

# **Book Review**

## **Studies in Language Learning and Spanish Linguistics, (1995).**

**Peggy Hashempour, Ricardo Maldonado & Margaret van Naerssen.  
McGraw-Hill, Inc., 481 pp.**

**Reviewed by Natalia Martínez León, Universidad de las Américas - Puebla.<sup>1</sup>**

---

Language learning and Spanish Linguistics is divided into three parts. Part one is an introduction to Tracy Terrell and a listing of his works. The second part is an overview that sets the tone for the rest of the book. It includes the Natural Approach theory and pedagogical comments of Terrell's work.

This new method claims that acquisition only occurs when the student comprehends the message, a contrast to the traditional audiolingual methodology. Adapted total physical response techniques are adapted so that they provide comprehensible input during the very early stages of language instruction (Asher 1965, 1966, 1979) and at the same time reduces stress. The teacher creates a non-threatening and friendly atmosphere in the classroom.

The most controversial about this theory is the questions of grammar, how it is treated in the classroom, detailed grammar explanations should be avoided whenever possible, and also we have to keep in mind that Terrell's approach focuses on communicative strategies mainly. Another questioned matter is if errors should be corrected or not, specific guidelines were given on what to correct and how to correct it as correcting all the time could be useless and harmful to students.

These major contributions had a great impact on present-day teaching of second and foreign languages even though some areas of teaching were not promoted as

---

<sup>1</sup>This author can be reached at: natalia@mail.udlap.mx

pronunciation, even though, in this book there is a report on a research dealing with pronunciation that throws data proving the Natural Approach theory can be useful to pronunciation.

The model was conceived for beginning language study but through research we find that it can be extended to continue language learning at the intermediate level based on the educational goals of beginning-level studies: attainment of a certain level of linguistic proficiency in the target language, development of an affective and self-motivated attitude toward the L2, increase in the knowledge of the target culture; and adding Krashen's suggested content-based instruction and Free Voluntary Reading.

Much depends upon the teacher and upon the students, their learning styles, the cultural situation, course expectations and other goals. For example, in one of Terry's latest study he found evidence that native speakers modify their speech to make it more comprehensible to language learners by slowing down, focusing on key words, using shorter sentences, using visuals, gestures, and other nonlinguistic resources. This input can be referred to as modified or simplified speech. We cannot assume that foreigner talk automatically provides good input. Experienced instructors know what works and what doesn't, these techniques might be different from what occurs in natural L2 and that might be what makes classroom learning more successful than natural L2 acquisition.

The third part of the book deals with two areas that were focused by Terrell.

1. The sociolinguistics of Spanish pronunciation
2. Topics in Spanish grammar

The first one includes articles about Cuban and Puerto Rican Spanish, the *hiato*, *sineresis* and *sinalefa*, XVI century Spanish in Mexico, Mexican-American Spanish and Sociolinguistic variation of sex, class and velarization among the youth in Spain.

The second area of focus, Spanish grammar, is about Terrell's research and its impact on further developments in the field. Three of the papers are about teaching techniques for specific grammatical elements on theoretical problems; six papers study the Spanish mood choice, how the use of mood in Spanish, and the application of the various movement transformations are directly related to the notions of assertion and presupposition (weak and strong). In the article by Terrell, assertion and presupposition analysis is treated more in depth as well as how the indicative or the subjunctive mood can be used in Spanish.

In the second article we have the explanation of the noun phrase of relative clause (NPR) to analyze a sentence containing a relative clause as referred to by the noun phrase composed of antecedent plus clause. The relationship between the clitic *se* and indicative / subjunctive mood choice in Spanish, where *se* having been treated as a marker of detransitivization, also imposes an increase in transitivity and can behave quite systematically.

In the next two articles the focus is on the function of the Spanish personal *a* and the tense and aspect markers of Spanish and how the periphrastic future (*ir + a + infinitive*) in Spanish is used to express future. The book ends with a section written by the people who knew Terrell, and it is entirely dedicated to his memory.

This compilation of articles (30) , covers all the aspects of Terrell's research and due to the fact that they were personally chosen by Terrell from a big list of prospective articles, when he already knew his forthcoming death, represents his philosophy and beliefs about language. It would be of interest and great value for those looking for something to stimulate them in their reflections about language learning and Spanish linguistics.