

TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE (TPR) ACTIVITIES IN TEACHING ENGLISH TO YOUNG LEARNERS

Rzamuratova Azada

4th year student of Foreign Languages Faculty, NSPI

Abstract

Activities to develop young learners' foreign language skills and knowledge. Being a language teaching method that uses movement/physical activity to teach language, TPR responds favorably to the children's need to be physically active, to learn by doing, and to learn language in meaningful communicative contexts and stress-free atmosphere.

Key words: TPR method, young learner, actions, basic principles, comprehension, CLT

Introduction. Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method of teaching a foreign or second language (target language) by developing listening comprehension through a series of commands to which students respond with physical activity. It was founded by James Asher, a professor of psychology, in the late 1960's and is still considered and used as a valuable linguistic tool in teaching a target language, especially in initial stages of instruction. It combines language and gesture, thus making language acquisition more natural and memorable (1).

Learners are not expected to speak while performing actions, which makes TPR stress-free and suitable for teaching beginners, either young learners, teenagers or adults (1).

When teaching young learners, TPR can be very beneficial as it responds favourably

to their tendency to learn best by doing; it also respects children's need to develop listening comprehension before speaking and to take as much time as necessary before they feel ready to speak. As Peck notices it, children „seem to learn language quickly and thoroughly when the brain and body work together“(13)

The basic principles guiding TPR method are drawn from developmental psychology, theory of learning, brain research, and humanistic pedagogy (15).

Asher believes that learning a target language should be similar to native language acquisition: in learning a native language, comprehension comes before speaking and a child first responds to commands physically, and only later verbally; as affective factors are very important in learning, teachers should create a comfortable learning atmosphere to lower the affective filter and to help learning; gestures should be combined with listening comprehension to increase long-term retention; since brain

processes information faster and accepts it as reliable if listening is followed by movement (right brain learning), without speaking or translation (left brain learning), learners should be silent not to cause 'brain overload': by silently responding to commands, learners internalise the new language (phonology, vocabulary, grammar and semantics) simultaneously, without any analysis, and speaking, reading and writing should follow later, after a solid foundation has been created by TPR (1).

Asher draws the above principles on three very influential learning hypotheses:

1. there is an innate language learning bio programme which involves the following steps and processes: children develop listening comprehension before they start to speak; children's listening comprehension is acquired by responding physically to parents' commands; solid listening comprehension enables speech to develop naturally, with no effort;

2. TPR is directed to right brain learning (unlike most language teaching methods), and right brain activities make it possible for the left brain hemisphere to process language for speaking, reading and writing;

3. first language acquisition happens in and is fostered by stress-free environment, which means that similar conditions should be created in target language learning: TPR reduces anxiety by sequencing the introduction of skills and by focusing on meaning (by combining listening comprehension and physical response) instead of on language form and grammatical structures (1).

However, the main aim of TPR method is to teach basic speaking and communication skill, and it is achieved by exposing learners to carefully graded vocabulary and grammar structures as „the material gradually increases in complexity so that each new lesson builds on the ones before“ (9). TPR is a form of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, which was developed in the 1980's, proposing that learners learn a target language best when using it for meaningful communication, while grammar explanations are not needed. Although TPR can enable learners to reach high proficiency levels and to build up considerable knowledge, its potential is limited when it comes to developing speaking skills (2).

Still, this method is widely used in teaching beginners and is quite effective when teaching children: the complexity of the input is gradually increased, children are involved in listening, responding to commands, and doing actions with a song or a story, and after some time they take over from the teacher and give commands themselves

Language lessons based on TPR involve a series of teacher's commands introduced gradually and repeated until internalised by the class. The teacher first gives a command and performs the corresponding action with four volunteers in front of the class (command: Stand up.), while the class just listens and watches them perform. New commands are added one by one to a set of already internalised commands (Stand up.

Sit down. Turn around. Jump. Stop. Walk.), with the teacher modelling the corresponding activities together with the volunteers, and frequently changing the sequence of commands (2).

In the next stage, the teacher gives already introduced and practised commands without performing the actions, and the volunteers respond, demonstrating their understanding of the language introduced and practised. After checking understanding with volunteers, the teacher gives the first command (Stand up.) to the class, and after all students show their comprehension, the teacher continues with other commands that the class has observed being performed by the teacher and the volunteers (Sit down. Stand up. Jump. Stop. Sit down. Stand up. Turn around. Turn around. Jump. Sit down.) (ibid.).

It is important that the commands are introduced at the right pace (three at a time, as Larsen-Freeman suggests, so that all students can feel successful.

Once the class can perform all the commands without hesitation, the teacher introduces new language through new commands that are more complex and contain not only new verbs, but also nouns, adjectives and adverbs: Point to the door/the chair/the desk. (7)

Walk to the door/the window/the chair. Touch the chair/the door/the desk. etc. In this way, not only content words can be introduced and practised, but grammar words, as well (articles, prepositions, pronouns, etc.). The sequence of commands should be varied until all the students are able to follow the commands with no hesitation. Also, it is very important to introduce the commands that are new to the students (e.g. Jump to the desk. Sit on the desk.), and to give compound commands that require two or more actions (e.g. Point to the door and walk to the door.): this helps students to develop flexibility in understanding unknown utterances and keeps them motivated and attentive (7). Moreover, the teacher can give a series of connected commands and create an action sequence related to everyday activities, like giving instructions about writing a letter: Take out a pen. Take out a piece of paper. Write a letter. (imaginary) Fold the letter. Put it in an envelope. Write the address on the envelope. Put a stamp on the envelope. Mail the letter. (7). By responding to compound commands correctly, with no hesitation, the students demonstrate that they have internalised the new language.

In the first few weeks of introducing and practising English through TPR, students are not expected to speak, but only to observe and respond nonverbally. However, when some students feel confident enough to give commands, they take over one by one, and the class and the teacher respond with actions.

Speaking is thus introduced at students' individual pace, as an anxiety-free activity. The errors that appear when the students give commands are part of the learning process and they should not be corrected until the students become more

proficient (7). Evaluation can be easily performed by giving commands to individual students or by having them create and perform skits in pairs or groups (7). The focus should be on vocabulary and grammatical structures that are embedded in imperatives as meaning, rather than form. Grammar is, therefore, learned inductively, which makes TPR particularly suitable for teaching English to young learners. Moreover, TPR has the potential to create fun and enjoyment. Although Asher's research with German, Spanish and Japanese learners shows that students can develop rather advanced levels of comprehension of vocabulary and grammar structures, without any oral practice, linguists agree that the main aim of TPR is the development of basic speaking skill and that it should be supplemented with other methods to be able to contribute to the development of other language skills (15). Listening comprehension lessons are seen as “a vehicle for teaching elements of grammatical structure and they allow new vocabulary items to be contextualized within a body of communicative discourse“(10).

Listening in TPR activities requires both understanding and performing actions like hand or body movement, thus responding well to the needs of children as learners.

Children are holistic learners and they need to use language for meaningful purposes and real communication. Therefore, the activities in the classroom should cater for their language learning needs: focusing on meaning, instead of on accuracy; stressing the value of activity, not the value of the language; involving collaboration and social development; providing a rich context, a lot of movement and activities that are interesting and fun, like songs, chants, poems, rhymes, stories or games that involve a lot of movement and gesture in response to rhythmic and repetitive language (13).

Moreover, TPR activities appeal to kinesthetic learners and support their learning of a foreign language. TPR activities, especially action games, can be used to introduce new language in a very effective way. The teacher interacts with children in the following sequence: giving commands, modelling the desired behaviour, removing the model after a few repetitions (when children respond confidently), combining commands in unexpected and creative ways, or turning them into stories and competitive games. Curtain and Dahlberg describe the procedure as specific steps to be followed by the teacher, and give the following examples:

- Raise your hand. Put your hand on your foot. Turn around. Put your hand on the floor.
- Put your hand on your elbow. Raise your knee. Turn around. Jump backwards three times.
- Put your elbow on your knee and turn around.
- Raise your hand. Walk backwards to the map, put your left hand on your head and put your right elbow on South America.
- Angie, hold the (stuffed animal) monkey with your right hand. Mario, put your right elbow on the monkey's head. Kim, put your elbow on the monkey's nose. Class, take out your (imaginary) cameras and take a picture of the monkey and his friends. Smile!

Useful vocabulary for beginning TPR should involve action verbs like stand up, sit down, lift/raise, lower, point to, lay/place, take, pick up, jump, skip, walk, turn around, clap, open, shut, hold, drink, eat, wave, then adjectives and adverbs such as fast, slow, (three) times, (to the) left/right/front/back, high, low, backwards, forwards, sideways, above/over, below/under, in, on, next to, and nouns denoting body parts, classroom objects, parts of the room, colors and numbers (3).

Children should be given the possibility to employ their imagination when using their bodies as a resource for obeying the teacher's command like Make your body like a pair of scissors/a car/a bicycle/a ball (10). Children's understanding of a concept is supported by their understanding of an object's shape and function, which helps them to associate body movement with the concept. A similar task is Body Spelling, in which children use their bodies to shape letters necessary to spell a given word.

Learning new concepts through the body helps children understand the meaning without the teacher's explanation or translation. Such learning can easily be assessed by giving commands in new, unpredictable sequences and observing how fast and confidently children respond to them. It is very important that the teacher should not give any commands that can embarrass children. However, introducing funny commands is usually greatly appreciated by children, like in this example: Walk, walk, walk. Walk to the left, walk to the right. Drink, drink, drink. Drink to the left, drink to the right. Even giving outrageous commands, such as Put your elbow on the ceiling. can be useful in strengthening children's understanding of what is possible/impossible (3).

The most usual TPR activities involve teacher's commands to which students respond physically, demonstrating comprehension. Some commands require using large motor skills, while others involve interaction with classroom objects, like desks, chairs, maps, the whiteboard, board markers, or pictures and charts (3). Here are some example TPR activities based on commands.

1. Depending on the topic of the lesson, the teacher can prepare commands that will strengthen vocabulary learning using hand movement to manipulate any set of pictures or flashcards: Point to / Touch / Pick up (an apple / a pear / an orange / a strawberry). The activity can become more physically demanding if carried out as a competitive game in which the speed of running and the ability to understand commands are combined: the pictures or flashcards can be stuck on the whiteboard and individual members of two groups of children run to the whiteboard to touch or pick up the picture with the word the teacher uses in his/her command; the group that collects more flashcards is the winner. This activity can be done as a lead-in for introducing new vocabulary, or as a practice activity for reviewing vocabulary.

2. A more demanding activity will be the one requiring children to act out the verbs appearing in a story. A good example is the story Susan Laughs by Jeanne Willis. There

are 14 action verbs in the story in two categories: sports and hobbies - dance, paint, ride, row, sing, swim, trot, and activities done in the park - fly, hide, spin, splash, swing, throw, wave. Children can mime the verbs, either while listening to the story or responding to teacher's commands. (11)

Hearing impaired children can be scaffolded with flashcards showing the pictures of activities, while physically impaired children can respond by holding up a flashcard showing the action that corresponds to the teacher's command.

Further, the verbs can be practiced by playing the game Susan says (similar to the well known action game Simon says): Susan says laugh! Susan says swim! Susan says wave! Susan says laugh! Children are supposed to perform only the activities introduced with Susan says. If children mime the action when the teacher says Laugh! without saying Susan says, they are out (11)

4. The commands can be made more challenging if given with increasingly faster speed. These activities can be used as practice or wrap-up activities, or at any time during the lesson if a change of pace is needed.

3. For lessons outside the classroom, more action can be introduced with commands like: Run forward. Take three steps to the left. Jump up and down. Throw the ball. The sequence of commands should be prepared in advance so that they are given fast, for the amusement of children (8).

TPR storytelling is another method that uses pantomime and physical activity: each word in a story has its own gesture, which can be drawn from Sign Language for hearing impaired students . After children have learned the vocabulary appearing in the story by responding to it with gestures or pantomime, the teacher tells this mini-story and the students act it out: Tammy has a cat in the chair. The cat runs away. Tammy looks everywhere for the cat. She comes back and sits down. Oh! The cat is asleep in the chair. (18).

Miming and role-playing This group of activities/games are usually related to a traditional song and focus on bringing language of the songs to life with simulation. Using simulation and dramatisation children act out the traditional songs, like The Mulberry Bush. When listening to the song, children join hands and run round a ring, and then stand still to mime washing their hands, cleaning their teeth, brushing their hair, cleaning their shoes, or going to school (8). Another well-known action song is Head, shoulders, knees and toes, in which children touch respective body parts, thus performing physical exercise that requires them to bend forward and crouch down.

What is more, movement and actions are often naturally embedded in stories for children. Actions can be introduced and practised before storytelling, and after that done during the storytelling (18). In this way, storytelling is more active and enjoyable, and actions meaningful and contextualised. Shin gives an example of performing physical actions of the story Five Little Monkeys (Jumping on the Bed) by both the

teacher and the children during storytelling: changing into their pajamas, brushing their teeth, jumping, falling, calling and sleeping. These activities can make the story memorable. (18)

Conclusion. In sum up the article focused on TPR activities appropriate for teaching a foreign language to young learners, and on the potential of such activities to develop not only children’s listening comprehension, but also a solid vocabulary and grammar foundation for speaking and communication activities. The paper has explored a number of benefits of using TPR method in teaching a foreign language to children: body movement (large-motor skills) can reinforce language learning and potentially strengthen physical development of children; enjoyment created in stress-free activities that focus on physical movement can further foster children’s engagement, enhance motivation for participating in action games, and make foreign language learning truly effective.

References

- 1.Asher, J. (2007). TPR: After forty years, still a very good idea. Retrieved on 10 July 2013
- 2.Cameron, L. (2008). Teaching Languages to Young Learners. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 3.Curtain, H. & A. Dahlberg (2010). Languages and Children, Making the Match: New Languages for Young Learners, Grades K-8. Boston: Pearson Education Inc.
- 4.Ellis, G. (2008). Promoting diversity through children’s literature. British Council Retrieved on September 20, 2012
- 5.Harmer, J. (2007). The Practice of English Language Teaching. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- 6.Krashen, S. (1998). Still a Very Good Idea. NovELTy, Vol. 5, Issue 4. Retrieved on 10 July 2013 from: <http://ipisun.jpte.hu/~joe/novelty/>
- 7.Larsen-Freeman, D. (2004). Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 8.Lee, W. R. (1986). Language Teaching Games and Contests. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 9.Lightbown, P. & N. Spada (2006). How Languages are Learned. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 10.Moon, J. (2005). Children Learning English. Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Limited.
- 11.Morley, J. (2001). Aural Comprehension Instruction: Principles and Practices. In Celce-Murcia, M. (Ed.) Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language, 3rd edition, 69-85. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning.

12. Nunan, D. (1991). *Language Teaching Methodology: A textbook for teachers*. Hemel Hempstead: Prentice Hall International.
13. Peck, S. (2001). *Developing Children's Listening and Speaking in ESL*. In Celce-Murcia, M. (Ed.) *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, 3rd edition, 139-149. Boston: Heinle Cengage Learning.
14. Phillips, S. (1993). *Young Learners*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
15. Richards, J. K. & T. Rodgers (2006). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
16. Rinvolucri, M. (2006). *Humanizing Your Course book: Activities to bring your classes to life*. Pea slake: Delta Publishing.
17. Roth, G. (1998). *Teaching Very Young Children: Pre-school and Early Primary*. London: Richmond Publishing.
18. Shin, J. K. (2014). *Teaching Young Language Learners: From theory to practice*. Boston: Heinle, Cengage Learning.
19. Slattery, M. & J. Willis (2001). *English for Primary Teachers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
20. Jalgasbaeva G. *USE OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCIES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING CULTURES //QUALITY OF TEACHER EDUCATION UNDER MODERN CHALLENGES*. – 2023. – T. 1. – №. 1. – C. 1147-1149.