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研究発表会　発表論文

HOW TPR COULD BE USED TO TEACH ENGLISH AT JAPANESE COLLEGE

―日本の大学で英語を教える際どの様に TPR を駆使できるか―

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Abstract

Japanese college students often have difficulties in learning English as a foreign language (EFL), this paper examines whether the Total Physical Response (TPR) approach would help English language acquisition. First the TPR approach will be discussed in light of teaching theory and brain research. Followed by a discussion of how TPR could be used to teach English at Japanese Colleges.

Keywords： Total Physical Response (TPR), Language Acquisition, Natural Approach, Japanese College Students, Brain Research
キーワード：TPR，言語獲得，ナチュラル・アプローチ，日本の大学生，脳の研究

1. Introduction

After teaching at Japanese Junior Colleges it became clear that the majority of the students found difficulties in producing English, that is speaking or writing in English, even though these students have had at least six years of English Education.

Many of the students expressed that they could not understand English as it was too difficult. 英語は分からない！ They had already experienced personal failure in English language classes and were not confident of learning English in the future. 英語は難しい！

In my experience as a teacher and learner of languages, this situation is not uncommon and indeed researchers such as James Asher have found out that “evidence suggests that only about five percent of all the students who start the study of a second language in a traditional program continue on to achieve fluency” (Lawson quoted in Asher 2000).

Therefore I have decided to investigate if using James Asher’s Total Physical Response

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(TPR) approach would be more successful for teaching English classes in Japanese Colleges. Asher's TPR approach suggests that learning English can be stress free, easy to learn regardless of academic ability and that college age students learn English faster than children. A video demonstrating the TPR approach can be accessed from the internet (TPR and Language Acquisition, 2009).

2. What is TPR?

TPR is an approach to acquiring language developed by James Asher in the 1960s and works because it allows students to gain comprehension of the second language before the students are expected to produce the second language by talking or writing. This comprehension before production experience is the same way that students learned their first language as children. The students gain comprehension from understanding small chunks of concrete language before moving onto more abstract language.

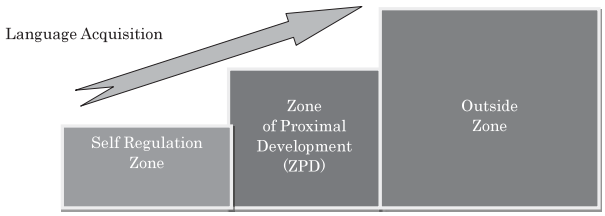
This way of teaching follows the "Natural Approach" language acquisition theory of Krashen (Krashen 1983). Krashen says that language is acquired subconsciously as opposed to consciously learning a language. If we consciously learn a language and its grammar the student tends to monitor their output. That is they pause before production to check if their language is accurate. They might achieve a small increase in accuracy but lose fluency and increase stress.

In TPR language is acquired by understanding input that is a little beyond our current level of competence. As the students understand the lesson and are not pressured into producing the language then the students have less stress and more motivation. Krashen describes this process as lowering the "affective filter" to enable language acquisition.

Another researcher Vygotsky (Van Lier 2001, p96) describes three zones of language acquisition:

- Self Regulation Zone-language that the student understands.
- Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)-acquiring new language just above their current level if the student is helped or "scaffolded" by the teacher.
- Outside Zone-language that the student cannot understand even with help.

Vygotsky's Zone Theory



Student language acquisition in Vygotsky's ZPD is similar to Krashen's ideas on comprehensible input and Asher's TPR ideas of teaching just above the student's current comprehension.

As the student learns the amount of English that is comprehended increases and new material that was previously in the Outside Zone (that the student could not do even with scaffolding) comes into the ZPD for language acquisition.

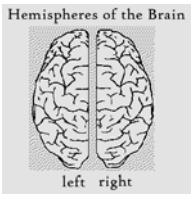
Vygotsky and TPR both warn not to repeatedly use the same commands after comprehension has been achieved. In doing

so adaptation occurs, this is when the students get used to the lesson and their language ability can also start to decline, boredom can set in. It can also lead to teacher dependence.

3. Brain Research

Asher uses the brain research by Sperry (Sperry in Asher 2000) which showed that the brain is split into left and right hemispheres with the left brain controlling production and the right brain controlling comprehension (Asher 2004). Asher also uses brain research by Goodale (Goodale in Asher 2009), and Gazzaniga (Gazzaniga in Asher 2009 p3-84) which showed that the left brain constructs secondary experiences whilst the right brain observes primary experiences. Simply Asher believes that the left brain interprets data after this data has already been processed by the right brain.

LEFT BRAIN
Logical
Slower Speed
Secondary Interpret Data



RIGHT BRAIN
Pattern Matching
High Speed
Primary Process Data

According to Asher the left hand side of the brain is logical, it slowly analyses experiences and if it believes they are true facts then these facts are stored in long term memory. If the left brain believes they are not true facts then these experiences are only stored in short term memory, soon to be forgotten. The problem with translation and learning new language is that the teacher is usually presenting information that contradicts the student's experiences in their own language. Therefore this new information is subconsciously rejected, even when the student consciously accepts this information and wants to remember it.

For example in an English language class in Japan the student already has lots of experiences about an イス. It knows that you sit on an 椅子 and everyone calls it an 椅子 except for the language teacher who calls it a chair! Therefore the left brain logically thinks that the teacher is lying and this 椅子＝chair lie will not be accepted. Thus traditional language teaching including grammar translation and pattern practice is often rejected by the left brain.

TPR on the other hand focuses on the right brain. The right brain pattern matches at high speed and when it finds a pattern, this pattern is stored in long term memory. These long term memory facts can be manipulated by the left brain, without the need for the left brain to fact check them as they have already been validated by the right brain.

How does the right, brain pattern match with TPR? First the right brain sees the instructor sit on a chair and the student follows the teacher's commands and sits on the chair. The student's experience of physical movement "sitting on the chair" and new word "chair" is matched into a pattern by the right brain, thus allowing the new word "chair" to be stored in long term memory.

To see how the logical left brain can interfere with language acquisition look at the look at the following chart and say the color and not the word.

きいろ	あおい	オレンジ
くろい	あかい	みどり
むらさき	きいろ	あかい
オレンジ	みどり	くろい
あおい	あかい	むらさき
みどり	あおい	オレンジ

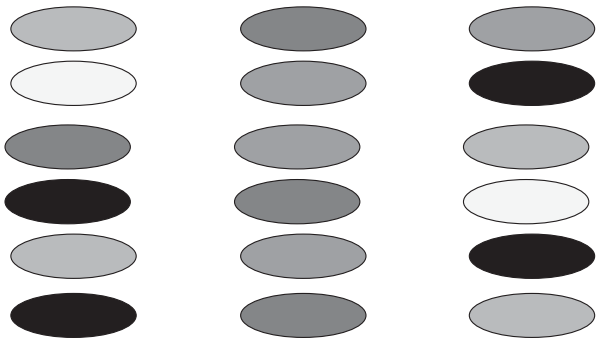
The previous diagram is an example of input that is not easily comprehensible; that is it is not easy to understand. Many language lessons have information that is not easy to understand.

Look at the diagram and say the words

きいろ	あおい	オレンジ
くろい	あかい	みどり
むらさき	きいろ	あかい
オレンジ	みどり	くろい
あおい	あかい	むらさき
みどり	あおい	オレンジ

The second diagram is easier to understand, in other words the data it has more comprehensible input.

Look at the diagram and say the colors



The third diagram is usually the easiest to understand it is an example of comprehensible input that will be used in TPR lessons.

An example of how the right brain processes physical actions is the Muller-Lyer illusion (Asher 2009 pp.35-37). In Figure 1 the four lines appear to be the same length to the left brain.

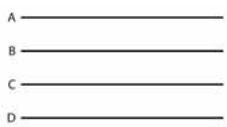


Figure 1

In Figure 2 to the left brain, the lines appear to be different lengths.

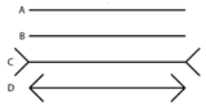


Figure 2

In Figure 3 physically touching the lines accesses the right brain and pattern matches the visual shape to the physical movement of the hand, the logical left brain accepts the findings of the right brain and understands that the lines in Figure 2 are indeed the same length.

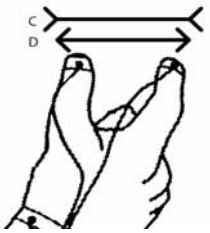
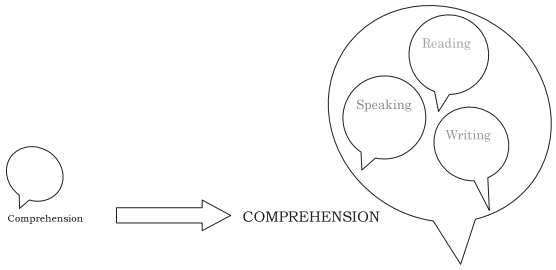


Figure 3

This is an example of how the pattern matching right brain responds to physical action without being deceived by the logical left brain.

4. How to teach TPR

After looking at the theory of TPR lets now look at how to use TPR to teach English to college students. As stated before comprehension comes before production of language. Blaine Ray (2001) talks of Asher's metaphor of an expanding balloon of student comprehension, this balloon of increases in size from a tiny sphere to a gigantic circle. Inside the balloon of comprehension, three tiny balloons in different colors will appear. Each of the tiny balloons represents the appearance of speaking, reading and writing. Although the outside comprehension balloon will always be the biggest, the three colored balloons will continue to expand as your students get more fluent, more literate.



So at the beginning stages of the semester, the students are not required to speak or write (produce) English. Instead the teacher gives the student's comprehensible input by way of spoken commands. The students listen to the commands (input) and begin to increase their balloon of comprehension. How does the teacher know that comprehension has taken place? This is done because the teacher uses the imperative/command grammar tense to introduce new input to the student. The student shows comprehension by correctly following the command physically. This "language body conversation" shows that comprehension has taken place (Asher 2000).

For example, the teacher says the command "open the book". The teacher confirms the student's comprehension of this language when the students physically open their books. Using the TPR approach new words can be introduced, for example: "open the door, open the window". In addition language structures (grammar) can also be easily taught. For example: The teacher can show a picture of a train at the station. Then the teacher says "open the book if the train has arrived at the station; stand up if the train is going to arrive at the station". Again the teacher, by observing the students' physical response, can tell if comprehension has taken place. In the above example, students opening their books would show the teacher that the students have understood the grammar point correctly. As the semester progresses then the length and complexity of the commands increase with the students' comprehension.

After 10 to 20 hours of silent instruction the students can take the role of command givers, so they begin to naturally speak the language. From here the students can read handouts of the words and grammar they have already comprehended thus improving their reading ability. Next the students can write commands thus demonstrating their writing ability.

The length of commands can be increased until the students are listening to short stories and answering either with physical actions or by speaking the answers.

It should be noted that TPR works with the right brain to learn new input, but then logical left brain teaching techniques should also be combined into the class to give variety. This will help to avoid the danger of student adaptation of the TPR approach. In other words, if the teacher continues to use the TPR approach in every lesson, all the time then students will lose interest in the TPR approach. However when learning new words or language structures then the TPR approach is again used as the teaching technique so that students can gain comprehension quickly and stress free.

Finally the teacher needs to think about how to incorporate the TPR approach into their teaching whilst using a textbook. One way is to use the TPR techniques at the

beginning of the semester to build student comprehension of the vocabulary and language structures found in the textbook. Another way is for the teacher to use a textbook designed around the TPR approach. One disadvantage with the TPR approach is that it is time consuming for the teacher to prepare for each class, especially if the course textbook contains a lot of new words and grammar.

5. Conclusion

The possibility of Japanese college students acquiring English quickly in a stress free environment, using Asher's TPR approach is very appealing. It remains to be seen however how college classes containing students of different levels of language ability and motivation will react to the TPR approach. Further research is required to document how the TPR approach affects Japanese college students' acquisition of English as a foreign language.

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