

The Relationship between English Songs and Learning Vocabulary

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Abstract

This article aims to consider the relationship between English songs and learning vocabulary. How can ELT be made enjoyable and effective? One feasible pedagogical application is to integrate English songs into ELT. I aim at examining the effectiveness of using English songs in EFL classes, to improve learning and recalling the new words as a result of making happy classes and high motivated students.

Keywords: Vocabulary, English songs, motivation, learning

1-INTRODUCTION

If you come to class eagerly and enthusiastically and then are struck by sayings like these: “Teacher, we hate English.”; “Teacher, we don’t learn English”. You will feel depressed. However, this is a common problem among Iranian students, studying in public guidance and high schools, where they learn English through only assigned books by the government, which lack any interesting and motivating activities and students learn English passively.

English language teaching (ELT) in Iran has for a quite long time followed the traditional ways of teaching, involving students with uninteresting exercises and then evaluating their accomplishments through exams. It is no surprise that EFL learners view English language learning as an unconquerable obstacle.

In my experience, the language classrooms shouldn’t be a prison where learners sit passively subjected to an “all-knowing” teacher, with emotions of hate, anxiety or fear. If students learn English with a fear at beginnings, this fear will bring nothing to their present state as Lewis .M and Hill. J(1992,P.20) argue: ‘If you feel pressurized, afraid, or tense, even if you perform at that moment, you will probably forget.’ Not stop at that point, the feeling of fear also have greater effect on the students’ later studies it can “destroy students’ interest for the subject and spoil their creativity”(Sensan,b.2001,P.122).On the other hand Light brown, P.M & Spada ,N(1992) show that students never learn everything they are taught, they only learn what they are interested in. And they even prove that students are unlikely to be very successful at learning anything unless they enjoy the processes.

From that point of view, I think that this problem can be solved by finding a way to change students negative feelings to one of interest and enjoyment .Infact ,ELT can be implemented in a relaxed and enjoyable way by using English songs in EFL classes.So, to woo students in my English classes and to add variety to my lessons ,I began to use songs that help me, present language points and add fun and relaxation to my lessons. This has distanced me and English from its negative reputation.

The paper proceeds as follows: In section two, the theories on the relationship between music and language , and researches which concern songs as a supplementary material in EFL classes, are reviewed. Then ,the study of English songs in teaching vocabulary is presented in section 3, following it in section 4, there is discussions on the findings and, section 5, is the conclusion.

2-REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Learning a second or foreign language mainly involves learning the sound system , grammar ,and vocabulary of that language .Vocabulary learning plays a very crucial role in learning another language. Laufer(1997) states that vocabulary learning is at the heart of language learning and language use .Considering the crucial role attributed to vocabulary learning in second or foreign language learning, one can implicitly understand the importance of vocabulary teaching as well. In the past, vocabulary teaching and learning were often given little priority in second language programs, but secondly there has been a renewed interest in the nature of vocabulary and its role in learning and teaching (Richard & Renandya , 2002).

Broadly speaking ,there are three approaches to vocabulary teaching and learning: incidental, or indirect learning (i.e., learning vocabulary as a by product of doing other things such as reading or listening),explicit or direct instruction (i.e.,diagnosing the words learners need to know, presenting such words to the learners and elaborating their own knowledge and independent strategy development (i.e., practicing guessing the meaning of the words from context and training learners to use dictionaries)(Hunt & Beglar 2000, cited in Richards & Renandya ,2002).

There are various techniques and devices for teaching of vocabulary in methodology textbooks. Weatherford (1990) stated that there are a variety of classroom techniques for second language vocabulary learning. The techniques include rote rehearsal; the use of visual aids; rote-playing; vocabulary learning in a specific cultural context; vocabulary learning through art activities; the root-word approach; mnemonic techniques, such as the key word approach; use of the notion of semantic fields to illustrate conceptual relationships between words; two types

of vocabulary learning through music (simple song, and the desuggestopedia method); physical activities, as in Total Physical Response instruction; study of cognates and direct borrowing; study of loan translations; use of soap-opera style drama tapes in the language laboratory; analogies; computer-assisted instruction through drills and games; and synonyms.

One of the interesting techniques, is teaching vocabulary through **music**. The value of songs in motivating students to learn English and enhancing learner involvement is widely acknowledged by ESL practitioners (Reeve & Williamson 1987, Guidice, 1986). Almost any article or book that talks about music in the classroom is sure to mention its high memorability (Hubbard ,etal,1983, Murphy,1992). Murphy notes that songs apparently work over short and long- term memory. “It is a common experience to forget nearly everything we learn in another language except the few songs that we learnt. For a variety of reasons, songs stick in our minds and become part of us, and lend themselves easily to exploitation in the classroom.

According to Murphy(1992),the singing of songs resembles what Piaget described as egocentric language, in which children talk just for the pleasure of hearing themselves repeat, for little concern for an addressee. He speculates :

“It could be that the need for ego-centric language never really leaves us and is fulfilled partly through song. Krashion has suggested that this involuntary repetition may be a manifestation of Chomsky’s ‘language acquisition device’ Songs may strongly activate the repetition mechanism of the language acquisition device. It certainly seems to do so with the children ,who learn songs almost effortlessly(Murphy,1992).As Stern(1983) states “Language teaching can be defined as the activities which are intended to bring about language learning” (P.21).Hence whatever theory of language teaching should starts from the learning process or the learner’s perspective. “the concept of learning ,as it is understood today, has been greatly influenced by the psychological study of the learning process....”(ibid,P.18).

How can English songs facilitate English language learning :

1- Psychological implications

Here, the effectiveness of integrating English songs in the ELT is demonstrated from the theory of human brain, which is the head quarter of language processing :

The theory of Multiple Intelligence (MI),proposed and elaborated by Gardner(1993),points out that there are a number of distinct types of intelligence possessed by each individual in variety degrees .In accordance with MI human intelligence is categorized in to at least nine primary types: verbal/linguistic intelligence, mathematical/logical intelligence, Visual/special intelligence, body/ kinesthetic intelligence, musical/rhythmic intelligence, interpersonal intelligence naturalistic intelligence and existential intelligence ,all of which are not isolated and irrelevant ,but interdependent on and complementary with each other. There fore it is inappropriate to explore only one type of intelligence in EFL learning. All contribute to developing and complementing a learner’s linguistic competence and enhance his ability of learning a foreign language. Listening to English songs is of great value to tap the learner’s linguistic potentials through enchanting melodies varying rhythms which appeal to multidimensional development of human intelligence.

Research on psycholinguistic reveals that songs can activate language acquisition and learning in both hemispheres of the human brain(Carrol,2000;Larsen Freeman and Long,2000,Williams and Burden,1997).Songs enter the human brain –from the left ear to right hemisphere- in a rather different way from our speech (right hemisphere, is keener to nonverbal sound such as melodies and emotional colors of the message), and thus can stimulate language learning in the right hemisphere, whose involvement in language processing become more active in eliciting the overall meaning and processing of formulaic speech(Ellis,1985). “formulaic speech consists of expressions which are learned as unanalyzable wholes and employed on particular occasions”(Lyons,1968,P.177).

The cognitive processing of music and language may also increase language acquisition. Memory is an important aspect of language learning, and many studies have linked musical support with improved memorization. In his book, *Introduction to the Musical Brain* ,Campbell(1992) notes that the more connections that can be made in the brain, the more integrated an experience becomes with in memory .Combining music with language creates many connections, as language is primarily processed in the brain’s left hemisphere and music in its right hemisphere.

However, connection between *music* and *language* have long been of interest to scholars across academic fields(Bjorkvold,1990;Borchgrevink,1982 ;and pribram,1982),and TESOL(Teaching English To Speakers of Other languages) professionals have long made use of music in their classrooms(Richard-Amato,2003;Lems,2002;and Guiglielmino,1986).There are researches that regard structural parallels between music and language ,ways in which music impacts the affective state, and the cognitive processing of music and language. There are structural parallels between music and language, and these can influence the ways in which music is best utilized in a language classroom. Jackendoff and Lerdahl(1982) were two of the earlier theorists regarding general structural parallels, as they compared the syntax and prosody of music and language. Slobada continued to examine this subject, drawing comparisons between the phonology, syntax, and semantics of music

and language. Sloboda noticed that both music and language consists of phonological building blocks, or small, individual sounds. In a language, these sounds are phonemes; in music, they are notes. In either situation the syntactic orders and structures these sounds, creating recognizable and meaningful patterns of sound.

2- Stimulation of affective learning by songs

Psychologically, learners affective states can influence their language learning, and music has been shown to have positive effects in this area. In 1982, “Dulay et al. suggested that the use of filter depends upon affective factors such as the learner’s motivation, attitude and emotions” (Ellis, 1985, p.297). And later Krashen developed the Affective Filter Hypothesis based on Dulay’s point of view. Krashen (1985) argued that affective learning will occur when the affective filter is weak. When the learner is in such an affective state as highly motivated, self-confident and at ease, the filter will be weak and allowing plenty of input, which means a positive attitude toward learning and the optimum state of language learning are present.

On the contrary, the filter will become stronger when the learner is haunted with low motivation, lack of self-confidence and high anxiety. Anxiety, associated with negative feelings, such as upset, tension, frustration, self-doubt and fear, would impede language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In that case, the learner is not ready for language acquisition or learning. The Affective Filter Hypothesis suggests that an ideal teacher should be capable of providing a classroom atmosphere conducive to motivating, encouraging his students and lessening their anxiety if there’s any; and Richard-Amato (2003) defines the affective state as a learner’s attitudes, motivation, anxiety levels, acculturation, personality and feelings of community. Lowering the affective filter, or the emotional and motivational blocks to language learning, is commonly accepted as an important aspect of language instruction. Even shy students participate in music activities. Using music gives students opportunities to become active creators of their own learning processes (Blair 1982). Music seems to be very beneficial in this area, as it can increase joy and confidence while lowering anxiety.

Affective learning is also effective learning. In the light of psycholinguistics affective engagement with language can “stimulate a fuller use of the resources of brain”, rekindle “neural paths between areas of brain” and deepen the multidimensional processing of language (Bolitho et al., 2003, p.256). So high motivation is the result of low affective filter and interest in learning and “life would be marvelous for teachers if all students wanted to learn” (Biggs 1995, p.83).

3 -Arousal of motivation by English songs

The importance of motivation in second language teaching and learning has been discussed for many years; teachers and researchers believe that motivation plays an important part in the process of acquiring an additional language because motivated students are usually those who participate actively in class, express interest in the subject-matter, and study a great deal. Motivation is a vital element in affective learning. Williams and Burden (1997, p.129) deciphered motivation as “a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which lead to a conscious decision to act, and which give rise to a period of sustained intellectual and /or physical effort in order to attain a previously set goal or goals. But since motivation is something very personal, it is not easy to develop. However, “If we can make our classrooms places where students enjoy coming because the atmosphere is supportive and non-threatening, we can make a positive contribution to students’ motivation to learn” (Light brown, P.M & Spada, N., 1999).

For this sake, songs seem to do very well. Songs have a great tendency to attract the attention of students that other forms of the mass media lack. According to Subramaniyan A. Nambiar (1985), “Even the person who is totally tone deaf may at times considers himself a good singer and a person who cannot understand the words of a song can still appreciate the song itself”. Songs, especially current pop songs exert a great influence over the young generation from which our students come. Secondly, students are often willing to learn to sing a song in a foreign language even if they do not fully understand or partially understand the meaning of the words. This allows them a chance to relax from the pressure of the study. By that way, songs blow a new fresh air into the serious and tedious routine of the class, they introduce an atmosphere of gaiety, fun and informality in the classroom which is far more conducive environment for language learning than a strictly regimented atmosphere. Lo and Li (1998) states that songs provide a break from classroom routine, and that learning English through songs develops a non-threatening classroom atmosphere in which the four language skills can be enhanced.

Moreover, while many students find it difficult and stressful to learn a new language, songs can help wash away these feelings. According to McDonald (1984), the use of the songs in English classroom allows the students to “hide behind the music” and then “avoids the heat of an early spotlight landing on a timid students.” By that way, “It also wraps the students’ perceptions of how difficult it is to use the new language. The result is a loss of certain inhibitions, a new respect for one’s own voice and the learning of whatever vocabulary, grammar, ...the song has to offer” (McDonald, 1984, p.35) In addition to that, when songs are played, the group spirit is really fostered, which is a great help to students in their practice of the language skill. And because the students can carry the song beyond classroom doors and sing for their family and friends. This, in turn, tends to reinforce the students’ interest in learning English. In short, speaking like Finocchiaro (1973, p.174) by using songs “language learning can be combined with recreation or aesthetic appreciation for a change of pace in the classroom to enhance

motivation”.

The actual use of music to enhance language acquisition was pioneered in the 1970s by Bulgarian psychotherapist Georgi Lozanov. Lozanov developed Suggestopedia, which involves the use of background baroque music to holistically enhance language acquisition. Quest (1999) found that music positively affects language acquisition even when implemented in passive fashion, students in Quest’s study exhibited more positive attitudes and less fatigue when music was played in the background. In addition, students who memorized word lists while background music was playing performed significantly better on recall tasks. The study by Bonnel et al (2001) demonstrates that music and language are processed independently in the brain. This implies that focusing on both music and language simultaneously should not interfere with the memory of either. That is, using music while teaching students language will not distract them or inhibit their acquisition of linguistic forms.

However, many language teachers prefer to involve students with music actively. In Fisher’s (2001) study students in musical classrooms seemed more excited about learning English than did students in the non-music classrooms. The study by Bonnel et al. (2001) demonstrated that music will increase language acquisition on cognitive levels, especially with regards to memory. As so, Wallece’s (1994) earlier findings support the idea that music can aid memory. Walleck found that when text is set to music, recall of that text is significantly higher than when the text is spoken.

Research across disciplines supports the notion that music assists language acquisition. Using music in language classrooms can assist students with language acquisition and contribute to a more positive classroom environment. Teachers and students alike find singing songs entertaining and relaxing. Songs offer a change from the routine procedures in the classroom. They are invaluable tools to develop students’ language abilities in listening, speaking, reading and writing and can be used to teach a variety of language items such as sentence patterns, vocabulary, pronunciation, rhythm, adjectives, adverbs and so on. As, Nseendic (1984) believes that activities and exercises should consider student’s interest, and one interesting activity is learning English through songs that provides a non-threatening atmosphere for students, who usually have great tension when speaking English in a formal classroom setting.

When coming across an impressive song, most learners are eager to take a further step—to understand what the singers are expressing and to sing it by themselves. With such a motivation, learners will feel surprised they can remember all the words that appear in the lyrics, even difficult ones. According to these facts, it is ideal to make the best use of this opportunity and use English songs as an effective, complementary material in EFL classes.

3-STUDY OF USING SONGS AS A SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL IN TEACHING VOCABULARY TO THE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS IN IRANIAN PUBLIC GUIDANCE SCHOOL.

Hypothesis:

This study was designed to test the following hypothesis:

Songs can be used to enhance student’s ability to learn vocabulary.

Null hypothesis that “ songs do not enhance students’ motivation in learning new words in English”.

Scope of the study:

In this study, it is intended to deal with the question of how to motivate students through English songs. They included songs with soft music with quite easy words and simple content. These songs were experimented for the period of one term (15 weeks), they were used at the end of the lesson not at the beginning as warmers. The chosen population contained forty students from two classes at the same level. The aimed teaching purpose was motivating students in learning new words through English songs. The study means studying the efficiency of using songs as a supplementary teaching material.

Subject Profile:

The research was carried out in Reihanatonabi guidance school and Marefat guidance school, these two schools are located in two different parts of a far away region. With the participation of 30 first year students. They all were in the first term and from two different classes. It was the first year that they encountered English, and they didn’t know, even an English word. The English material for the Iranian students in public schools is only a book which in addition to its many pedagogic problems, it suffers from lack of interesting materials. Students who for the first time have this new subject in their curriculum, will lose their motivation to learn English, after a not long time. This state results in their lose marks or even failure in English exams. That was the reason why I would like to conduct this research of using songs as a type of supplementary material in teaching new words in order to erase their prejudice against learning English and help improve this bad state among the students.

Procedures and method of data collection.

The study was done in 2 steps:

Step 1: I (the teacher) taught 2 classes of 15 homogenous students (that is; not knowing even an English word) for three months, about 15 weeks and classes were once a week for one and half an hour. In one class-students in Reihanatonabi guidance school- the new words were presented through songs as supplementary material (class A),

whereas the other class- students Marefat guidance school - had lessons from the student's book only (classB).

Step2: Then a same oral test was taken from both classes as a means to measure the effect of using songs in teaching new words .The test had 10 pictorial items, and the exam was hold orally, with careful administration for reliability of the test; I pointed to a picture from the presented test paper ,and students should name the specified picture, after listening to the teacher and recognizing it.

The use of the songs in the lessons.

In this study, students were commonly taught the songs in about twenty five to twenty minutes at the end of each lesson via three steps as follows:

At the first step, students listen to the song only, then the teacher sang the song one or two times and students only listen , again. Then she writes the song on the board and underlines, pronounce and translate the words. When students became familiar with the new words, they follow the teacher and work on the pronunciation and meaning of the new words several times.

Secondly, teacher sang the song and again students listen carefully, but this time they track the lines of words on the board, now they know the new words and the their meanings , they follow the teacher in singing the songs.

Finally, all the class sang the song altogether beautifully and the teacher corrects them if there is a problem in pronunciation. At the end of this phase the teacher ask the meaning and pronunciation of new words, again to make sure every thing is clear.

The new songs will be practiced every session at the end of the each class and when they mastered the song , a new song will be presented.

Data analysis and discussion.

The aim of the test was to answer the question what progress the songs help students to make in learning new words.

After the tests were done,the test score were analyzed in terms of **Frequency distribution** to find out the range of marks each class reach and **measures of central tendency** to clarify the progress tendency of each class.

At the end of the term: post- test

Frequency distribution

Class A			Class B		
Score	Number of testeess	%	Score	Number of testeess	%
1	0	0	1	0	0
2	0	0	2	0	0
3	2	6.7	3	3	10
4	2	6.7	4	3	10
5	4	13.3	5	4	13.3
6	7	13.3	6	8	26.7
7	9	30	7	7	23.3
8	3	10	8	3	10
9	3	10	9	2	6.7
10	0	0	10	0	0

The Mode: 7

The Mode:6

The Median: 6

The Median:6

Looking through the data, it can be seen that class B is inferior to class A, it can be drawn out that class A seems to overtake class B on the way to improve their learning of new words.

- correlation:

	N	Mean	Std.deviation
Class A	30	6.3667	1.62912
Class B	30	5.3000	1.23596

The comparison of the mean reconfirms that class A left the class B behind in the progress of learning new words. This difference in the mean scores of the two classes show very clearly that after a term of using songs in teaching new words students' number of learned words is improved significantly.

4-DISCUSSIONS OF THE FINDINGS

From the analysis of the data we can see statistics significance between two means, in other words the experimental group scored better than the control group. This rejects the null hypothesis that "songs do not enhance students' motivation in learning new words in English". And the hypothesis that "songs can be used to enhance student's

motivations in learning new words in English” is accepted. Below are some explanations for this statement.

Firstly, a large number of students in class like listening to English songs. People when doing what they like, often do it whole-heartedly. This fact makes songs a magic motivator for students to learn the skill and their results in their positive activities in the lesson. Actually most of them try to get involved in the songs.

Secondly, it is undeniable that songs bring about a lot of benefits. Usually songs are considered a wonderful outlet for students when they feel tired and bored with the heavy and schedule of lessons tedious every day, with a song used at the beginning or at the end of lessons, an exciting learning environment is recreated, students, therefore regain their interest in learning.

Last, the tapes and record of music are not of exception. So there are no reasons for not making advantage of such a useful and potential source of teaching material.

Challenges

Everything has two sides; the good and the bad points. It is case with English songs. Through data analysis above, it is possible to realize that song yield a lot of good points to learners. However some difficulties go along with them.

The first one comes from the song itself. The song with its music is sometimes so appealing to some poor students that they become passive and follow the song for fun only. Moreover, the assimilation happenings commonly in the songs, make it difficult to follow and cause a doubt of pronunciation among students. These issues are really challenging to the teacher if he/she wants to exploit this wonderful source as a type of teaching material. It requires a lot of experience, patience and belief from the teacher.

Secondly, it is very crucial to select appropriate song for our students. The song should be suitable in length in order to prevent students from the feeling of overwhelmed. Choosing a suitable song is a big concern.

CONCLUSION

Through this paper, I would like to make a strong statement that English songs play a magical role in teaching new vocabulary, and they should be used as a type of supplementary materials in teaching. Active vocabulary learning is an activity that is seldom paid any attention in most language classrooms. It is here that songs can be of great help. Numerous words that deal with a particular theme or emotion appear in a song. In some songs particular grammatical features occur with great frequency. Such songs, therefore, can be used as a form of reinforcement for the particular structural item.

In conclusion, songs provide an enjoyable way to introduce or review vocabulary, teach pronunciation, present structures and sentence patterns in a novel way, “it’s an innovative and efficient method to use English songs to improve students’ listening and speaking also” (Lynch, L.M. 1993, P.23).

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