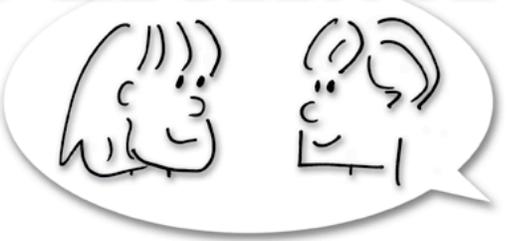


Sabine und Michael

German TPRS Materials



The Circus is in “Tense”

by Michael Miller

Three-Ring Circus Created by Bertie Segal

Takes TPR beyond the imperative and into other tenses.

Can be used within the first few weeks of instruction and you can go back to it at any time to review tenses.

Pick three actions you are currently working on (preferably actions that do not have cognates and are the most difficult for students to remember).

For example:

- Jump on one foot!
- Throw the pencil on the floor! Pick up the pencil!
- Walk slowly to the door! Run back to the board!

Get three volunteers to do these activities. They have to continue doing the actions over and over.

Circle of questions

Now that you have your three actions going on, you can describe the action in the present indicative (or present progressive) tense.

- Bill is jumping on one foot.
- Janet throws the pencil on the floor. Janet picks up the pencil.
- Susan walks slowly to the door. Susan runs back to the board.

Ask yes/no questions and either/or questions first.

Yes/no (true) Is Bill jumping on one foot?

Either/or Is Bill or is Susan jumping on one foot?

Yes/no (false) Is Susan jumping on one foot?

Yes/no (true) Is Bill jumping on one foot?

Restate the truth Yes, Bill is jumping on one foot.

These questions should be mixed up to avoid predictability. Students are allowed to answer with one-word responses. You can make the “either/or” a person or an object (like a foot) or a place.

Interrogatives

Write the following interrogatives with their translations on the board:

Who?
What?
Where?

Mix in the interrogatives with the other questions.

- Who is jumping on one foot?
- Where does Susan run (to)?
- What does Janet throw on the floor?

If students get stuck on an interrogative, use an either/or question to clarify.

- What does Janet throw? A pencil or a door?
- Where does Susan run (to)? The door or the board?

You can also get some crazy questions in the mix:

- Does Janet throw Bill on the floor?
- Does Bill jump on Susan's foot?
- Does Susan run to Bill?
- Does Susan jump on Bill?

(I like to add in): Is that a good idea?

Remember to keep the questions in a mixed, unpredictable order. If you get stuck, go back to the basic circle format and go from there.



The reason we ask these questions:

- To provide repetitions of the vocabulary
- To check whether students understand the vocabulary
- To keep the students focused on the language.

Students won't zone out when they see their friends doing circus acts!



Past tense

After you have gone through the circus acts in present tense and you have circled a number of questions to get repetitions, have the actors sit down.

Give the class a **VERY BRIEF** description of the past tense. Mainly: What to listen for. Example in German:

“hat ge-verb” or “ist ge-verb”

If your language has several versions of the past tense, choose what form most native speakers would use in this situation.

Then go back to the basic circle in the past tense:

- Did Bill jump on one foot? (Class: Yes)
- Did Bill or Susan jump on one foot? (Bill)
- Did Susan jump on one foot? (No)
- Did Bill jump on one foot? (Yes)
- Yes, Bill jumped on one foot.

Add in the interrogatives and mix up the questions.

Use constant comprehension checks to verify whether students understand what the sentences mean, including what tense it is in. Translation is the quickest and surest way to check comprehension. For example:

“Janet hat den Bleistift auf den Fußboden geworfen.

Translate that, please.”

(Class: Janet threw the pencil on the floor).

“Awesome. What told you it was in past tense?”

(Class: The “ge-verb” at the end)

Future tense

Do the present and past tense for several sessions. Then add the future tense in a similar way. Before anyone starts acting you tell the class who is going to do what activity.

- Bill is going to jump on one foot.
- Janet is going to throw the pencil on the floor and then Janet is going to pick up the pencil.
- Susan is going to walk slowly to the door and then Susan is going to run back to the board.

The actors still haven't started yet, but they know what they're going to do. While you are in the future tense, you again circle the questions.

- Is Bill going to jump on one foot?
- Is Bill or Susan going to jump on one foot?
- Is Susan going to jump on one foot? etc. . . .

Add the interrogatives and mix up the questions as with the present and past tenses.

When you have finished circling the future tense, then have the actors perform their parts in front of class as you circle the present tense.

Then have your actors sit down and circle through the past tense.

Tips

I don't like to spend more than five minutes per tense. Otherwise the activity lasts too long and I could lose student interest.

Constantly check comprehension through translation and "pop-up grammar". The circle of questions also checks comprehension.

Maintain eye contact and expect everyone to answer your questions.

For advanced classes, you can do this activity with subjunctive, conditional, relative clauses, etc.

- I want Bill to jump on one foot.
- If I were Bill, I'd jump on one foot.
- Susan said that Bill jumped on one foot.

These more advanced structures can still be circled:

- Did Susan say that Bill jumped on one foot?
- Did Susan or Janet say that Bill jumped on one foot?
- Did Janet say that Bill jumped on one foot?
- Did Susan say that Bill jumped on one foot?
- Yes, Susan said that Bill jumped on one foot.
- Who said that Bill jumped on one foot?
- Susan said that Bill jumped on what?
- Who did Susan say jumped on one foot?

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