Introduction: The Historic Link between Linguistic Theory and ESL Pedagogy

By Charlene Crupi

Language education students who are struggling with the strange jargon and difficult abstractions of their required linguistics courses are sometimes skeptical about the relevance of theoretical issues to actual classroom practice. The question is often asked, “How can linguistic theory help me teach more effectively?” Despite the fact that the connection may not always be immediately apparent, there is a vital link between linguistic theory and second language pedagogy. By exploring what language is and how it works, the linguist defines the “stuff” that is the object of the language teacher’s efforts. In fact, linguistic theory informed praxis in the field of second language instruction in a fairly direct way in the past. Two theoretical perspectives that enjoyed a transparent connection with educational practice are traditional grammar and American Structuralism.

Traditional grammar, the more familiar of the two, is based on the notion that language is a manifestation of thought. From this representational orientation, language consists of a priori word classes which represent universal categories of thought. The sentence, a complete thought, is the basic unit of analysis and is comprised of elements that relate to one another in a logical, abstract way, independent of content meaning. Traditional grammar, then, describes the elaborate rules of realization which determine when and how word classes function within the sentence.

The second language pedagogy most closely linked to traditional grammar was the grammar-translation method. The assumption that languages shared common universal categories held a strong appeal for a
pedagogy whose purpose was accurate translation from one language to another. Furthermore, the notion of the same a priori concepts had important consequences for the second language teacher. The job of teaching a language within this paradigm became a matter mapping known concepts onto the nomenclature of the target language. By means of rote memorization, the students learned new words and the appropriate category of each. The instructional goal was not verbal communicative competency, but rather the production of correct sentences. “Correctness” in this context referred to conformance to the rules governing abstract relationships between sentence constituents rather than any communicative purposes. Thus, the goal of grammar-translation methodology rested solidly on the underlying assumptions about the nature of language which characterized traditional grammar.

While many modern ESL textbooks in the US are attempting to steer clear of the grammar-translation approach to teaching English, traditional classics such as texts authored by Betty Azar (1985), are still widely used in Asian countries. Even recent “communicative” textbooks like Fingado & Jerome’s English Alive (1991) maintain the basic spirit of the traditional approach in that they continue to give students lists of word types to memorize. For example, in the section on verb + infinitive (want to go) and verb + gerund (enjoy going), Fingado & Jerome follow the traditional approach by supplying lists of verbs that use one form or the other. Students are cautioned that “[t]here are much longer lists for these verbs in other texts, but [they] will become confused if [they] try to learn all of them at one time” (p. 163). So, despite its informal appeal, it would appear that English Alive offers only quantitative rather than qualitative differences
from the traditional methods of Azar’s *Fundamentals of English Grammar* (1985). In both texts, memorization of verb types is the key to language learning and the ability to supply the correct form for each verb is the ultimate instructional goal.

Another linguistic theory that exerted considerable influence in second language education was American Structuralism. AS rejected the mentalist orientation of traditional grammar in favor of a rigorously empiricist view of language. Rather than positing a relationship between the observable forms of language and invisible thought, the structuralist saw language as operant human behavior acquired through the conditioning model of behavioral psychology. As a result, linguistic inquiry was strictly limited to observable phenomena. With a strong preference for spoken as opposed to written language, the structuralist’s analysis proceeded from raw sound to phonemes to morphemes and ultimately to syntactic patterns. Morphemes, the basic linguistic unit, were divided into classes which could, in turn, fit into certain positions in sentence patterns. In essence, the American structuralist arrived at the same destination as the traditional grammarian; the former arriving by induction from empirical observation; the latter by deduction from a priori assumptions.

However, because the American structuralist embraced a very different perspective on what language was, the related pedagogy was quite different from that informed by the representationalist perspective of traditional grammar. From the structuralist orientation, there were no universal linguistic categories. Rather each language was unique in the way it classified the world around it. For the American Structuralist, teaching a second language was a matter of helping students form new language habits.
Thus the pedagogical method most commonly linked to AS was the audio-lingual method (ALM) which had students repeat prefabricated chunks of the target language in order to form the appropriate speaking habits. Consistent with the AS insistence on the primacy of spoken language, the goal of ALM was to produce verbal fluency. In some cases (e.g. Berlitz), students were not initially exposed to written forms at all. Once again, underlying assumptions about the nature of language defined both the goal of educational practice and the process by which the goal was to be reached. In fact, when the behavioral orientation of American Structuralism gave way to more cognitive theories of language, the associated ALM pedagogy also fell into disfavor. However, shades of behavioral pedagogy can still be found in recent textbooks such as Boletta’s *Fast Fluency* (1991). While the author disclaims any connection with structuralist theory, he still relies heavily on repetition and substitution of words in prefabricated phrases appropriate to specific communicative contexts. For example, students are encouraged to complete the sentence stem “Do you by any chance . . .” with such unrelated phrases as: *know how long it takes; need a new car; remember her name; have the time; or watch the evening news* (p. 19).

Guided by this pedagogy, the ESL learner can at best hope to encounter situations where the prescribed phrases are appropriate since the process of constructing original phrases is not presented.

It is apparent from the two previous examples that different theoretical approaches to language can produce radically different pedagogies. However different the grammar-translation and ALM

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1 In the introduction to *Fast Fluency*, Boletta denies that the “chimerical specters of ALM [have] come back to haunt us” in his text (1991, p. ii).
pedagogies might have been, each reflected a direct connection between underlying theoretical assumptions about what language was and how it was learned and used.

It would seem, then, that a strong link between linguistic theory and second language pedagogy benefits both fields; theory defines the substance and scope of language which becomes the goal of educational practice. The language classroom, in turn, provides data that can refine the linguist’s understanding of what language is and how it functions in the process of communication. However, this direct tie between theory and practice was greatly undermined by the advent of the generative-transformational theory of Noam Chomsky.

**The Chomskyan Disconnection**

In a sense, the Chomskyan revolution represented a return to the mentalistic approach of traditional grammar with a vengeance. The communicative function of language was of little interest to Chomsky. His main interest in language was what he claimed it revealed about the human mind. Initially, Chomsky defined language as an infinite set of sentences comprised of finite length. The object of study was not what speakers said (performance), but rather the knowledge (competence) of native speakers that enabled them to make grammaticality judgments (Chomsky, 1971, p. 13). During the early years, Chomsky and his students attempted to write generative grammars that would represent all the possible grammatical sentences of specific languages. These grammars described formal syntactic relationships between sentence constituents independent of content meaning.
However, in later years, Chomsky moved in the direction of seeking basic structural principles underlying all languages (Universal Grammar). It was in these endeavors that the Chomskyan school exerted its greatest impact on second language pedagogy. Faced with the seeming paradox that the knowledge necessary to produce grammatical sentences was too complex for linguists to describe after years of effort, yet children seemed to acquire competence in their native language effortlessly in a few short years, Chomsky came to the conclusion that the human brain must come equipped with a dedicated language processing apparatus (termed a language acquisition device or LAD) akin to other organs of the body that performed specific functions.

While a critique of the assumptions that led to this conclusion is not within the scope of this paper, an important point must be made. As previously mentioned, Chomskyan theory initially drew a sharp distinction between competence and performance. The introduction of the LAD physically incorporated this distinction into the structure of the brain itself. According to the model, the LAD only controlled hypothesized “deep” structures of language which, in turn, could be altered by other linguistic factors which operated outside the LAD’s domain.

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2 Two assumptions anticipated the construct of the LAD: (1) Chomsky’s basic assumption about the nature of linguistic knowledge, that grammatical competence consisted of a complex set of rules for forming sentences; and (2) the dualist notion that grammatical competence operated independently of meaning. Starting with these assumptions, Chomsky reasoned that it was not possible for children to inductively learn their native language because the linguistic data they received was not sufficiently rich to support such a rapid and uniform acquisition (Larson-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 228; Cook, 1988, p. 55). Furthermore, the linguistic input was impoverished by vagaries in performance which included false starts, slips, fragments and so forth. More importantly, parents rarely corrected mistakes; and the language children heard contained no negative examples to instruct the child as to what was not possible.

3 Chomsky’s model for how the LAD operates is dominated by the metaphor of a computer. Basic categories of language are hardwired into the structure of the brain and then activated or “set” by the linguistic input that a child receives. One example of the type of information programmed by the LAD
speakers often employed other modes of intelligence in their actual language use which accounted for inconsistencies between the idealized grammatical structures residing in the LAD and what people actually said. (Cook, 1988, p. 22). Thus Chomsky posited a discontinuity between the theoretical construct that linguists used to describe language and the active cognitive processes that speakers employed when they used language in communication. In a 1974 article, Dulay and Burt highlighted this discontinuity when they made the distinction between product (what linguists describe) and process (how language is acquired), and, in essence, severed second language acquisition from its previous linguistic moorings (Dulay & Burt, 1974b). Any connection between theory and practice was to be found, not in the Chomskyan notion of what language was (the ability to make grammaticality judgments), but rather in how language was acquired (via an innate language processing device). As a result, current second language teachers find themselves faced with communicative pedagogies that are at odds with the Chomskyan construct of language. Nowhere is the inconsistency between theoretical model and pedagogy more striking than in Stephen Krashen and Tracy Terrell’s widely-espoused Natural Approach (1983).

*The Natural Approach: The Greening of Chomskyan Linguistics*

would be the pro-drop feature of language which dictates whether or not subjects can follow verbs in a given language. For the child exposed to English, the switch would be set in the non-prodrop position (Subject - Verb- Object order only) rather than the prodrop setting of a child receiving Spanish input (where subjects can follow verbs). The question that Chomskyan theorists do not answer is how a child’s LAD “knows” which data to count as exemplars of UG and which to discard because of the interference of performance factors. What would happen if the prodrop feature was set when an English-speaking child heard the sentence, “In a corner sat a small child”? 
Although Chomsky did not directly address the issue of second language (L2) acquisition, the impact of Chomskyan principles of first language (L1) acquisition on current second language pedagogy has been far reaching. In the popular *Natural Approach*, authors Krashen and Terrell (1983) hypothesize that the Chomskyan construct, the LAD, responsible for first language acquisition, is still operational in adults and directs second language acquisition as well. Like Chomsky, Krashen and Terrell postulate two modes of language processing. However, they differ from Chomsky in the role they assign comprehension in the language acquisition process. For Chomsky, the formal aspects of language are not related to its use in communication. The child requires only minimal understanding for the LAD to set the parameters of Universal Grammar. However, Krashen and Terrell insist that comprehension is the key to the natural language acquisition directed by the LAD. They seem make no attempt to resolve the theoretical inconsistency of linking comprehension to what is assumed to be an automatic process. In order to have a clearer picture of how Chomskyan linguistics has been recast in order to accommodate *The Natural Approach*, it will be helpful to examine Krashen and Terrell’s basic assumptions about second language learning.

In their introduction to *The Natural Approach*, Krashen and Terrell list five a priori assumptions that serve as the theoretical foundation for their book. The first is the distinction between two modes of language processing: acquisition and learning (p.18). Acquisition refers to the unconscious assimilating of a second language by the LAD within the context of actual communication. The alternative mode, language learning, describes the explicit knowledge of grammatical rules gained through
formal instruction. For Krashen and Terrell, it is natural acquisition, not teacher-directed learning, that leads to competence in a second language. In fact, these authors assert that engaging conscious knowledge of rules and correctness can impede a second language student’s ability to communicate.

At first glance, it would seem that the acquisition-learning dichotomy echoes Chomsky’s distinction between competence and performance. However, in the Chomskyan model, the two processing modes handled very different kinds of information. Lexical knowledge, pragmatic use and syntactic category were processed by normal intelligence; while the blueprint of syntactic relationships resided in the LAD. Krashen and Terrell make no similar distinction between what is acquired via the LAD and what is learned through the conscious process of problem-solving. In fact, they are quite resistant to any differentiation in content when they insist that the acquisition-learning hypothesis “does not specify what aspects of language are acquired and what are learned, or how the adult performer uses acquisition and learning in performance. It only states that the processes are different and both exist in the adult” (p.26). Though never explicitly stated in The Natural Approach, it would seem that the product for both processes is the same: rules governing sentence-level phenomena, since suppliance of forms in obligatory contexts is the criterion for

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4 The components of language processed by the LAD and those handled by general intelligence have varied throughout the evolution of Chomskyan theory. Initially, Universal Grammar carried no semantic component. Later, a semantic component was added which governed how lexical items fit into the syntactic schemata. Thus it was hypothesized that when a child learned the work “sleep,” she also learned that it was a verb that was not followed by a NP. In this way, each lexical item carried with it a syntactic tag that could be “projected” onto UG. Again, any counterexamples to the idealized scheme (e.g. Our new camper sleeps six people or Did you have a good sleep?) would be attributed to performance factors.
measuring acquisition levels.\textsuperscript{5} By concentrating on the acquisition/learning process rather than its product, Krashen and Terrell obscure the basic conflict between their natural approach and Chomskyan theory. Whereas Chomsky assumed that the formal aspects of language were not related to its use in communication, Krashen and Terrell insist that only within the context of communication can the formal aspects of language be acquired. How comprehension facilitates an automatic process is a question they do not address.

The second requisite assumption in Krashen and Terrell’s model of second language learning is that there is a natural order for the acquisition of grammatical structures in communication (p. 28). Thus, while we cannot differentiate between what is learned and what is acquired, the latter distinguishes itself by following a natural order. An example of this natural order would be that learners of English acquire the present continuous tense prior to the simple past and simple present.

The third underlying principle of the Natural Approach is that learned grammatical rules can serve only as an editor or “monitor” to utterances initiated by the speaker’s acquired competence in those instances where the student has the time, is focused on form and knows the rule (p. 30-31). Here Krashen and Terrell provide a ready explanation for data that conflict with their theoretical model. Just as Chomsky credits counter-examples to

\textsuperscript{5} The notion of “obligatory contexts” is borrowed from Roger Brown’s methodology in A First Language. In order to determine if a child had acquired what Brown termed grammatical function (such as plural-s, present tense, third person singular -s), he looked to see if the child supplied the correct form in those contexts where it was necessary. For example, in the sentence “Tommy eats the cookie” the -s on eat is obligatory or necessary for the sentence to be grammatically correct in a context where the utterance is not a command. It is worth mentioning that Brown concluded that the long developmental process of morpheme acquisition argued against the notion that “rules” were being acquired. After all, one either had a rule or did not. Once a rule was acquired, there would no longer be the wild upward and downward swoops that characterized children’s acquisition curves (Brown, 1973, p. 257).
his universal parameters to the interference of performance factors, Krashen and Terrell are able to account for “unnatural” orders in grammatical structures produced by adult L2 students on written exams by attributing the skewed results to high monitor use. However, the issue of whether or not acquired competence precedes learned rules is not clear cut. On the one hand, the authors assume that learned knowledge follows acquired knowledge because acquisition via the LAD is a much faster process than the tedious job of learning. However, they also allow that the monitor may be useful in helping a student produce “learned, but not yet acquired rules” (p. 61).

The fourth and perhaps most crucial presupposition is that language is acquired when a learner understands input that is slightly beyond her current level of acquired competence (i). This (i + 1) utterance is termed comprehensible input. Natural acquisition can only occur in the context of an understood message, or comprehensible input. Thus, comprehension precedes production in the process of language acquisition (p. 32).

While Krashen and Terrell assert that comprehensible input is necessary for language acquisition, their fifth hypothesis stipulates that it is not always sufficient (p. 19). There are affective variables which can facilitate or impede the process of acquisition. Factors such as positive attitudes toward L2 speakers, low anxiety and a high degree of self-confidence render the L2 learner more permeable to linguistic input. Receptive learners are said to have “low” affective filters, whereas resistant learners have “high” affective filters that hinder the process of language acquisition.
The theoretical model of Krashen and Terrell’s Natural Approach is best summarized by their own diagram (p. 39):

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\text{AFFECTIVE FILTER} \quad \begin{array}{c}
\text{INPUT} \\
\text{LAD} \\
\text{COMPETENCE}
\end{array} \quad \text{ACQUIRED}
\]

To review, in order for acquisition to occur, learners must be exposed to target language input that is understandable, but slightly beyond their current level of acquired competence. The affective filter alludes to emotional factors that can inhibit language acquisition.

The pedagogical implications of the model are obvious. Since for Krashen and Terrell, second language acquisition is an unconscious process directed by an innate structure of the brain rather than a conscious, problem-solving effort on the part of the learner, they have little use for the teaching of formal grammar, which they assert hinders “natural” acquisition. The job of second language instructors is to provide “comprehensible input” to their students in a pleasant, stress-free environment that will facilitate natural acquisition. Since acquisition follows a natural order, teachers are encouraged to present material in accordance with this sequence.\(^6\) For the ESL teacher, the job of providing comprehensible input is a formidable one, since students’ competence levels typically vary. What might be

\[^6\] Some modern ESL textbooks, such as *English Alive* present grammatical structures in an order consistent with that prescribed by *The Natural Approach*.\[^6\]
comprehensible input for one student could be unintelligible or boring to another.

It is also apparent that all teaching efforts must necessarily be directed at the input end of the model, since once input reaches the LAD an automatic phase begins, not unlike the physical process of food digestion. Output only serves as a benchmark to indicate a student’s location along the natural path of L2 acquisition. To focus on output from the standpoint of error correction could, in fact, undermine the entire process by raising the affective filter of the L2 learner.

Despite Krashen and Terrell’s claim that *The Natural Approach* is supported by recent first and second language acquisition research, the connection is tenuous. In order to link a communicative pedagogy to theory that assumes that there is no connection between the structure of language and its communicative function, it was necessary for Krashen and Terrell to ignore what Chomsky meant by the term *language*. In fact, Chomsky’s theoretical construct of what language is and the functioning of the LAD has little to do with those aspects of language that they wish to foster through their natural approach. Chomsky limited the domain of the LAD to core grammar, excluding other factors of language use such as: peripheral grammar, pragmatic competence and other communication skills which contributed to actual performance. According to Chomsky, children must rely on general cognitive ability and associative learning in order to master the components of language not supported by the LAD.\textsuperscript{7} Universal

\textsuperscript{7} Cook (1988) states, “It is not denied that in actual use the production and comprehension of language depends upon other mental faculties and physical systems [than the LAD], although, as we see later, it is tricky to disentangle them” (p. 69).
Grammar theory, then, is only concerned with those aspects of language that are acquired via the LAD, which accounts for only a portion of the communicative competence that Krashen and Terrell are striving to help the ESL learner achieve. In order to recast Chomskyan theory to fit *The Natural Approach*, the authors were forced to extend the functioning of the LAD to include all aspects of language use.\(^8\)

Krashen and Terrell claim further theoretical support from research done by Roger Brown (1973) and Dulay & Burt (1974a and b). Dulay and Burt inferred from observed similarities in the acquisition order of certain English morphemes by L2 learners of different L1 backgrounds that there was a “natural” order of second language acquisition which was guided by the LAD (Dulay and Burt, 1974a). Although their research model was closely fashioned after that of Roger Brown’s *A First Language*, the inferences they drew differed significantly from Brown’s conclusions. Brown in his seminal study on children’s first language acquisition hypothesized that children learning the same language would demonstrate an “invariant” order in their acquisition of both semantic and grammatical knowledge. He regarded this “invariant” order in first language acquisition to be the product of the child’s own cognitive development relative to the

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\(^8\) Krashen and Terrell are not alone in miscasting the generative-transformational model as a model for the production of language. Chomskyan adherents such as Pinker (1994) credit the LAD with giving children the ability to produce grammatical sentences, whereas Chomsky only claimed that competence enables children to judge if a string of words is or is not a grammatical sentence. The difference between a formal description and a production model is captured nicely by a comparison made by Wallis Reid (1998). He notes that the formula \(x^2 + y^2 = c^2\) is a mathematical description that generates all circles, where \(x, y\) represents a point on a grid with an \(x\) and \(y\) axis and \(c\) is a constant value. Though the formula generates circles in the sense that it provides a formal description of them, it has nothing to do with why someone might want to draw a circle, or the method that s/he might choose to accomplish the task. However, one could feasibly check two dimensional figures to see if all their points satisfied the conditions of the formula.
semantic and grammatical complexity of a given structure. In this, Brown rejected Chomsky’s nativist model of language acquisition in favor of a developmental process more in line with Piagetian theory. While the order that Brown referred to included the five general stages of language development, he also noticed that the three children in his longitudinal study demonstrated a strong similarity in the acquisition order of 14 “functors” or grammatical morphemes (plural -s, verb tense) or free forms (a, the) that refined or “modulated” semantic meaning. The “invariant” order of these 14 morphemes became the source of Roger Brown’s considerable influence in second language education. As previously mentioned, Brown himself did not favor the idea of innate language processing structures. However, because Dulay and Burt were more Chomskyan in their linguistic perspective than Brown, they were quite ready to take similar morpheme acquisition orders as evidence of the operation of the LAD. When they found evidence of similar orders of acquisition of English functors among Chinese ESL students, they concluded that LAD operated past puberty and beyond first language acquisition. The LAD also directed second language learning in a pre-programmed “natural” order.

Krashen and Terrell accept this link between natural order and the LAD, and overcome the difficulty of individual differences in second language acquisition (a plausible disproof of an automatic process

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9 Stage I: Semantic roles (agent, patient, instrument) in word order; Stage II: semantic modulations (number, tense, articles) through grammatical inflection; Stage III: Modalities of simple sentences (questions, imperatives, negation); Stage IV: Embedding clauses; Stage V: Coordination of full sentences with appropriate deletions.
controlled by an innate structure) by placing an affective filter between the comprehensible input and the LAD. As already noted, the pedagogical implications of this assumption are profound. Language acquisition directed along a “natural” order by an innate structure is impervious to any kind of formal instruction. The language teacher’s role is limited to that of a cheerleader who encourages students along the path of natural acquisition. While comprehension and communication are key components of Krashen & Terrell’s Natural Approach, it is assumed that both can be accomplished without engaging any conscious theory construction on the part of the L2 learner.

The uniting of a communicative pedagogy with Chomskyan linguistics was, at best, a marriage of convenience for Krashen and Terrell. At the time, the behaviorist orientation of American Structuralism, had been largely discredited in favor of cognitive approaches to human psychological development. What the authors do not explain is how comprehension facilitates a basically automatic process. If negotiation of meaning is a necessary component of language acquisition, then any supporting linguistic theory must posit a direct relationship between the form of language and its communicative purpose. For this reason, the instrumental view of language developed by William Diver and his Columbia University colleagues would have been a far more compatible theoretical partner for Krashen and Terrell’s *Natural Approach* than the Chomskyan model that they chose.

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10 A similar trend took place in early reading pedagogy. Jay Ludwig (1977) noted that the whole language perspective that grew out of miscue analysis supported the “cognitive concepts of human development -- again growing out of the anti-behaviorism of the generative-transformational analysis of language” (p. 31).
An Instrumental View of Language:  A Suitable Theoretical Partner for a Communicative Pedagogy

Columbia School linguistics focuses on the communicative use of language, rejecting the notion that linguistic form and communicative function belong to separate domains of inquiry. Language is viewed as a tool in the process of communication; an inventory of signs (paired signals and meanings) which are used to construct messages. Since the sign is the basic unit of CS linguistic analysis, grammar operates at the level of the individual sign whose meaning is determined in part by its relationship to other signs within a common conceptual field. Thus from the CS perspective, utterances are formed as a result of goal-directed choice, based on the individual semantic contribution of each linguistic unit toward the intended message. Purely formal rules based on abstract logic do not play a part in actual language use. In addition to its “pro-choice” innovation, CS is unique in the role that it assigns to human inference in the process of communication. The meanings of units within an utterance do not add up to the intended message (i.e., the message is greater than the sum of the individual meanings of units), but rather serve as hints that aid the hearer/interpreter to construct messages. Thus, CS situates the inferential ability of human beings and their communicative purposes at the structural core of their construct of language.

In many ways, CS linguistics provides a more natural theoretical fit for Krashen and Terrell’s communicative pedagogy than the Chomskyan model they employ. In particular, the instrumental construct of language provides a plausible explanation for the link between comprehension and acquisition -- a link that remained problematical within the Chomskyan
paradigm of an innate language processing device. From the CS perspective, meaning rather than abstract syntactic relationships directs language use. What language learners acquire is an inventory of meanings that make sense out of the language they hear. Viewed in this light, second language learning becomes a problem-solving process of creating concepts (meanings) that are consistent with the categorical distinctions of the target language (Reid, 1984). This notion of creative construction fits hand-in-glove with Krashen and Terrell’s principle of comprehensible input. When an understood message contains only one unknown (i + 1), the L2 learner will have a relatively easy time hypothesizing the semantic contribution of this single unit. Within this context, “meaning is the clue to language (MacNamara in Reid, 1984),” or, as Krashen and Terrell assert, comprehension must precede acquisition.

While Columbia School theory supports the Natural Approach’s emphasis on comprehension, the idea that language is learned through an active process of theory construction runs counter to Krashen & Terrell’s basic premise that language acquisition is directed by an autonomous structure in the brain. This difference carries significant pedagogical implications. Within the instrumental model, second language learning is once again teachable, but from a very different perspective than the traditional model. In a sense, Columbia School agrees with Krashen and Terrell that traditional grammar methods are ineffective in teaching a second language, but the fault lies not in the mode of processing (as Krashen and Terrell assume), but in the grammar itself. As previously

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11 The fact that young children say such things as “foots” and “goed” provides strong evidence that children are actively engaged in similar creative construction of concepts during the process of learning their first language.
mentioned, from an instrumental perspective, rules governing abstract relationships within a sentence have little to do with the goal-directed choices that inform language use. Since “meaning” serves as an explanation for the occurrence of signs in communication, then a truly communicative grammar must describe the relationships that exist between the meanings of individual signs in a language. As a result, although CS pedagogy would appeal to the same problem-solving ability employed by traditional grammar, the problems addressed would be very different. While the traditional grammarian seeks to describe abstract, formal relationships within the sentence, the CS practitioner would strive to provide a meaning-based rationale for language use.

An example will be helpful in illustrating how this works. From the traditional standpoint, the gerund and infinitive are both verbal forms that function as nouns. In effect, the to and ing serve as markers that indicate form’s function within the sentence, but neither makes an independent semantic contribution to the sentence’s overall message. Theoretically, then, the two forms should be interchangeable, since they can fulfill the same role in sentence construction. However, the student of English soon finds that this is not the case; certain contexts require the use of a gerund while others call for an infinitive. Verbal nouns immediately following verbs are a particularly difficult problem. As mentioned in an earlier section, the verb +gerund/verb + infinitive distinction in English has traditionally been approached from the viewpoint of correctness. Lists are provided which specify which verbs are correctly followed by gerunds and which are to be followed by infinitives. A typical example would be that hope and want are followed by the infinitive form, while enjoy, finish and
stop are indicated as requiring the gerund form (Fingado & Jerome, 1991, p. 163-165). The process of mastering the gerund/infinitive distinction is one of memorizing which verbs take which form. And in those instances, such as start, where either form is termed “correct,” it is assumed that there is no difference in meaning.\textsuperscript{12}

For the Columbia School practitioner, the starting point in teaching the gerund/infinitive distinction is the semantic difference between to and ing. Although gerunds and infinitives share similar roles in sentence constructions, that does not imply that they have the same meaning. By closely examining those contexts that favor one form over the other, or looking at examples where substituting a gerund for an infinitive produces a very different message, it is possible to discover what this difference in meaning is. Rather than advocating rote memorization, the CS teacher provides contexts and examples that help ESL students discover meanings that explain when and where gerunds and infinitives are used.

Working within the CS paradigm, Wherrity & Cooper (1991) concluded that the infinitive was used in instances where a purpose or possibility was present, while the gerund seemed to indicate an activity in progress or an actual happening. These meanings are consistent with the individual meanings of to (direction toward a point) and verb-ing, a process. From this meaning-based distinction, it is easy to hypothesize that the regular occurrence of hope with the infinitive form is the result of the semantic coherence between the tentativeness of hope and an occurrence

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} It is interesting to note that English Alive puts stop on the gerund list and start on the list for both gerunds and infinitives. This is perhaps because the authors assert that in the group of verbs that can take either form, there is no difference in meaning. Since the difference between “I started to eat” and “I started eating” is less pronounced than that between “I stopped to eat” (purpose) and “I stopped eating” (the process of eating), the notion of “correctness” is not obscured by differences in meaning.}
which is only a possibility (e.g., I hope to pay my bill next Friday.), without referring to an abstract notion of verb class and correctness. Further, this difference in meaning can also explain the unexpected or less usual occurrence such as, “I hope paying my debt will end my credit problems.” Rather than relegating an example such as this to the “exceptions-to-the-rule” list, Columbia School exploits such examples to illustrate how the meaning of the forms differ and offers a meaning-based rationale for selecting one or the other. From the instrumental perspective, correctness is a matter of making the choice appropriate to the intended message, rather than adherence to arbitrary rules.

To summarize the difference between the traditional grammar approach and the CS method of teaching ESL, Columbia School pedagogy takes seriously the morphology of the forms themselves; that is, CS assumes that both grammatical and lexical forms are associated with a unique meaning that determines when and where that form is used. Traditional grammar uses linguistic morphology to determine word class or grammatical category often without assigning any semantic import to the form itself. For example, traditional grammar assumes that the -s of present tense verbs carries no independent semantic content, but is merely an automatic response to third person, singular subjects (Reid, 1991). As previously mentioned, the to of the infinitive has been traditionally considered a semantically empty marker of the noun form of the verb. Columbia School scholars such as Wallis Reid in English Noun Verb Number: A Functional Explanation (1991) and Wherrity & Cooper (1991) in Teaching the Gerund/Infinitive Distinction: A Non-Traditional Approach present compelling evidence that -s and to do indeed make an independent
semantic contribution to the message that is communicated. Not only does meaning provide a rationale for those most common cases which are summarized in the rules of traditional grammar, but also for those instances when actual language use appears to exceed the limits imposed by traditional rules. In this sense, CS theory not only offers an explanation for issues that remain problematical in Krashen and Terrell’s Natural Approach, but in a more global sense it also provides a convincing picture of what language is and how it used in the process of communication.

Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the connections that exist between the field of linguistics and second language pedagogy. In the case of traditional grammar and American Structuralism, the associated pedagogy was an accurate reflection of the basic construct of language of each theory. In contrast, the application of Chomskyan linguistics as the theoretical basis for Krashen and Terrell’s Natural Approach involved considerable distortion of Chomsky’s basic assumptions about the nature of language and which aspects of language were handled by an innate language processing device. By attributing the acquisition of all aspects of communicative competence to the LAD, Krashen and Terrell conflate Chomskyan competence -- the ability to make grammaticality judgments -- with the ability of speakers to produce and understand language within the context of real communication. Within their model of second language acquisition, the issue of how comprehension aids in the automatic process directed by an innate structure is a question that is never answered. The
unfortunate result of this mismatch between theoretical construct and educational goal, is a lop-sided pedagogy that focuses solely on the input side of the equation and ignores output.

The pedagogical implication of pairing Krashen and Terrell’s communicative pedagogy with a more compatible theoretical partner has also been investigated. From an instrumental viewpoint, meaning directs language use. This vital link between form and communicative function provides a plausible explanation for the connection between comprehension and language acquisition noted by Krashen and Terrell. However, unlike Krashen and Terrell, CS theory does not rely on a LAD to expedite language learning because rules governing abstract relationships between sentence constituents play no part in the instrumental model of how language works in the process of communication. On the contrary, language learners acquire an inventory of meanings that make sense out of the language they hear. This process of actively constructing concepts is accomplished through the normal methods of abstraction and inference that characterize all problem-solving efforts. As a result, Columbia School theory would restore the value of teaching grammar, but at the level of the linguistic sign rather than the sentence. Grammatical systems consist of oppositional meanings of signs sharing the same conceptual field. This includes both lexical oppositions (kitten, cat, feline, tomcat) and grammatical oppositions (gerund/infinitive distinction, -s on present tense verbs). In addition, an instrumental approach to L2 instruction would provide balance between input and output in the learning process. However, error correction would not aim to make students conform to some abstract notion of agreement or formal relations between sentence
constituents, but rather guide students toward an understanding of how individual signals either contribute to or impede the construction of an intended message. In sum, the goal of Columbia School instruction is to teach second language learners how signs within the target language are used to communicate.

It is clear, then, that linguistic theory -- either correctly or incorrectly applied -- exerts a strong influence on classroom practice in the field of second language instruction. As illustrated in this paper, differing theoretical constructs of the basic nature of language and how it functions in the process of communication foster different views on what a second language learner is learning (or acquiring), and how instruction can best facilitate the process. For the traditional grammarian, language learning is a matter of mastering a new nomenclature for universal thought categories, as well as the formal rules governing how these categories are mapped on the sentence structure of the target language. Both abstract thinking and memorization are involved in this process. From the American Structuralist perspective, language learning is a matter of forming new speech habits through repetition. Krashen and Terrell’s adaptation of the Chomskyan model posits the unconscious assimilation of second language via an innate LAD in the environment of comprehensible input. Columbia School asserts that language learning is a process of creative construction whereby learners construct meanings that enable them to make sense out of what they hear. In view of the impact of basic assumptions about language on second language pedagogy, it is a further conclusion of this paper that a strong foundation in linguistic theory is a valuable part of every prospective language teacher’s preparation.
References


