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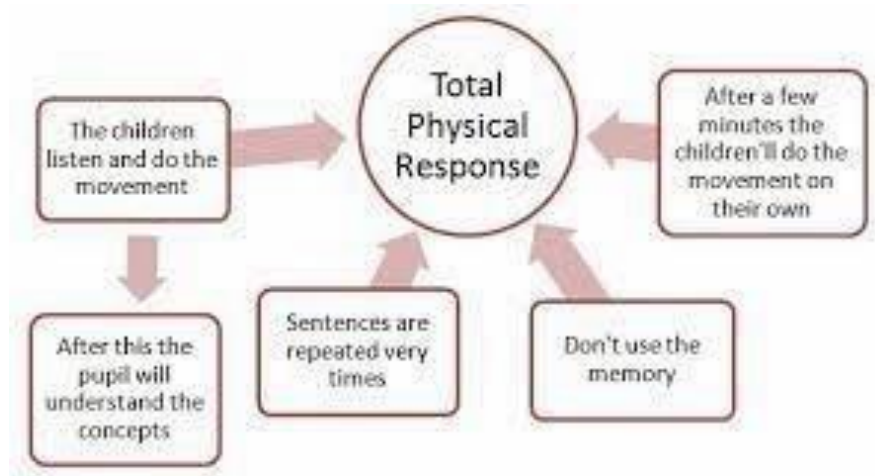


Third stage
Introduction

Let us first consider a general approach to foreign language instruction which has been named the Comprehension Approach. It is called this because of the importance it gives to listening comprehension. Most of the other methods we have looked at have students speaking the target language from the first day. In the 1960s, James Asher's research gave rise to the hypothesis that language learning starts first with understanding and ends with production. After the learner internalizes an extensive map of how the target language works, speaking will appear spontaneously. Of course, the students' speech will not be perfect, but gradually speech will become more target-like. Notice that this is exactly how an infant acquires its native language. A baby spends many months listening to the people around it long before it ever says a word. The child has the time to try to make sense out of the sounds it hears. No one tells the baby that it must speak. The child chooses to speak when it is ready to do so.

A fourth method, James Asher's Total Physical Response (TPR), is the one we will examine in detail here in order to see how the principles of the Comprehension

Approach are put into practice. Based on his research cited above, Asher reasoned that the fastest, least stressful way to achieve understanding of any target language is to follow directions uttered by the instructor (without native language translation). We will learn about Total Physical Response through our usual way of observing a class in which it is being used. The class is located in Sweden. It is a beginning class for 30 Grade 5 students. They study English for one class period three times a week.



Based on the teacher experience, the following are the main principles that this method based upon:

- 1 The teacher gives a command in the target language and performs the action with the students.

Meaning in the target language can often be conveyed through actions. Memory is activated through learner response. Beginning language instruction should address the right hemisphere of the brain, the part which controls nonverbal behavior. The target language should be presented in chunks, not just word by word.

- 2 The students say nothing.

The students' understanding of the target language should be developed before speaking.

3 The teacher gives the commands quite quickly.

Students can initially learn one part of the language rapidly by moving their bodies.

4 The teacher sits down and issues commands to the volunteers.

The imperative is a powerful linguistic device through which the teacher can direct student behavior.

5 The teacher directs students other than the volunteers.

Students can learn through observing actions as well as by performing the actions themselves.

6 The teacher introduces new commands after she is satisfied that the first six have been mastered.

It is very important that students feel successful. Feelings of success and low anxiety facilitate learning.

7 The teacher changes the order of the commands.

Students should not be made to memorize fixed routines.

8 When the students make an error, the teacher repeats the command while acting it out.

Correction should be carried out in an unobtrusive manner.

9 The teacher gives the students commands they have not heard before.

Students must develop flexibility in understanding novel combinations of target language chunks. They need to understand more than the exact sentences used in training. Novelty is also motivating.

10 The teacher says, 'Jump to the desk.' Everyone laughs.

Language learning is more effective when it is fun.



Dear students

The following ten questions cover all what is important in this method. Please read and memorize them all.

1 What are the goals of teachers who use TPR?

Teachers who use TPR believe in the importance of having their students enjoy their experience of learning to communicate in another language. In fact, TPR was developed in order to reduce the stress people feel when they are studying other languages and thereby encourage students to persist in their study beyond a beginning level of proficiency.

The way to do this, Asher believes, is to base foreign language learning upon the way children learn their native language.

2 What is the role of the teacher? What is the role of the students?

Initially, the teacher is the director of all student behavior. The students are imitators of her nonverbal model. At some point (usually after 10–20 hours of instruction), some students will be ‘ready to speak.’ At that point, there will be a

role reversal with individual students directing the teacher and the other students. 3

What are some characteristics of the teaching/learning process?

The first phase of a lesson is one of modeling. The teacher issues commands to a few students, then performs the actions with them. In the second phase, these same students demonstrate that they can understand the commands by performing them alone. The observers also have an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding. The teacher next recombines elements of the commands to have students develop flexibility in understanding unfamiliar utterances. These commands, which students perform, are often humorous.

After learning to respond to some oral commands, the students learn to read and write them. When students are ready to speak, they become the ones who issue the commands. After students begin speaking, activities expand to include skits and games.

4 What is the nature of student–teacher interaction? What is the nature of student–student interaction?

The teacher interacts with the whole group of students and with individual students.

Initially, the interaction is characterized by the teacher speaking and the students responding nonverbally. Later on, the students become more verbal and the teacher responds nonverbally.

Students perform the actions together. Students can learn by watching each other.

At some point, however, Asher believes observers must demonstrate their understanding of the commands in order to retain them.

As students begin to speak, they issue commands to one another as well as to the teacher.

5 How are the feelings of the students dealt with?

One of the main reasons TPR was developed was to reduce the stress people feel when studying other languages. One of the primary ways this is accomplished is to allow learners to speak when they are ready. Forcing them to speak before then will

only create anxiety. Also, when students do begin to speak, perfection should not be expected.

Another way to relieve anxiety is to make language learning as enjoyable as possible. The use of zany commands and humorous skits are two ways of showing that language learning can be fun.

Finally, it is important that there not be too much modeling, but that students not be

too rushed either. Feelings of success and low anxiety facilitate learning.

6 How is the language viewed? How is culture viewed?

Just as with the acquisition of the native language, the oral modality is primary.

Culture is the lifestyle of people who speak the language natively.

7 What areas of language are emphasized? What language skills are emphasized?

Vocabulary and grammatical structures are emphasized over other language areas.

These are embedded within imperatives. The imperatives are single words and multi-word chunks. One reason for the use of imperatives is their frequency of

occurrence in the speech directed at young children learning their native language. Understanding the spoken word should precede its production. The spoken language is emphasized over written language. Students often do not learn to read the commands they have already learned to perform until after 10 hours of instruction.

8 What is the role of the students' native language?

TPR is usually introduced in the students' native language. After the introduction, rarely would the native language be used. Meaning is made clear through body movements.

9 How is evaluation accomplished?

Teachers will know immediately whether or not students understand by observing their students' actions. Formal evaluations can be conducted simply by commanding individual students to perform a series of actions. As students become more advanced, their performance of skits they have created can become the basis for evaluation.

10 How does the teacher respond to student errors?

It is expected that students will make errors when they first begin speaking. Teachers should be tolerant of them and only correct major errors. Even these should be corrected unobtrusively. As students get more advanced, teachers can 'fine tune'—correct more minor errors.



The following techniques are the main techniques that used in this method. Please read them carefully.

- Using Commands to Direct Behavior

It should be clear from the class we observed that the use of commands is the major teaching technique of TPR. The commands are given to get students to perform an action; the action makes the meaning of the command clear. Since Asher suggests keeping the pace lively, it is necessary for a teacher to plan in advance just which commands she will introduce in a lesson. If the teacher tries to think them up as the lesson progresses, the pace will be too slow.

At first, to clarify meaning, the teacher performs the actions with the students. Later the teacher directs the students alone. The students' actions tell the teacher whether or not the students understand.

As we saw in the lesson we observed, Asher advises teachers to vary the sequence of the commands so that students do not simply memorize the action sequence without ever connecting the actions with the language.

Asher believes it is very important that the students feel successful. Therefore, the teacher should not introduce new commands too fast. It is recommended that a

teacher present three commands at a time. After students feel successful with these, three more can be taught.

Although we were only able to observe one beginning class, people always ask just

how much of a language can be taught through the use of imperatives? Asher claims that all grammar features can be communicated through imperatives. To give an example of a more advanced lesson, one might teach the past tense as follows:

TEACHER: Ingrid, walk to the blackboard.

(Ingrid gets up and walks to the blackboard.)

TEACHER: Class, if Ingrid walked to the blackboard, stand up.

(The class stands up.)

TEACHER: Ingrid, write your name on the blackboard.

(Ingrid writes her name on the blackboard.)

TEACHER: Class, if Ingrid wrote her name on the blackboard, sit down.

(The class sits down.)

- Role Reversal

Students command their teacher and classmates to perform some actions. Asher says that students will want to speak after 10–20 hours of instruction, although some students may take longer. Students should not be encouraged to speak until they are ready.

