before any further discussion, it is better to give a broad definition of input by Abbott

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and Wingard (1981:15):

> The input is a verbal experience, visual or auditory, which may con
> sist of language in use, as when listening to someone during a con
> versation; or of deliberately selected usage, as when reading the
> examples preceeding an exercises; or of metalanguage – that is –
> remarks that some aspect of the foreign language.

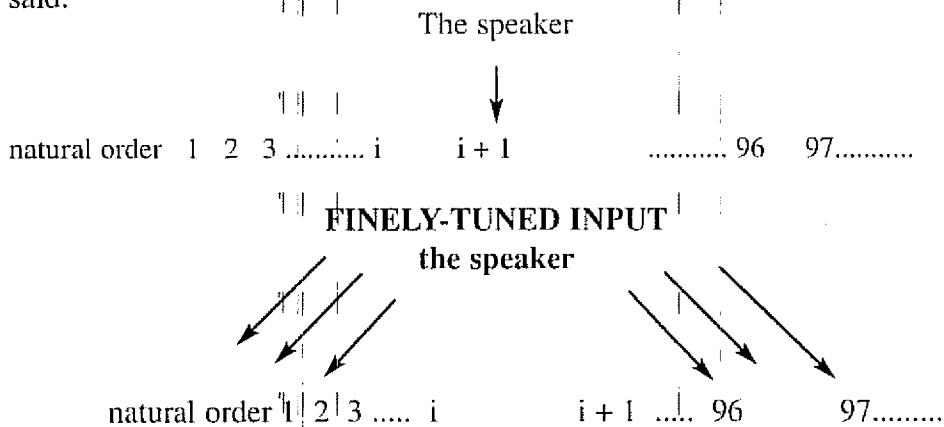Simply, input is something that is to be learned (see the following figure by Abbott and Wingard, ibid.)
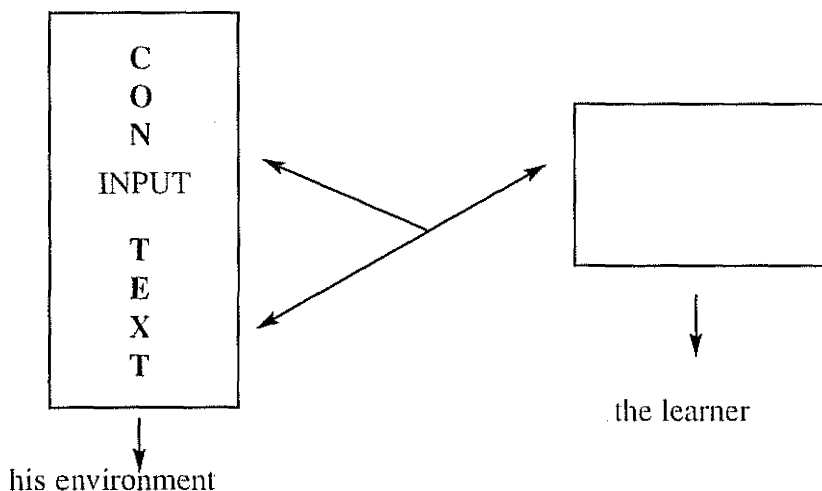
Form this figure where the right hand box represents the learner and the left hand box his enviroment, it is understood that context is directly related to providing comprehensible input and also intake. (This will be discussed later).

Krashen and Terrell (1983:32) attempts to state the hypothesis a bit more formally as follows: "An acquirer can move from a stage i (where i is the acquirer's level of competence) to a stage i + 1 (where i + 1 is the stage immediately following i along some natural order) by understanding language i + 1". That is, if a learner has zero-knowledge about the TL, for example, it means that he is in the stage i.

Another part of the Input Hypothesis says that input must contain i + 1 to be useful for language acquisition, but it need not contain i + 1. It says if the acquirer understands the input and there is enough of it, i + 1 will automatically be provided. In other words, if communication is successful i + 1 is provided what is told to him, the teacher, in his more complex patterns than those in his previous input as this hypothesis suggests.

However, how we can understand language that contains structures

that we have not acquired yet is a significant question. Krashen's answer is that this will become possible through context and extralinguistic information. Comprehensible input refers to utterances that the learner understands, based on the context. "When a speaker uses language so that the acquirer understands the message, the speaker "casts a net" of structure around the acquirer's current of $i + 1$" (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:133). If an English acquirer has acquired 'English plural' and 'copula' and is ready to acquire auxilliaries and articles according to the Natural Order Hypothesis, the teacher need not worry about providing auxiliaries and articles in the input. However, the teacher should feel sure that the students understand, that is, if there is enough input, $i + 1$ will be covered automatically. The following figure by Krashen and Terrell (1983:33) illustrates the differences between finely-tuned input, the input that aims specifically at one structure at a time, and roughly-tuned input (the net), that is, the input as a result of the fact that a speaker uses language so that the acquirer understands what is said.

The speaker

↓

natural order   1   2   3 .... i $i + 1$ 96   97..........

FINELY-TUNED INPUT

the speaker

natural order 1 2 3 ..... i $i + 1$ 96   97.........

ROUGHLY-TUNED INPUT

Regarding what the Input Hypothesis suggests roughly-tuned input is favourable so that the learner is exposed to more language functions. From this perspective, finely-tuned input seems to delay the learner's acquiring a language.

The major points of the input Hypothesis, then, can be summarized as follows:

i.   It relates to acquisition, not to learning

ii .We acquire language by understanding input that is a bit beyond our current level of competence. Context is helpful in doing this.

iii. Listening comprehension and reading are of importance. Spoken

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fluency emerges gradually and is not taught directly.

iv. When the acquirer understands the message, input automotically contains i + 1 , that is, the grammatical structures that the acquirer is ready to acquire.

As can be seen, the acquisition process support this Hypothesis. In this connection, it is beneficial to discuss the evidence supporting the Input Hypothesis in detail, extending this to the counter arguments in relation to its implication for language teaching.

a. Evidence Supporting the Input Hypothesis

Krashen (1985) argues that certain phenomena in relation to language acquisition can be viewed from the perspectives of his theory. In his view, the Input Hypothesis can account for the following phenomena :

In relation to child language acquisition, the existence of caretaker speech on children provides good evidence for the Input Hypothesis. Researchers have found that many parents do not talk to their children in the same way they talk to other adults. They simplify their speech. They seem capable of adapting their language to give the child maximum oppurtunity to interact and learn. Caretaker speech is limited to the here and now. The input becomes more displaced in time and space as children develop their linguistic competence.

In the same way, adult acquires of a second language are provided with simple codes that facilitate second language comprehension. Foreigner talk is a caretaker speech as well. Since communication is the only aim native speakers modify their speech when they talk to non-native speakers. As Klein (1986:45) points out, "the native speaker has a tendency to adjust his language to the presumed potentialities of the learner".

Teacher talk is the foreigner talk in the second language classroom. There is a good evidence that teacher talk is also roughly-tuned to the level of the student.

The Input Hypothesis also helps to account for why the acquirer experiences a silent period in informal second language acquisition. This phenomenon has been observed in some children, especially, who come to a new country where they are exposed to a new language. During this period, which they are experiencing a cultural-shock ,which seems to hinder the acquisition, they are presumably building up their competence in the language by listening via comprehensible input. The acquirer may say very little except memorized whole sentences the components of which that he probably does not understand when they are used in other sentences.

It has been stated that in accordance with the Input Hypothesis speak-

ing emerges after enough competence has been developed by listening and understanding. The Input Hypothesis is also supported by the view that older acquirers progress more quickly in the early stages because they obtain more comprehensible input than do younger learners. Older acquirers obtain more comprehensible input because their greater experience and knowledge of the world helps make the input they hear and read more comprehensible.

It is also considered that more exposure to a second language results in increased proficiency. However, this is directly related to the fact that exposure entails comprehensible input. Otherwise there would be no relationship between exposure and acquisition/proficiency.

b. Implications of the Input Hypothesis for Language Teaching

From the beginning of a class conducted by the method based on the Natural Approach, emphasis is on presenting comprehensible input in the target language. Teacher talk focuses on objects in the classroom and on the content of pictures as in the Direct Method. As discussed before, the learners would understand language that contains structures that have not been acquired through context and extra linguistic information. Krashen argues that the best way to learn a second language is to approach the language as children do when they are acquiring their first language. Rather than focusing on form, the learner needs to understand message. Learners are not required to say anything until they themselves decide they are ready, but they are expected to respond to teacher commands and questions as in Asher's Total Physical Response Method.

Lozanov's Suggestopedia is another one that has been demonstrated to be clearly better that traditional approaches. These methods and approaches including Communicative and Natural Approach have one major characteristic in common: They provide a great deal of comprehensible lively input in the second language in the classroom and also aim at providing a low-anxiety environment. It is also noticed that there is a parallelism between the student's emotional attitude and the input. As the students understands the language through comprehensible input, his anxiety will decrease.

Krashen also argues that methods that rely on providing learners with comprehensible input are clearly superior to grammar, and drill-based methods. For example, mechanical drills fail as optimal take for acquisition. It is an activity in which the primary focus is on the form of the language being used rather than its communcative intent. Students do not pay much attention to the repetitive drill after a few repetitions, and also it is doubtful that the meaning strikes deeply.

Free conversation also fails to provide optimal input as it is often not

understandable. Moreover, second language teaching involves more than just talking to students about topics of interest. This clearly does not show that being a native speaker of a language qualifies one to be a teacher of that language. However, mechanical drills together with free conservation may succeed in encouraging some language acquisition.

The best activities, Krashen says, are those that are natural, interesting, and understandable. When these requirements are met and if there is a great deal of input of this nature it may be the case that i + 1 will naturally be covered and progress in language acquisition will result. W. Littlewood (1984:60) also agrees that " exposed to this kind of input , the learner's natural acquisition mechanisms can operate, picking out the structures for which they are ready at any given time.

Krashen (1985:16) also argues that the programmes in immersion and sheltered language teaching are effective because they provide learners with comprehensible input through the use of subject they can understand. In language classes aiming at providing comprehensible input teachers always face the problem of what to talk about. In immersion-style comprehensible subject matter teaching, the topic is automatically provided. In addition, since students are tested on the subject matter, not on the language, it becomes possible to assure a constant focus on the message.

What Krashen also claims is that simple codes such as caretaker speech or teacher talk asssist language acquisition. These codes are used to communicate meaning, but not to teach language.

As a result, it should be noted that the Input Hypothesis predicts that the classroom may be an excellent place for second language acquisition, at least up to the intermediate level. Especially, for beginners the classroom can be much better than the outside world because the outside world usually provides beginners with very little comprehensible input.

c. Counter-Arguements on the Input Hypothesis

Although it is claimed that the Input Hypothesis is the basis for second language acquisition theory, as it suggests that comprehensible input should be essential in language programs, this hypothesis is criticized due to its inefficiency in some respects and its lack of some properties. These arguments are as follows :

i. Mclaughlin (1987:37) discusses the Silent Period. While Krashen indicates that once competence has been built up, speech emerges. Mclaughlin says this is hardly evidence for the Input Hypothesis. He argues that there are more plausible explanations for the silent period such as anxiety and per-

sonal differences. However, it should be bore in mind that the Natural Approach aims at establishing a low-anxiety environment. In spite of this, if the learner feels anxious, the teacher should assume that the input is not as comprehensible as possible.

ii. Mclaughlin also argues that language classes are thought to be less helpful when the students are already advanced enough to understand some input from the outside world, and the input is available to them. It may be that advanced ESL students benefit less from instructions because what they have to learn is not as great as it is with beginning students. Once the students can negotiate meaning in a language, they may be less motivated to refine and polish their grammar.

iii. W. Klein (1986:45) and R. Ellis (1985:128) refer to the disadvantage of the modifications in the input given to the students. Klein argues that "it is not always beneficial to have these modifications". He claims that the native speaker's modifications may hinder comprehension if the learner is fairly advanced in the language. This is also important in terms of the emotional attitude of the learner. He may interpret them as a sign of social distance and condencension. This leads the learner to feel insulted by being addressed in a particular of jargon. Ellis also points out that 'degenerate' input is inadequate for acquisition. One thing should be made clear: the language teacher, providing his students with a roughly-tuned input, should not allow such a case to arise.

iv. What Mclaughlin finds doubtful is whether comprehensible input alone accounts for how learners correct and adjust their hypotheses about the language. Unless learners try out the language they are unlikely to get the kind of feedback they need to analyze the structure of the language.

V. CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, it can be said that the Natural approach , basically derived from Acquisition Theory in terms of mentalists and empricists views, is consistent with this theory in that it puts input in a central and significant place in the curriculum. Second Language Acquisition theory says that the ideal input for acquiring a second language is similar to the input received by the child. It is also claimed that unless the learner is ready to acquire a particular form , he or she should not be exposed to it. The Natural Approach focuses on especially this assumption of the theory. It also makes a strong claim that accquisition is caused by understanding the input to which the learner is exposed. It is evidently clear that the teacher is the primary generater of the input and is required to generate a constant flow of

language input while providing a multiplicity of non-linguistic clues to assist students in interpreting the input.

What makes this hypothesis significant is probably that it attempts to answer the critical question of how we acquire language. From this perspective, the principles of first language acquisition are brought to second language classroom. It is claimed that speaking is a result of acquisition, not its cause. In relation to acquisition and its result, not only comprehensible input, but also the monitor model is important. In a classroom conducted by the principles of first language acquisition, namely the Natural Approach, the main goal of the teacher is to provide the students with comprehensible input, and also to encourage the students to be optimal-monitor users, that is, optimal users who monitor their speech when it is appropriate. As a final word, it can be noted that understanding a new language is given far greater stress that speaking it.

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