BLOCK 4.
The past meets the present: Language teaching methods in the 20th and 21st centuries
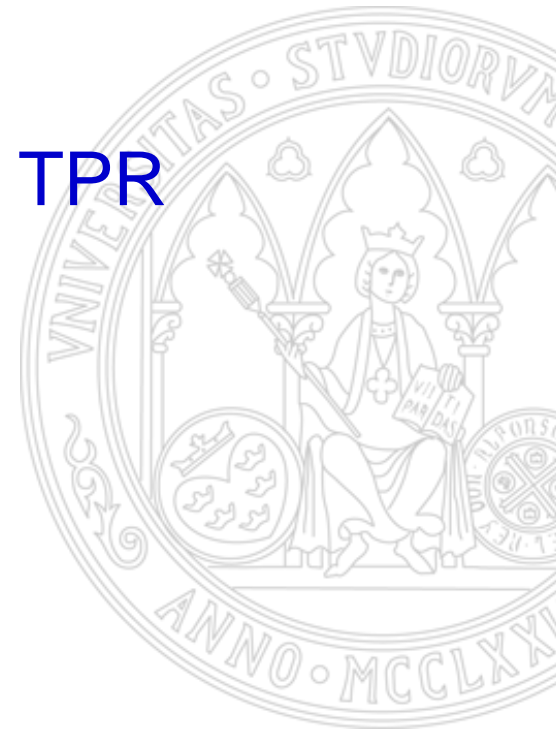
Sub-block 4.2.
Humanistic or Holistic methods
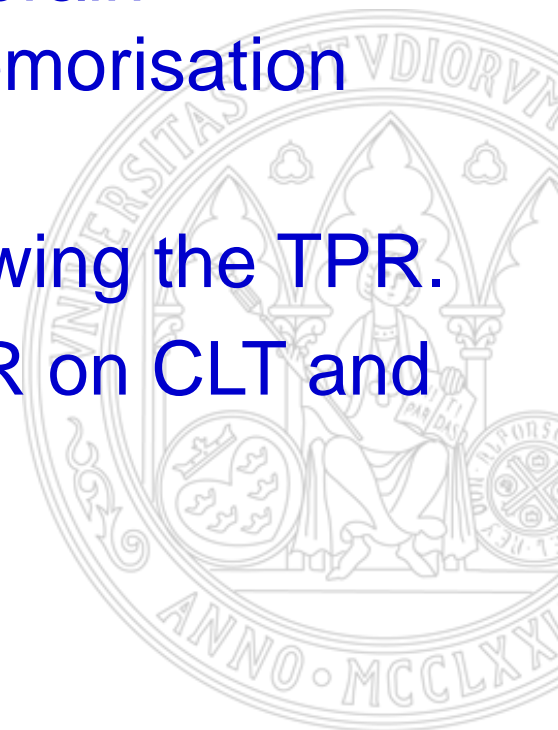
Unit 4.2.2. Total Physical Response Method (TPR)

Outline

1. Objectives of this unit
2. Goal of the TPR
3. Historical background of the TPR
4. Analysis of the components of the TPR
5. Critical assessment of the TPR

1. Objectives of this unit

1. Understand the bases that have inspired the TPR.

2. Analyse the relationship between brain functions and physical actions (memorisation and movement) in relation to FLL.

3. Critically analyse a real class following the TPR.

4. Determine the influence of the TPR on CLT and spin-offs.

2. Goal of the TPR

To attain oral proficiency at an elementary level.

3. Historical background of the TPR

Why do you think that this method is called Total Physical Response?

3. Historical background of the TPR

✓ TPR attempts to teach language through physical activity, by combining oral imperative commands and motor actions.

✓ TPR is a partial adaptation of the DM and falls within the naturalistic tradition.

From what we have seen so far, why do you think that the TPR falls within the naturalistic tradition of language teaching?

✓ Developed by James Asher, a professor of psychology at San José State University, California, USA.

✓ Draws on several traditions: developmental psychology and humanistic pedagogy as well as on certain language teaching procedures stated by Palmer (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 73).

✓ *A method that is undemanding in terms of linguistic production and that involves gamelike movements reduces learner stress and creates a positive mood in the learner, which facilitates learning.*
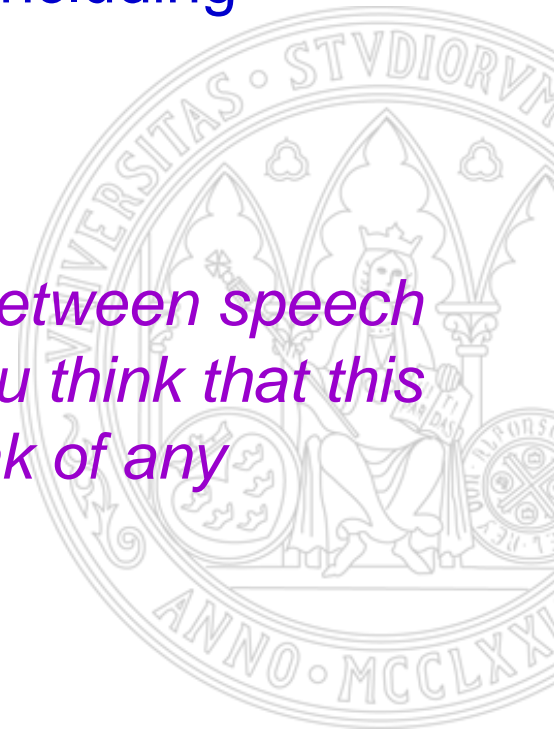
(Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 73)

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

❑ Theory of language (nature of language, including approach to culture)

If the TPR draws on the coordination between speech and action, which part of speech do you think that this method revolves around? Can you think of any predecessor?

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

- ❑ Theory of language (nature of language, including approach to culture)
  - ▪ Grammar-based view of language. Central element: the verb.
  - ▪ Culture is the lifestyle of L2 native speakers.

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

❑ Theory of learning (learning principles)

- L1 learning = L2 learning (naturalistic and inductive learning).

- Understanding should precede production.

- Initial role of L1, which is seldom used after first stages of learning

- Behaviourism (stimulus-response)

- Trace theory of memory in psychology (Katona, 1940)

- Kinaesthetic style of learning favoured.

- "Most of the grammatical structure of the target language and hundreds of vocabulary items can be learned from the skilful use of the imperative by the instructor" (Asher, 1977: 4).
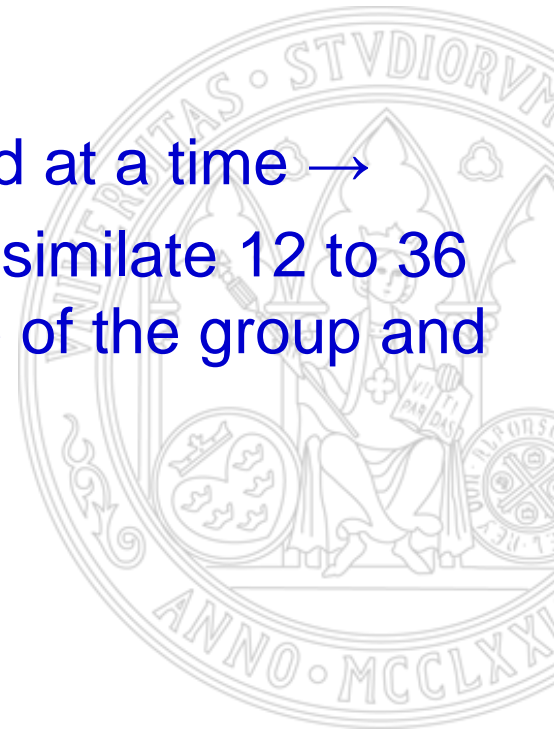
4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

❑ Theory of learning (learning principles)

▪ A fixed number of items to be introduced at a time →

"In an hour, it is possible for students to assimilate 12 to 36 new lexical items depending upon the size of the group and the stage of training" (Asher, 1977: 42).

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

❑ Theory of learning (learning principles)

▪ Asher also distinguishes elements which facilitate or inhibit FLL:

1. Bio-program for language learning.

A reasonable hypothesis is that the brain and 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, 1977: 4)

2. Brain lateralization: different learning functions in the left- and right- brain hemispheres. *Unit 4.4.2*

3. Reduction of stress (an affective filter): focusing on meaning through movement instead of analysing language

Krashen's affective filter (Unit 4.3.3)

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 1. The Why. Underlying principles and beliefs (approach)

❑Theory of teaching (pedagogical principles)

- ▪ Inductive approach to grammar learning and teaching (practice and inference)

- ▪ No grammatical explanations

- ▪ Formal accuracy is emphasised

- ▪ No use of L1 in the classroom

- ▪ Teacher is an active, caring director of the class
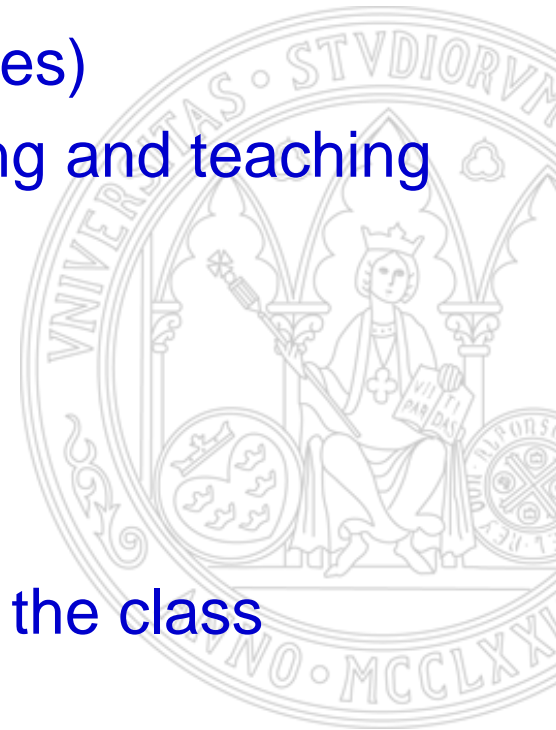
4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 2. The What. Objectives of teaching. Syllabus specifications

- ❑ Model of language: everyday speech
- ❑ Emphasised language areas: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation. Grammar-based syllabus but initial attention to meaning
- ❑ Selection of grammar and lexis depending on their usefulness for classroom situations (not based on frequency...)
- ❑ Emphasised skills: oral (listening and speaking). Order of presentation of skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing. Understanding should precede production in both oral and written skills

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

- ❑ Activities
  - Imperative drills
  - Conversational dialogues: after 120 hours of instruction.
  - Roleplay and slideshow presentations, around everyday situations (at the supermarket, at the station…)
  - Writing (not taught as such). End of the class: Some items written on the blackboard upon students' request. Previously practised through imperative drills (Lado, 1988: 29)

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

❏ Activities

A typical TPR class consists of

70% listening

20% speaking

10% reading and writing

(Lado, 1988)

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

❑ Procedure

(From Asher, 1977: 54-56)

Review:

Jeffe, throw the red flower to Maria.

Maria, scream.

New commands:

Look for   a towel

the soap

a comb

Brush   your teeth

your pants

the table

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

❑ Procedure:

Other items:

<u>Rectangle</u>	Draw a rectangle on the chalkboard.
	Pick up a rectangle from the table and give it to me.
<u>Slowly</u>	Walk slowly to the window and jump.
	Slowly walk to me and hit me on the arm.
<u>Toothbrush</u>	Take out your toothbrush.
	Brush your teeth.
Towel	Put the towel on Juan's arm.
	Juan, put the towel on your head and laugh.

Where is the towel? [Eduardo, point to the towel!]

Where is the toothbrush? [Miako, point to the toothbrush!]

Role reversal.

Reading and writing.

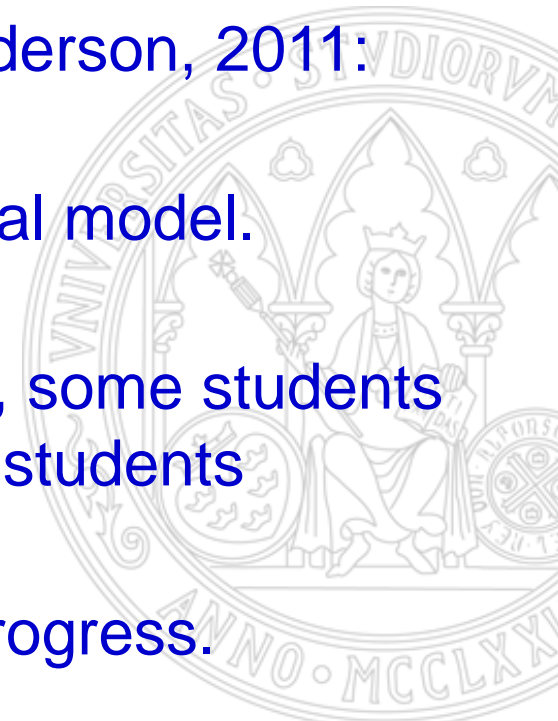# 4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

- ❑ Roles of teacher (including feedback issues) (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011: 109; Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 76)
  - ▪ Initially: the director of student behaviour.
  - ▪ Active role. Selects what and how to teach it.
  - ▪ Facilitator of learning rather than conveyor of learning (providing the best exposure and maximising speaking abilities; responsible for fostering the students' own natural learning pace).
  - ▪ Should be tolerant of errors when students first begin speaking and correct only major errors in a non-obstrusive way.
  - ▪ Minor errors can be corrected in more advanced stages of learning

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

❑ Roles of students (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011: 109; Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 76)

- ▪ Initially: imitators of teacher's non-verbal model. Listeners and performers.

- ▪ After usually 10-20 hours of instruction, some students will be 'ready to speak': role reversal – students directing teacher and classmates.

- ▪ Monitors and evaluators of their own progress.

4. Analysis of the components of the TPR

Axis 3. The How. Activities through which the selected content is transmitted to the students and other procedural aspects

- ❑ Roles of instructional materials:
  - ▪ No textbook as such.
  - ▪ *Realia* (common classroom objects) are very important, especially in the initial stages of learning (beginners), together with teacher's voice and gestures.
  - ▪ Later stages: more *realia*, pictures, slides, word charts (Richards & Rodgers, 2001: 77).
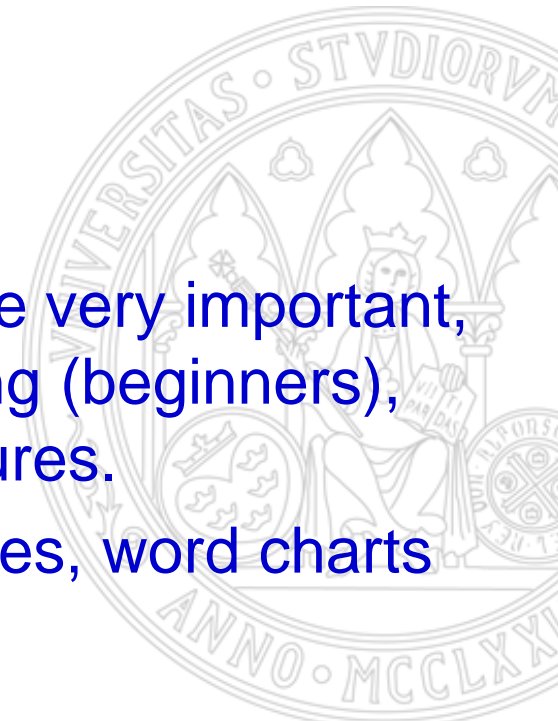
5. Critical assessment of the TPR

a) *Can you think of any positive and negative aspects of the TPR?*

b) *Do you think that the TPR caters for all students' needs and profiles?*
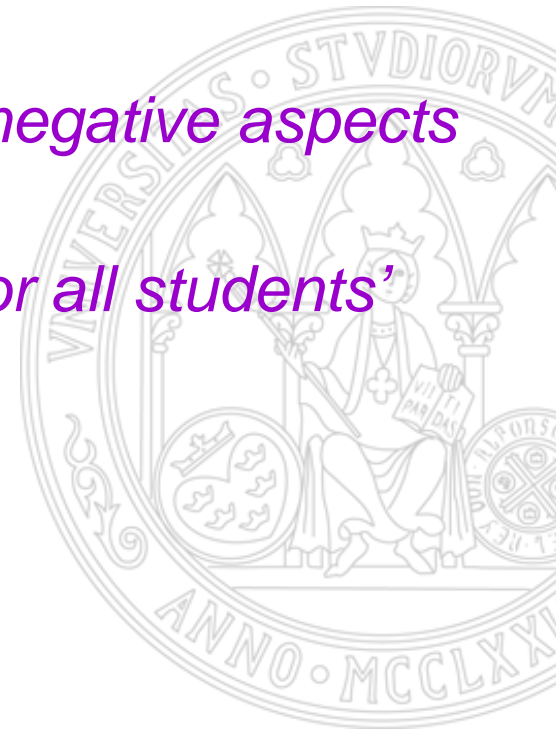
5. Critical assessment of the TPR

❑ **Positive aspects**

1. Stressed emotional factors in language teaching
2. Stressed the silent period
3. Stressed biological factors in learning
4. Suitable for beginners (non-aggressive pedagogical style)

❑ **Negative aspects**

1. How to cater for heterogeneous classes, adult learners and beyond-elementary levels?
2. Difficult to implement as a single-solution method in a classroom. Asher himself stresses the need to accompany it with other methods.
3. Infantilization of the adult learner

5. Critical assessment of the TPR

❑ **Influence of the TPR on FLT**

- Very much linked to Krashen's (1981) "Natural approach": role of comprehensible input and the silent period hypothesis, by which learners go through an incubation period and should not be prematurely rushed to speaking.

- Other than that, not permanence as a one-fits-all method to be implemented in the classroom, though teachers may draw on its techniques.

- TPR Plus (Tomlinson, 1994): lessons can include a TPR Plus phase, which involves an extension of the TPR activities, e.g. writing or dramatisation.