

**TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING**

**Total Physical Response for Enhancing Vocabulary Learning of a Foreign Language in  
Students of Second Grade**



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TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING

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**2021**

**NOTA DE RESPONSABILIDAD**

“Tanto el desarrollo del contenido como las ideas aportadas en este trabajo de grado son  
responsabilidad exclusiva de los autores”

Artículo 1° del acuerdo N° 324 de octubre 11 de 1966, emanado del Honorable Consejo  
Directivo de la Universidad de Nariño.

**NOTA DE ACEPTACIÓN**

Aprobado por el comité de grado en  
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## TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING

### Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to determine which one of the *Total Physical Response* (TPR) activities proposed is the most appropriate for second graders to learn vocabulary in the foreign language. This was carried out with the aim of increasing the children's motivation and interest when learning the foreign language. It was planned to do so by implementing activities based on the TPR approach which gives the opportunity to vary the dynamic of the classes making them more attractive for the youngest. The idea is to keep the students active during the development of the sessions for them to feel comfortable in the learning setting, developing confidence in a stress-free environment and thus facilitating the whole learning process.

**Keywords:** Attractiveness, *Total Physical Response*, learning, motivation, movement, negative filter, confidence.

### Resumen

El objetivo principal de este trabajo es determinar cuál de las actividades de *Respuesta Física Total* (RFT) propuestas es la más adecuada para que los estudiantes de segundo grado aprendan vocabulario de la lengua extranjera. Esto se llevó a cabo con el objetivo de aumentar la motivación y el interés de los niños al aprender el idioma extranjero. Se planeó hacerlo mediante la implementación de actividades basadas en el enfoque RFT que brinda la oportunidad de variar la dinámica de las clases haciéndolas más atractivas para los más jóvenes. La idea es mantener a los estudiantes activos durante el desarrollo de las sesiones para que se sientan cómodos en el entorno de aprendizaje, desarrollando confianza en un ambiente libre de estrés y facilitando así todo el proceso de aprendizaje.

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***Palabras clave:*** Atractivo, *Respuesta Física Total*, aprendizaje, motivación, movimiento, *filtro negativo*, confianza.

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### Glossary

**Kinesthetic learning:** it refers to a learning style that requires a lot of physical movement in order to obtain students attention and carry out a successful learning process (Favre, 2009).

**Method:** it is a general plan for presenting the language in a systematic and organized way (Anthony, 1963).

**TPR:** this is the abbreviation for total physical response which is a language teaching method consisting of a relation between speech and action. Its purpose is to teach foreign languages by means of commands and physical movement (Asher, 1969).

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### CHAPTER I: THE PROBLEM

The Colombian Political Constitution and The General Law of the Education establish that since elementary school, students must learn a foreign language giving priority to the English language. They state that by learning English, students will be able to develop their competences, and thus get many opportunities not only to access higher education but also to obtain good job offers in order to improve their quality of life. Taking into account the importance of learning English as a foreign language, this project intends to examine a way in which learning this language can be facilitated for primary school students. In this regard, this project reviews the Total Physical Response method (TPR), developed by Dr. James J. Asher (1968), and its possible effectiveness to enhance vocabulary learning in English in primary students. Also, it will identify a set of TPR activities to improve the quality of vocabulary learning and the comprehension of the target language. Moreover, a previous class observation which allowed to analyze the behavior that most of the second-grade students have when they are learning a foreign language will be described. Accordingly, the importance of arousing more interest, attention, and motivation in learners will be highlighted. For that reason, the alternatives that TPR method proposes will be studied with the purpose of providing students with better comprehension and communication levels in a foreign language.

#### **Problem Description**

The topic of study came from a previous personal observation in which some younger learners showed not being interested in learning languages through a traditional class where the only materials are the board and worksheets (Richards & Schmidt 2002). While some English classes in an elementary school in Pasto were observed, it was possible to notice that learners did not show any interest in the class as a result of the boring and repetitive approach teachers use to

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give a lesson only explaining topics, doing some exercises, and finally assessing the students' knowledge on the subject. This is how some teachers who were observed in I.E.M Mercedario conducted the class in elementary level. The implementation of traditional approaches could be a factor that contributes to students' low enthusiasm in learning the target language. It was observed that when the teachers developed the classes in a very active way, students were more willing to learn. For instance, they liked to stand up from their chairs and stretch the whole body, making movements, dancing, leaping, running, and so on. Students felt comfortable when they were able to do what the teacher had said. For example, when the teacher said: -turn around- using an imperative and showing a movement which is in accordance with the command, students repeated the action and the movement too. It can be inferred that younger learners learn better when class topics are physically represented because they turn into meaningful knowledge. It may be that through motor movements children can remember vocabulary easily while they understand language for producing it and using it effectively for communicating, for instance recalling basic nouns and some verbs.

Moreover, without the use of a significant way of teaching, students are more likely to forget the contents studied. For instance, it is not strange that during elementary school children are exposed to big amounts of vocabulary, but it is evident that with the children's development and the lack of stronger mind connections, they generally forget most of the words that they have already learned. It is for that reason that the methods implemented by the teachers will be questioned to determine which ones are the most adequate and if they adapt to students' needs. It is essential to consider that it is necessary to internalize all the vocabulary on the part of the students in such a way that they can remember, understand, and use it.

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After observing classes, it was considered that applying TPR activities could be one option to improve vocabulary learning. This paper focuses on testing an active method for vocabulary learning of a foreign language in a way that students get motivated and achieve the learning goals set.

### **Statement of the Problem**

What Total Physical Response activity is the most appropriate for second grade students of Escuela Normal Superior de Pasto to learn English vocabulary?

### **Significance of the Study**

This paper is important not only for primary school students, but also for teachers. First of all, for students because it shows how some TPR activities are favorable when learning the target language vocabulary. It contains a set of motor activities that allow catching the young learners' attention during the class, which provides huge opportunities for them to learn. Thus, they feel involved and more motivated to participate actively in a comfortable and safer environment where they have more chances to receive feedback. Second, it is substantial for teachers since it describes three kinds of activities that may help to succeed when teaching English vocabulary specifically to second graders. The description of the application and the steps to follow provide a good resource to take into account to enrich the teaching process. All in all, the application of TPR might be useful for primary school students and teachers because students will possibly learn vocabulary in an appealing and easier way which could trigger their creativity and motivation and enhance their engagement in class. Concerning the teachers, they would have a good tool for varying their classes and improving their teaching.

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### **Research Objectives**

#### **General objective:**

- To determine what activity from the TPR method is the most appropriate for vocabulary learning by second-grade students.

#### **Specific objectives:**

- To apply a set of activities implying the use of the TPR method with students at the second level of primary school in order to improve their vocabulary learning.
- To determine between different TPR activities what is the most appropriate for students to achieve a better way to learn vocabulary.

### **Research Questions**

#### **General question:**

- What is the most appropriate TPR activity for second-grade students to learn English vocabulary?

#### **Specific questions:**

- What TPR activities can benefit the improvement of English vocabulary at the second level of primary school?
- What TPR activity is the most suitable for second graders to learn vocabulary?

## CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

According to James J. Asher (1968), before starting to produce any language, a person has to be able to understand it. Once this process is completed, a person can move ahead to produce it. This assumption led to the formulation of Total Physical Response, a method that focuses on the bodily reaction of the students when they are given commands in L2, and they are expected to provide a physical response based on them. Asher (1968) claims that “The strategy of the total physical response is to have the students listen to a command in a foreign language and immediately obey with a physical action” (p.7). As a result, students are pushed firstly to learn to listen to the L2, to familiarize themselves with it, to understand it, and then to perform the activity or the command proposed by the educator.

Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2001) define TPR as a language teaching method built around the coordination of speech and action. It attempts to teach language through physical (motor) activity. TPR is based on different branches like psychology, humanistic pedagogy, and on language teaching procedures. In short, this method proposes a way of teaching in which students have to move and be active when an utterance is said by the teacher. In this way, students can remember and make stronger connections between what has been said and the immediate movement that they perform or with what that word is related to. The language is presented in an oral form, and so students are encouraged to listen as much as possible to be able to comprehend the language and then produce it. These authors explain in a clear way some definitions and generalities about TPR method; Richards and Rodgers (2014) provide a detailed description and summarize the full work of Asher for better understanding how TPR works in a better way. These concepts facilitate this work because they constitute the bases for the complete research.

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### **Theory of Learning**

Asher (1968) claims that the dynamic of stimulus-response supports language teaching pedagogy. Richards and Rodgers' research (2001) is in agreement with Asher's basing his method principally on behaviorism, a theory developed by Skinner (1957). It proposes that when children listen to a language, they try to imitate it. Then if the reinforcement is positive (to communicate effectively), children will continue imitating and practicing. Likewise, children imitate selectively because they do not replicate what they have not understood yet. In this sense, children not only imitate language, but they also produce it in a creative way inventing new utterances with what they already know (Lightbown & Spada, 1999).

After defining behaviorism, it is precise to mention three important influential learning hypotheses that Asher proposes: bio program, brain lateralization, and reduction of stress. The bio program is referred as a kind of innate system for learning languages that provides the natural ability to learn the first language and second language. This innate system emphasizes, first on listening before speaking, for later combining language with body movements. Second, brain lateralization explains that language learning belongs to the left hemisphere but the initial acquisition of language begins in the right side of the brain. TPR stimulates motor movement which is a characteristic of the right hemisphere, but the left hemisphere processes the language to produce it, so language learning not only pertains to one of the hemispheres but to both. Third, reduction of stress, concept taken from Krashen who talks about an affective filter which claims that negative emotional feelings could reduce the quality of learning the L2. For this reason, corporal movements are used to diminish stress creating willingness in the learner's learning process (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

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### **Theory of Language**

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), there is no specific theory of language here, but this seems to apply the structuralist view because Asher (1968) proposed the imperative form of the verbs as the fundamental use in learning a language. He says that language is constituted by abstractions and non-abstractions (nouns and imperatives). The latter ones are the most appropriate to teach the second language in an effective way, meanwhile abstractions are not necessary when beginning to learn an L2.

Some researchers have focused their studies in obtaining results by applying the TPR method in order to find answers to big issues like the way in which a second language is learned. According to Asher and Price (1967), it is believed that children are better able than adults to learn a foreign language. But through some experiments which study the retention capacity by acting in adults and children, Asher and Price found that adults' retention capacity by acting is better than children's capacity. However, they found that children are better in sound production. Thanks to this research proposed by Asher and Price, the purpose of implementing the TPR method during the teaching of foreign languages in elementary school students can be analyzed and looked into. Thus, it is pertinent to study the efficacy of this method to enhance the learning of a foreign language in children.

Regarding the effectiveness of TPR, Singh (2011) proposes that there are three central processes in TPR. The first one is that children develop listening competence before speaking ability. The second one is that children develop their listening comprehension abilities due to the fact that they are required to respond physically to different commands. The third process is that speech evolves naturally once listening comprehension has been established. In this regard, an



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observation conducted by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) described a class given in Sweden with 30 children which revealed some important ideas about the effectiveness of TPR for English vocabulary learning. In the first phase, the teacher explained in Swedish that she was going to use just English throughout all the session, the second step was to ask for four volunteers to help her. She started by saying some imperatives in English (stand up, sit down), and then she performed them with the students several times. In the second phase, the teacher sat down and told the commands to the learners to test their understanding when performing alone. In the last phase, the teacher added some nouns and rearranged the utterances to create new directions in order to encourage students' flexibility in understanding. Weeks later, some students who had not spoken before, started to direct their classmates with the previous utterances taught. From this, it was possible to draw some conclusions. First, the process that students follow is to develop the capacity to listen and understand the language before producing it. Next, they comprehend the meaning of the directions because they link the new words with the physical representations they observed and performed. Finally, the students were able to produce the language because they could associate the instructions and their meaning. In short, it can be inferred that the students learn in an efficient way when they are given the possibility of being bodily active and connect the language taught to the actions they perform. Additionally, they started to speak just when they felt comfortable and ready to do so, as well as when they had understood the language.

Through these observations, it can be thought that by implementing motor activities, it is possible to obtain good results in teaching a foreign language owing to the successful response in terms of learning on the part of the students.

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In terms of teaching activities, Seelv and Romijn (as cited in Savić, 2014) claimed that body movement allows students to improve language learning because they learn by doing. The proposal was based on a physical activity through TPR by using storytelling in which each word has its own gesture. Thus, the instructor tells an appealing short story and performs it, after some repetitions the students are able to act the words out when the teacher retells the same story.

Another activity described is miming, here students are encouraged to act out some action songs where they simulate, mime and dramatize. A famous action song is head, shoulders, knees and toes. Using this song, the parts of the body as well as some verbs can be learned by the students since they use mimic to act out the song. In this way actions acquire a context and learning turns into something enjoyable for children (Lee, as cited in Savić, 2014). This evidence displays how the implementation of corporal activities during a class boosts students' attention, motivation, and learning engagement. Moreover, physical activities help to reduce stress and to create a comfortable environment to learn.

All in all, the studies described above are useful for the purpose of this work because they define clearly the processes that TPR follows to develop and upgrade foreign language learning, and they are relevant too because some teaching strategies which focus on the elementary school students' needs can be adopted.

### **CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY**

Taking into account that the topic of this work is Total Physical Response for vocabulary learning by students of second grade, it was decided to use a qualitative approach in order to develop the research work.

As said by Cresswell (2014), the qualitative method “is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribed to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting” (p.32). In this sense, the use of this kind of approach allows to address the research problem in such a way that it is possible to collect data from the observation of the affair studied. Furthermore, in this study, the qualitative design will allow to know through the design method and the instrument of data collection, which of the proposed activities is the most suitable for vocabulary learning improvement in second graders.

#### **Method**

Case studies constitute the analysis of cases related to programs, events, activities or processes that want to be experienced to show the results obtained from the application of strategies, activities, processes, programs, etc., the number of participants in the study can be very limited or it can constitute a considerable number of people. The investigators gather information using data collection procedures over a period of time and the phenomenon studied is limited by the activity and the time (Stake, 1995). In this regard, it was adequate to select this design method since it permits to observe a limited number of students throughout the class context, to draw conclusions from the data revealed and to compile evidence to determine what the most proper activity presented to the students is the best for them to the vocabulary learning.

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The category of the case study of this research is descriptive. “A descriptive study is a type of research that describes a population, situation, or phenomenon that is being studied. It focuses on answering the how, what, when, and where questions in a research problem, rather than the why” (Formplus Blog, n.d. paragraph 4). With this in mind, a descriptive study fits the purpose of this research as it provides the means for explaining, reporting and analyzing the setting and the possible inconveniences that could appear in the process.

In sum, the case study will aid to establish which factor works better, which helps to go in deep in the general objective that is to determine what activity from the TPR method is the most suitable for vocabulary learning. Finally, the descriptive study permits to analyze the different situations that could appear during the students’ learning process in an English class and know what students’ limitations are at the moment of learning a foreign language.

### **Population**

The population which will be taken into account for this research is constituted approximately by 60 students of primary school of Escuela Normal Superior de Pasto. That educational institution is located in San Felipe neighborhood in the city of Pasto.

### **Sample**

For this project, one group of second-grade students will be taken as a sample from the Escuela Normal Superior de Pasto, it means around 30 students who are aged between 7 to 8 years old. Considering that the descriptive design method is going to be applied, the group will be taught by means of TPR activities with the aim of obtaining the necessary information to find out which one of the activities proposed works better for vocabulary learning in second grade students.

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### **Data Collection Instruments**

For applying the procedures, one instrument is necessary in order to organize and define the steps for collecting data in this research study, such as the following one.

**Tests:** it is a research instrument that allows collecting specific information of a group of people by testing them, in this case, to show the second grade students' improvement in terms of vocabulary learning.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

In this section, the procedure to conduct the research will be described. It consists in formulating three different oral tests for second graders from Escuela Normal Superior de Pasto. The purpose of the tests is to know the amount of vocabulary they learned at the end of the application of each one of the three TPR activities to the group. Thus, the oral tests could show what the most pertinent activity to learn English vocabulary was. In brief, the tests applied during the research work will help to have enough evidence and support to make good deductions to this project.

**Tests:** there will be three oral tests that will be applied to students at the end of each lesson taught by means of TPR activities. The oral tests consist in showing students printed pictures of the vocabulary proposed: body parts, clothes and tastes. The next step is to ask them for the correct English word for the displayed printing. The test would be clear and didactic with the aim of making the students understand and be able to answer the questions (Appendix A, B and C).

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All in all, this step will provide an organized plan to develop this research work. Besides, it would serve for determining which activity functions better for improving second grade students' English vocabulary learning.

### **Analysis of Data**

Taking into account that this research works with a qualitative methodology, to develop this study, it is necessary to implement a comparative analysis.

In order to compare the results in terms of the learning process with each one of the TPR activities suggested, three oral tests will be implemented at the end of the classes. The tests will have the same number of elements to be evaluated, it means, nine pictures each one with the topics of body parts, clothes and tastes (see appendix A, B C)

The test results will serve to determine which TPR activity is more suitable to learn, to measure how many words the students are able to identify, pronounce and use after the vocabulary is taught during the sessions.

### **Pilot Study**

The purpose of this section is to determine if the designed tests are suitable to be applied to the second graders, if they are understandable enough for them to identify clearly the pictures related to the vocabulary that is going to be taught during the three sessions. Moreover, it would serve to realize what are the strong and weak points in terms of design of the tests and attractiveness for the young learners.

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### **Results of the Pilot Study**

All the tests were presented to six second graders who were between 7 and 8 years old. With the first test related to body parts, there was some misunderstanding because when looking at the images the students said “es una pierna, no, quizás es un brazo” or “es una mano, o tal vez son dedos”. The confusion occurred because there was not any mark pointing out the specific part of the body, so it was necessary to add some arrows to some of the pictures for students to better identify the specific body parts being asked. As for the second test related to “clothing” the children recognized perfectly what item was being shown, it was not necessary to make any change to this test and they liked it a lot because the pictures were so colorful. As to the last test, the students identified each one of the food items presented, after looking at the cards they immediately started to say for example “ají, no, no me gusta el ají” followed by doing a disgusting gesticulation, something similar happened with the rest of the flavors. To conclude, the results of this pilot study revealed a weak point just in the first test, since in this one the images were ambiguous, so that it was necessary to modify it in such a way that the children could identify plainly the specific body part. Additionally, as for the strong aspects, it showed that the design of the cards was appealing for them, the pictures attracted their attention due to the colors and the creativeness of the same which is a plus when applying a test for children.

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### Experimentation stage

The three activities proposed shall be described in detail in this section. The topics of the classes will be: *body parts, clothes and tastes*. All the topics will be taught by applying different physical activities based on TPR throughout three classes. The activity for the first session will be "*Action Songs*": this is a current and funny way to learn English. Here, the students will play an active role during the development of the class: singing, imitating and following indications. Firstly, they will watch and listen to the song called "parts of the body song". After some replays, the teacher will reinforce the teachings orally and by performing the action displayed in the song with its respective body part. Next, all the students will sing the song and replicate what is being exhibited. Finally, the children will have to act out alone just following the teacher's commands, like "move your head" or "move your mouth". Teacher also must teach the question model "what part of the body is it?". During the second class, the activity to be developed is "*Charades*". Here, the topic will be vocabulary related to garments. To begin, the teacher will indicate the clothes he is wearing followed by saying the corresponding names in English, this is going to be done at least three times to assure the students' vocabulary retention. At this point, the teacher will strengthen the vocabulary teaching by means of the whiteboard where he is going to write the nouns making the children to pronounce and point them out simultaneously. Later, on small sheets of paper, the names of some clothing items will be presented to the students. Taking turns, the children have to pick a paper at random, it will show a garment which the student has to point out on his own clothing and the other students have to guess what name of the clothing is. The last activity is "*The Amazing Race*" and the topic will be tastes. At the beginning of the lesson, the teacher will show some toys representing specific food such as: a chili, a lemon, a candy, a cup of coffee, a slice of meat and chips. After this, the teacher is going



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to take the toys and he will make gestures that are characteristic when each one of those foods are eaten. The instructor will write on the board the different flavors like: spicy, sour, bitter, umami, sweet and salty representing them all at once. After a few repetitions of the previous steps, the teacher is going to gesticulate once again a determined flavor. Subsequently, he will ask a student to bring him the toy that is represented by the gesture he is making. By doing so, the teacher could know if the topic was learned by the students.

And by means of the application of the tests and the tallying of the words learned by the students at the end of each one of the sessions, it will be possible to determine which TPR activity is more effective for students to increase their vocabulary learning in a foreign language.

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### **Conclusions**

#### **Expected results**

With the application of the activities proposed it is expected to clearly identify what TPR activity best helped the second graders in the foreign vocabulary learning process. Another outcome to reach is to apply successfully the different activities to improve vocabulary memorization, understating, retention and of course, to arise the children's motivation and interest when learning. The last end result to be achieved is to establish which one of the TPR activities gave the best tools for facilitating the vocabulary learning in students.

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**APPENDIX A**

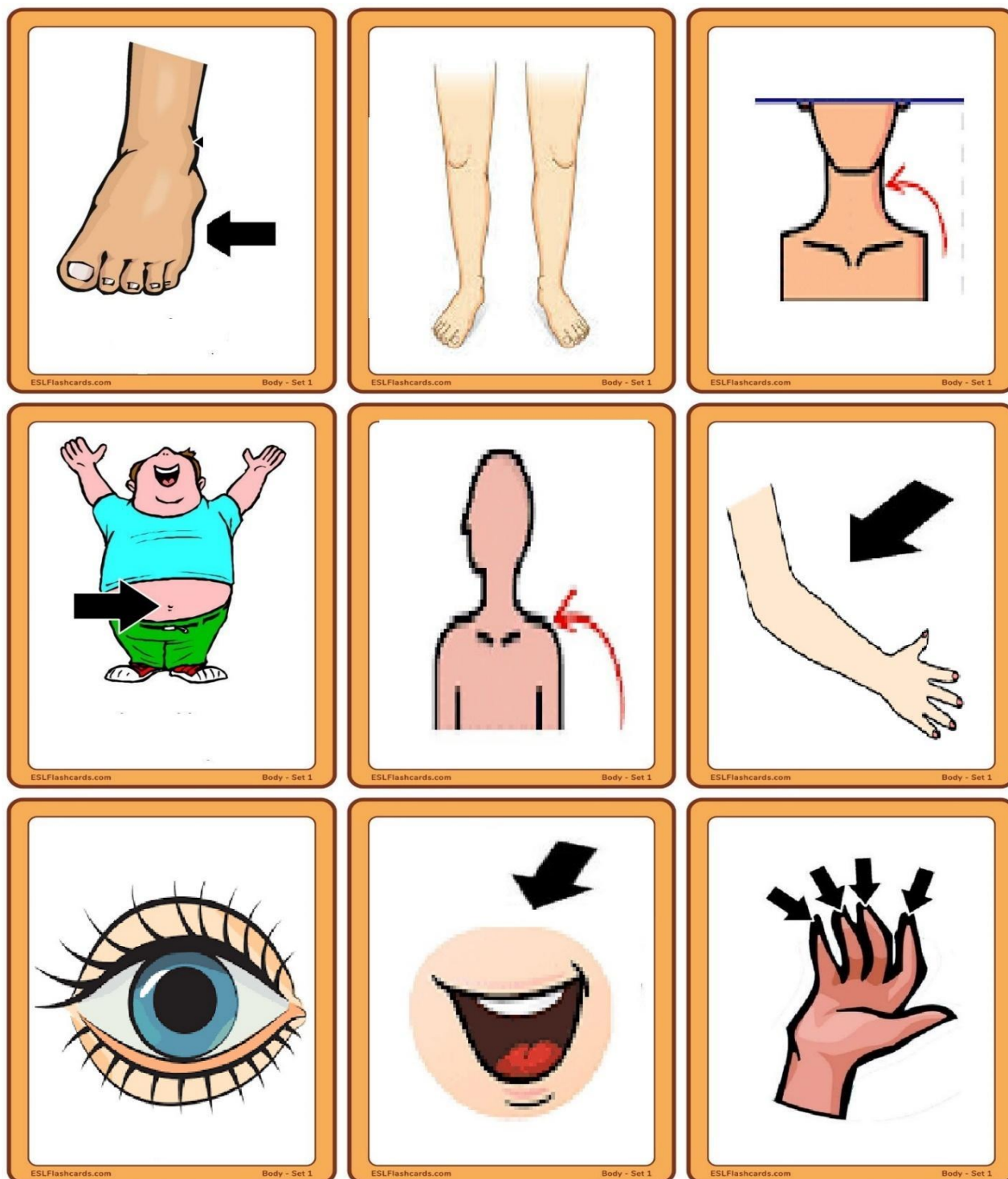
The following are the pictures that will be printed and showed to students for analyzing their vocabulary knowledge related to “*body parts*”.

**Description:** the directions for the development of the test will be in Spanish so that the students understand the activity in a better way. The teacher should refer to the student as follows:

“Le voy a mostrar 9 imágenes al azar. En la imagen hay una marca que indica una parte del cuerpo; cuando vea la imagen y distinga la parte del cuerpo, deberá decirme su nombre en inglés.”

Once the test starts, the teacher must switch the language into English to make the basic and previously taught question: “What is this part of the body?”

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**Figure 1***Body Parts*

## TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING

**APPENDIX B**

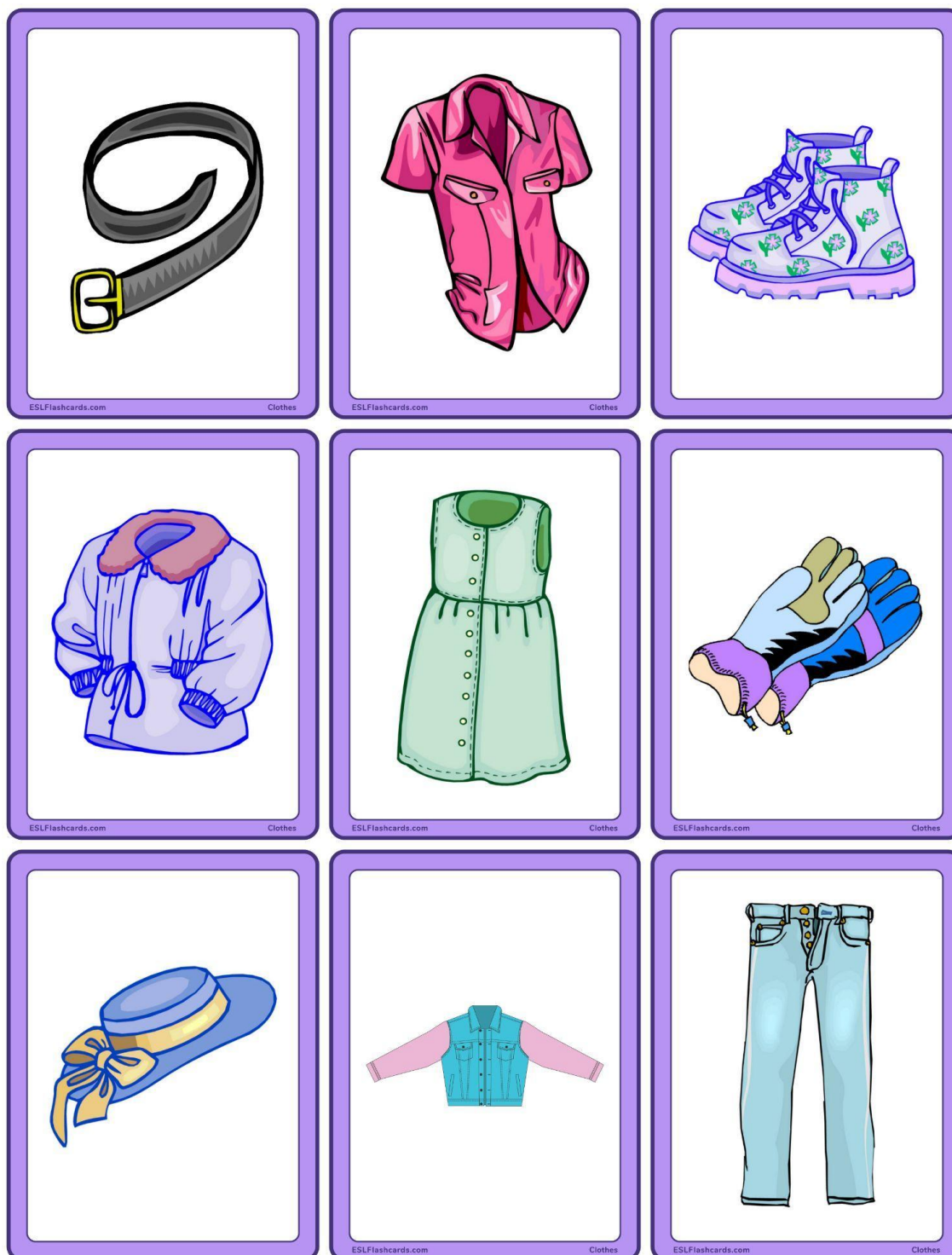
In this part, the 2<sup>nd</sup> test with the directions and the pictures to measure the amount of the vocabulary learned in terms of “*clothing*” will be showed.

**Description:** The test will contain nine appealing images displaying some garments, the instructions will be given to the children in Spanish at the beginning in this way:

“Va a observar algunas imágenes que muestran las prendas de vestir previamente estudiadas, cuando las identifique, por favor dígame cada uno de los nombres que usted recuerde en inglés”

After this, the teacher will address to the students starting to show and ask in English the question “what is the name of this item?” or “what is this?”

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**Figure 2***Clothes*



## TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING

**APPENDIX C**

The test number three is going to be described in this segment. This test intends to assess the students' vocabulary learning with the topic of "*tastes*".

**Description:** This test is made up of two parts: six images of food are going to be presented and the students would say orally the flavor of each food, in addition to that they would have to act out the flavor. The directions are similar to the previous tests: teacher talks to the students first in Spanish and the questions in English.

"Tengo algunas imágenes las cuales contienen un alimento que simboliza un sabor específico. Cuando yo se la indique, usted tendrá que decirme el nombre de ese sabor en inglés; además tendrá que representar el gesto correspondiente al mismo".

Subsequently, the teacher will present a specific image and will ask the child a question like this one: what is the taste of this food? Can you make the gesture that it produces?

## TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE FOR VOCABULARY LEARNING

**Figure 3***Tastes*