

# Total Physical Response (TPR)

Babies don't learn by memorizing lists;  
why should children or adults?



- Total Physical Response is an example of “Comprehension Approach”.

## Comprehension Approach

- The idea of Comprehension Approach comes from child language acquisition.
- Speaking is a natural product of listening.
- The importance is given to listening comprehension.
- In the 1960s and 1970s language learning starts with reception then production comes.
- The child speaks when he is ready, no one forces him.

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## Natural Approach (Krashen & Terrell)

- An example of Comprehension Approach.
- Communication through pictures and words is fostered.
- L1 is used.
- Creating low affective filter.
- When input is comprehensible, acquisition proceeds naturally.
- Natural Approach is similar to Direct Method, except use of L1.

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## Self Instructional Program (Winitz & Reed) The Learnables (Winitz)

- ⦿ An example of Comprehension Approach.
- ⦿ In **Self Instructional Program** and **The Learnables**, Ss listen and look at relevant pictures.
- ⦿ The meaning is clearly provided by the pictures.
- ⦿ Ss respond such as pointing to each picture as it is described.
- ⦿ In **TPR** students **listen and respond** in actions.

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## Lexical Approach

- ⦿ An example of Comprehension Approach.
- ⦿ Less considered with Ss production but more concerned that Ss receive abundant comprehensible input.
- ⦿ T talks extensively.
- ⦿ Activities raise Ss' awareness about lexical features of TL.
- ⦿ This results in development of phrasal lexicon.

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## Total Physical Response (TPR)

Another example of  
'Comprehension Approach'

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## The Approach to TPR

- ◉ The language learning theories are similar to those of other behavioural psychologists.
  - > L2 learning is parallel to L1 learning and should reflect the same naturalistic processes.
  - > Listening should develop before speaking.
  - > Once listening comprehension has been developed, speech develops naturally and effortlessly out of it.
  - > Adults should use right-brain motor activities, while the left hemisphere watches and learns.

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## What is TPR?

- ◉ An approach to teaching a FL, based on *listening* linked to *physical activities* which are designed to reinforce comprehension.
- ◉ Developed by Dr. James J. **Asher** a professor of psychology at San Jose State University, California.
- ◉ **The assumption of the method:** When learning a L2 or additional language, that language is internalized through a process of **code-breaking** similar to L1 development.
- ◉ Ss respond to **commands** that require physical movement.

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## Total Physical Response

- ◉ Asher used the way children learn their own language as the basis for his approach.



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## Total Physical Response



- TPR can be modified in many different ways.
- Teachers can use different chants and action rhymes.

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## Total Physical Response

- TPR is useful for students at different stages of language and literacy acquisition.



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## Four Basic Theories

### ✓ Trace theory:

- ✓ Oral repeat, gesture/body action help the recall or association of memory.
- ✓ The more a memory connection is traced, the storage of memory associations is easier (Heb's Law).
- ✓ Tracing and retracing can be both verbal (language) and motor (actions).
- ✓ The combination of the two fosters the recall.

### ✓ Imperatives:

- ✓ The language that kids contact most before they speak is the imperative that parents said; thus, the adult should learn imperatives first.

### ✓ Emotion:

- ✓ Emotion affects the result of learning, and in the process of learning, the tension should be lowered to promote learning effects.

### ✓ Comprehension Approach:

- ✓ Comprehension should be formed before production.
- ✓ So, listening ability should be trained first in language teaching.
- ✓ Only after Ss have developed cognitive listening ability can Ts start to train their oral expression ability.



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## The Secret of Learning

- **An infant learning his first words:** The unique conversation between a parent and infant would be a prime example.
  - > Parent: "Look at daddy".
  - > The baby turns to the father.
  - > The father then responds which becomes a **'Language-Body Conversation'**.
- Although the child is not yet speaking he is internalizing the patterns and sounds of TL.

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## Process of L1 Acquisition

- At the beginning, infants imprint the patterns and sounds of TL in their minds. After the child decoded enough of TL, speaking appears spontaneously.
- At first, the infant's speech might not be perfect, but gradually the child's utterance will approximate more and more that of a native language.

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## Characteristics of TPR

- **Humanistic:** Gamelike movements reduce stress.
- Basically **structuralist:** Imperative verbs at the center.
- Claims that **nonabstractions** (verbs and concrete nouns) help us learn abstractions.

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## Chunks & Grammar

- ✓ **Language chunks** are practiced rather than single items.
- ✓ **No grammar** explanation is given (inductive).

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## Theory of TPR

- The theory of psychology is **Behaviourist**.
- Verbal Stimulus → Response

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## First learning hypothesis Asher draws on for his learning theory

- ◉ **A specific innate bio-program for language learning**
- ◉ Defines an optimal path for L1 and L2 development.
- ◉ Listening before speaking (Natural Approach) and synchronized with body.
- ◉ Human brain has a biological program used to acquire any natural language on earth.
  - > 1st Evidence: Sign language for the deaf.
  - > 2nd Evidence: Infants internalizing their L1.

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## Second learning hypothesis Asher draws on for his learning theory

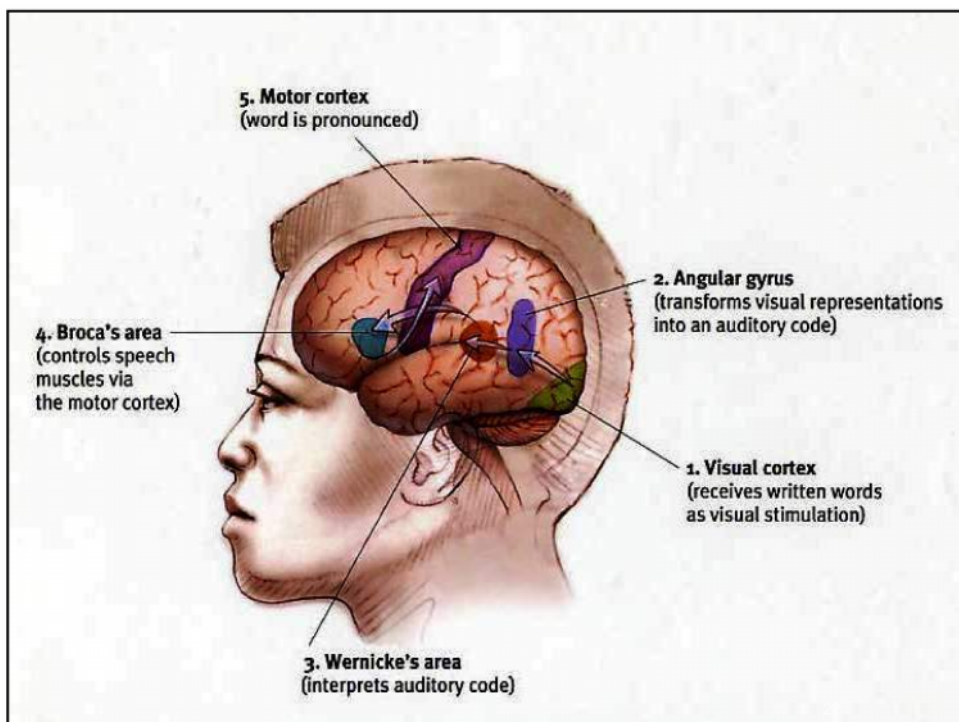
- ◉ **Stress** (an affective filter)
- ◉ Intervenes between the act of learning and what is to be learned; the lower stress, the greater the learning
- ◉ Meaning through movements.

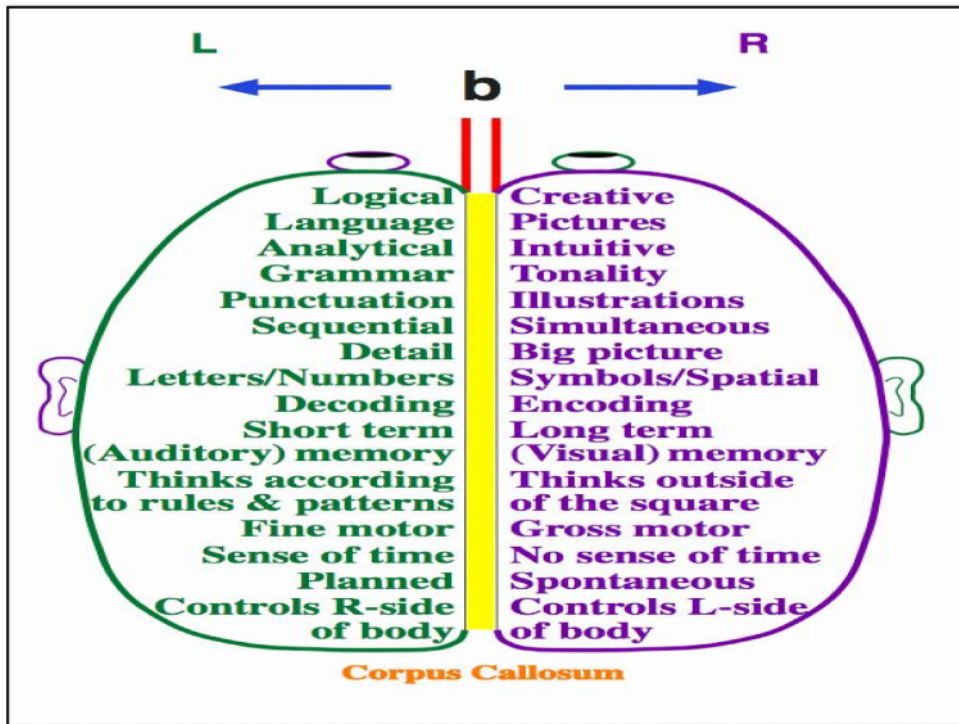
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## Third learning hypothesis Asher draws on for his learning theory

- **Brain lateralization**
- Defines different learning functions in the left- and right-brain hemispheres
- Motor activities are right brain centred.

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## Lateralization

- Ss master L2/FL through right hemisphere motor activities while the left one (**language center**) is watching and learning.

## Principles

1. Meaning is transferred through actions. Right brain (nonverbal centre) is involved. Chunks are preferred to single words.
2. Listening before speaking.
3. Actions accompany the language. The teacher acts first.
4. The basic structure is imperative (only volunteers act).
5. Students first observe and then perform the actions.
6. Feeling of success and little anxiety facilitate learning.
7. Changing order of commands blocks memorization.
8. Correction should be indirect and through actions.
9. Novelty of commands can be motivating.
10. Language learning should be fun (funny commands).
11. Spoken language comes first.
12. Speaking emerges very naturally. They choose to speak.
13. T is tolerant of the errors. Delicate points and details are put off for later and higher levels.

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## What are the goals of the T?

- ◉ T believes the importance of having Ss enjoy their experience.
- ◉ TPR aims to reduce the stress when people feel studying a FL.

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## What are the roles of the T and Ss?

- **The teacher:**
  - > The director of all S behaviour.
  - > Has an active and direct role.
  - > Expected to plan exact utterances as the action is fast-moving.
  - > Controls the input that Ss receive (cognitive-map).
- **The Ss:**
  - > Listeners and performers.
  - > Imitators of T's nonverbal model.
  - > When some Ss become ready to speak, there is a role reversal with individual Ss directing T and other Ss.

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## What are some characteristics of the teaching/learning process?

- T issues commands to a few Ss and performs with them (modelling).
- Then, these Ss understand the commands.
- T recombines elements of commands to develop flexibility in understanding unfamiliar utterances.
- Ss learn to read and write them.
- When Ss are ready to speak, they issue commands.
- After Ss begin speaking, activities expand to include skits and games.

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## How are Ss' feelings dealt with?

- Aim: Reducing stress.
  - > Allow Ss speak when they are ready.
  - > Do not force to speak; creates anxiety.
- Do not expect perfection.
- Make language learning enjoyable; use crazy commands and humorous skits.
- Not too much modelling; but do not rush Ss.
- Feelings of success and low anxiety facilitate learning.

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## What areas of language and skills are emphasized?

- **Vocabulary** and **grammatical structures** are emphasized with **single-** and **multi-word imperatives**.
- Understanding the spoken word precedes its production.
- The **spoken language** is emphasized over **written language**.
- Ss often don't learn to read the commands they have already learned to perform until after ten hours of instruction.

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## What's the role of the Ss' L1?

- Introduce TPR in L1.
- After introduction, use **L1 rarely**.
- Make meaning clear through body movements.

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## How is evaluation accomplished?

- T observes Ss to learn whether they understand or not.
- Formal evaluation: Ask individual Ss to perform a series of actions.
- As Ss advance, their performance of skits they have created can become the basis for evaluation.
- Ss monitor and evaluate their own progress.

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## How does the T respond to S errors?

- T follows the example of parents.
- Ss are expected to make errors when they first begin speaking.
- T is tolerant and corrects only major ones unobtrusively.
- As Ss advance, T 'fine-tunes' minor errors.

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## Syllabus

- Sentence-based syllabus, with grammatical and lexical criteria being primary in selecting teaching items.
- Initial attention to meaning rather than to the form.

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## Techniques in TPR

- ◉ **Using commands to direct behaviour (Imperative drills):**
  - > **T:** Mary, walk to the blackboard. (Mary gets up and walks to the blackboard.)
  - > **T:** Class, if Mary walked to blackboard, stand up. (The class stands up.)
- ◉ **Role reversal:**
  - > Ss comment their T and classmates; after 10 or 20 hours of instruction.
- ◉ **Action sequence (operation):**
  - > Take out a pen. – Take out a piece of paper. – Write a letter. – Fold the letter. – Put it in an envelope. – Seal the envelope. – Write the address on the envelope. – Put a stamp on the envelope. – Mail the letter.
- ◉ **Conversational dialogues:**
  - > Only after 120 hours of teaching.
- ◉ **Role plays:**
  - > Centre on everyday situations such as restaurant and supermarket.
- ◉ **Slide presentation**
- ◉ **Reading and writing**

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## Advantages of TPR?

- ◉ **Fun and easy:** Ss enjoy activity!
- ◉ **Simple TPR activities** do not require a great deal of **preparation** for T.
- ◉ **Aptitude-free:** It is inclusive working well with a mixed ability class.
- ◉ Good for **kinesthetic** learners who need to be active in class.
- ◉ Good tool for building **vocabulary**.
- ◉ **Actions** help build connections in the brain.
- ◉ **Ss achieve fluency faster:** activities involve Ss in situational language use.
- ◉ Good instructional practice for ESL's in their **silent period**.
- ◉ Works well for **child** and **adult** learners.
- ◉ **Memorable:** Actions help strengthen the connections in the brain.
- ◉ **Class size:** No problem.
- ◉ **Stress free:** Like playing a game, interesting & comprehensible input
- ◉ **High speed:** Instant understanding
- ◉ Suitable for **all levels**.
- ◉ Useful for **newly arrived ESL Ss:** Direct and visual instruction.
- ◉ **Instant understanding of TL:** Regardless of academic aptitude.
- ◉ **High speed long-term retention.**

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## Disadvantages of TPR?

- ◉ Most useful for **beginners**.
- ◉ **Preparation** becomes an issue for teachers at higher levels.
- ◉ Ss don't express their own thoughts in a **creative manner**.
- ◉ It is easy to **over-use** TPR and begin to **bore** Ss.
- ◉ May **limit Ts** in term of scope of language that can be addressed since certain TLs may not suit to TPR.
- ◉ Can be a major challenge for **shy Ss**.
- ◉ TPR is magical to jump start people of all ages into TL but repetitive practice will **tire Ss**.
- ◉ **Partial teaching of language**: Cooperation with other methods is essential (the use of language background and pictures, telling stories, extensive reading and sheltered subject matter teaching – content-based).

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## Who benefits most from TPR?

- ◉ Work effectively for children and adults.
- ◉ No age barrier.
- ◉ If the language training starts after puberty, probably Ss will have at least some accent in speaking L2, no matter how many years Ss lives in the foreign country.
- ◉ English speaking Ss who have little academic reinforcement at home.
- ◉ Struggling Ss.
- ◉ Ts are noticing growth in Ss' learning, and boosting the academic levels in their classrooms.

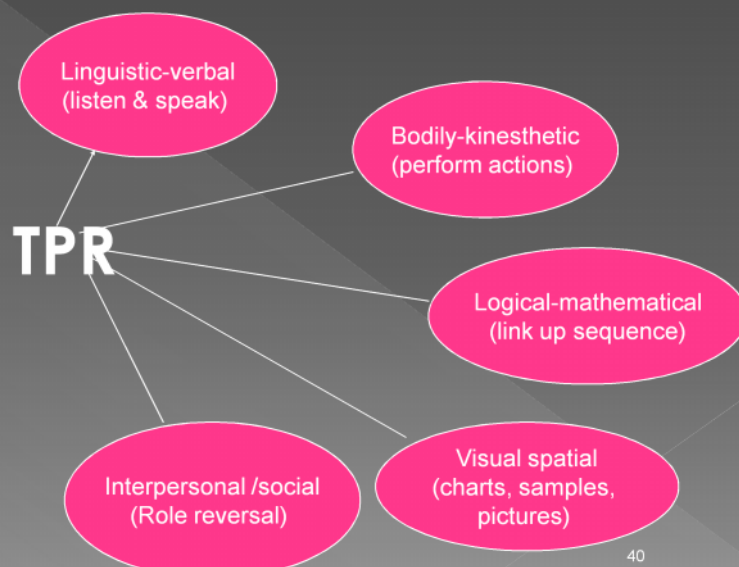
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## Steps for teaching TPR lesson

1. **Choose physical vocabulary.**  
Ex: Stand up, show me the door (language used in the classroom).
2. **Introduce vocabulary gradually.**  
Start with 3 and randomly use.
3. **Drop the physical modelling.**
4. **Add additional commands.**
5. **Add additional responses.**  
Find new ways for students to display their understanding of vocabulary (Ex: draw picture).
6. **Play games for additional practice.**  
Only when students gain confidence.
7. **Assess student progress & understanding.**  
Easy to visually assess, make a checklist.

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## The interaction of TPR with MI



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## Sample TPR Activity (1)

- Round and Round in a game.
- Round and round and what's your name?  
Ca-ro-line  
Then do it with other objects.

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## Sample TPR Activity (2)

- Mystery Dictation
- Draw five lines like this

— — — — —

On the fourth line write the letter 's'.

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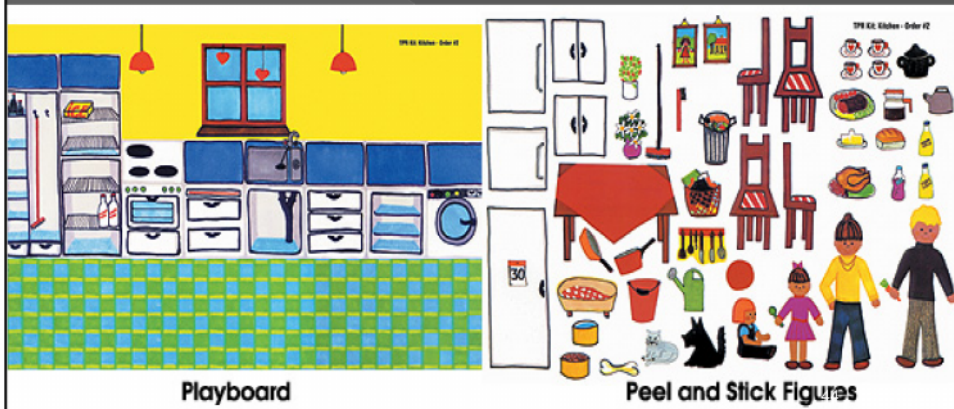
## Sample TPR Activity (3)

- Fold a piece of paper into 24 spaces.
- Write one of the following words in each of the spaces.  
house tree teach tooth paste children school  
strong street blue big eleven letter mouse  
horse fire work July Christmas dress people  
investigation channel from
- Write a word in each space. Cut apart the spaces. Put the words in an order that makes sense to you.
- Have a partner try to figure out how you grouped the words.

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## Sample TPR Activity (4)

- Ss can perform at their seats.
- Each has a kit such as the interior of a kitchen.
- T in TL says, "Put the man in front of the sink".
- With T's play board displayed so that it is clearly visible to Ss, T places the man in the kitchen of T's kit and Ss follow by performing the same action in their kits.



## Conclusion

- Popular in the 1970s and 1980s.
- Asher stressed that TPR should be used in association with other methods and techniques.
- TPR practices may be effective.

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## REFERENCES

- [www.tpr-world.com](http://www.tpr-world.com) – One of the most comprehensive web-sites related to Total Physical Response.
- [www.tprsource.com](http://www.tprsource.com) – A Great Resource For ESL Teachers.

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