

Learning Language Through Movement

An Introduction to TPR and the Guoin Method

George Ann Gregory and Julie MacGahran

This chapter describes briefly the authors' work teaching Indigenous languages using two well known second language teaching methodologies.

This activities in this chapter were originally conceived in response to a request from the Aotahi: School of Māori and Indigenous Studies, University of Canterbury. That program has been severely impacted by the earthquakes (Te Aika, 2013), and the workshops were intended to give that program a boost. With the aid of a grant through the Fulbright Specialist program, George Ann Gregory came for two weeks in October, 2012, and provided workshops at the University of Canterbury and also the University of Auckland, Te Kura o Te Puna Wānanga: School of Māori Education for student teachers, language teachers at the university and public school teachers. Māori, already armed with Gattegno's (1963) Silent Way (Te Ātarangi) and a great passion, have been using immersion since the 1980's with measureable success. And today, Māori children have the right to request instruction in the Māori language in school (Te Aika, 2013). Often times, however, these are once-a-week classes for an hour and a half that are not producing speakers—hence the need for methods that engage learners comfortably.

Why these methods?

There are several good reasons to incorporate these methods and/or their principles in indigenous language classes. First, there is the immediacy of the threat of not having speakers of a language: The projection for the majority of the world's language is dire (Crystal, 2000). Because of the immediacy of the need for a solution, the poor statistics—only about 5% of students following the more conventional approaches, such as grammar and translation, pattern drills and listen and repeat achieve fluency (Lawson, 1971)—compel an interest in more workable approaches. The two methods demonstrated here, Total Physical Response (TPR) (Asher, 1977) and the Guoin Method (Gouin, 2012) provide a way for students to understand the language being taught without the need for translation and involve students in learning actively from the beginning.

Main principles

Both approaches attempt to mimic first language acquisition by having the learner acquire the language through movement and real objects. In other words, language learners acquire language in a meaningful context so that the language represents a concept and no translation has been involved, and there is no direct instruction of the rules of the language. Instead students intuit the rules from

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the language they are learning. In this situation, adults and older teens have an advantage because they are already looking for language patterns. Adults also have a somewhat better memory (Asher, 2009). Movement apparently is an aid to memory and certainly helps with the meaningful comprehension of verbs. Both approaches also provide real language in complete sentences. TPR uses commands to teach language while the Gouin Method uses a sequence of actions in third person that tells a little story. To support the Gouin Method, Oller (1983) found that language organized in narrative form is an aid to language learning.

The workshop

After a brief introduction to the basic principles, two possible introductory lessons, one in Nahuatl and the other in Choctaw, were used to demonstrate the methods. Julie and George Ann decided to team teach the languages with Julie teaching Nahuatl using TPR and George Ann demonstrating the commands¹ and George Ann teaching the Choctaw using the Gouin Method with Julie demonstrating the sequence. Generally, however, these methods are just used by a single instructor.

Nahuatl Commands

<i>Nahuatl</i>	<i>English translation (not given to students)</i>
Ximoquezta	Stand up (singular)
Ximoquextacan	Stand up (plural)
Ximotlali	Sit down (singular)
Ximotlalican	Sit down (plural)
Xinehneni	Walk (singular)
Xinehnenican	Walk (plural)
Ximapillhui	Point (singular)
Ximapillhuican	Point (plural)
Ximapillhui(can) inon icpalli.	Point to the chair.
Ximapillhui(can) inon ahcopectli.	Point to the table.
Ximapillhui(can) inon tepantli.	Point to the wall.
Ximapillhui(can) inon caltentli.	Point to the door.

Since both the singular and plural forms were being taught, one of the participants assisted in the demonstration. Julie began with just the actions of standing up and sitting down. Once that was demonstrated, she asked the participants to follow those commands while they were being demonstrated: Both the singular and plural forms were demonstrated. To this short sequence, she added the command to walk, and this was also demonstrated by walking between two sets of chairs so that sequence included standing, walking and sitting. Following the demonstration, Julie invited the participants to follow the commands with us. Then, point was demonstrated. Following this, George Ann demonstrated pointing to the different objects when Julie gave the commands. Then, the volunteer and George Ann demonstrated the plural form of pointing to the objects. After the

demonstration, the participants followed the commands while they were being demonstrated. Finally, Julie gave various commands to the participants without any demonstration. When a participant missed a command, the other participants were quick to show him/her the correct movement. This final step was done long enough for participants to feel comfortable with following the commands.

Part of the challenge in designing this lesson was the need to show the singular and plural forms of the command in Nahuatl, a unique feature of this language. Generally, TPR lessons are designed to teach specific grammar and vocabulary. Each lesson should build on the previous lessons so that students continue to hear previous language while still moving into new language. The TPR demonstration was followed by a short question and answer session. One question was about when learners should begin to “speak” the language. It was explained that the language should emerge naturally. If a student should indicate a desire to give the commands, that student should be allowed to do so. This delay in speaking produces better pronunciation in the language being taught. Another question had to do with introducing literacy. In TPR, the only attention paid to literacy is to simply write the structures and vocabulary for the students to copy. This step is also true for the Gouin Method. The participants were then grouped and each group created a short lesson in TPR in a language chosen by each group. There were demonstrations in Navajo, Gwich’in and Mohawk.

The Gouin Method uses the language in a sequence of actions. According to Gouin (2012), an activity should be analyzed for each movement and there should be language for each movement. George Ann and Julie chose an activity that could easily be demonstrated in the workshop.

Gouin Sequence

Choctaw

Ohoyo vt aimpa ya nowah.
Abinili binili.
Ishuckcha i-tahchi shoffi.
I-hannali otalaya
I-shukcha tiwa.
Pisa anuka.
Holisso kuchi.
Holisso ya aimpa talaya.
Ishtholisochi kuchi.
Ishtholisochi a aimpa otalaya.
Shukcha ya itipotahpo otalaya
Ishtholisochi alma.
Ishtholissochi chi ibbvkushi cha
 ibbvkushi iklnna ish takali.
Holisso im ibbk ofoha.
Ishtholissochi a holisso misha kanali.
Ikcholi ikbi.

English translation

The women walks to the table.
She sits in a chair.
She takes the bag off her shoulder.
She puts the bag in her lap
She opens the bag.
She looks inside.
She takes out a piece of paper.
She puts the paper on the table.
She takes out a pen/pencil.
She puts the pen/pencil on the table.
She puts the bag on the floor.
She picks up the pen.
She holds the pen between her
 thumb and middle finger.
She rests her hand on the paper.
She moves the pen across the paper.
She makes a line.

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Julie demonstrated the sequence of actions as George Ann supplied the Choctaw for each action. This was done twice. Then, Julie demonstrated the sequence while George Ann just gave the verbs. Finally, Julie demonstrated the entire sequence again while George Ann gave the complete sentences. At this point, the audience was asked to go through the sequence with Julie. Several of the participants picked up props, but some of them just mimicked the actions. The complete sequence was done again twice, followed by the sequence with just the verbs, and finally the entire sequence with complete sentences. At the end of this, George Ann just gave the Choctaw and the participants were able to demonstrate the actions with each sentence.

As with the previous demonstration, there was a short question and answer period. Like TPR, the Gouin Method allows the learners to produce language as they feel confident in the language. The groups then created short lessons in the Gouin Method. The process was very well duplicated by each of the groups in their teaching demonstrations. By this time, the workshop time was up. At the end of the workshop, each participant received a manual that included theory, sample lessons and sample curriculum outlines as well as other resources to read more about the two methods.

Perceptions as language teachers and language learners.

Preparing for this workshop was Julie's first experience with both methods. Since neither of us are native speakers of these languages, we had to use these methods to teach them to ourselves. Understanding the languages these ways was quite simple, but we were forced to speak early on in the process. Being forced to speak the language was a little detrimental to actually remembering the language. The Gouin Sequence took very little time to learn—about eight times through—before George Ann felt she could say the sequence comfortably. During the preparation time, Julie was teaching at the Native American Community Academy (NACA) where she taught Nahuatl, using TPR, to a group of sixth graders and on another occasion to a group of eighth graders. In both instances, the students easily learned the commands and remained interested throughout the short session.

George Ann had previously used both methods when teaching English as a Second Language. In 2004, she used a curriculum employing the Gouin Method developed by Clark Carr to teach an ESL class offered by a community college and open to the public. Some students came fairly regularly while others only dropped in occasionally. The class met once a week for eleven weeks. She spent about 30 minutes per class on learning the sequences with students copying the entire sequence at the end of each lesson. One student, a nineteen-year-old male from Mexico, attended almost all of the sessions. In the pretest, he knew no English, but in the posttest he scored reading at the fifth grade level.

Note

¹Some TPR participants have taken exception to the use of the word “commands” since Indigenous child rearing methods often give a lot of autonomy to children, and perhaps the use of the word “requests” might work better in such a situation.

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