



**Tikrit University / College of Education  
for Women**

**English Department**

**Methods of Language Teaching / 3rd.  
class**

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**The-Total-Physical-Response**

## **Introduction**

Developed by James Asher in the 1960s, total physical response (TPR) is a language-teaching approach based on the coordination of language and physical movement. It “introduces the language through the use of commands(imperative sentences) and has students demonstrate their understanding through action responses”. TPR is probably the most overt example of the “learning by doing” principle in language teaching as it aims to help learners acquire language through physical actions without explicitly teaching it. Asher believes that such a teaching strategy (he prefers “strategy” to “method”) is fun and stress-free, which helps with long-term retention of what has been learned. TPR was developed as an attempt to mirror how preverbal children acquire their mother tongue. Asher (1984) recalled his earlier observation that less than 5%of adult second language learners gain satisfactory final attainment while most6-year-olds have reached a high level of native proficiency without schooling. He noted that (a) children pick up language unconsciously without explicit instruction on forms; (b) children are not forced to produce language until they are ready ,so there is a silence period; (c) during this period, children respond to input by physical movements, with most of the input being directives. By comparison it is obvious that second language learners lack these critical elements which at least partially explain why there is such a contrast in linguistic achievement between babies and adults. As a result of these observations, Asher proposed TPR to teach a second language through students acting out instructions. TPR has been extending its use from listening comprehension to speaking, reading, and even writing.

## **Objectives**

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.

## **Features of TPR**

1-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' understanding of the target language should be developed before speaking.

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

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

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

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

7-Students should not be made to memorize fixed routines.

8-Correction should be carried out in an unobtrusive manner.

9-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-Language learning is more effective when it is fun.

11-Spoken language should be emphasized over written language.

12-Students will begin to speak when they are ready.

13-Students are expected to make errors when they first begin speaking. Teachers should be tolerant of them. Work on the fine details of the language should be postponed until students have become somewhat proficient.

## **Techniques of TPR**

1-Using Commands to Direct Behavior/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.

2- 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.

3- Action Sequence/the teacher told the students to point to the door, walk to the door, and touch the door. As the students learn more and more of the target language, a longer series of connected commands can be given, which together comprise a whole procedure. This series of commands is called an action sequence, or an 'operation.' Many everyday activities, like writing a letter, can be broken down into an action sequence that students can be asked to perform.

### **Advantages:**

- TPR engages multiple senses by combining physical movement with language learning. This multi-modal approach improves memory retention, making it easier for students to recall vocabulary and grammar structures.
- Students are physically involved in the lessons, which keeps them engaged and motivated throughout the class.
- It can be easily adapted for a wide range of language learning contexts and situations.
- TPR simulates the way children acquire their first language. It immerses learners in a context where language is used for communication, helping them develop their language skills organically.

- The interactive nature of TPR makes language learning enjoyable. Students often see TPR activities as games, which contributes to a positive classroom atmosphere.

### **Disadvantages:**

- For languages with complex grammar or abstract concepts, TPR may not cover all aspects of language learning adequately.
- While comprehension is essential, some students may feel reluctant to transition from comprehending language to actively producing it. As a result, TPR might delay oral communication skill development.
- TPR activities tend to be relatively simple, focusing on basic commands and actions. This simplicity might not challenge more advanced learners who need to expand their vocabulary and language usage.
- The TPR approach is primarily focused on oral and physical language acquisition. As a result, it may not develop students' writing skills as extensively as other language teaching approaches. Critics go further, arguing that students get too accustomed to "playing" and then do poorly when faced with more rigorous forms of assessment.