

【論文】

Play that Funky Music: Using Songs to Teach a Foreign Language

Robert J. Ashcroft*

歌を使って外国語を教える方法

アシュクロフト ロバート ジョン

Abstract

Using music effectively in the language classroom involves much more than simply hitting the play button. When used correctly, songs can not only contribute to a more congenial class atmosphere, but can also be a potent means of motivating students and facilitating language learning. Indeed, music and language are inextricably linked. Charles Darwin (1871) saw music as a relic of our evolutionary past which eventually lead to the complex linguistic faculty of modern humans. The development of our musical intelligence (Gardner, 1993) begins long before birth, with the unborn child perceiving the rhythm and pitch of voices coming from outside the womb (Deliege & Sloboda, 1996). As well as being strongly connected to L1 development, music can be used in the L2 classroom to promote word articulation (Leith, 1979), reading skills (Murphey, 1990), vocabulary acquisition and grammar (Failoni, 1993). Songs can also produce positive emotions in learners and thereby mitigate the effect of anxiety often associated with speaking in a foreign language, especially among Japanese students (Ashcroft & Imrie, 2012). Moreover, by influencing blood pressure, posture, breathing rate, pulse and general activity, tasks involving music can increase both students' attention span and the amount of effort they exert (Benenzon, 1997). This paper examines several stimulating ways language teachers can incorporate music and songs into their classes to promote and help facilitate language learning. Using the link provided at the end of this paper, interested readers can access a wide selection of music-based materials and lesson plans developed by the author.

*国際文化学部国際コミュニケーション学科

要 旨

語学の授業で、音楽を効果的に活用することは、単に音楽を流すという以上に意味がある。正しく使えば、歌はクラスを心地よい雰囲気にするだけでなく、学生の動機づけを高め、言語学習を促進する効果的な手段になりえる。実際のところ、音楽と言語は密接に関連している。Charles Darwin (1871) によれば、音楽とは、現代人の複雑な言語能力に最終的に至るまでの進化における過去の遺物である。音楽的知能 (Gardner, 1983) の発達、生まれる随分前から始まっており、胎児は子宮外の声のリズムやピッチを知覚している (Deliege & Sloboda, 1996)。第一言語の発達と密接に関係しているのと同様に、第二言語の授業でも、音楽は語の明瞭な発音 (Leith, 1979)、リーディングのスキル (Murphey, 1990)、語彙と文法 (Failoni, 1993) の習得を促進させることが可能である。歌はまた、学習者に肯定的な感情を生み出し、特に日本人学習者が、しばしば外国語を話す際に感じる不安の影響を軽減することができる (Ashcroft & Imrie, 2012)。さらに、血圧、姿勢、呼吸速度、脈、一般活動性に影響を与えることにより、音楽を用いた課題は、学生の注意持続時間と、彼らが費やす努力の量を実際に増加させることができる (Benenson, 1997)。本稿では、言語学習を促進するために、語学教師が音楽と歌を授業に取り入れる、様々な刺激的な方法を検討する。本稿の最後に記載しているリンクから、興味のある読者は、筆者が作成した音楽を用いた豊富な教材と指導案にアクセスすることが可能である。

Introduction

University classes are long, and the ever-present danger for teachers that their students become distracted and restless means that it is vital to find ways of maintaining students' interest and motivation. One way to help achieve this aim in language classes is to use music. Using popular songs in class instantly makes language study more interesting and engaging. Music has a universal appeal which means that it can connect across cultures and between languages. It can even bridge the generational gap between a teacher and his or her students. Many students have an intrinsic motivation to find out what song lyrics are about and to try to understand the language which they contain. Listening to English songs is a way for students to share an authentic linguistic and cultural experience with their L1 English American or British peers. In this paper, I will explain why songs are one of the most effective resources available to university language teachers. I will also outline several tried and tested song-based activities to get the best results across a range of language-based skills.

Building Leadership and Team-working Skills

As one might expect, using music to teach language is particularly effective for those students who love music. In 1993 Howard Gardner advanced his theory of multiple intelligences. The model proposed that human intelligence could be broken down into several distinct modalities. His theory contrasted sharply with the single-measure general ability view of the incumbent IQ model of intelligence. In response to Gardner's work, various teaching methods have been proposed to cater to learner preferences and strengths. The idea is that each method includes activities which will appeal to those learners who are strong in the corresponding intelligence (Mora, 2000). Two such methodologies are musical and bodily-kinesthetic (Ulate, 2007). Using music to teach language to those students with a high level of musical intelligence is thought to be very helpful in facilitating the process of language acquisition in those students. Bodily-kinesthetic teaching methodology is concerned with the physical use of the body and involves having learners move around and associate learning with physical actions. These two approaches can be used in conjunction through dance or other actions to music. One activity which combines these approaches is creating a *Lipdub video*.

Making a *Lip-dub* video is an engaging project which not only focuses on language, but also gives students a chance to develop their leadership and team-working skills. Students should work in small groups of around five students. The first step is to have them choose a song in English. It is important that their chosen song contains a significant amount of singing / lyrics. Once they have chosen a song and the teacher has checked it for suitability, students should plan how their video is going to look and what each team member's role will be. They should learn the lyrics so they can lip-sync to the words, and they should also choreograph the movements of everyone in the video. Using a smart phone, they take the video in one continuous shot, lip-syncing, dancing and moving to the song which they have playing on a second smart phone in the background. Students then use simple editing software such as *Windows Movie Maker*, or *Apple's iMovie* to lay the original song soundtrack over the top of their video.

Once all the projects are completed, an in-class screening of the videos can be held. Students often become extremely motivated and engaged while completing the project and the results are very often stunning (An example of a Lip-dub video created by the author's students at Tokai can be viewed at: <https://youtu.be/zFvC5Z2xkaE>). Making a *Lipdub* video is quite an involved undertaking, typically taking three or four classes to complete. If time is short however, there are more expedient ways of using songs to increase the motivation and engagement of language students.

Increasing Attention Span & Effort

Using songs can be an effective way for university language teachers to increase students' attention span, and the amount of effort they are willing to invest in class. Using popular English songs can establish a positive teacher/student relationship, increasing students' motivation to learn, and making students feel more at ease in the classroom. In my experience, using songs which students already enjoy can help to strengthen my relationship with the students. Many seem to find it easier to approach and talk to me because they feel like we have something in common, and that I understand and care about their interests. As a result, my students feel more comfortable in class, and therefore more likely to have a positive attitude towards learning. In addition, the use of music which students already know and like can be a powerful catalyst for motivation. When teaching a group of students on a regular basis over a period of time, such as during a fourteen-week university semester, it is a worthwhile investment of time trying to find out what kind of music the students enjoy listening to. At the beginning of a course I usually have students discuss which artists and which particular songs they like. Students then write down their top three English songs on a slip of paper, which I then collect in and use as the basis of song-selection for classes during the semester. Using songs familiar to students can be an excellent source of intrinsic motivation for students.

Music in class can help students relax, making it easier for them to learn. Stephen Krashen (1982) famously said that language acquisition and student motivation can be severely inhibited if students have, in his words, "a high affective filter". He meant that if students are disinclined to learn, are anxious, or otherwise feel negatively toward either the language or the learning context, then they will not be realizing their true language-learning potential. Playing music in class is a straightforward and effective way to help students feel more relaxed and comfortable, and in so doing, lower their effective filter and facilitate learning (Schoepp, 2001; Ulate, 2007). For example, when upon arrival at their classroom, a teacher can put on some background music while setting up for class and while the students come into the room. In this way, the students feel less inhibited to chat with the teacher and each other before the class starts. Although it seems clear that music can significantly boost students' motivation, L2 songs are also an excellent language resource in their own right. For example, song lyrics can be used to teach new words.

Vocabulary

Songs contain a wealth of vocabulary on a variety of topics. Moreover, songs are usually written about a theme (e.g. falling in and out of love / childhood memories) so much of the vocabulary in a song

Listen to the song and write down the rhyming words you hear:		answers
nights	l _____	lights
green	s _____	seventeen
stairs	h _____	hair
undone	t _____	twenty-one
means	l _____	limousines
drive	t _____	thirty-five
dregs	k _____	kegs
year	c _____	clear

Figure 1: *Rhyming Vocabulary Activity from It was a Very Good Year by Robbie Williams*

usually belongs to the same lexical set which can help students with its acquisition. In addition, a song provides a context for these words in the form of a coherent message, such as a story. The context can help students understand the meaning of new words in a song. There is no doubt that songs provide an excellent opportunity for studying new words and expressions. The following section provides some practical suggestions for teachers on how to go about this in class.

One way of focusing on the vocabulary in a song is to select several words from the lyrics which rhyme with other words in the song. Students are given this list of words and told to listen out for the corresponding rhyming words as they listen to the song. Figure 1 shows an example for the rhyming words from *It was a Very Good Year by Robbie Williams*. Before doing this activity, the teacher should explain the meaning of any unknown words and drill the pronunciation of the words on the list if necessary. This activity builds students' vocabulary knowledge by focusing their attention on individual lexical items in the lyrics. It also helps with pronunciation as students' attention is drawn to pairs of words pronounced in the same way.

Song lyrics often contain lexical sets of paradigmatic-related words. For example, the song *Hot and Cold by Katy Perry* contains pairs of antonyms. This sense relation is a useful one for language learners because new vocabulary can be learnt more effectively in pairs which can be mapped directly on to their L1 mental lexicon. Although the meaning of target words can be conveyed in several ways, such as a picture, L2 definition or L2 synonym, research indicates that L1 translation is the most effective method (Laufer & Shmueli, 1997; Nation & Webb, 2011). Accordingly, students can be provided with a worksheet which includes L1 translations of pairs of English antonyms from the song, with corresponding blanks for students to fill in the English equivalents as they listen to

the song (Figure 2).

Song lyrics often use vocabulary in a colorful and creative way. Idiomatic vocabulary is often embedded in song lyrics and many students enjoy learning vocabulary in this way. Teachers can pick out the interesting words, expressions and idioms and ask their students if they know the meaning.

For example, using the 2001 song *Hero* by Enrique Iglesias, the teacher can ask what is meant by *in too deep* and *lose my mind*.

The teacher can illustrate the meaning with drawings, synonyms and examples. Teachers can have their students write sentences of their own which include the target words or phrases. In addition to teaching new vocabulary, songs and music are an effective means of drawing students' attention to non-textual communication using intonation.

Listen to the song and write down the rhyming words you hear:					
Japanese	English	answer	Japanese	English	answer
暑い	_____	hot	冷たい	_____	cold
はい	_____	yes	いいえ	_____	no
内	_____	in	外	_____	out
上	_____	up	下	_____	down
黒	_____	black	白	_____	white
別れる	_____	break up	繕いを戻す	_____	make up
喧嘩	_____	fight	ちゅう	_____	kiss

Figure 2: Antonym Pair Vocabulary Activity from *Hot & Cold* by Katy Perry

Intonation: The Music of Language

In the same way that speech conveys information through intonation devices, music uses keys and tones to do the same (Fonseca-Mora, Toscano-Fuentes and Wermke, 2011). Through speech, information is communicated in the meaning of the words, but information can also be communicated by *how* those

words are said. Variations in the tone and pitch of voice, and the emphasis of particular sounds provide additional information to supplement the textual message. Music conveys information in just the same way; one tune can sound sad and foreboding while another sounds happy and upbeat. Tunes can express the range of human emotions depending on the use of keys and tones. The two *Beatles* songs, *Yesterday* and *Here Comes the Sun* are two respective examples. By listening to songs, students can hear how the different intonation of a word can convey this additional meaning. Teachers can develop materials which focus their students' attention on intonation and the emotional message conveyed through the intonation used by the singer.

Grammar

Song lyrics are a rich source of grammatical material for language students. One approach to language teaching is to focus on grammatical form and function. In other words, to explicitly draw students' attention to the rules which govern the language's form, meaning and use (Celce–Murcia and Larsen–Freeman 1999: 4, as cited in Nava and Pedrazzini 2018: 11). Grammar–based Teaching (GBT) usually involves students examining explicit language rules, lists of conjugations, drills and L2 to L1 translation (DeBot, Lowie and Vespoor, 2005). Such activities can become tiresome for many students. A more motivating and engaging way to focus on a specific grammar point is by using a song. Most songs seem to have a grammar structure which repeats throughout the lyrics, and this presents an ideal opportunity to teach grammar. For example, the song *Castle on the Hill* by Ed Sheeran is a nostalgic reminiscence of the singer's childhood. The lyrics can be used to focus on the past simple tense, which is prominent in the lyrics. For example, the teacher writes the following verbs from the song; *break, do, find, have, leave, lose, make, overdose, raise, roll, and watch* on the board, eliciting the part of speech (i.e. verbs) and checking the meaning of the words with the students. Using their existing knowledge, checking with a partner, or on their mobile device, the



Figure 3: Antonym Pair Vocabulary Activity from *Hot & Cold* by Katy Perry

students then write down the past simple form for each one (i.e. *broke, did, found, had, left, lost, made, overdosed, raised, rolled, and watched*). Next the teacher provides a copy of the lyrics, with the target verbs missing, instructing the students to listen to the song and fill in the gaps with the simple past forms (Figure 3). As an extension activity, students write a paragraph about a pleasant childhood memory for homework, thereby practicing the target grammar in a freer and more personalized way. It seems clear that song lyrics can provide a stimulating way for students to focus on grammar.

Listening Comprehension Skills

Songs are an excellent resource for listening practice. As with any listening practice activity, students can be asked to complete a wide range of tasks while listening. For example, giving students a copy of the lyrics with some of the words missing and having them fill in the blanks as they listen. Another option is to set comprehension questions and have students listen for the answers. Alternatively, the teacher can select some key words from the song, put them on individual cards and have students put them in chronological order. The type of activity selected will depend on the level of the students, the goals of the class, and the song itself.

Listening comprehension difficulty varies a great deal between songs. Firstly, the speed of the singing on a song significantly affects the ease of comprehension. The faster the singing, the more difficult it is. The easiest solution is to choose slower songs for lower level classes. Another option is to use free, open-source software such as *Audacious* (<https://audacious-media-player.org/>) to change the tempo of a song to slow it down without changing the pitch of the singing or the music itself. Another factor which effects comprehensibility is the clarity of the voice and interference of the music and instruments with the voice of the singer. Songs where the singer's voice can be clearly heard above the music are clearly a better choice. Finally, many song lyrics contain contractions, which can be a challenge for learners. One idea is to include the uncontracted forms on the students' worksheets / copies of the song lyrics. For example, although the singer may sing '*'cause*', instead have *because* on the copy of the lyrics for students. It is important to consider the difficulty of comprehension when selecting songs for listening practice.

Discussion

Songs are an effective way to initiate authentic communication in the classroom. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach to teaching gives primacy to the importance of using the target language for communicating with others. Using CLT means that teachers provide communicative events for students and that through participation in these events, they will develop their

communicative language skills (Celce–Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell, 2012; Willis, 1990). Songs can be an effective way of setting up these kinds of communicative events. Pop songs come with a pre–packaged social and often political context. Songs are often used as a way of speaking out against prejudice and dogmatism, promoting propaganda, or upholding cultural values. As a result, the lyrics, music video and the artists themselves can often provide an effective springboard for discussion about society’s values, cultural differences and political issues. For example, in the song *Hot and Cold* by American artist *Katy Perry*, the singer is complaining that her husband is having second thoughts about getting married. When introducing this topic, the teacher could elicit ideas about what are the most important decisions in life, and write the ideas up on the whiteboard (e.g. university; career; whether to get married; who to marry). The teacher could then have students work in pairs or small groups to rank the ideas in order of importance. During plenary feedback and class discussion, students explain their choices supporting their choices with reasons. By using songs in this way, the teacher provides a real–world, authentic context for experiencing the target language. Discussion activities can be used at the beginning of a class in order to introduce a topic (as with the above example) or towards the end of a class, allowing students to expand on a specific topic (the one introduced with the song) using any target grammar and vocabulary already covered in the class. In this way, students have a chance to practice their communicative fluency, explore their ideas about a topic, and to consolidate their proficiency using the new language covered in the class.

Reading

Just as almost any text can be adapted by the teacher for reading skills practice and development, song lyrics are no exception. There are millions of songs to choose from, about a plethora of topics and covering a wide–range of linguistic complexity. A teacher can select a song with lyrics which will stimulate and challenge his or her students, both linguistically and intellectually. As with any text, teachers can formulate a list of comprehension questions which practice a range of reading skills such as skimming for gist, scanning for details, and guessing meaning from context. If the reading component is the focus of the class, the teacher may wish to present students with the reading tasks first, and listen to the song once the reading stage has been completed. The advantage of using songs for reading is that there is a higher probability that students will be more motivated to read song lyrics than other types of texts.

Writing

Writing activities using songs are especially suited to creative tasks towards the end of a class, or for homework. Asking students either individually or in small groups, to write an additional verse to

a song, maintaining the same mood and theme as the rest of the song, is a good example. Students can then share their ideas with the rest of the class. If time allows, students can write a completely new set of lyrics for the whole song. Another writing activity is to have students relate their own experience to the content of the song. For example, after listening to the *Ed Sheeran* song *Castle on the Hill*, about the singer's childhood, students could write a paragraph about a childhood memory of their own. Another idea is to have students write a paragraph from the point of view of the character the song was sung about, or sung to. For example, in *Hot and Cold*, *Katy Perry* complains that her fiancé is unsure whether he should get married. Students could write a paragraph from the point of view of the fiancé, defending his indecision. Lastly, another effective writing task is to have students choose a character from the song lyrics and write a diary entry for that person. The context of a song can provide a diverse range of opportunities for students to practice their writing and thereby personalize some of the language and ideas contained in the lyrics.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the value of songs and music as a teaching resource for foreign language classes. It has also discussed a range of practical uses of songs which teachers can implement in their classrooms. Songs are clearly one of the most effective and motivational resources available to language teachers. The advantages of using songs to teach a foreign language are primarily two-fold. Firstly, in the author's experience, using songs seems to result in a change in students' attitudes. The incorporation of songs can result in higher levels of motivation and engagement, a more relaxed and constructive class atmosphere, and can even improve the teacher-student relationship. Secondly, songs are a rich and versatile resource which can be adapted for use to teach all aspects of a foreign language from vocabulary and grammar, to the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Songs, and an understanding of how to use them in class, should be an integral component of every language teachers' toolbox. For access to song-based lesson plans, worksheets and other downloadable resources developed by the author, you can visit: <http://bobashcroft.com/songs.html>

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