

TEACHING ENGLISH FOR YOUNG LEARNERS USING A TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE (TPR) METHOD

Aprilia Riyana Putri

Islamic University of Nahdlatul Ulama` Jeparo

Email: apriliamuzakki@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Teaching English for young learners needs some good methods because English here is as a second or foreign language. Young learners do not practice to make communication using English with their families or people around them. So, it will be difficult to teach them if the teacher only use a common way. As an English teacher, choosing good method to make their students learning English Easily is a must. And Total Physical Response is one of an alternative good method for teaching English for young Learners. It can help young learners to memorize some commands or some vocabularies easily through use their physical movement. The students will not only learnable but also interesting and enjoyable. Total Physical Response is very good method for Kinesthetic learner who need to be active in the classroom. This method tries to introduce the language skill in an action and the English teacher has three responsibilities: as an instructor, as a role model, and an action supervisor until they are ready to imitate what the teacher said and did. This method is good for improving students listening and speaking skills.

Keywords: *Teaching English, Young Learner, Total Physical response (TPR), The Designer Method.*

INTRODUCTION

Based on the new curriculum in the elementary schools in Indonesia, it does not use English in their curriculum again, but in fact most of Elementary schools give some English materials to the students for giving some knowledge about a foreign or second language which is English as an International Language. It is including into extracurricular subject. It is not an easy task to transfer the teacher knowledge about English to young learners, because they do not use English as their daily communication. That's why the English teachers have to find a good method

for teaching them easily, interesting, understandable and also enjoyable. One of an alternative good method that can be used English teacher is Total Physical Response (TPR). This method is really good for teaching young learner because they will not feel under pressure but feeling happy to learn new English vocabularies that they never heard before or listened to the English Language which they do not use for communication in daily life with their families, relatives, and also people around them. It is different when teaching young learner using Indonesian or using their

mother tongue which is they use everyday; it is easier than transferring new knowledge from English materials to them. In this method, basically, the instructor gives commands in the target language, demonstrates the corresponding action, and directs the student to perform the same action. Young learners respond the commands through physical movement.

Total Physical Response (TPR) method is a “natural method” in a sense that second language learner follows the naturalistic process of first language learning. According to Asher there are three processes as central to natural process of language acquisition: (1) Children develop listening competence before they develop the ability to speak at the early stage of first language acquisition. They can understand complex utterances that they cannot spontaneously produce or imitate. (2). Children’s ability in listening comprehension is acquired because children are acquired to respond physically to spoken language in the form of parental commands. (3). Once a foundation in listening comprehension has been established, speech evolves naturally and effortlessly out of it. (Asher,1988: 2-4; Richards and Rodgers, 1999: 90).

To successfully in English teaching for Elementary schools, teaching material and methods should be suited. For this reason, one method considered one of the efforts to English teaching for children should be introduced. Before discussing this method in detail, this article starts with describing characteristics of young learner.

CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG LEARNERS

Teaching of English for young learners is not a simple problem; it is because English is not their first language. In learning language, young learners need process for combines both verbal and physical aspects. According

to Asher (1988) children respond physically to their parents’ speech. For months, they absorb the language without being able to speak; this is a period of internalization and code breaking. After this stage, they will be able to reproduce the language spontaneously.

In teaching young learners English, there are some characteristics of whom presented by Scott and Lisbeth (1992).

- Children aged 8-10 are mature enough;
- They have a particular point of view;
- They are able to describe the difference between facts and fictions;
- They are curious of asking questions;
- They believe in what is said and the real world to express and comprehend meaning/ message;
- They have distinct opinion about what they like and what they dislike;
- They are open to what happens in the classroom and begin asking a teacher’s decision; and
- They can cooperate with each other and learn from others.

In addition, Scott and Lisbeth (1992) say that children particularly aged 8-10 are competent mother tongue users. In this regard, they are aware of basic linguistic rules of their mother tongue. At these ages, children can grasp abstracts and symbols, generalize language, and systemize it. Children are also capable of interpreting meaning without understanding words separately, are competent in using language creatively, are frequently fond of doing ‘exploration’ and making a certain condition enjoyable; have established imagination; and are fond of communicating (Halliwell, 1992).

In the context of teaching, most people assume that children learn a foreign

language in the same way that they learn their mother tongue. Basically, children are potential in acquiring and learning a foreign language, and even they learn it more quickly than those who are learning the foreign language after puberty (Mc Laughlin 1978). On the contrary, children are less capable of absorbing or acquiring a foreign language optimally (Long, 1990).

WHAT IS TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE (TPR)

Total Physical Response (TPR) is a language teaching method proposed by Dr. James J Asher (1988), a professor of psychology at San Jose State University, California. According to Asher, TPR is based on the premise that the human brain has a biological program for acquiring any natural language in the world. The acquisition process is visible when we observe how children acquire their mother tongue. Communication between parents and children combines both verbal and physical aspects. Children respond physically to their parents' speech. The responses are in turn positively reinforced by the parents' speech. For months children absorb the language without being able to speak; this is a period of internalization and code breaking. After this stage children are able to reproduce the language spontaneously. With TPR the language teacher tries to mimic this process in the classroom. This method is, therefore, also referred to as "the Comprehension Approach" because it gives emphasis on listening comprehension prior to production.

In designing TPR, Asher carefully considered how infants acquire language and based on his method on three principles of first language acquisition: listening precedes speaking, language learning is associated with body movement, and listening skill prepares a child for speaking. When

speaking to a kid, parents commonly point to an object and clearly state its labels, e.g. "ball" or instruct the child, "pick up the ball", and show through action what they mean by utterance. Children are able to show comprehension by responding physically to the parent's utterance. With no pressure, children slowly but surely learn to respond and eventually try to speak.

Asher claims that second language acquisition, Asher views, follow the same process to child first language acquisition, that is, the speech addressed to children usually consists primarily of commands which they respond to physically. Adults, therefore, could follow the way children successfully acquire their mother tongue. In other words, Asher's TPR is a 'Natural Method' in a sense that second language learning follows the naturalistic process of first language learning. For this reason, there are three such central processes:

- (a) before children develop the ability to speak, they develop listening competence. At the early phases of first language acquisition, they are able to comprehend complex utterances, which they hardly can spontaneously produce or imitate. Asher takes into account that a learner may be making a mental 'blueprint' of the language that will make it possible to produce spoken language later during this period of listening;
- (b) children's ability in listening comprehension is acquired because children need to respond physically to spoken language in the form of parental commands; and
- (c) when a foundation in listening comprehension has been established, speech evolves naturally and effortlessly out of it.

Asher believes that it is crucial to base foreign language learning upon how children learn their native language. In other words, TPR is designed based upon the way that children learn their mother tongue. In this respect, TPR considers that one learns best when he is actively involved and grasp what he hears (Haynes, 2004; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Linse, 2005).

Asher's TPR is basically based on behaviorist psychologist for its learning theory. Learning is the result of stimulus-response sequence. However, he elaborates this theory by adding some tenets to account for what facilitates or inhibits learning. He draws three hypotheses about learning from different scholars such as Lennebel (1964) and Krashen (1977). The three hypotheses are as follows:

1. Bioprogram

There exists a specific innate bioprogram for language learning, which defines an optional path for first and second language development. The brain and the nervous system are biologically programmed to acquire language in a particular sequence and in a particular mode. The sequence is listening before speaking and the mode is to synchronize language with the individual's body (Asher, 1988: 4). Children or learners, therefore, should first internalize a cognitive map of the target language through listening exercises and listening should be accompanied by physical movement; speaking skill then comes later.

2. Brain- Lateralization

Brain lateralization is the divisions of functions within the brain different learning function in the left brain hemispheres. Children acquire language through motor movement (right brain activity) then it is processed for the production in the left brain. Right brain activities must occur before the left brain can process language for

production. Similarly, adult should develop language mastery through right brain motor activities, while the left brain learns. When a sufficient amount of right brain learning has taken place the left- brain will be triggered to produce language.

3. Reduction of Stress

Stress (an affective filter) intervenes between the act of learning and what is to be learned; the lower the stress the greater the learning. An important condition for successful language learning is stress free. The key to stress-free learning is to strike into the natural bio-program for language development and this can bring back the relaxed experiences during the first language learning. by focusing on message which is interpreted through movement, the learner is said to be freed from stressful situation. Adult language learning often causes stress and anxiety and thus adult should learn second language as children acquire their mother tongue. In this way, second language learners will be freed from foreign language syndrome (i.e, stress, shy, anxiety, lack of self confidence, etc). (Asher, 1988: 5-6; Richards and Rodgers, 1999: 90- 91).

CHARACTERISTICS OF TPR

Total Physical Response has characteristics. Asher who developed this method, focused in particular on two characteristics of first language acquisition which is written in David Nunan's book (1991, 244)

1."The child gets a vast amount of comprehensible input before beginning to speak. Young children comprehend language which is far in excess of their ability to produce.

2. There is a lot physical manipulation and action language accompanying early input. Throw the ball to Rudi', put your arm through here', etc. This action language,

encouraging physical manipulation, is couched in the imperative”.

From the above description, the students try to comprehend the utterances of language before trying to produce verbal language. They learn by using physical movements or actions. To make it easy for the students, the teacher should not give abstract words first. It can be delayed until students can comprehend the target language. Asher (1991, 244) stated that: “Abstractions should be delayed until students have internalized a details cognitive map of the target language. Abstractions are not necessary for people to decode the grammatical structure of a language. Once students have internalized the target language”. To know more about Total Physical Response, the following is the basic principles of Total Physical Response which was created by Asher (1974, 244):

When should stress comprehension rather than production at the beginning levels of second language instruction with no demand on the learners to generate the target structure themselves. We should obey the ‘here and now’ principle.

We should provide input to the learners by getting them to carry commands. These commands should be couched in the imperative”.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF TPR METHOD

Advantages:

- It is fun and easy
- It does not require a great deal of preparation on the part of the teacher.
- It is a good tool for learning vocabulary.
- Class size does not need to be a problem.
- There is no age barrier.
- It is good for kinaesthetic learners

Disadvantages:

- It is not a very creative method. Students are not given the opportunity to express their own views and thoughts in a creative way.
- It is easy to overuse TPR.
- It is limited, since everything cannot be explained with this method. It must be combined with other approaches.
- It is challenging for shy students
- It is for children only

THE APPLICATION OF TPR IN THE CLASSROOM

Imperative drills are the major classroom activity in TPR. They are used to elicit physical actions and activity on the part of the learner. Conversational dialogues are delayed until after about 120 hours of instruction. Since they are highly abstract and disconnected. And to understand them requires a rather advanced internalization of the target language (Asher, 1988: 95). Learners have the primary roles as listeners and performers. They listen attentively and respond physically to commands from the teacher. Where teacher plays an active and direct role, the director of a stage plays in which students are the actors (Asher, 1988: 43).

TPR can be used to teach and practise such many things as:

- ✓ Vocabulary (Smile, Dizzy, Hungry etc)
- ✓ Grammar (Tenses; present/ past/ future and continuous; I comb my hair twice a day) I
- ✓ Classroom Language (take your pen)
- ✓ Imperatives/ Instructions (Up your hand)

According to Muhren (2003) the basic technique of TPR is simple. Learners act out commands given by the teacher or their fellow pupils (at a later stage). These commands or series of commands are simple

at the beginning (*stand up, sit down*) but after sometime they may become more complex (*I want the boys to stand in a circle please*). A TPR sequence can be a chain of action relating to a compound task (take pen and paper, sit down, begin at the top of your paper, write down: Dear...or even contain a story- line.

Here are sample materials used in TPR:

Sample materials 1:

Context : Teaching series of Vocabulary in an Action Song (Part of Body)
 New Words : Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes, Eyes, Ears, Nose and Mouth
 Preparation : Play a song entitled “Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes” from laptop and prepare sound speaker.

Procedures :

1. The Teacher stands up in front of the students and touch part of her/ his body based on the songs lyrics while singing the song and the students should listen to the song carefully and pay attention to the teachers’ body movement.
2. The teacher gives command to the students to imitate what the teacher did. All of students have to participate to stands up and follow the rule to touch their parts of body based on the song lyrics together.
3. The Teacher asks one of the students to be the performer and their friends should follow him/ her.

Children enjoy singing. There are lots of action songs. The students sing and act out the words of the song. Here is an example of an action song.

Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes, Knees and Toes

Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes, Knees and Toes

And Eyes, and Ears, and Mouth and Nose

Head, Shoulder, Knees and Toes, Knees and Toes

Sample Material 2:

Context :
 Teaching Vocabulary (Verbs)

New Words :
 Wash, Brush, Open, Close

Procedures :
 The teacher teach some new vocabularies related to verbs, then gives command to the students for doing the instruction based on the verb, for example:

- Wash your hands
your face
your hair
- Brush your teeth
your pants
- Open your book
your window
your bag
- Close your eyes
your pencil case

CONCLUSION

Total Physical response is one of an interesting method for teaching young learner because they directly practice the command with the physical movement.

It is only suitable for teaching young learner, it is not suitable to be practiced for teaching adult.

Based on the researcher, it is better method for teaching young learner who has kinaesthetic learner style.

In practicing this method, the teacher does not need much preparation to use this method in teaching learning process. It is good for teaching listening, speaking skills and improving students’ vocabularies.

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