

The Application of TPR Teaching Methods in Mandarin class of America

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ABSTRACT. *Total Physical Response/TPR (1960s-2000s) also known as TPR is formulated by American scholar James Asher. In this method, both language and body movement are synchronized through action responses and the use of imperative. TPR is very effective in foreign language teaching, which helps to improve student's understanding and enhance their confidence. This thesis attempts to prove the effectiveness of TPR to Chinese teaching and offers empirical evidences. It collects data from in-class experiment and out-class questionnaires, and makes combined analysis.*

KEYWORDS: *Total Physical Response; effectiveness; analysis*

1. Background

As the status of Chinese in the world gradually rises, Chinese as a carrier of cultural heritage in China, get more attentions from different countries than before in the world. In particular, China has a long standing and well established relationship with United States of America, in order to better promote the development of the two countries, from the university to the primary schools in America all have Chinese courses in recent years. So what will be the best Chinese teaching method for America students is the question that scholars discussed.

There are so many methods in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, such as the traditional translation method, audio-lingual, direct method and task-based language teaching. TPR (Total Physical Response) teaching method had come to China in the twentieth century, which injected a fresh blood in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Total Physical Response (TPR) is a approach to immerse learners who are just begin their studies, and is widely used all over the world. TPR use the actions, voices, images and videos to help students remember the meaning of what they've seen or heard. And this approach will make the learners respond physically to the simple requests that the teacher made. (Reyhner, J, 2003)

2. Statement of the Problem

What are the effects of using Total Physical Response for Novice A students in Mandarin class of America?

To what extent is Total Physical Response better than other teaching approaches for Novice A students in Mandarin class of America?

3. Review of the Literature

3.1 Total Physical Response.

3.1.1 Conception of Total Physical Response

Total Physical Response is a method developed by Dr. James J. Asher, a professor of psychology at San José State University, with the purpose to learn a second language. In his early journal: *The Total Physical Response Approach to Second Language Learning* (Asher, 1969), he mentioned that during L2 acquisition (second language), listening, speaking, reading and writing are four basic skills. However, the training time of L2 is limited, and Dr. James J. Asher found that the training of listening and speaking may result in an unbelievable expectation in a limited time. So he suggested that the first training stage should focus on one skill, and listening is the best choice. As Asher notes, "There is evidence that the skill of listening comprehension has high positive transfer especially when speaking a foreign language. And listening skill seems to have a large positive transfer, because reading and writing depend upon the fit between phonology and orthography of a specific language." (Asher, 1969) To solve the problem, he developed a strategy: Total Physical Response, which can make listening fluency while learning a L2 maximally as much as to learn L1 (first language). That means when students are listening a foreign or second language, and then they can immediately obey with a physical action. Furthermore, Iiwana, N, concludes that TPR is based on the way in which children learn their mother tongue. Taking TPR as the link between word and action, the teacher giving a command and the learners obeying the command is the main activity of TPR. Therefore, it is easier for the students to recall the words they have learned if they use their body to learn vocabulary items. TPR can be varied in any different activities such as storytelling, dialogue, games, or a pattern drill to introduce new vocabulary and new grammatical features at any level. (Iiwana, 2010).

3.1.2. The teachers and students' roles in Total Physical Response.

Since the theory of TPR was promoted, how to apply it in the real teaching situation is one problem. In Widodo's article, *teaching children can use a Total Physical Response method: Rethinking* (2005), he considers that the most important activities in TPR classrooms are imperative drills which are typically geared to highlight physical actions and activities on the part of the students. Students play the roles of listener and performer. The teacher plays an active and direct role: the

director of a stage on which the students are the actors. In giving feedback to students, the teacher needs to follow the way of parents of giving feedback to their children. In the early stages, the teacher should make fewer mistakes in speech, and he has to avoid too much interruption from errors as this may inhibit students to take an action or speak out. To sum up, the responsibility of teachers is giving commands and monitoring actions taken by the students. The interaction between the teacher and the students is the teacher speaking while students responding nonverbally, then the students become more verbal and the teacher responds nonverbally. (Widodo. 2005) Iiwana's makes these roles between teachers and students more clearly in a definitive list. (Iwana, 2010)

1) The teacher directs and the students "act" in response. The instructor is the director of a stage play in which the students are the actors.

2) Listening and physical response skills are emphasized over oral production.

3) The imperative mood is the most common language function employed, even well into advanced levels. Interrogatives are also heavily used.

4) Students are not required to speak until they feel naturally ready or confident enough to do so.

5) Grammar and vocabulary are emphasized over other long areas. Spoken language is emphasized over written language.

6. Whenever possible, humor is injected into the lessons to make the learners more enjoyable in learning languages." (Iiwana. 2010.)

3.2 Scientific Theoretical Basis.

3.2.1 Physiology

The reason why the teaching method is very explanatory is that it has scientific theoretical basis. First, we analyze the physiological structure of human beings. With the research on its process of human development, scholars have found clear division of one half of the brain's brain, but faces a specific problem, how the brain decides to work half which, left and right sides of the brain and how to communicate? German scientists have designed a unique experiment to find the management center and the control mechanism in the brain to coordinate the work of the left and right brain. Gereon Fink, a neuroscience expert at the University Hospital in Aachen, Germany, and his colleagues reported one issue in the journal Science, which said the human brain seems to be symmetrical, actually differences. The left is responsible for dominating human's ABSTRACT. thinking ability, emphasizing on language, numbers, symbols, logical reasoning and so on. The right is mainly responsible for image thinking ability, emphasizing on intuitive imagination, rhythm, graphics, orientation, music and image thinking. And the two parts has independent individual innervation, the left dominates the right arm and the right half dominates the left arm. Orientals usually use their right hand to stimulate more left brain, so the left brain is more developed. If people use their left hand more, they will stimulate

the right brain and the right brain will develop relatively well. If we use both left and right hands at the same time, the results of the left and right two parts of the brain will be developed at the same time. Ornstein, American educator, proved that if one half brain can actively cooperate with the other half of the brain, the whole brain aggregate ability and work efficiency will undoubtedly increase in multiples after a certain period of time. It can be seen that people who use both left and right hands at the same time are generally able to get great benefit as well as people's memory and thinking ability.

TPR teaching method, after requiring a large number of hearing and a variety of information, emphasizes the coordination of gestures and body, thus promoting the development of the potential of the left and right hemispheres. When the right half brain or left half brain is active, it can stimulate the other half of the brain, and the interaction between left and right brain can stimulate interaction, and greatly improve the efficiency of learning, especially the quality of language learning.

3.2.2 Psychology

The TPR method absorbs the idea of "memory trace" theory in psychology. According to the theory, more frequently and strongly connected to memory, more easily associate and recall the memory. In the TPR teaching, students are first allowed to use the body reaction, and then learn to react with the language, set up a link between body reaction which is easy to form memory. In addition, because this method does not strictly require students' language output and always goes with the game, it can reduce students' psychological burden, cultivate pleasant learning emotions and improve learning efficiency. TPR teaching method is suitable for students' psychological characteristics, helps to cultivate students' interest and let students study happily.

From behavioral psychology and Gestalt psychology, we can see that people are more likely to tend to perceive things as a whole, emphasize real specific situations, language activities, and complete structural form. We should mobilize sensory system in a comprehensive way, use situational context teaching, emphasize overall perception of language structure, access to teaching materials close to life and actual communication needs, and cultivate students' target language ability.

4. Research Methodology

TPR (Total Physical Response) teaching method, namely "the whole body reaction method", also known as "body language teaching method", in the 1970 s by the famous American psychologist James James Asher Dr. It is based on second language acquisition: people in the student times, learning a language is heard that promote their verbal and written communication skills, when the information obtained from heard by quantitative change to qualitative change, the students can naturally use language to express themselves. The TPR teaching method focuses on the interactive mode of language learning, and the teaching is conducted in the form of games, situational dialogues and performances.

In order to see the effectiveness, there will be an empirical study between two classes, which will use the same teacher, same teaching material, and same level of students, but different teaching methods, one is the TPR, the other is the traditional teaching method. While after one month study, giving the students' test, and then construct the evaluation scale of teaching quality and teaching effect for the application of TPR in Chinese classes. Empirical methods such as questionnaire, descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression analysis are used to evaluate the TPR in Chinese classes, in order to describe the basic situation of the teaching quality and effect of the TPR.

5. Analysis

The empirical results show that (1) the quality of the TPR is relatively high in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, which can effectively arouse the interest of the students. (2) students with higher level of Chinese language may have higher evaluation on TPR, and TPR teaching effect is also better on them.

To sum up what has been discussed above, it is easy to notice that whether one uses TPR, GTM, or CA, the main purpose is to create an excellent lesson. The lesson must be interesting and intellectually challenging, and the students should be eager to learn. A good lesson usually needs several teaching methods to achieve the goal. And in Novice A students education, TPR can be used as a main method with other methods used to support it. What is more, Wang, X, M (2008) and Wang, L (2007) suggest several conceptions for specific ways to use TPR in practical teaching situations.

- (1) The combination of TPR and alphabets.
- (2) The combination of TPR and games.
- (3) The combination of TPR and Vocabulary.
- (4) The combination of TPR and music.

Acknowledgments

Project of jilin higher education institute in 2018 "The Application of TPR Teaching Methods in Mandarin class of America"; Education science project of jilin province "Research on the cultural introduction teaching reform under the Internet of college English in independent colleges"

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