TPR-STORYTELLING
A key to speak fluently in english

Contar historias a través del método
de respuesta física total
La clave para hablar en Inglés*

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to share a general idea of the Total Physical Response-Storytelling method, the principles upon which it arises, and how it works in an EFL classroom. We offer, on the one hand, a historical background review of the TPR-Storytelling method; this helps to contextualize it and understand its focus as well as its influence on children or adult learners' oral production and fluency development. On the other hand, we show a contrast in the methodological development of this method, highlighting some partial findings achieved in this on-going research project, based particularly on the steps followed within the American and Colombian didactic foreign language learning contexts. This article is based on a research study developed by the authors of this article, carried out with children as well as with adults, including university students majoring in English in a Language Licensure Program; and particularly with primary school teachers bound to teach English to children, despite the fact that they are not formally qualified to do so. The theoretical review of this project includes the consideration of both cognitive and affective factors in human learning.

Key words: Oral fluency, storytelling, learning, personality factors, cognitive and affective factors.

Resumen

El propósito de este artículo es dar a conocer una idea general de lo que trata el método de Respuesta Física Total basada en narración de historias, los principios sobre los cuales éste se fundamenta y de cómo éste funciona en un salón de clase, donde se enseña una lengua extranjera. El artículo, por una parte, presenta una revisión histórica del método TPR_Storytelling, puesto que ésta contextualiza y permite entender su enfoque, al igual que su influencia en la producción oral en la lengua extranjera, así como el desarrollo de la fluidez en los aprendientes de la misma, quienes pueden ser indistintamente niños o adultos. Por otra parte, éste muestra un contraste en su desarrollo metodológico, en el que se destaca algunos hallazgos parciales logrados hasta ahora en la investigación en curso, particularmente en relación con los pasos didácticos que se siguen en los contextos de enseñanza norteamericano y colombiano una lengua extranjera. El artículo se basa en la investigación adelantada por los autores de este artículo, tanto con niños como con adultos, entre los que se cuenta a estudiantes universitarios, cuya área mayor de interés es el inglés, en el programa de Licenciatura de Idiomas, y en particular a profesores de inglés en la escuela primaria, quienes por mandato legal deben enseñarlo, pese a que no estén cualificados para ello. La revisión teórica hace parte del proyecto de investigación en mención e incluye la consideración tanto del factor afectivo como del cognoscitivo en el aprendizaje.

Palabras clave: fluidez verbal, narración de historias, aprendizaje, factores cognitivos, afectivo y de personalidad.

Introduction

One of the first most frustrating facts that English educators have to face quite often in foreign language teaching occurs when, not far after beginning, students decide to drop out language programs before achieving oral production, deemed this as a first difficulty that they come across. This is why this article focuses on the Total Physical Response Storytelling method basis, procedure, and advantages of its application in the ESL Colombian classroom, based on the authors' research projects results.

Though the TPR-Storytelling method is not perhaps the most fashionable one, it indeed becomes an appealing, suitable and powerful alternative for a foreign language teaching, nowadays. It is convenient to bring out that regardless the learner's needs as well as the contexts may vary, the method keeps on being suitable on account of its easy flexibility and adaptability in its implementation. Its adaptation, in particular, is described in contrast in both North American and Colombian contexts, witnessed by the authors of this article.

We consider TPR-Storytelling method of great significance in the foreign language teaching field because it introduces the language through the use of comprehensible input, namely stories (Blaine 2008). This makes a student-centered class in a way that learners are the protagonists, who create their desire to communicate meaningful things in real-life communication and indeed, as Brown states, "it deals with the personality factors within a person that contributes in some way to the success of language learning" (1994, p. 134).

This article is organized to contextualize the reader by providing him/her with some good guidelines in order to understand how the method works. It shows the theory of TPR-Storytelling method in the light of its historical background, its linguistics aspect, and its language pedagogy, (Brown, 2001).

Finally, it is explained, step by step, the procedure to follow them when applying the aforementioned method in different contexts; and the conclusions. All of this will surely shed light on the teachers' performance and students' oral production and fluency improvement.

Methodology

This paper is a significantly theoretical report advance that describes TPR-Storytelling method advantages in terms of learners' oral production and fluency improvement. It goes over its historical background in order to contextualize its transformation since its origin until today along with its didactical incidence; its theoretical review that encompasses human learning aspects in relation to linguistics and pedagogy; explanation of the method steps added by making a contrast between the original TPR-Storytelling method steps and their adaptation to the Colombian teaching/learning context.

The information included here is the result of both a careful exploration and recent experiences with the method applied in different research projects. The purpose of this is to make the readers of this paper aware of the TPR-Storytelling method's benefits by giving them the theoretical and pedagogical tools. To understand and to take advantage of it, this method comes as an alternative in the ESL classroom when improving learners' oral production and fluency, and having it as a choice for teachers' performance. Anyone can learn to use it and consequently make their classes more effective than before, assuring to achieve a higher level of teaching and learning.

Theoretical review

Total Physical Response Storytelling background

Understanding this TPR-Storytelling method performance, when put into practice, calls for knowing its evolution thoroughly, because it becomes the first application step in its methodological and didactical development through the use of commands. Actually, it is the platform where TPR (Total Physical Response) was settled down by James Asher, its developer, who laid its foundations based on his left brain research, as the model for explaining the amazing results of TPR. According to this, Asher stated that "the brain is independent of us (in that it can process information without intruding upon our awareness) and the brain has the answer to any question we may ask at least one-half second before we do". (2000, p. 1-1).

Asher (2000) used his funds from the navy to search for the secret behind language-body learning. When noises coming from someone's mouth are followed by a body movement, the learner is amazingly able at once to decipher the meaning of the noise at various levels of awareness including phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics. Understanding the noises coming from someone's mouth is not only immediate, but the pattering of the target language is internalized in such a way that, with no effort, the learner is able to recognize constituents to understand new statements.

Asher states that with few language exposures in context of body movement, we could witness in children and adults, on the one hand, the comprehension of new sentences; on the other hand, long–term retention, which seems to have the permanency observed in skill learning, as when one acquires basic skills such as the ability to ride a bicycle, to swim or to drive. Likewise, the linguistic achievement is seemingly accomplished, with no effort and with no anxiety. When language and movement are complemented reciprocally as for choreography, for instance, following Asher's words, this is analogous to people floating in a gravity-free environment (Asher, 200).

In the TPR method, there were three key ideas in the instructional format for children or adults' foreign language learning:

- Understanding should be developed through the learner's body movements.

- Understanding the spoken language should be developed in advance of speaking.

- Using imperatives becomes a powerful aid because the teacher can utter commands to manipulate learner's behavior.

- Forcing learners to speak is not recommended at all. Krashen entirely agrees with this and calls it "the right to be silent" (Krashen. 1978). As they internalize a target language cognitive map through understanding what they hear, individuals will spontaneously begin to speak by producing own utterances.

TPR method worked up to certain point, but as it is very well-known it ran into the TPR wall, which means that a small percentage of the words in a language are truly TPRable. Teachers who tried to use TPR to teach words that were not TPRable came across problems (commands and concrete objects). Thus, it excluded discourse and abstract vocabulary.

Then, TPR-ST (Total Physical Response- Storytelling) came up and went beyond Asher's TPR constrains by incorporating stories. Blaine Ray, its developer, stated that there are four elements that stand out as the most essential considerations in the method, which foster

straight oral production and fluency development, and are also of paramount transcendence to achieve the best results in the method application. They are as follows: a) basic structure and vocabulary acquisition thoroughly (comprehensible input); b) keeping classes interesting and effective by the use of questions and mini-stories and mini-situations; c) storytelling insertion; and d) quick comprehensibility checking of "barometer" students (based on the slowest students' achievement in the class). Experience and observation have shown that learners have got early fluency in TPR-Storytelling classes because they have acquired basic aurally structures and vocabulary thoroughly (Blaine, 2008).

Once learners have acquired useful and meaningful vocabulary, they are able to produce utterances orally in their own speech. Conversely, if their vocabulary is not thoroughly enough and/or their comprehension is not good enough, there may be two serious consequences: learners are not able to follow the stories since they do not acquire anything they can not catch on. Thus, as Blaine states, "comprehensible input hypothesis with high believability will produce long–term memory" (2008, p. 11).

Stories actually come to be raw material to pick up contextual vocabulary, that is to say, vocabulary from meaningful contexts. As a matter of fact, stories are easy to recall because they have a sequence and episodes, which with the help of mnemonic or memory aide, learners are likely to retain with little effort and much efficiency. In nature, children fantasize and get used to telling day in and day out real or unreal facts by using sequences unconsciously. It means, they do not memorize what they tell, they simply tell it spontaneously by using sensory association.

> *Words are most likely to be acquired in very limited contexts, in first instance, but they then require to be put in fuller and meaningful contexts that match learners' needs, interests and likes. In that way, duly motivated and involved, learners may acquire vocabulary and language efficiently. Language acquisition occurs incidentally, without their being aware of it.* (Blaine, 2008. p. 23).

We are strongly convinced that when something is not interesting for students, it does not matter what you teach or the best way you teach it; in the long run, it will be a waste of time. It is taken for granted that there must be more than one way for developing fluently oral production, a way for students to express themselves orally in their own words, not memorizing lines. Blaine found *"the stories to be a vehicle that meets these criteria"* (2008, p. 17).

Story lines are easily remembered. It does not matter that you have not heard or told a story for years, you will be able to remember it because the brain can sequence it. Stories

become a powerful language acquisition tool that allows storytellers to remember its events, as well as relate them along with words that describe them. A language lesson must be above all comprehensible. As Blaine says "the reason is that, when students do not understand the class, they simply turn it off" (2008, p. 18).

It goes without saying, in a nutshell, that the main innovation of TPR-Storytelling lies in storytelling addition. TPR-ST combines many of the techniques of Asher's classical Total Physical Response with the language acquisition theories, developed by Stephen Krashen (explained and discussed later on). This mix is then purposefully applied to the storytelling process. Lessons are vital part of the methodological component of Blaine's TPR-ST method, which goal is to provide as much fully comprehensible input as possible (Ray & Seely, 2008).

TPR-ST method in the language acquisition process

In this section, we go over the theory related to this method in the language acquisition process. Firstly, in the sub-discipline of Linguistics, language acquisition deals with the consideration of how adults both acquire and learn a foreign or second language. Thus, we deem Krashen's five hypotheses because they are specifically the theoretical foundation of the TPR-ST method. These hypotheses are brought here as a simple framework to be considered in this study, provided that Krashen's theories, have been too controversial and deemed somewhat outdated by some academicians, and consequently quite questioned by some researchers in the field of languages such as Cook (1993), Mitchell & Myles (1998), and Celce-Murcia(2001).

Bringing here the aforementioned five hypothesis lets readers assume a critical instance to either accept or reject them. In order, they are as follows (Krashen. 1983):

1. Natural order hypothesis that sets up that there is a pre-established order from which the language grammar rules are acquired.

2. The acquisition learning hypothesis. It sets up the difference between conscious and unconscious learning.

3. The monitor hypothesis. It occurs when a learner reaches a high language level. S/he acquires the ability of self-correctness.

4. The input hypothesis. Learning a language is feasible provided that there is a vehicle that makes it comprehensible.

5. The affective filter hypothesis. Affective factors influence the language acquisition process positively or negatively. The more anxiety the less learning, and all way round.

Secondly, we have referred to two specific personality factors related to foreign language acquisition: self-steam and risk-taking. (Brown, 2001). Coopersmith (1976) defines self-steam as "personal judgment of worthiness that is expressed in the attitudes that the individual holds towards himself. It is a subjective experience which individuals convey to other by verbal reports and other overt expressive behavior". (p. 47).

It is out the question that when learners believe that they can achieve the tasks they have undertaken, they have a greater chance of actually accomplishing them. Teachers have two responsibilities to bear in mind in relation to his/her pupils' successful learning process: to assure learners' confidence in them, and to sequence activities ranging from easier to more difficult ones. TPR-ST method's indeed helps teachers to accomplish them. As to the latter idea, a TPR-ST lesson sequencing is very important because it facilitates learners' comprehensible input and with it, effective learning. As for the former, teachers are expected to encourage day in and day out their learners to accept themselves such as they are and believe in their own capacities.

The "Risk-Taking" principle states that "Successful language learners [should] attempt to produce and to interpret language that is a bit beyond their absolute certainty" (Brown, 2001, p. 63). In that sense, TPR-ST method brags to be one of the few ones able to offer learners a number of possibilities to develop their "Risk-taking" chances. First of all, its whole language curriculum is risk-taking itself, and motivates learners to take such risks permanently. Second, learners may volunteer to act out the story which, of course, requires not only recalling the already worked vocabulary, but to understand and perform with gestures the new vocabulary of the day's lesson, which will always be demanding and challenging. Third, learners are also encouraged eventually to create a new story from that of the lesson, which implies the use of their own ideas, initiative, and imagination. It also means the chance for learners to experiment with the target language feeling at ease.

Finally, we turn now to a consideration of the main component of TPR-ST method, storytelling. Rose (1985) states that, "a story is, in fact, a good mnemonic or memory aide. A story links words to be remembered and it causes you to build up scenes that have visual, aural and sensory actions for you. If you can create a powerful visual image between two words, remembering one will trigger recall for the other" (p. 45). Coherently with this learning view, our experience lets us share the idea of encouraging learners to develop self mnemonic strategies that facilitates their learning, such as mapping out, cartoons, powerful visual

images, etc. These tools definitely facilitate mainly the story sequencing, not to mention its events.

Bruner (1986) mentions that, "Individuals use narratives to organize and make sense of past experiences and to understand new information. Individuals' natural interest and familiarity with narratives, then, make storytelling a strong vehicle for supplying target language input and capturing student interest". (p. 78).

Methodological procedure

Didactic contrast among TPR, TPR-ST and the new proposal

It is interesting to see the transformation of TPR method since its origin to the time when this proposal comes up from this ongoing research project. Indeed, its adaptation design results from permanent and purposeful observation and experience throughout the time of this research project so far. There are some features that keep commonplace maintaining the method nature in the three methodological perspectives. Likewise, there are also some changes, adaptations or additions that have come out simply as a result of a needs analysis towards a Colombian contextual methodological accommodation. To a better understanding of this, here is the following chart:

TPR ASHER (Universal Context)	TPR+ST BLAIN'S ADDITION (North American Context)	NEW PROPOSAL ADAPTATION (Colombian Context)
Receptive precedes TPR, productive Skills	Receptive precedes TPR-ST, productive Skills.	Receptive precedes TPR-ST, productive Skills
Interaction comes after Receptive Skills	Interaction comes after Receptive Skills	Interaction comes after Receptive Skills
Raw material: commands	Raw material: silly (sometimes non-sense) and bizarre stories	*Raw material:Short, sequential, purposeful and meaningful stories*
Listening skill is transferred to the others	Listening is reinforced by reading	*Listening is supported behind visual aids, sensory association, action and movement*
Meaning prioritizes rather than grammar	Meaning prioritizes rather than grammar	Meaning prioritizes rather than grammar
Teaching must minimize learner's stress and anxiety	Teaching must minimize learner's stress and anxiety	*Both Teaching and learning must minimize Learner's stress and anxiety*
Use of mainly commands	Use of stories: 7 steps -introducing vocabulary -Teacher assesses students' commands -Personalize mini -situation: the teacher tells the story. Teacher chooses students to act out the story. Teacher uses questioning cycle. -Teacher re-tells the story-Students retell the storyThe 6th and 7th steps are to be carried out after one year of using the method, with the purpose of introducing new and advanced grammatical points. -Teacher retells the story from a different perspective changing subject or tenses. -Students retell the story from a new perspective	*Use of stories: 3 steps adapted to the Colombian context:* *1.First stage: Pre-TPR+ST* *-Setting a suitable environment.* *-Storytelling anticipation* *-Lesson target lexicon inventory and material (posters, drawings, icons, etc.) elaboration* *-Checking comprehension of target lexicon by acting it out* *2.Second stage: While TPR-+ST* *-Storyteller's modelling (the whole story)* *-Learners in group follow storytelling with mimicry (episodes)* *-Rewarding/ complimenting achievements* *-Retelling story in peers* *-Retelling story individually* *-Rewarding/ complimenting achievements*
English through Actions	Listening. Extensive reading and literal translation for comprehension.	*3.Third stage: Post-TPR+ST* *-Drawing a big book by writing some target language learned in the lesson combined with images* *-Creating new stories* *-Rehearsing telling new stories in peers* *-Telling new stories recycling the learned process* *-Rewarding/ complimenting* *"Reading" visuals, images, sign language, mimicry, body language, sounds* *Translation for understanding if necessary.*
Learning subjects are usually school pupils	Learning subjects are either school pupils and/ or high-school students	*Learning subjects may be also school teachers*

Fuente: El autor.

Advantages of TPR-Storytelling

There are numerous advantages to TPR-Storytelling that are rarely found in other methods. The most important one is that students can recall the words. They get enough exposure to them through storytelling and through TPR, so that they are able to make use of the words in context, and speak the language consequently.

Stories are simple in nature and easy to always remember. Learners may be likely to forget what they have been taught in class, but they will surely remember the events of a story and its descriptive words to narrate it.

TPR-Storytelling develops fluency with accuracy. Learners acquire language in an amusing way, which enables them to speak it. In the process, they develop an «ear» for what sounds right. As a result, they learn how to speak the language that way, whether it sounds right or not to them. (Burling, 1982). This process closely resembles that of first language acquisition.

TPR-Storytelling is fun. Humor makes learners laugh and promotes better long-term memory and a positive attitude towards their new language. TPR-Storytelling is also interesting. Since it is centered on the learners' lives, it is more likely that they will be truly interested in the content, and in expressing meaningful things in real communicative life situations.

The results of using TPR-Storytelling in regard to spoken production are especially noteworthy: it develops the ability to speak freely, that is fluency; it encourages learners to use their imagination and creativity; it also encourages them to take on a large part of their responsibility for learning and building their confidence when speaking.

TPR-Storytelling is entertaining and a low-stress way of acquiring foreign language.

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