

Teaching English through Action

Berty Segal Cook

With contributions by Kirstin Plante

Teaching English Through Action

Expanded second edition, 2020

Author: Berty Segal Cook

Contributor: Kirstin Plante

Copy-editor: Anny Ewing

Design: Arcos Publishers

ISBN 9789490824297

BISAC: FOR007000, EDU005000, EDU029080

Keywords: TPR, Total Physical Response, ESL, foreign language education

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Welcome

Welcome to this second edition of Berty Segal Cook's *Teaching English through Action!* Like many other language teachers, you may be looking for a way to include more movement in your beginner's classes. If you're an acquisition-driven language teacher, your lessons probably are already very dynamic and interactive. However, movement and physical activity may be less explicitly included, even though you are aware of the positive effects that movement has on learning, language acquisition, and the attention span of your students.

The Total Physical Response approach offers an easy and enjoyable way to make use of the advantages of using movement when acquiring a new language. It was originally developed to be a complete teaching method in itself, and can still be used as such. However, with the development of comprehension-based approaches that focus on language acquisition rather than the study of grammar, many teachers now use TPR as one element of their acquisition driven curriculum.

With the publication of this second edition of her book, I wish to honor Berty Segal Cook's invaluable contribution to the world of comprehensible-input-based language education. Berty is one of the grand masters of TPR, and she has personally trained many of the original TPRS/CI teachers who have inspired so many of us, like Shelley Thomas, Jason Fritze, Elizabeth Skelton, Linda Li, Karen Rowan, and Ben Slavic.

My personal reason for wanting this book to become available again is that I had a hard time learning how to use TPR when I was teaching adults through comprehensible input. I felt the need to have my students move more but could not make it work other than in very short brain breaks. That's why I wanted to have a guide that would take me and my colleagues by the hand and give us a firm basis on which we could develop our own style and practice of TPR.

Berty Segal Cook wrote this book several decades ago, when she was active as a teacher trainer. I have collaborated with her to create this updated expanded teacher's manual, so that a more dynamic way of language teaching is once more within reach of every language teacher. I hope you'll enjoy teaching with it.

Kirstin Plante

About this book

Teaching English Through Action is a comprehensive guide with daily lesson plans implementing the Total Physical Response approach to English as a Second Language. It is an excellent tool for teaching beginning and intermediate students of any age level. Total Physical Response (TPR) is basically a right-brained approach to second language acquisition. This strategy has been developed, extensively researched and popularized by Dr. James J. Asher, emeritus Professor of Industrial Psychology and former Associate Dean at San Jose State University. The intent of Dr. Asher's method and of this program is to "pre-tune the student with a high level of listening skill so that [they] will have a perceptual readiness to make a graceful, non-stressful transition to speaking the language."¹

This Teacher's Guide consists of ten units organized thematically around useful vocabulary for conversational English. Each unit contains:

- **Target vocabulary:** this is an overview of the words which will be taught via commands in the succeeding group of lessons.
- **Individual lesson plans:** a step-by-step detailing of exactly which commands are to be presented. TPR is a euphoric experience for both teachers and students, and it is necessary to have very well-planned commands at your fingertips in order to remain "in command of the situation." (Pardon the pun.) With these specific directions you will have control as well as enjoyment.
- **Review lesson:** this is a review of the vocabulary of the entire unit. This lesson should be given orally.
- **Record of mastery:** in Appendix A there is a grid for recording mastery (or need for further review) with each Review Lesson. This provides a record of each student's progress.

You will note that vocabulary development is very carefully controlled. There are never more than eight new words or fewer than four new items per lesson, except in unit 8, the review unit. Each new item appears inside a command several times during the first presentation; then again in the following lesson, in the Review Commands and in further lessons and units. There is actually a tremendous amount of drill, but what makes the drill unapparent, and therefore not tedious, is that the words are constantly being recombined in new and different commands. Thus, you can drill ad nauseum and never feel nausea.

The Total Physical Response approach

The Total Physical Response approach is based on the concept that language acquisition can be greatly accelerated through the use of kinesthetic behavior or body movement. Dr. Asher has researched and documented this approach for many years. It is one of the most researched second language approaches that exists today. Dr. Asher noted in his early work that young children without schooling easily comprehend and utter thousands of sentences in their mother tongue, but both high school and college students, under professional teachers, find the process of second language learning a stressful and often discouraging experience. Asher presents solid evidence to support his theory that we have been largely unsuccessful in teaching second languages because we have overlooked natural language learning sequences which are clearly successful in first language acquisition. The TPR strategy is based on the model of how children acquire their first language.

Commands are a natural model

Asher states, “Adults [...] in first language acquisition, manipulate children’s physical behavior by a massive number of commands. The infant becomes ready to talk only after many months of moving in response to gentle directions from adults. [...] This is nature’s model for learning additional languages. Children acquire listening skill in a particular way. [...] There is an intimate relationship between language and the child’s body.”

Listening precedes speaking

In first language acquisition, listening skill is far in advance of speaking skill. For instance, it is common to observe young children who are not yet able to produce more than one-word utterances demonstrate perfect understanding when an adult says, ‘Run to Grandma and give her a kiss.’ Asher noted that, “as far back as 1935, teams of investigators such as Gesell and Thompson or Bühler and Hetzer have reported that when children learn their first language, listening comprehension of many complex utterances is demonstrated before these children produce any intelligible speech.”

Asher infers from his observations, “It may be that listening comprehension maps the blueprint for further acquisition of speaking.” Dr. Tracy D. Terrell, who co-authored *The Natural Approach* and co-developed several language textbooks based on this approach, agreed: “The listening comprehension skill is basic. The first step for a language learner is to comprehend the essential idea of what is being said to him.”²

Implication: Understanding should be developed through movement of the student’s body. The instructor can utter commands to manipulate student behavior. Most of the grammatical structure of the target language and hundreds of vocabulary items can be learned through the skillful use of the imperative by the instructor.

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

Speech emerges naturally, errors are natural

The third element in first language acquisition is: speech emerges naturally in the first language; it is not forced. Asher noted that in second language training, when speech has been forced before the student was ready, the stress that was caused by this impaired, rather than enhanced, learning. Dr. Stephen Krashen, professor emeritus at the Department of Linguistics, University of Southern California, has come to the same conclusion. He states his strong support for an early 'silent period' in which the student receives comprehensible input, without the stress of having to produce speech. He emphasizes that anxiety strongly affects language acquisition: "The lower the anxiety, the greater the language acquisition [...] For language acquisition, the anxiety level has to be zero. Anxiety blocks input."³

Implication: Do not attempt to force speaking from students. As the students internalize the target language through understanding of what is heard, there will be a point of readiness to speak. The individual will spontaneously begin to produce utterances.

When speech emerges, it will naturally be imperfect, with many distortions in pronunciation and errors in grammar. The teacher must have patience, accept these errors and strongly limit error correction, knowing that, at the beginning stages of speech production, the most important consideration is whether communication is taking place. Krashen agrees. He states, "Error correction is actually harmful, because it raises the anxiety level."

Asher states, "Remember, when the student begins to speak, the individual's entire attention is directed at trying to produce, and so the student cannot attend efficiently to feedback from the instructor. This feedback should not interrupt a student in the middle of an attempt to express a thought. The feedback should be modified by a wide tolerance for errors. The instructional goal should be uninhibited communication that is intelligible to a native speaker. We want students to talk and talk and talk. Eventually, they can be fine-tuned for more perfect speech."

Asher stresses that speech production during the expressive stages is a natural, developmental, and spontaneous reaction to the internalization (which takes place during receptive stages) of the target language's 'code'. In other words, the distortions are a necessary aspect of the early stages of speech development and they will be reduced over time, just as errors are reduced, with time, in production of the child's native language.

Implication: We must be careful not to rush students into reading and writing before they have had ample experience with listening and speaking.

Reading and writing come after listening and speaking

In first language acquisition, reading and writing are not required of children until they have had five years of listening experience and at least three years of speaking experience. This implies strongly that it is necessary that we not rush

children who are learning a second language into the reading and writing of that language. The natural progression of language acquisition and proficiency is: (1) listening, (2) speaking, and (3) reading and writing.

In implementing these concepts, this new program provides 103 detailed listening/receptive lessons and a developmental speaking/expressive plan. The program removes stress because: (1) The student is required only to respond physically to commands, which most students enjoy doing, and (2) The student is not required to speak until they feel comfortable about expressing themselves. Most students begin speaking after approximately 8 to 10 hours of listening/receptive lessons. *It is very important that the student be allowed plenty of time for this receptive learning.* When the student finally does express themselves, it has meaning to them, and the process is enjoyable.

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Unit 1

Body parts and classroom
items

Stand, sit, and sing

Head and shoulders

Point to your leg

Happy skipping

Elbow on the table

Pick up your pencil

Review lesson

Unit 1 • General Observations

When using this book, you will combine the actions from the vocabulary list with the nouns, adverbs and other words to form a great variety of commands. The commands in this book are meant as a starting point for you, to give you an impression of the commands that are possible with these words. Feel free to replace any vocabulary items that are irrelevant to your students with other, relevant words. You are also free to make your own combinations, always keeping in mind not to add too many new words at a time.

Tips when giving commands

- Read *The basic procedure* and *The very first lesson* on page 12 before you start.
- Repeat and keep changing the order of commands, always in an unanticipated order. Also, keep changing the groups you give commands to.
- Keep your commands ‘clean’! This means, model *only* what your command says to do. If, as you command “Touch your arms,” you also incidentally scratch your leg, you will see your students respond by touching their arms *and* scratching their legs.

Listening only

In this first Unit, the students are not expected to speak. They only listen and perform the commands you give them.

Props

Make sure you’ve collected all the classroom items that are needed before you start a unit, so that students have the necessary materials to follow the commands. Students can help you collect these items as early homework assignments, see page 13 for suggestions.

Unit 1 • Target Vocabulary Lessons 1 - 7

These vocabulary items are to be taken as building blocks for acquiring structures, rather than items for memorization. What is important is for learners to have repeated exposure to the structures and the high frequency verbs. Therefore, please only use the nouns, objects, and items that make sense for your classroom and your students, and feel free to limit the number of items. The scripts for each lesson are designed to give you ideas and inspiration; they do not need to be followed literally.

The vocabulary items are given in singular, but will be used in both singular and plural. When you use a plural form of the noun, make sure to put up 2 fingers to indicate 'more than 1'.

Actions	Nouns	Nouns	Other
hop	arm	knee	and
jump	ball	leg	around
pick up	book	marker	down
point to	chair	mouth	happily
put	chest	nose	my
sing	desk	pen	on
sit	door	pencil	to
skip	ear	shoulder	up
smile	elbow	table	your
stand	eye	toe	
stop	finger	window	
touch	foot		
turn	hand		
walk	head		

Stand, sit and sing

The basic procedure

1. Command and model with: 2–3 students / the entire group / 3–4 or 4–6 others / an individual volunteer.
2. Command without modeling and the whole group responds / small groups of 2–3 or 4–6 respond / an individual volunteer responds.
3. Combine old and new commands and model.
4. Recombine old and new commands without modeling.

Commands

Stand.

Sit.

Walk.

Turn.

Stop.

Sing.

The Commands section provides you with a guided, controlled network of commands.

Repeat, and keep changing the order of commands, for example:

Stand... Sit... Stand... Sit... Stand... Walk... Stop.

Walk... Turn... Sing... Stop... Walk... Sit.

Sing... Stop... Sing... Turn... Turn... Walk... Sit... Stand.

Also, keep changing the groups commanded. Command groups of 2-3 students, 4-6 others, the whole group, back to 3-4 others, always in an unanticipated order. When groups do not know when and if they're next to perform, the listening is much keener.

Note: In a longer session or when working with older students, you will be able to cover more than one lesson during one class session. A session may include 2 or 3 lessons. Do not proceed to the next lesson until most or all of the students are demonstrating confident and automatic physical responses to your commands. It is very important not to proceed too rapidly. You want this first session to be a complete success!

Head and shoulders

New words

smile, touch, your, shoulder, head, eye, ear, nose, mouth

Review commands

Stand.

Sit.

Walk.

Turn.

Stop.

Sing.

Spend the first part of every lesson with the Review commands. Repeat these Review commands until students' hesitant movements become confident movements.

If *touch* does not feel appropriate in your classroom setting, you may use *point to* in this command series and throughout the book. Also keep in mind that there will be many variations of touching taboos in different cultures.

Commands

Touch your shoulder... Touch your head... Touch your shoulders.

Touch your head... Touch your nose... Sing.

Touch your nose... Stand... Touch your shoulders.

Smile... Touch your eye... Touch your ear... Sing.

Sit... Touch your mouth... Stop... Touch your shoulder.

Stand... Touch your nose... Touch your ears... Smile.

Sit... Turn... Sing... Touch your mouth.

Stand... Turn... Touch your eyes... Smile.

Walk... Sing... Touch your ear... Turn.

Sit... Walk... Stop... Turn.

Walk... Stop... Smile... Touch your head... Touch your mouth.

Touch your eyes... Stand... Sit... Touch your shoulders.

Point to your leg

New words

jump, point to, and, on, desk, chair, foot, hand, finger, leg

Review commands

Stand... Sit... Turn... Walk... Stop.

Touch your head... Touch your eyes... Touch your mouth.

Touch your ears... Sing.

Smile... Touch your nose... Touch your shoulders... Sit.

Commands

Point to your nose... Point to your chair... Point to the desk.

Stand... Point to your foot... Sit on your chair.

Touch your feet... Stop... Walk and smile... Jump... Stop.

Point to your leg... Touch your legs... Point to your feet.

Jump... Turn... Stop... Point to your finger and sing.

Touch your hand and your foot... Jump... Point to your feet... Smile.

Jump... Touch your finger and your shoulder.

Sit on your chair... Touch your head.

Point to your desk... Touch your legs... Sing.

Stand on your feet... Jump and stop... Touch your foot.

Touch your head and point to your shoulder.

Novel commands

Sit on your chair, turn on your chair, and point to your mouth.

Sit on your desk, point to your legs, and sing.

Walk on your hands and smile.

Turn your head and touch your ears.

Students are not speaking, only listening and performing. They are internalizing the target language through understanding what is heard.

You will say strings of actions that are separated by “...” one at a time as the students do them, giving your students time to process each action before continuing to the next one.

The Novel commands reinforce vocabulary via humor and serve to test comprehension as they recombine earlier vocabulary with newer words and actions. Here, you may encounter longer strings of action without a pause, where you ask your students to do more than one thing in a single sequence.

Happy skipping

Kindergarten children have difficulty skipping, so if you teach kindergarten children, use *hop* instead of *skip*.

New words

skip/hop, put, up, down, happily, table, chest, arm

Review commands

Point to your chest and your shoulders.

Touch your head, fingers, hands, and arms.

Jump... Sit on your desk... Stand... Sing and stop.

Walk... Turn... Jump and Stop.

Touch your feet... Smile happily.

Commands

Skip/hop to the wall.

Skip/hop to the table... Skip/hop to your chair.

Skip/hop to the wall... Touch the wall... Turn... Skip/hop to the table... Point to the table.

Touch your chest... Touch your arm... Sing and smile.

Skip/hop happily to the chair... Walk to the wall.

Point to the desk... Point to your chest... Put your hand on the table.

Point up and point down... Jump up and down and smile happily.

Skip to the wall... jump up and down... Stop... Turn your head.

Put your head down... Put your arm up and down.

Put your arms up... Sing... Put your arms down.

Point up to your eyes... Point down to your foot.

Put your hand on your chest... Put your arm on the table.

Skip/hop to the chair and put your hand on your head... Touch your feet.

Novel commands

Jump to the chair... Skip happily to the table... Put your nose on the table.

Put your chest on the chair and point to your shoulder.

Sit on the table... Stand on the table... Point to your ears.

Put your feet on the wall and walk on the wall.

Put the chair on the table and put your fingers on the chair... Turn the chair.

Let them enjoy trying to put both their feet on the wall, knowing they can't do it from a standing position. Some may find a way to do it (lying on the floor, for example).

Elbow on the table

New words

my, around, elbow, knee, window, door

Review commands

Walk happily to the chair and the table... Touch the table and the chair.
Point to the table and the wall... Point to your ears and touch your legs.
Jump to the table... Smile happily... Put your arms down and up.
Skip/hop to the table and the wall.
Put your nose on your hand and sing.

Add any body parts or classroom objects that need to be reviewed to these commands.

Commands

Touch my desk... Touch your desk... Touch your arm.
Walk to the window and put your hand on the window.
Skip/hop to my table... Walk around my table and sit on my table.
Touch your knee... Touch your elbows... Put your elbow on the table.
Put your arm around the chair... Smile.
Skip around the desk and point to the window.
Point to the door, walk to the door and touch your knee.
Skip/hop around my desk and touch my chair... Touch your elbow.
Put your fingers around your elbow... Put your arms around your knees.
Point to your elbow... Turn around... Sing and jump.
Walk to the door and point down... Walk around the table and point up.

Novel commands

Sit on my chair... Stand... Jump to the door and skip to the window.
Put my chair on your desk and smile happily.
Walk around my desk and your chair.
Put your knee on my chair and put your elbow on your knee.
Put your leg on the wall... Touch your head and touch the wall.
Put your hands on my table... Point to your eyes.

Pick up your pencil

New words

pick up, book, pen, pencil, marker, ball, toe

Review commands

Stand up... Sit down... Touch the table and point to the window.

Walk to the wall... Put your ear and your knee on the wall.

Point to my desk, jump and point to my feet.

Jump around your chair... Skip happily around my chair.

Point to your elbows... Put your elbows on my book.

Walk to the door... Turn... Put your arms around your head and sing.

Commands

Point to the pencil... Point to the marker... Point to the book.

Pick up my pencil/pen... Pick up your pencil/pen.

Touch the marker and pick up the book.

Pick up the ball... Skip to the window... Put the ball on the table.

Pick up the chair... Walk on your toes around your desk... Put the chair on your desk.

Pick up the pencil/pen and the marker... Put the pencil/pen on my chair... Smile.

Point to your toe... Walk on your toes to my desk.

Pick up the book... Turn the book around and put the book on your chair.

Touch the ball and smile... Pick up the ball and jump on your toes.

Pick up your pencil/pen... Put your pencil down... Pick up your book and sing.

Novel commands

Put the book on your head, turn the book, and touch your ear.

Put your nose on the pencil and point to your eyes.

Pick up the book... Put the book on your toes and smile happily.

Pick up the book and the ball ... Put the book on your nose and hop to the window.

Put the ball on your head... Skip around the table.

Put the chair up and down... Point to the marker... Put the marker on your toes.

Branch out! Novel combinations are fun and provide instant feedback that the actions and nouns are being decoded and understood.

Review lesson or test

These commands may be used for formative or for summative assessment. Use them to know what your students understand or as a basis for a grade, according to your requirements. Assessments are to be given orally. You may copy the test form in Appendix A to mark each student's comprehension. At this point, only listening comprehension is tested, but in a later stage you may use this sheet for marking other skills as well. See pages 26–27 for more instructions on testing.

1. Stand... Touch your head... Sing.
2. Jump... Touch your shoulder... Sit on the chair.
3. Touch your eyes... Touch your nose.
4. Touch your arm... Touch your hand.
5. Stand... Touch your finger... Sing... Stop.
6. Touch your legs... Touch your feet... Jump.
7. Touch your chest... Turn... Stop.
8. Touch your mouth... Turn... Smile.
9. Turn your head.
10. Touch your ears... Walk... Stop.
11. Jump to the desk.
12. Skip to the window.
13. Skip to the door.
14. Walk on your toes to the chair.
15. Point to my chair.
16. Touch the table.
17. Walk around my table.
18. Point up. Point down.
19. Sit down on the book.
20. Touch the pencil/pen.
21. Pick up the ball.
22. Walk to the marker and point to the marker.
23. Point to my fingers.
24. Point to the book... Touch the book.
25. Pick up the pencil.
26. Put the pencil down.
27. Put your hand on your head.
28. Smile and turn.
29. Point to my knee.
30. Put your arms around the ball.
31. Touch the door and your toe.
32. Put your chest on the table.
33. Jump and point to your feet.
34. Sit down, stand up, and sing.
35. Put your hand on your shoulder.

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