Critical analysis of total physical response as pedagogy

Rachel Lynn Anderson

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CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE AS PEDAGOGY

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education:
Bilingual/Cross-Cultural

by
Rachel Lynn Anderson
June 2008
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Approved by:

Dr. Barbara Flores, First Reader  6/3/08

Enrique Murillo, Second Reader
ABSTRACT

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language-teaching method, developed by James Asher in the 1960s. In this critical analysis the theoretical origins of TPR were explored along with the work of James Asher. Twenty-three studies by Asher were examined in conjunction with others who have studied TPR, in order to understand the effectiveness of TPR as both a theory and pedagogy. In all studies examined, TPR (which focuses on listening comprehension) was found to be an effective means for producing near-perfect retention— even long-term. TPR was found to be a powerful method for teaching a second language. Thus, both the theoretical and pedagogical implications are consistent as evidenced by the critical analysis of the empirical studies.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the help and friendship of Barbara Flores who taught me not to fear thinking—­and action. Special thanks to Enrique Murillo for reading my paper. Many thanks to Spencer Tibbitts for being one of the best friends ever. Thanks to my family, the best family in the universe, for being kind and supportive (and patient). A special thank you to my boyfriend, Vico Zuniga for telling me I could do it and to not give up. Additionally, thank you to the myriad of people who have helped me get to this point—­even if all you did was listen to me talk when I was stressed—­you rock!
DEDICATION

To Alvin Ludovico Zuniga who lovingly walked beside me every step of the way.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background

Have you ever taken a Spanish class, but can’t understand Spanish-speakers? Sweated your way through two semesters of college French and all you remember now is "ou est la salle de bains?" Maybe your language crisis isn’t due to your lack of attention—it could be the method of instruction.

The language teaching method of Total Physical Response (TPR) is a novel idea in a world where most language classes are taught using traditional sit-at-desks, paper and pencil methods. Total Physical Response is precisely what it’s name says: a physical response to commands in the target language.

A more detailed explanation of TPR is this: an instructor gives a command in the target language. The student then follows the instructor to physically complete the command without speaking. The commands increase in complexity and novel commands are also introduced. When ready the student speaks without prompting.

TPR was developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s at San Jose State University by James Asher, a professor
of psychology who decided to study language because he "had and interest in skill learning and...wanted to select a problem to explore that was complex and could be applied to the 'real' world" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-2). He was puzzled by the fact that he had studied languages in school and had done well, and yet seemed to recall very little of what he had studied (Asher, 2000). Thus Asher set out to discover the "secret" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-2) behind learning a second language.

Theoretical Origins of Total Physical Response

Asher’s quest for understanding of language acquisition took him down a path which would eventually lead to the development of TPR. One of his first ideas was to make a language teaching machine which would engage the senses of the learner--visual, oral, and aural. Unfortunately, someone had already invented such a machine.

Another study which Asher did in his early days at San Jose State was to determine which "produced more efficient learning and retention" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-3)--vision or audition? He discovered that vision was more efficient. In a study done in 1964 by Asher, the student was shown a picture, followed by a word in the target
language which named the picture. Once the words were learned in this way they were then presented through audition. The student would see a picture, pronounce word, and then listen to the correct pronunciation. Others learned the words the other way around (Audition, then vision) (Asher, 1964).

Guessing was also studied by Asher. He found that guessing is a powerful predictor of information retention. If you can guess something right on the first try, you are more likely to remember it. Thus, Asher decided, the best chance for remembering would be to “internalize” it on the “first exposure” (Asher, 2000, p. 1-8). This led to “One-trial learning” (Asher, 2000, p. 1-10).

In a study done by Asher (1963) on one trial learning, he observed results much like those of the concept of guessing. Less practice before learning occurs equals greater retention. The question that this idea presented for further research was How can teaching be organized to allow “learning to occur on the first presentation” (Asher, 1963, p. 100)?

As Asher studied one-trial learning, connections were made with right and left brain thinking. As explained by Asher “Input to the left brain in verbal tasks is a slow, incremental multiple exposure process because the left
resists the novel. Input to the right brain is a pattern...understood in a flash--in one trial” (Asher, 2000, p. 1-13). Instead of attempting to learn information through words, which enter through the left hemisphere of the brain, professionals recommended using pictures so that information could enter through the right brain. These were the beginnings of a very essential part of TPR—the division of the brain between right and left hemispheres (Asher, 2000).

Because left brain resists the novel, information given to the right brain can be “understood...in one trial” (Asher, 2000, p. 1-13) it makes logical sense to teach new information to the right brain. Through “Acting, drawing, games or sports, gesturing, metaphor, pointing, singing, storytelling, touching, and tasks such as sewing, cooking, or small appliance repair” (Asher, 2000, p. 3-9). This is why the concept of right brain and left brain are so important to TPR. Right brain is the ideal entrance to the brain for new information because it accepts it, but it must enter using one of the above methods. TPR is all about movement, which is what the above list describes (Asher, 2000).

So the left brain resists new information. “One way, I thought, to establish the believability of incoming data
would be to demonstrate a cause-effect relationship” (Asher, 2000, p. 1-18). Enter TPR. It was at this point that Asher recruited Kunihira, his Japanese graduate student, and Dickie, his secretary, to help him. After some unsuccessful trials with Kunihira uttering commands and Asher and Dickie repeating the commands, they all sat down to rest. It was at this moment that the idea for TPR came to Asher. He was able to abandon his ingrained notions that speaking must be part of a language program, and as described in the opening paragraphs of this paper, Kunihira instructed Asher and Dickie in Japanese, using what would later be called the TPR method (Asher, 2000).

Another essential part of the theoretical origins of TPR is that the brain learns a second language in much the same way that is learns a first. According to Asher, the “Neural blueprint does not change with age” (Asher, 2000, p. 6-2). This means that the way the brain assimilated language when you were a baby is the way that is assimilates language now. TPR is similar to how an infant learns language because in both there are “language-body conversations” (Asher, 2000, p. 6-2). The parent gives the baby a command such as “Get the ball” and the baby obeys the command of the parent. They understand the parental utterance and respond--through action rather than words.
It is obvious, through watching a child, that their comprehension exceeds their production. The same is true in people learning a second language (Asher, 2000). This is why TPR is an ideal way to teach language—it plays to the naturally developing language skills.

TPR has gone from theoretical origins and trial experiments to being used and taught throughout the world, and in many languages. It is important to understand TPR—how it works as a viable teaching method in order to use it in second language instruction. There are several studies done by James Asher with countless other studies and experiments performed by interested people and scholars throughout the world. This paper will investigate and discuss just a few of them as it seeks to understand and to critically analyze the method of TPR.
There are six angles from which Total Physical Response (TPR) must be examined to determine its validity as a method for teaching a second language. They are 1) The theoretical origins of TPR; 2) The evolution of TPR; 3) The effectiveness of TPR; 4) The procedures and methodology of TPR; 5) The effectiveness of TPR in teaching a second language; and 6) Who is and is not using TPR.

Theoretical Origins of Total Physical Response

Many of the theoretical origins of Total Physical Response (TPR) come from other studies done by James Asher, the originator of Total Physical Response. Other origins of TPR come from other people's work. One study (1964) by Asher discusses the transfer of information from vision to audition and audition to vision. For vision the English-speaking individual would be shown a picture and then a word (which named the picture) in a nonnative language (Spanish, Japanese, Russian, Persian, Turkish). Once learned, the person would relearn the same words through audition; that is, they would see a picture, pronounce the word, and then listen
to the correct pronunciation. Others learned through audition first and then vision.

For those learning Spanish, there was a greater positive transfer from vision to audition, although there was a positive transfer for both. Japanese also experienced a greater positive transfer from vision to audition (Asher, 1964). In Turkish there was good transfer from vision to audition and transfer was neutral from audition to vision (Asher, 1964). A reason for a higher positive transfer from vision to audition in Spanish, Japanese and Turkish may be the "phonetic fit" between spoken and written language (Asher, 1964). The phonetic fit hypothesis is "The more congruent the relationship between allophones and the visual notation, the greater the probability of a large, positive transfer in learning" (Asher, 1964, p. 296).

Russian displayed a negative transfer from vision to audition and positive transfer from audition. However, both numbers were insignificant (Asher, 1964). While Spanish, Japanese, and Turkish are considered to have phonetic fit, Russian, Persian, and English have phonetic misfit.

Another paper by Asher studies whether or not repetition is necessary in language learning (Asher,
In the 1950s Irvin Rock did studies in which items were either learned on the first trial or eliminated. This concept is an all-or-none concept of learning (Asher, 1963). It if for this reason that this paper is entitled “Evidence for ‘Genuine’ One-Trial Learning”. In one trial learning the information is learned on the first trial. However, it is called that simply because it is learned on the first trial, not because it’s eliminated otherwise.

The results of the study were as follows. Less practice before learning occurs equals greater retention (Asher, 1963). The question, then, for further research and study is, How can teaching be organized to allow “learning to occur on the first presentation” (Asher, 1963, p. 100)?

A study by Asher and Garcia (1969) was conducted to ascertain whether or not children, before puberty, are able to attain a near-native fluency in a second language.

Cuban immigrant children and American children read sentences. Judges attempted to determine, based on their reading, if the children were native or nonnative. “...all 71 of the Cuban children...were identified as nonnative speakers” (Asher & Garcia, 1969, p. 3).

The information gleaned from this study showed that those who had the greatest chance of obtaining near-native
fluency in a second language are those who arrive in the country before the age of six and have been in the country for at least five years (Asher & Garcia, 1969). Females who had been in the country 1-4 years had much better pronunciation than males with the same amount of time in the country. Those who had 5-8 years had similar pronunciation.

One interesting phenomenon is that although accurate pronunciation is more likely among those who come young to the country and have been there at least 5-8 years; some older children also achieve near-native fluency thus proving that pronunciation is not caused by age alone (Asher & Garcia, 1969). “Pronunciation may be a learning based on copying while listening comprehension may be learning rules and principles” (Asher & Garcia, 1969, p. 8).

Another study done by Asher (1971) for the Defense Language Institute set out to determine what and how much correlation there is between language aptitude and success in language learning. The hope of this study was to ascertain which students would have the greatest possibility of success in training in the different languages at the Defense Language Institute (Asher, 1971).
"No study has ever been attempted to achieve data which were comparable across many languages" (Asher, 1971, p. 3). Asher analyzed the tests which were given and available to determine language learning ability--but not just in general--across different languages. From the data collected they learned that the students were not "assigned randomly" to a language (Asher, 1971, p. 22). In the aptitude tests there were even parts. The evaluation showed that three of those tests "were doing most of the work" to determine aptitude (Asher, 1971, p. 22).

Asher and Judd (1960) analyzed the concept of group versus individual thinking. They discussed which is more efficient. "Taylor and Block (1958) have shown that individuals thinking alone about a problem produced significantly more ideas than did small groups of people, in a circle, discussing the problem" (Asher & Judd, 1960, p. 1).

In this study Asher and Judd had groups and individual brainstorm different topics. They then recorded how many responses were given by both individuals and groups. In this study there were no significant differences between individual and group thinking (Asher & Judd, 1960). The authors observed a "homogeneity of
output" in the groups--their ideas tended to cluster together (Asher & Judd, 1960, p. 6).

Part of the procedure of a study by Jacobsen and Asher (1963) was that participants were shown a series of 17 pictures which started with cat and gradually became dog. “Scoring was based on the point at which the outcome of the transition was correctly perceived” (Jacobsen & Asher, 1963, p. 10). “Concept constancy was described as the natural tendency of established concepts to avoid disequilibrium, which spontaneously results when they are disrupted, by assuming a certain constancy, stability, or autonomy” (Jacobsen & Asher, 1963 p. 17).

A point of interest made by the authors is that we learn from concept constancy that those who have more difficulty in switching from one concept to another may be less creative (Jacobsen & Asher, 1963). This study found that the performance on creativity tests was related to the performance on Concept Constancy Tests (Jacobsen & Asher, 1963). This may be important to know when teaching using a language teaching method such as TPR because it is an alternate method--it requires a different mindset than memorization or writing down answers. The mind must switch into creativity mode in order to physically follow directives.
The authors of the study pointed out that "Strength of disruptive tolerance was measured by determining at what point one was willing or able to abandon the initial concept, as evinced by correctly perceiving the outcome of the transition" (Jacobsen & Asher, 1963, p. 17).

One of the theories behind TPR is the importance and engagement of the right brain. In an imaginative study by Asher and Post (1964), a right-brain solution for sorting the mail was devised for the U.S. postal system. "The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how neo-field theory was applied to invent stimulus fields as solutions for the complex problem of encoding mail by humans so that computers could then direct machine sorting of the mail" (Asher & Post, 1964, p. 517). "The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how neo-field theory was applied to invent stimulus fields as solutions for the complex problem of encoding mail by humans so that computers could then direct machine sorting of the mail" (Asher & Post, 1964, p. 517).

This study developed a system for sorting mail which uses two non-conventional keyboards which have the appearance of maps, each more detailed than the first which is a map of the city or an area within the city. This is to be used to speed up the time which is required
to sort mail. After the mail is sorted in this way, a machine then sorts it by patron for the postal carrier. One of the things that stood out most was the unconventional nature of the keyboard developed by Asher and Post. It related to TPR in that it was an unconventional way of getting a job done in a more efficient and meaningful way.

Asher developed a new interview technique called "Q by Q" which has the interviewer give a rating for each question after it is asked instead of waiting until the end of the interview. "This article presents a novel format for the selection interview, called the Q by Q interview and shows under what conditions the technique has high reliability" (Asher, 1970, p. 451).

In the experiment raters watched videotaped interviews. It was predicted that there would be lower amounts of variation among those who used the "Q by Q" method of rating than among those who used the control methods (waiting until the end of the interview to rate the interviewee) (Asher, 1970).

The results of the experiment "seem to confirm" that the "Q by Q" raters had less variation than the control group raters. This study is another example of using a different method other than the traditional with splendid
results, or as Asher would term it, using the right side of the brain.

Asher (1970) performed a study in which psychology students watched video tapes of statistics students being interviewed with the intent to determine whether or not they would be good statistics students (Asher, 1970). There were three other groups who also rated the interviews. The second group rated at the end of the interview only. The third group used "Q by Q" by listening to the interview without picture. The fourth group rated the interview at the end only after listening to the interview without picture.

Asher explained the purpose of the study. "In this study, the primary intent was to explore how the physical appearance of applicants influenced the reliability and validity of the selection interview. A secondary objective was to determine whether applicant appearance would have a differential effect depending upon the format of the interview" (Asher, 1970, p. 687-688).

It was found that "Q by Q" had high reliability while end-of-the-interview had low reliability (Asher, 1970). "The appearance of the interviewees had little or no effect on inter-rater reliability" (Asher, 1970, p. 689).
One note of conclusion made by the author was in relation to the nature of the cues given by interviewees. "Nonverbal visual cues (seeing the interviewee) increase the precision of prediction, but it would be interesting to know which cues give predictive information and how the rater evaluates these cues" (Asher, 1970, p. 694).

Asher (1971) continued to use the "Q by Q" interview format to predict the success of students learning various languages (Asher, 1971). One reason for the validity of this study is as follows. "The psychological literature in the past 70 yr. has shown that the interview is the most unreliable source of information for predicting future behavior" (Asher, 1971, p. 331). This is because interviewees are typically analyzed at the end of the interview. The "Q by Q" method allows for rating after each question answered by the interviewee.

It was expected that the "Q by Q" group would have less variability than the end of interview group and it did--for all seven languages (Asher, 1971).

Biographical items which are included on applications for employment were studied by Asher (1972). He cited a study review by Schuss in 1967 which showed that "biographical items had a predictive relationship with job turnover" (Asher, 1972, p. 254).
When compared against tests for specific criteria for job proficiency biographical items were shown to be more indicative of job proficiency (Asher, 1972). It was found that the best predictor of job proficiency is the "B-items," that is, the questions that can be answered factually (Asher, 1972, p. 258-259).

In regards to interview questions versus biographical items on an application, this is what Asher discovered that investigating and analyzing "B-items" can be more effective than using standardized questions which may not pertain to the situation or the individual (Asher, 1972).

Asher and Hards (1978) did a study in which a class of psychology students were given an analysis of personality using three methods: handwriting analysis, self-assessment, and a standard personality test (Asher & Hards, 1978). Handwriting sample analysis was used "...since handwriting is free of language coloring (miscommunication), it becomes a culture-fair measure" (Asher & Hards, 1978, p. 1). The system used to analyze handwriting in this study is called "Bunker's Graphoanalysis" (Asher & Hards, 1978, p. 5).

The conclusion was that graphoanalysis was successful in determining personality traits. This was seen when about 80% of the graphoanalysts observations were in close
or exact alignment with those of the self-assessment (Asher & Hards, 1978).

In his book "Learning Another Language Through Actions," Asher describes what led him to the development of TPR (2000). He received a master's degree in radio and television. For a portion of this time he was an assistant to Dr. Richard Evans who was doing a television program and decided to pursue a Ph.D. in psychology. Thus, Asher earned a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Houston in 1957 and became a professor of psychology at San Jose State College.

At San Jose State Asher wanted to study something "complex" that "could be applied to the 'real' world" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-2). He chose foreign language because not a lot of people were studying it at the time, and he was interested in language, and although he had studied four languages, he didn't really remember them and wanted to figure out why.

Asher studied many different aspects of language at San Jose State before arriving at the TPR method. One idea he had was to make a language machine--and then he found out that someone was already making it. He also did a study which showed that vision is more efficient than audition. In another study he found that guessing is a
powerful predictor for information retention. If you guess something right on the first try, you are more likely to remember it. Asher thus decided that the best chance for remembering would be to "internalize" the information on the "first exposure" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-8). Asher studied the left brain.

One of Asher's studies was about cause and effect. In this study his assistant, Shirou, uttered a Japanese command while Asher and his secretary repeated the command and acted it out. Thus, his "language produced (or caused) an action in the learner" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-18). It was not retained. They tried it again with Shirou giving the command, acting it out himself, and Asher/secretary repeating the action only. Then, Shirou tested them by only uttering the command and Asher/secretary only acted it out. They, then, expanded from one-word commands to expanded long-sentence commands. Retention was long-term. And that was the beginning of TPR.

Evolution of Total Physical Response

Asher (1984) gave a paper on how to analyze the TPR method by using six criterion by which a language teaching method may be analyzed. He describes how Total Physical Response (TPR) measures up to all 6 criterion. Asher
describes TPR in the following way. "...an innovative approach which I have developed over the past 20 years, called Total Physical Response (TPR)" (Asher, 1984, p. 1).

Using TPR, the Student attrition (Students dropping out from one level to the next.) from Level I to Level IV is 95% (Example: Level I Spanish to Level IV Spanish) (Asher, 1984).

Asher teaches that we hold conversations with infants: we speak and they respond with their bodies (Asher, 1984). This is reminiscent of coma victims--they may not be able to speak but at times are able to communicate via blinking or other means. Asher points out that "...comprehension always precedes production" (Asher, 1984, p. 2).

Although, in this paper, Asher points out some of the "pros" of TPR, he also addresses what TPR shares with other teaching methods. "Commonality," Asher says, "I am uncomfortable with approaches that pretend to be independent of all other learning strategies." He then outlines some approaches which are similar to TPR (Asher, 1984, p. 2).

A paper by Asher (1964) addressed problem solving. Asher stated "If learning is a process of forming a concept within a cognitive system and problem solving is a
process of disrupting established concepts; then, in this sense, problem solving is the inverse of learning" (Asher, 1964, p. 4).

Asher discussed a new type of problem solving which can potentially allow for better and more efficient arrival at a solution. "The new field theory attempts to conceptualize a cognitive sequence of events which occur in problem solving activity. If these events occur, then there are implications for the optimal organization of the problem field for generating solutions" (Asher, 1964, p. 8).

A study was completed as a master’s thesis by Bradley Fallentine. It was done in 1961, when TPR was still in its infancy. He said "Since Asher’s neo-field theory of learning the 1+n language is still in the developmental phases, the literature is sterile of studies that were stimulated by Asher’s theoretical model" (Fallentine, 1961, p. 8). This does, state, and imply, that Asher “armchaired” the theory behind TPR.

The purpose of this study is to “...test the existence of a high velocity logical process in learning the 1 + n language” (“Which results in concept formation”) (Fallentine, 1961, p. 12-13). A study by McGinnis and Lazarus is mentioned in which subjects were shocked at the
same time that a nonsense syllable was shown. One conclusion drawn from this study is that we absorb much more than is consciously learned (Fallentine, 1961). Learning is faster if there are logical connections made between the new and what the organism already knows (Fallentine, 1961).

It was found in the second study mentioned in this paper that the learning rate of ten vocabulary words was accelerated when they were learned in several (four) languages as opposed to being learned in only one new language (Fallentine, 1961).

There was a result from Fallentine’s (1961) study, also, which relates to concept constancy “...it is safe to say that the data strongly suggests that noise produced in learning a new response to an old stimulus is a function of an incongruent or illogical relationship between the concept to be learned and the concepts already established within the learner” (Fallentine, 1961, p. 25).

Results of this study were similar to Asher’s in that there was better retention of vocabulary if relearned through a different modality. The best results are found in those words first learned visually and then relearned auditorily (“reduced error by about 66%”) (Fallentine, 1961, p. 57). The research done in this paper can help to
bring us closer to an understanding of one-trial learning (Fallentine, 1961).

Effectiveness of Total Physical Response

College students with no background in Japanese or in learning Japanese volunteered for a project in which they were given the MLAT language aptitude test and the ACT test to determine their intellectual and language abilities (Kunihira & Asher, 1965). The experimental group learned Japanese through Total Physical Response (TPR). There were three control groups. The first learned Japanese by listening to commands in Japanese, then, without responding themselves, watched the instructor respond through TPR. The second group heard the command in Japanese, then in English. The third heard the Japanese words and then saw the same words in written English. The results of this study were as follows. Learning and retention among TPR students was much higher than among the three control groups. Learning and retention for TPR students was almost 100%. This was found to be especially true with "long utterance" commands and novel commands. The exciting aspect about learning and retention of novel utterances is that it indicates fluency. Or, as it said in the study, "It is not enough for output to equal input"
(Kunihira & Asher, 1965, p. 286). This means that if all that was learned were those exact phrases which were uttered, heard, seen, or observed during practice, then fluency might never be attained, for how can one possibly have enough time or strength to acquire every possible phrase belonging to a language. Mastering of novel utterances is where the secret lies.

It is mentioned in this study that one student who received TPR training in a previous study done by Asher (1964) still had more than 90% retention one year later.

Asher also did a study to test the effectiveness of the TPR method on teaching Russian (1965). He described it as “An experiment in a series designed to test the hypothesis of a total physical response” (Asher, 1965, p. 299). In the test there were two different groups. The experimental group was taught using Total Physical Response (TPR). The control group sat and observed a model acting out responses to commands. In tests both groups responded with written responses (Asher, 1965).

The results of the tests were similar for both groups for one-word responses. However, for longer responses and novel responses the TPR students’ scores were superior. As mentioned, the TPR students responded well to novel utterances. TPR works towards fluency--beginning with
listening fluency (Asher, 1965). This may also be why children moving to a foreign country are able to learn the language quickly: because play is like TPR.

One of the points made in a paper by Asher (1974), which has been mentioned in previous works by James Asher is that learning through actions is a very effective way to learn. That idea was also shared by Palmer and Palmer, authors of English Through Actions, written in 1925, who “suggested...that executing orders is a prerequisite to achieving the power of expression in a second language” (Asher, 1974, p. 24). Thus, they share the sentiments of Asher, that commands enable language learning. However, it does not mention in this paper the reasons why Palmer and Palmer advocated the command-style of language learning. We do know, however, that Asher developed Total Physical Response (TPR) as a means of teaching a second language in the same way that a baby learns a first language—through hearing the commands of their caregivers and executing them. In reference to Palmer and Palmer, Asher stated “Even further, they advocated that no approach to teaching foreign speech is likely to be economical or successful which does not include in the first stage an extensive period of time for classroom work involving students carrying out orders by the teacher” (Asher, 1974, p. 24).
Studies have shown that learning through physical response is effective even for subjects other than foreign language (Asher, 1974). Some people other than Asher who have used motor learning are Palmer and Palmer, Bryant J. Cratty (from 1966-1970), and George O. Cureton (1972 in teaching reading) Asher, commenting on using commands to teach “Most linguistic features can be nested into the imperative form, and if the approach is used creatively by the instructor, high student interest can be maintained for a long-term training program” (Asher, 1974, p. 30). Asher explains that TPR can be effective for teaching any part of language. “With imagination, almost any aspect of the linguistic code for the target language could be communicated using commands” (Asher, 1974, p. 26). This is so for different verb tenses, as well as details, such as adjectives that describe a person or object. Asher gives examples of these types of commands. “When Luke walks to the window, Mary will write Luke’s name on the blackboard.” This example uses present and future tense in a command. a second example is “‘Gregory, find the picture of the beautiful woman with green eyes, long black hair and wearing a sun hat that has red strips. When you find the picture, show it to the class and then describe the woman’” (Asher, 1974, p. 26).
Total Physical Response in Spanish

In another experiment described in this paper college students were taught Spanish for the first time. The experimental group learned through TPR. They were asked to give "distinct" bodily responses so that there would be no confusion as to whether or not the student understood the command (Asher, 1974). After several repetitions each student was tested individually, then the commands became more complex (Asher, 1974). After about ten hours students were invited to switch places with the instructor and from that time forward about 1/5 of the class was performed this way. Students also made and performed skits and did problem solving in Spanish. One example is what they would do if, while showering in their hotel room in a Latin country, a repairman came to fix the light bulb (Asher, 1974).

The experimental group scored higher than the three control groups (High schoolers with one year of Spanish, college students with one semester of Spanish, and college students with two semesters of Spanish.) on listening and reading (Asher, 1974). Because the experimental group was instructed in Spanish listening skills, it is interesting to note the amazing transfer from listening to reading. On the Spanish reading test which was administered, this
group scored 75 and 65 percent for levels one and two (Asher, 1974). The experimental program was 90 hours long (Asher, 1974).

An important point about TPR is that TPR allows the student to learn the target language in "chunks" instead of one word at a time which accelerates and improves assimilation (Asher, 1974, p. 31).

The topic of adult v. child language learning was discussed in a study by Asher and Price (1967) which investigated the commonly held belief that children learn a second language faster than adults. The authors' hypothesis as to why this is the case is that children learn the language coupled with physical activity--play commands with peers while adults are consigned to learning through small talk with peers (Asher & Price, 1967). In this study children and adults in an "Act-Act" group and "Observe-Act" group were given identical instruction to learn Russian (Asher & Price, 1967, p. 2).

"This study suggests that when adults learn a second language under the same conditions as children, the adults are superior" (Asher & Price, 1967, p. 7). The generalization that adults learn a second language better than children can only, from this study, be made for listening comprehension (Asher & Price, 1967).
However, the authors point out that the study may not be representative of the general population because the adults were from San Jose State College, which enrolls the top 30% of high school graduates. It would be interesting to do a study using the top 30% of second, fourth and eighth graders and comparing them with adults from San Jose State College to see if the results vary (Asher & Price, 1967).

The Oral Method was used by Harold E. Palmer in his English Language instruction (Japanese for Everyone). It has been claimed by others that Asher’s method comes from Palmer’s idea. “The aural/oral method, as it was originally developed, was an attempt to duplicate in second language learning by adults this process used by a child in acquiring the ability to speak its first language” (Japanese for Everyone, 2008).

Davis-Wiley (1994) studied the effectiveness of TPR at the elementary level. In her study she explained how teachers trained in TPR taught foreign language classes at the elementary level. The classes were held twice a week for thirty minutes each class session.

This study was done because “Second language at an early age” has been proven to “have a dramatic and positive impact on children’s cognitive processing,
academic achievement, and linguistic skills (Davis-Wiley, 1994, p. 3).

Parents, students, and teachers liked the program. The paper does not describe what the other results of the program were other than the students liking the program.

Procedures and Methodology of Total Physical Response

Asher asserts that the "Neural blueprint does not change with age." This means that the way that a second language is learned is similar to the way that the L1 is learned (Asher, 2000, p. 6-2). Total Physical Response (TPR) is a method of learning language which is similar to the way that babies learn to speak their L1. It is done through what Asher terms "language-body conversations" (Asher, 2000, p. 6-2). The parent gives a command, such as "Come to mommy" (Asher, 2000, p. 6-2) and the baby responds by obeying the command. Language comprehension moves forward at a much higher level than language production. Although a one-year-old cannot speak, they can understand.

A web site created by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (2008) gives a definition of TPR. It says that it is "Based on the coordination of speech and action." One point that is made on this site is that "It is linked
to the trace theory of memory, which holds that the more often or intensively a memory connection is traced, the stronger the memory will be" (Summer Institute of Linguistics, 2008).

Effectiveness of Total Physical Response in Teaching a Second Language

The Office of Naval Research sponsored a study, executed by Asher (1968), which was designed to examine the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response (TPR) method on teaching a second language. This was an extensive study in which already established language teaching methods were tested beside the newly-developed and emerging method of Total Physical Response.

The three methods which were analyzed besides TPR were Translation, Audio-lingual (whose goal is speaking) and the Direct method (used in the Berlitz School (Asher, 1968)--one teacher, one student; teacher speaks, student imitates).

The author stated that it was an unrealistic expectation that in a setting such as high school, where the class meets for one hour a day, that the student be able to achieve fluency in four different language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Asher, 1968). Thus, Asher suggests that one skill be focused on at a
time, starting with listening. Listening should be the primary focus of instruction for at least a college semester, following which the natural transition to speaking be made.

The actual experiment consisted of different methods of teaching language. The experimental group acted in responded to commands during both instruction time and during tests. One control group observed during instruction and acted during testing. Other control groups did not act but wrote responses during retention tests.

Some interesting findings which were reported in this study are “Adults are far superior to children in listening comprehension than children using TPR” (Asher, 1968, In pre-paper comments). Another is that translation does not produce effective retention (Asher, 1968).

Thirdly, “When Ss learned the speaking and listening of Russian together, listening comprehension was rather severely retarded” (Asher, 1968, p. 50).

James Asher (1960) reports three interesting points about Total Physical Response:

The first is that “Motor learning, in contrast with verbal learning, appears to have enormous resistance to extinction” (Asher, 1969, p. 253).
The second is that with TPR stress which usually comes with learning a second language is eliminated (Asher, 1969).

The third point of interest is that the translation method of learning a second language actually takes away form learning.

Total Physical Response in German

An experiment was done using a community adult German class (Asher, 1972) which was offered for eight weeks, two nights a weeks, for two hours each night and cost thirty dollars. No college credit was offered for the course. As the experimental group. Two different control groups were also used— one was a college German I class. The other was a college German II class. Both has significantly higher language aptitude than the experimental group.

The experimental group was taught using Total Physical Response. “After 16 hours of listening training the students pressed the instructor to let them speak” (Asher, 1972, p. 135). When tested, the experimental group scored better in listening comprehension and equal to control group I in reading. The experimental group also had much higher listening comprehension than the second control group.
In this experiment the method of instruction had much more to do with the success of the student than the language aptitude of the student (Asher, 1972). An advantage that the Experimental group had was motivation—many of them said that they had a trip to Germany planned “within one year” (Asher, 1972, p. 138). One amazing result of this study was that, without reading instruction, the experimental group scored as high in reading German as did the first year college German class.

One suggestion that the author gave for improvement is the following. The situation in the experimental group was that instead of having actual kitchens, bedrooms, bathrooms to practice in they had pictures on paper, etc. It would be ideal to work in a more true-to-life environment (Asher, 1972).

In children the first language skill learned is listening (Asher, 1972). So why not in a second language? It says in a footnote (Asher, 1972, p. 139) that in a pilot study five 11-year-old girls after 12 hours of language listening training developed a level of listening fluency similar to students at the DLI who had received 180 hours of training. This is equivalent to 2-3 semesters of college language training.
At the University of Texas, Austin, student enrollment in German was steadily declining annually. So they decided to focus on changing that and to do what was necessary to reverse the trend of 45% of students dropping out of German after the first semester (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978).

Here is what the professors decided to do. Total Physical Response (TPR) was used to teach the classes. Students were encouraged to voluntarily speak after ten instruction hours (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978). German was used the whole instructive hour except for a five-minute "Question and answer" session at the end of each class in English (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978, p. 28). Even all written instruction, such as the syllabus, was given in German. Cartoons, illustrations, etc. were given to assist students in translation. Inference was used to guess meanings. In the fifth week of instruction a transition was made from listening and speaking to reading (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978).

Essentially this study was about teaching listening and reading, the two input learning modes (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978). After about 17 weeks students "expressed an independent desire to do regular memorization" (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978, p. 30). They then set their own
memorization goals which included different parts of grammar (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978). This study was not an experiment. The instructors wanted to figure out how to improve their language program so as to increase enrollment and produce greater learning results (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978).

These were the results of the study. The "Attrition" (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978, p. 31) rate (rate at which first semester students do not continue to the second semester) declined from 45% to 28% in the first year and from 28% to 22% in the second year (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978). Student attitudes also improved. For example, their opinion of their teachers went from "Somewhat above average" to "Excellent" (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978, p. 32). Students were asked if they felt confident in their reading and listening skills at the end of the school year. The majority said that they did in reading and 48% of second semester students reported feeling confident in their listening skills. They also took the MLA test and scored in the 70th percentile in listening and the 68th percentile in reading (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978).
Total Physical Response in French

Tuttle (2005), teacher of kindergarten French performed a study using TPR on her students. Because kindergarteners as a whole do not yet read, she had the unique opportunity of working with a group who must necessarily be taught through listening and speaking (Tuttle, 2005). Her experimental group learned French through TPR while the control group learned through acting out stories told to them by the teacher.

During instruction, the control group had a lot of listening time with little speaking time. The experimental group had more speaking time. The teacher noted that the interest of the students in the story group was riveted, even after several exposures to the story. The TPR group's interest, however, had declined by the end. She suggested using the story and TPR methods combined (Tuttle, 2005). The researcher concluded that both methods were effective teaching methods. Thus, she believes that TPR is an effective teaching method (Tuttle, 2005).

Total Physical Response with Elementary Students

An article describing an elementary school in Rochester, NY where the PTA decided to start offering Spanish classes to the second and third grade students,
paid for by parent donations was written by Schneider (1984), who conducted the study described therein. She developed her own curriculum, which focused around the imaginative use of TPR, supplemented with other methods (Schneider, 1984).

One technique which the author used was two puppets. One spoke Spanish fluently and the other only spoke some Spanish. Thus the fluent Spanish-speaking puppet translated for his friend. The author wanted to focus on Asher’s method of not using production early on in instruction. She stuck to this with the exception of songs, which were taught in Spanish and sung by the children.

The author decided to introduce speaking in the seventh week. She made this decision after observing a student command a classmate spontaneously to put his pencil on the desk. “‘en la mesa, en la mesa’” (Schneider, 1984, p. 623).

An interesting connection between Asher and Piaget was made by the author. “The key idea behind Asher’s approach comes from Piaget’s child language acquisition theories which explain that the infant needs to ‘construct reality’ through physical responses to language’”
(Schneider, 1984, p. 621). This theory continues on, according to Asher, in second language acquisition.

William Celestino (1993) enthusiastically described how influential TPR is in the classroom. He emphatically shared that it can be a useful warm-up tool in a traditional language (such as Spanish) classroom. It is possible to use it for the first ten to fifteen minutes of class without distracting from the established text book curriculum (Celestino, 1993).

Celestino explained that “It is all too easy for the foreign language teacher to teach about language rather than how to speak and understand it” (Celestino, 1993, p. 902). TPR is a way to teach students how to speak a language. He explains that TPR is not used just for whole-class instruction but that students are also broken into groups to practice and quizzed individually, either through drawing a picture to identify the meaning of a word or through individually acting out commands.

Who Is and Is Not Using Total Physical Response

On August 8, 2007 I spoke on the phone with a male teacher, name unknown, at the Missionary Training Center (MTC) of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.
The Missionary Training center for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints trains thousands of missionaries on an annual basis. One of the key components of training for many of these missionaries is foreign language training. When I spoke to this gentleman on the phone, I asked him about the use TPR in their language training programs. He was not familiar with TPR but explained the training model that they use, which consists of five steps: 1. Explain--the teacher explains the material. 2. Demonstrate--the teacher demonstrates. 3. Practice--the students practice. 4. Evaluate--the teacher evaluated student progress. 5. Repractice--students re-practice.

When I explained to the MTC teacher what TPR is, he said that he thought that they use it to some extent in modeling and gestures while speaking. Their main teaching method is to have the students speak as much as possible. They also have the students repeat after the teacher. I had a phone conversation with Marlice Mueller head of the French department at Harvard University on August 9, 2007.

Mueller said that no one at Harvard, as far as she knows, is using TPR. But, she said that she couldn't speak for everyone and that I could contact others at Harvard.
She said that she was aware of it in the 60s. She didn’t think much of it then and doesn’t think much of it now.

On August 13, 2007 I received a phone message received from Murphy from the Lay Mission Help office of the Arch Diocese of Los Angeles, California of the Catholic Church.

This message was in response to a message that I left asking if they use Total Physical Response in their missionary language training programs. Murphy indicated that they don’t have language support in Los Angeles, that the language training is done in the actual country where the missionaries are sent.

On August 8, 2007 I had a phone conversation with Sister Ann Carla Costello, head of the sisters at the Los Angeles, California Arch Diocese of the Catholic Church.

In this conversation I asked Sister Costello if they use TPR in their language training. They do not. She said that the only language training that they use in Los Angeles is to train sisters who come from other countries to speak English. They have a program called “Sisters helping sisters” through which sisters of the same ethnicity teach each other conversational English. They also have two ESL teachers that offer English classes.
I received an e-mail on August 13, 2007 from Neil Anderson, Linguistics professor, Brigham Young University. After reading a study by Neil Anderson on metacognitive learning or teaching styles in which three of James Asher’s works were cited, I decided to contact him to find out if TPR is used at BYU. Dr. Anderson said that TPR is not used at BYU except for sporadic use. In my e-mail to him I had asked him if he had any materials about TPR and if not, where they could be obtained. He indicated in his e-mail that he neither had materials or knowledge of where they could be obtained.

I received an e-mail from Shelley Thomas, Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at Middle Tennessee State University on April 26, 2008.

Dr. Thomas is an advocate of TPR. She teaches honors foreign language classes. According to Thomas “In my beginning Honors classes I use about 3 weeks of TPR, 3 weeks of TPRS....” She indicated that after being a “traditional teacher” for approximately twenty years she encountered TPR and began using it. Thomas gives three reasons for switching to TPR: it helped her learn other languages, “because of how my (her) students reacted when I (she) used them (TPR and TPRS), and because as far as
what she knows about how the brain learns TPR and TPRS correlated best.

Conclusion

The teaching method of TPR has been widely researched and attempted, praised and criticized. It shares common threads with other teaching methods and yet stands alone as a unique and effective way of teaching a second language.

In a study done by Asher and Judd (1960) which evaluated the effectiveness of group versus individual thinking, it was found that although there were no significant differences between individual and group thinking (Asher & Judd, 1960), the ideas of the group member tended to cluster together (Asher and Judd, 1960). This tendency can be seen in reference to TPR. Although Asher appears to have drawn from the ideas of others, TPR still remains his individual flash of genius.
CHAPTER THREE
METHODOLOGIES AND PROCEDURES OF
TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE

Picture in your mind a baby speaking for the first time, "Da da! "How old is that child--eight months, a year old? Now picture that same child responding to his mother’s command "Come here! Don’t touch! Smile!" The child is able to execute the commands of his mother even though he is unable to respond verbally or verbally make the same commands himself.

This is the idea that drives the Total Physical Response (TPR) method of teaching a second language. The idea that in the first stages of learning a language an individual hears and responds to commands. It is only through extended practice of this sort--hearing the command, and being prompted to fulfill the command if it was not understood, that a person develops listening comprehension. Then, when they are ready--just like a baby--they speak (Asher, 2000).

How Total Physical Response Came About

When Asher was attempting to understand how information can be assimilated on the "first exposure" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-18) he decided to experiment with a
"cause-effect relationship" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-18). And so he recruited one of his graduate students, Shirou Kunihira and his secretary, Alice Dickie. The procedure went like this: Shirou (who was Japanese) uttered a command in Japanese, Asher and Dickie repeated it, then they acted them out (Asher, 2000).

Unfortunately, using the above method, Asher and Dickie could not remember the words from one command to the next. And so Asher suggested that Kunihira give the command, then act out the command with Asher and Dickie imitating his actions only. Kunihira taught them the commands for stand, sit, stop, turn, jump, squat, and walk backwards (Asher, 2000). After practicing each command several times Asher instructed Kunihira to only give the command. Asher and Dickie were then required to execute the command without prompting. This they were able to do successfully.

After Asher and Dickie each demonstrated that they were able to perform Kunihira’s commands successfully on their own, Asher instructed Kunihira to increase the complexity of the command (Asher, 2000). Now, instead of being commanded to walk, Asher and Dickie were told, "Walk to the door" as they repeated the learning process with Kunihira (Asher, 2000, p. 1-19). Afterwards, the commands
increased even more in complexity--"Walk to the desk and put down the pencil and book" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-20)--and were once again met with success.

An interesting point which is made by Asher in his book "Learning Another Language Through Actions" is that, as he typed the Japanese commands given by Kunihira, he said that "It was the first time in over twenty years that I have seen the Japanese in print; but those utterances are so thoroughly internalized that I can still hear Shirou uttering each direction as if he was in the room reading over my shoulder as I typed" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-19). Thus, the purposes of the experiment were carried out--long-term retention of the language was achieved (Asher, 2000). Asher also shares that "The more complex the direction in Japanese, the easier it was to understand" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-20).

One of the exciting parts about Asher, Kunihira and Dickie's experiment was that they had successful "zero trial learning since we could respond perfectly to novel utterances--ones we had never heard before" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-20). This was evidenced by the fact that Asher and Dickie were able to perform commands that they had never heard before, such as "Run to the window, pick up the book, put it on the desk, then sit on the chair" (Asher,
2000, p. 1-20). Although they had heard and understood some of the words in the sentence before, they had never heard that exact word combination, and yet were able to carry out the command with exactness.

After the excitement of the first trial of what came to be known at TPR, Asher and Kunihira decided to test it out in a laboratory setting. They used “a small classroom...directly across from the men’s room” (Asher, 2000, p. 1-21). When people would come out of the restroom, they were asked if they would like to try TPR. Also, a 12-year-old son of one of the professors at the University (San Jose State College) and two of his friends were taught Japanese using TPR. This proved to Asher that it “worked with people of all ages” (Asher, 2000, p. 1-22).

The Adaptability of Total Physical Response

One of the great things about TPR is how versatile it is. It does not have to be used alone, as the only teaching method in the classroom. To those who are asked to use a certain textbook, or method of teaching other than TPR Asher recommends using TPR as a warm-up exercise. He says, “Use this opportunity to TPR vocabulary that the students will encounter in the next chapter of the textbook” (Asher, 2000, p. 3-82). Celestino, (1993) a
teacher who uses the TPR method agrees with Asher’s assertion that TPR can be used as a warm up, stating that this can be done without distracting from the mandated curriculum.

Another way in which TPR is versatile is class size. Although some language-teaching methods require one-on-one instruction or small group size, Asher (2000, p. 3-83) quotes Joan Christensen as saying “'I have used TPR in classes as small as 3 and as large as 40....I have also used it with an exchange student I had in my home a couple of years ago....'” Celestino (1993) explained that he doesn’t focus on whole class instruction only. In his class the students are also broken into groups to practice. Asher says that if the class is very large, the teacher can first model by giving the command, then completing it himself while the class watches. Then the class is divided into groups, each with a tape player which has the instructor’s voice giving the same commands just heard. The groups are then invited to respond to the voice of the instructor on the tape player (Asher, 2000).

One of the great things about TPR is the ability to be creative. Asher explained (2000) that it is not necessary to begin with the commands used in the first attempt with Kunihira and Dickie (Asher, 2000). Some ways
in which TPR can be introduced are “physical movement, drawing, acting as in a skit, dramatizing a scenario (Stand up. Walk to the drawer. Remove the pistol, etc.), playing a game such as a sport, performing a task such as cooking, sewing or small appliance repair, and singing. (Asher, 2000, p. 3-14)

Tuttle (2005) used TPR to teach the vocabulary of “The Very Hungry Caterpillar” by Eric Carle in French to her kindergarten class.

Asher describes what the optimal TPR classroom would look like. He explains that there would be “a large open area with many different breakaway movie set that represent different life situations such as the living room, the kitchen...” (Asher, 2000, p. 3-34,35). In this way students would be able to literally proactive in different real-life scenes. So when the instructor commanded a student to get out a pot, fill it with onions, and put it on the stove, they would be able to perform the actual action. However, this classroom arrangement is not necessary. Ramiro Garcia suggests having the chairs one either side of the room face each other, with unfilled space in the middle for instructor and student movement (Asher, 2000).
One important part about the TPR method is that it can be used to teach different verb tenses, grammatical features, and vocabulary. Asher explains (2000) that "students internalize" language—"which includes the present, past, future, and the conditional" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-35). This is done through commands such as the following "'Maria, if Jeffe moved a chair under the window, raise your hand, but if he moved the chair next to the table, make a funny face’" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-35). That is a complex command for a language student to be able to execute. However, as Asher explains, because language is "internalized" rather than "memorized" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-35) students are able to achieve long-term storage and use of language.

TPR can also be performed while students are at their desks (Asher, 2000). This can be done using "TPR Student Kits" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-47) which are little 2-D paper scenarios. For example, one of the kits is of a kitchen. It consists of a background which is the kitchen. There are also pictures of different things that belong in the kitchen for students to manipulate as they hear the instructor's commands. For example, the instructor models for his students, "'Put the sink in the kitchen’" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-47).
In TPR homework is usually not given. One reason for this is, as Asher states, "retention from class to class is almost 100 percent" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-49). This means that homework is not necessary because students absorb almost all of what is learned in class. However, parents may not be happy with the idea of no homework being sent home. This was the case with Davis-Wiley (1994) who did an experiment teaching with the TPR method to elementary school students. Asher tells of a Kindergarten French teacher who would record tapes for parents to learn at home with their children (Asher, 2000).

Transition from listening to other skills using the TPR method allows for students to naturally transition from listening comprehension to other language skills. If the language is one of "Phonetic fit" (Asher, 1964, p. 284), that is, one in which the written language is written the way it is pronounced, then transition from listening to reading is instantaneous (Asher, 2000).

As far as how long it take before TPR students are ready to speak, Asher, explains that this time amount varies, and is generally between "10 to 20 hours" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-44). In a study done by Schneider (1984) who taught Spanish to second and third grade students using the TPR method, she introduced speaking in the seventh
week of instruction. She decided to invite students to speak after hearing student command a classmate to put his pencil "'en la mesa, en la mesa (on the desk, on the desk)'" (Schneider, 1984, p. 623).

When TPR students are ready to speak the are given the opportunity to command the teacher and class (Asher, 2000). The teacher can also allow students to instruct one another. In an experiment done in Aptos, California, an experimental group (an adult night school class) was taught German using the TPR method. "After 16 hours of listening training the students pressed the instructor to let them speak" (Asher, 1972, p. 135).

One branch of TPR is storytelling. "Blaine Ray developed this innovation to make a smooth transition from the imperative to other grammatical features, such as the declarative" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-49). Asher recommends that this approach be used wisely, and as a supplement to regular TPR instruction, so as to not overuse it and thus bore the students (Asher, 2000).

A TPR instructional recommendation is to keep the class interesting through varied instruction and goal-setting (Asher, 2000). Asher insists on forming educational goals for the class, so that there is purpose to classroom instruction and so that students can feel
that purpose (Asher, 2000). He says, "We select activities only after we have selected our goals" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-55). The goals should be motivational and geared toward the students' interests, not the teachers. Students have goals of understanding and using the language. Thus, it would be perfectly rational to have as a goal: "At the end of two weeks...read three classified ads in a German newspaper" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-55).

One way in which the TPR instructor can share with the students what the next short term goals are is to show them something in the target language which they do not understand, such as a commercial. Then explain to them that in two weeks they will be able to comprehend the commercial (Asher, 2000). This is an interesting goal and way of presenting it that is sure to catch and keep student interest.

Right/Left Brain

After Asher developed the TPR method he set out to determine why it works (Asher, 2000). In his book "Learning Another Language Through Actions" (2000) he offers possible reasons why TPR is so successful--with all ages and group sizes. He said that "Language-body communication is a fascinating and powerful principle of
The fascinating part is that it seems to hold true for all age groups—infants and adults.

Brain lateralization is one explanation for TPR success (Asher, 2000). In an experiment done by Sperry (Asher, 2000) on cats, the tissue which connects the two brain hemispheres was severed. The cat was then placed before two doors, one with a V on it, the other an upside down V. Behind the door marked with a V was food. It also had an eye patch on one eye. The cat eventually learned to go to the door with the V. Then the food was switched to the door with the upside down V. The eye patch was also moved to the other eye. Asher indicates that in a normal cat one would expect repeated trials for it to learn that the food was no longer behind the door with a V. However, for this cat with the separated brain, it behaved as if it had never seen the doors, and was then trained to go to the door with the upside down V instead of the V. From this we see that the two hemispheres operate somewhat independently of one another (Asher, 2000).

A similar study was done with a 15-year-old boy named P.S. who had suffered from epileptic seizures and received a surgery which, like the cat, severed his brain hemispheres, one from the other. In an experiment where
images and words were flashed on a screen, he was unable to verbalize what was displayed on the left side of the screen. Interestingly, he was able to write the name of the object or word. This indicated to the researchers that the right and left brain communicated in different ways. The right brain, although mute, was able to communicate in other ways including through actions. When it was displayed on the screen that P.S. should go into boxing position, he did so, although he was unable to communicate what word it was that he saw (boxer) (Asher, 2000).

Asher explains the left and right brain in the following way.

The right hemisphere is mute but can express itself by listening to a command and then performing the appropriate action. The left hemisphere can express itself by talking. The left is verbal while the right is non-verbal which means that it can communicate through physical behavior such as pointing, touching, drawing, singing, gesturing, and pantomime. (Asher, 2000, p. 2-24)

This is how Asher believes that a baby learns to speak—first through the right brain, and then through the verbal left brain. And that is what forms the foundation
of TPR—his belief that this learning mode does not change (Asher, 2000).

Through this framework comes the logical recommendation that both right and left brain activities be included in TPR instruction in order to maintain student engagement. Schneider (1984) did this by incorporating puppets and songs into her instruction. Asher (2000) recommends using storytelling and skits to engage the right brain, and "speaking, reading, and writing mini-dialogues and stories" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-56) for the left brain.

Dr. Shelley Thomas is a professor of language at Middle Tennessee State University. In an e-mail she explained that she used to be a traditional teacher but switched to using TPR/TPRS (Total Physical Response Storytelling) in her instruction "because of how my students reacted when I used them, because what I read about how the brain learns best coincided with all the components of TPR/TPRS" (4/26/08). She indicated that she uses TPR and TPRS in her honors classes at the university—"because of how the brain learns best" (Thomas, 4/26/08).
How Total Physical Response Can Be Used in Other Subjects

TPR is great for teaching a second language. However, its principles are also effective when applied to other subject areas. One of the underlying assumptions about TPR is that it requires the brain to switch back and forth from right to left brain. One application of this concept was seen in a study done by Asher and Post (1964). They designed a right-brain method of sorting the mail. Their idea was to create a computer in the shape of a map of the city in which the mail sorter would need only to touch the area of the map where the mail was to go. The idea was ingenious because it was creative—allowed the sorter to visualize the area to which the mail would be taken.

There are other ways to apply TPR. Asher speaks of a few in his book "Learning Another Language Through Actions" (2000). It can be used, as Diane Preston described, in Kindergarten, using teddy bears. She had each student bring their bear and they did lots of activities using them—like classifying—whether or not the bear had clothing, patterns—AB with dressed and non dressed bears, and even Venn diagrams—drawing a picture of their bear and placing the picture in the appropriate circle on the ground (Asher, 2000).
In my own kindergarten classroom I have seen the effectiveness of using TPR principles. The other day, to teach the principle of halves and fourths I told the children that I had brought them a treat. This was an idea that came from the Saxon Math curriculum that we use. It was six blueberry jam sandwiches on a tray. Immediately their attention was riveted. We then counted the sandwiches together and I asked them if there were enough for everyone. “No.” So we decided to cut them in half. this we did. I had also drawn six squares on a chart paper, which we divided in half with a marker. I asked again if there was enough for everyone. “Yes!” They exclaimed. Well, we counted the people and there weren’t enough halves. “What should we do?” I asked them. they suggested we cut them into lots of little pieces. I told them we could ust cut them in half again. We did, and drew lines through the ones on the paper as well. We counted the pieces b twos, talked about halves and fourths and then the children went happily to their tables to eat their sandwich fourth. All of this was done with complete attention.

TPR is taught by using the “Neural blueprint (that) does not change with age” (Asher, 2000, p. 6-2). This means that a second language is taught using the same
method in which a baby learns its first language--through commands actions, and eventual speech.
CHAPTER FOUR
CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF EFFECTIVENESS OF TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE

As a Theory

Total Physical Response is an effective theory that has been tested in numerous experiments since its conception over forty years ago. Asher himself, since its development, has dedicated himself to its study and spread through experiments, books, presentations, trainings, and communication with other scholars (Asher, 2000).

In the sixth edition of “Learning Another Language Through Actions” (Asher, 2000) There are sections on frequently asked questions, an interview with Dr. Asher, Letters from his “Mail Bag” (p. 7-1) and even experiences shared by other teachers who use TPR. Thus, a book written 40 years after Asher developed TPR exemplifies the continued interest in TPR--both by the author and others around the world (Asher, 2000).

The dictionary defines theory as “a well-substantiated explanation of some aspect of the natural world; an organized system of accepted knowledge that applies in a variety of circumstances to explain a specific set of phenomena” (WordNet, 2008). The theory of
the Total Physical Response method is "substantiated" upon the following principles. 1) The way in which the brain acquires its first language in infancy is the same way in which the brain acquires a second and all succeeding languages; 2) the brain is divided into two hemispheres: the right and left. Both sides must be used for the successful attainment of a language (Asher, 2000).

The way in which TPR is founded upon the principle of infant language development is as follows. A baby learns a language through hearing the commands of its parents. "Look at mommy!" or "Open your mouth!" With each adult utterance the infant learns to perform a task. Eventually, after numerous hours of complying silently with parental commands, the child utters its first simple word--"da da" or "ba ba" (Asher, 2000). TPR works in the same way. An instructor utters a command, and then executes it while the students quietly execute the command right along with him--without saying a word. Although the commands begin with single words "Walk," they progress to include complex sentences, such as "Walk to the door. Knock on it. Knock again. Set the package down". Commands even proceed to include the "novel"--new sentences which students have never hear before, such as "Throw the package at the
door!” (Kunihira & Asher, 1965). When the student is ready, they too utter their first words (Asher, 2000).

The way in which TPR is founded upon the principle of lateralization of the brain is as follows. The brain is divided into two hemispheres. “The left hemisphere can express itself by talking.” “The right hemisphere is mute but can express itself by listening to a command in the target language, and then performing the appropriate action” (Asher, 2000, p. 2-24). From the description of the functions and abilities of the brain hemispheres we understand that the right brain must be used especially in the beginning nonverbal stages for TPR to be successful (Asher, 2000).

The definition of “Theory” says that it must be an “organized system of accepted knowledge” (WordNet, 2008). TPR is an organized system that has been tested and proven through scientific experiment and is accepted by language teachers throughout the world. The method of TPR is used like this. An instructor utters a command in the target language. The instructor and students physically complete the command. If the command is “Yell” then the instructor and students yell (Kunihira & Asher, 1965). Typically, about three new concepts are introduced at a time (Asher, 2000). As the students become familiar with the simple
command, the instructor increases the complexity of the command. "Tap Johnny on the shoulder and yell" (Kunihira & Asher, 1965). Also, novel utterances are introduced, such as "When Jane smiles at you, yell." After a few hours students will either spontaneously speak in the target language or express a desire to do so. At that point students are given the opportunity to give commands to the teacher or to other students. This process is continued throughout instruction with other learning activities and creativity added to this basic format to maintain the interest of the students and engage the left brain as well (Asher, 2000).

The Proven Effectiveness of Total Physical Response

The effectiveness of TPR has been proven by many studies. The first studies were done by James Asher, the creator of TPR. Although TPR was created spontaneously in a meeting with his Japanese graduate student, Kunihira, and his secretary Dickie, formal experiments were then conducted in a classroom across from a men’s restroom at San Jose State College where Asher was a professor. Kunihira was the instructor for much of the language training that took place as men would exit the restroom and be invited to participate in language training (Asher,
2000). For his master’s thesis Kunihira tested the method of TPR in teaching Japanese as a second language (Kunihira and Asher, 1965). It was found in his experiment to be a successful language teaching method.

Several other TPR studies were done. One was conducted by Asher for the Office of Naval Research of the United States (Asher, 1968). In this study an experimental and control groups learned Russian. It was discovered that those who were taught using the TPR method had much higher understanding of the Russian language than those taught using another method (Asher, 1968). In this experiment the students were given tests of retention after they received language training. They were tested again 24 hours later, 48 hours later, a nd two weeks later. Those who were taught using TPR received almost perfect scores at each interval of time (Asher, 1968).

An amazing result of a study done by Asher (1965) in which the experimental group learned Russian via TPR and while the control group watched a model follow commands while the remained mute and still and gave written answers in retention tests. The result was that for one-word commands the results were similar for the experimental and control groups. “However, the group applying the learning strategy of the Total Physical Response had significantly
better retention for short, long, and novel utterances” (Asher, 1965, p. 296). TPR was able to facilitate more complex remembrance of that which was learned in training.

In a review which was given of TPR Asher (1966) explained that “The results of pilot studies were almost perfect retention in listening to Japanese from two weeks to a year when the subject ranged from school children to adults” (Asher, 1966, p. 79). Retention using TPR remains in force even a year after the language is learned using this method. Or, as Asher, explained, while writing his book “Learning Another Language Through Actions” which was published in 2000, he included the Japanese commands which Kunihira had given Asher and his secretary Dickie in the first TPR experiment. To his surprise, upon seeing those commands again, for the first time in twenty years, the felt as vivid as if he had just learned them, so well were they ingrained in his memory (Asher, 2000).

One of the key components of the success of TPR is the stress-free environment in which the students are engaged in language learning. The procedure focuses on listening comprehension before anything else. Other methods force the student to speak from the beginning of their training. As Asher explains “To force speaking from the beginning of training may be somewhat analogous to the
electroshock experiments with rats" (Asher, 1966, p. 81). In summary, the rat experiments determined that when rats are shocked immediately after learning a maze, they forget what they have learned. In like manner, Asher suggests the possibility of memory loss of language concepts if students are given the "shock" of acquiring listening and speaking comprehension at the same time (Asher, 1966). For this reason he recommends developing "listening fluency" (Asher, 1966, p. 81) before one tries speaking.

The TPR method has been proven effective in people of all ages. One of the first trials done by Asher was teaching Japanese to three twelve year olds. He created a film to show the method and effectiveness of the TPR method. The film was also made to show "the complexity of Japanese understood by American children after twenty minutes of training" (Asher, Kusudo, & de la Torre, 1974, p. 24). Children experience immediate success using the TPR method.

Other studies have been done with children learning a second language with success using the TPR method. one such was done by Schneider, teaching Spanish to second and third grade students. One moment in which she realized the students were learning was when she told the students to put their pencils on their desks and one of the children
leaned over to a classmate and said, in Spanish "'en la mesa, en la mesa'" (Schneider, 1984, 623). She helped the students have a successful learning experience by also using talking puppets and songs (Schneider, 1984).

Dr. Shelley Thomas (personal e-mail) is one who teaches her honors language students at Middle Tennessee State University using the TPR method. She has also gone to India to teach English to rural village children using TPR and Total Physical Response Storytelling. After ten days of instruction The Hindu, an Indian newspaper, reporter, reported the following:

These students were from tribal villages scattered in the foothills of the Poondi. They did not know English and some of them had not even heard it being spoken before. Yet, they understood their teacher perfectly. Through actions, pictures, songs and short stories, they were initiated in the world of English. (Accelerated Acquisition, 2008)

Adults have also been proven to learn and retain language with amazing success using TPR. A study done by Asher contrasted the results of a adult night school of students learning German using the TPR method with two different college German classes (German I and II) taught in the traditional method. The group taught
using TPR displayed “vastly superior listening skill” (Asher, 1972, p. 136) than both of the control groups. even though the German II class had had more than twice the numbers of hours of instruction than the TPR group. Amazingly enough, the TPR group also performed on equal par with the German I class in reading comprehension even though the TPR group “had no systematic training in reading” (Asher, 1972, p. 136).

Right and Left Brain

Learning a second language is done best when both sides of the brain are engaged. This is because, as discussed, the left side of the brain communicates verbally while the right side communicates physically. TPR engages the right side of the brain which “can express itself by listening to a command in the target language and then performing the appropriate action” (Asher, 2000, p. 2-24). This is precisely what happens in TPR--the instructor gives a command and the student physically carries through with it (Asher, 2000). Thus, because TPR attempts to replicate the process by which an infant learns its first language, learning begins with the right side of the brain. However, just as babies begin to speak, and they switch to the left brain, also TPR students must
in time have their left hemisphere engaged in order to have a whole language experience (Asher, 2000).

Asher expressed "that the left hemisphere should not be unoccupied for too long" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-8). It can be engaged in any type of verbal activity from storytelling (TPRS as developed by Blaine Ray), to student-created skits, to the teacher asking questions that the students answer with oral or written response (Asher, 2000).

The left brain can also be engaged by allowing students to speak. Celestino, a teacher who uses TPR in his Spanish classroom indicated that one can say to their students "'Who thinks they can give me a command'" (Celestino, 1993, p. 902)? This is an enjoyable way to engage the left brain of the student, because, as Celestino commented, "Students enjoy being able to tell their teacher what to do, and in a foreign language, no less" (Celestino, 1993, p. 902)! Another way in which Celestino teaches to both the left and right hemispheres of the brain is by allowing students to make drawings of written commands. The right brain responds to the drawing and the left to the written words (Celestino, 1993).

One example of the benefit of engaging both the left and right brain was seen in a study done by Tuttle (2005),
a teacher of kindergarten French. Her experimental group was taught using TPR, the control group by telling them stories and having them act them out. She observed that by the end of the study the interest of the TPR group had waned while the story group's attention remained riveted. However, the TPR group had performed well in the study. Her conclusion was that it would be wise to combine the two techniques in her teaching. Her conclusion was logical, because it was a natural combination of right and left brain engagement (Tuttle, 2005).

The need to teach to both sides of the brain is an issue that was addressed by Asher in his book “Learning Another Language Through Actions” (2000). He said that one “land mine” (Asher, 2000, p. 3-53) that instructors will want to avoid is that of overuse, which can lead to the following kind of comment “'Gee, it was absolute magic for a month or so and then the students seemed to shut down and refused to perform’” (Asher, 2000, p. 3-54). TPR instruction is most effective when there is constant switching of activities to engage both rain hemispheres (Asher, 2000).
Comparison to Other Methods

In a study done by Asher for the Office of Naval Research several groups learned Russian in different ways (Asher, 1968). In the study some groups observed a model act out responses to commands and then acted them out themselves in testing. Other groups acted during instruction (along with the model) and acted in testing. Other groups observed during instruction and then translated Russian to English either in writing or orally in testing. Those groups that acted during retention tests scored the best out of all the groups. This demonstrates that although written and oral responses in a language class are the most common forms of testing, they are not the most effective ways to promote listening comprehension (Asher, 1968).

Swaffar and Woodruff (1978) turned to TPR as a means to increase enrollment and curb the increasing rates of attrition in German language classes at the University of Texas, Austin. Through the use of TPR and other language teaching methods, they were able to help decrease the rate of attrition (students that drop out) from the first to second semester from 45% to 28% the first year, and form 28% to 22% the second year. Also, student enthusiasm for the classes increased. Their opinion of their teachers
went from "Somewhat above average" to "Excellent" (Swaffar & Woodruff, 1978, p. 32). Another great result of switching to instruction with TPR was that the majority of the students, at the end of the school year, said that they felt confident in their German reading skills. They also took the Modern Language Association (MLA) test and scored in the 70th percentile in listening and the 68th percentile in reading (Swaffar and Woodruff, 1978).

Correct Method

Effectiveness in TPR comes from doing it the right way and attempting to make it the best experience possible for the student. Asher explains a potential "land mines" to be avoided by TPR instructors. One is the "land mine" of "over-modeling" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-56) in which the instructor continues to model the command along with the student. This can be solved by paying attention to the students, observing their actions and moving on when they appear to be ready. He says, "This is a marvelous example of the 'less is more' principle" Asher, 2000, p. 3-56). Another "land mine" is "under-modeling" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-56), which essentially is the opposite of over-modeling. The third "land mine" is "mindless repetition" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-56) in which the
instructor, seemingly without throughout, repeats the same command over and over "Put the book down. Pick the book up. Put the book down. Pick the book up." Falling into traps like these can cause TPR to become mindless and drive the students crazy (Asher, 2000).

There are many studies which have been done on TPR. Asher himself said "I often say that my Total Physical Response is perhaps the most thoroughly researched idea in the entire field of language acquisition" (Asher, 2000, p. 3-3). One can imagine that this might be true because TPR is so different from other language teaching methods—it allows students to be up and out of their seats. It has been proven over the last four decades to rapidly and effectively teach learning comprehension at high and long term rates of retention. TPR has been proven over and through time to be an effective method for teaching a second language to people of any age and groups of varying size.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

James Asher enjoys thinking about why things work and about how to accomplish a task in the most efficient and effective way. This is evidenced in the studies that he has done throughout his life. It is some of these studies that led him to develop the TPR method of language instruction. Asher (2006) said "There is nothing more exciting than to make a discovery--to find out something that nobody else on earth knew before. What could be more fun than that" (Asher, 2006, p. 47)?

In this study the origins and evolution of TPR have been traced. The literature on TPR has been studied, the procedures and methodologies of TPR have been described, and the effectiveness of TPR as a theory and a pedagogy have been analyzed. Through all of this we have come to a greater understanding of TPR and an appreciation for the process of discovery.

TPR is a method that was developed in an instant and yet was years in the making. One man, James Asher, prepared himself for years by studying psychology and language acquisition. Then, in a choice moment, he
received a flash of inspiration. That flash was TPR. In that moment Asher realized that it was not necessary to produce words in order to be learning language (Asher, 2000).

As has been explained, Kunihira uttered commands and with him, Asher and Dickie followed those commands. Later came full sentence commands, complex sentence commands, and novel commands (Asher, 2000). Asher and Dickie then performed the commands without Kunihira modeling, they performed the actions alone, and all with immense success. The process of discovery was so exciting that "We 'worked' for hours with no awareness that time was passing. And the more we worked, the more exhilarated we were" (Asher, 2000, p. 1-20). If this process was so riveting for Asher and his associates, one can imagine the impact it also has on other language students.

TPR finds its theoretical origins in the components that make up its effectiveness. One of these components is infant language acquisition. We have discussed the way in which infants acquire speech--that they go from complying with commands to speaking. Children also progress in their language skills further by learning to read and then write. These skills naturally develop as the child is immersed in a language-rich world. However, they cannot be
rushed--each step must be taken in its order and when the child is ready (Asher, 2000.) The same is true with second language acquisition. We have explored the ideas of Asher—that "The neural blueprint does not change with age. The sequence is the same for all ages" (Asher, 2000, p. 6-2). In this we understand that language acquisition follows the same pattern and steps whether we are one one hundred.

We have come to understand the effectiveness of TPR, both as a theory and a pedagogy. We have examined many of the studies of Asher where TPR was proven to be an effective teaching method. We have also seen in his studies the strength of TPR as a theory--it holds up in many different situations and over time. It has also proven effective in studies done by other researchers and educators alike.

We have studied the effectiveness of TPR when paired with left-brain activities such as singing, storytelling, and skits. The success of these activities has been demonstrated by Schneider (1984). The success and joyful reception of TPR in India has also been examined (Accelerated Acquisition, 2008) in the work of Thomas, who has also enjoyed success with TPR in her own personal language acquisition and that of her university students (e-mail, Thomas, 4/26/08).
Recommendations

This study has focused on the success of those who have used and taught with TPR. But what about those who don’t like it, who haven’t enjoyed positive results with it, or are indifferent to it or don’t know that it exists?

In a phone conversation (August 9, 2007) with Marlies Mueller, the head of the French department at Harvard University, I was informed that TPR, as far as she knows, is not used at Harvard. She told me that she was aware of it in the 1960s; that she didn’t think much of it then, and she doesn’t think much of it now. What could have transpired to cause her to think in a negative way about TPR?

Could it be that she thinks this way because of the cultural learning method norm of our country, which is: sitting at a desk, listening, writing, reading, and speaking. There is little room for movement. In fact, children who leave their desks at school or wiggle on the carpet are often punished. With all of this looming over one’s head and inside of their brain, it is only natural for the left hemisphere to shout "'Stick with the tried and true'" (Asher, 2006, p. 1). But let’s be honest, if we were to always stick with the tried and true milk would still be one of the leading causes of death from the
harmful bacteria inside. Pasteur’s idea couldn’t have been all wrong.

When asked if he encouraged his own children to take a language in school, Asher replied that he did not “since the instruction was a traditional left-brain approach....I knew that the probability was only 5 chances in 100 that my children would be successful in the slow-motion, high-stress audio-lingual classes” (Asher, 2000, p. 3-76). His reasoning is logical. TPR has been proven to be more effective than other language teaching methods, and even if there is a method that is more effective, it still does not change the fact that TPR is so very successful for most people in learning a language and retaining it.

Some simply don’t know about TPR yet or opt to use other language teaching methods. Some of these methods include aspects of TPR. Asher himself did not pretend that TPR stands alone. He said “I am uncomfortable with approaches that pretend to be independent of all other learning strategies” (Asher, 1984, p. 2).

When I spoke on the phone to one of the language instructors at the Missionary Training Center of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Provo, Utah (Where thousands of missionaries receive language training each year in many different languages) on August 8, 2007,
he admitted that he was not familiar with TPR. However, when I explained what it was he indicated that they do use it to some extent in teacher modeling and gestures while speaking. He explained to me the training model that they use. Two of its components are the teacher demonstrating the principle to the students and the student practicing. These two components are similar to the modeling/student following command of instructor aspect of TPR.

There will always be opposition to success. There will also exist ignorance. Some things that can come of this paper are using TPR (and other right-brain activities) because they are needed for effective teaching and work, and sharing the news about TPR. Now that we have learned this information, we should contact our school boards and principals, informing then of this useful method and requesting that it be used to teach language in our schools. We should research right-brain learning and share with principals and teachers the discoveries we make that can help to make a significant positive impact in our school. We now have the information that we need to begin effective language study for ourselves--to revisit languages attempted in the past and relearn them using TPR. Find a friend or a school that teaches the language
of your choice using TPR and brain switching (Asher, 2000) methods.

TPR is a significant teaching method—not just because it works, also because it uses right-brain thinking. It encourages people to step outside the box and use a different teaching/learning method because it is successful and makes learning a joy rather than a chore to be endured.

Asher sought for methods that were more precise and efficient, such as TPR, handwriting analysis (Asher & Hards, 1978), mail sorting (Asher & Post, 1964), and Q by Q interviews (Asher, 1970). He was seeking for a better way to get things done. That's what happened when he thought. What happens when you think?
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