topic : Using Songs as a Tool   on Listening and Culture in EFL Classes

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Abstract

This paper aims at manifesting the using of songs as a tool in English language learning. most of the research to date has not really considered songs as a veritable and versatile tool in English language learning. in this paper, the concern will be on how songs facilitate the learning of English language in the twenty first century. The teaching methodology of songs activities are mentioned or described in this text. music is also used as an integral part of song in the classroom. From this backdrop, focus is based on some skills and sub skills are developed in this paper as a manifestation of song as a galvanising tool in English language learning.it was noticed that songs act as a pedagogic innovation in the teaching of English language and hence, enhances the easy understanding of English as a secong language acquisition.

keywords: song, foreign language teaching, skills, music, song activities.

Introduction

Song is a multisemiotic form of discoure, consisting minimally of an interaction of words plus music, so the study of either in isolation will not be doing justice to either of them.

today, music is a common denominator of our lives. Everywhere we go we encounter songs in all forms; either while driving our cars, listening to radios at home or music at the background of films we watch regularly. we are often exposed to music unconsciously rom our neighbor's home, when shopping in a supermarket, or when travelling either in a public bus or in our provide cars.

English is the most used language in the world today, especially in the world of business; as grunert posits: "" taking a cultural close-up, on can easily reconstruct that we are constantly bombarded with the English language in a very broad variety of musical ways, shapes and forms. to the author, this combination of English and music in (especially contemporary) songs is particularly promising for the effective acquisition

of that language since it assists to familiarize students with the target language via contacts to their own world.""(2009: 9).

the digital revolution has also a big impact on the spread of music all over the world. according to an article from the journal the psychologist, the digital revolution ""cause the fact that music is being more integrated in our everyday lives. the situation about listening to music has fundamentally changed since the early 1990s''.

from the anthropological point of view, it is believed that language originated in song and that song preceded speech. f.b. Livingstone tries to prove this theory by saying : "although it is often stated that man is the only primate that can talk, it is rarely noted that he is also the only one that can sing. since singing is a simpler system than speech, with only pitch as a distinguishing feature, i suggest that he could sing long before he could talk and that singing was in fact a prerequisite to speech and hence language. (Livingstone 1973, cited by serpentfd.org)

Definition of Music

in Encyclopedia Britannica, the word music, in Greek mousike, is derived from the so called muses. in Greek mythology the muses were goddesses considered to be a source of inspiration mostly for artists and poets. here, the inspiration plays a key role in defining music. and it is not only the issue of the past. music still entails some kind of inspiration, and not only to artists poets, but for every one of us.

in terms of Halliday's typology of functions (1976) song shows a marked shift away from ideational function, towards the interpersonal and textual functions. this is what gives the meanings carried by tune the abstract quality that makes them so difficult to talk about, and has lead so many people to equate music with structures of feelings, (e.g. "music can reveal the nature of feelings with a detail and truth that language cannot approach": langer 1948).

griffee tries to define the notion of song by comparing the terms of a song, speech, and poetry, claiming that all of them have something in common. he states that song and speech are similar because they are both "vocally produced, are linguistically meaningful and have melody". (1992:3)

when Griffee (1992) compares song and poetry, he explains that these are similar in a way that both are composed of words carrying meaning, both can be musicalized, and people can listen to them at occasions such as reading poetry or going to a concert.

Johnny cash, an American singer and songwriter, wrote a song called "get rhythm" and released it on the "b" side of his great single "i walk the line" back in 1956. this song celebrates rhythm as a great tool to overcome depression and life difficulties in general. a song excerpt:

"get rhythm when you get the blues

come on, get rhythm when you get the blues

a jumpy rhythm makes you feel so fine

it'll shake all the trouble from your worried mind

get rhythm when you get the blues"

why is rhythm so powerful? after all is but a part of a song which consists of tune, melody, intervals, and lyrics. even though oxford dictionary defines rhythm as "a strong, regular repeated pattern of sound or movement". (2009:798), it is something we cannot see, touch or smell. yet without rhythm our chanting and singing would just be screaming in the air. suppes adds "one of the main features of rhythm, in the many different contexts, is some central but only approximate notion of periodicity."(2009:161) he also mentions that rhythm comes naturally from our bodies and breathing and heartbeats are considered to be the source of the rhythm. rhythm is evident in our everyday activities like walking or running and not only for humans, but also for animals(2009).

victor hugo writes: "music expresses that which cannot be said(put into words) and that which cannot be suppressed"(91). music and language, as a matter of fact, are distinct in this that they are mainly responsible respectively for the communication of emotive and referential meanings. this accounts for the widespread belief that music begins where words ends.

speaking in english goes through different stages in which speakers build and share meaning with others. these stages involve the use of oral articulation and body languages determined by various contexts (chaney,1998).speaking as a discourse, according to huebner (1960), is a skill which can be used in classrooms or outside. learners can acquire this skill by much practice and repetitions. it is also a skill that human beings need for interacting and surviving with others. for this reason, speaking should be given much attention in the teaching and learning process(Rohmawati, 2009).

Theoretical framework

The theoretical support of this paper is based on the elements: listening, songs as authentic material and the link between songs and culture.

Listening, definition and difficulties

Oxford dictionary -1993,p 206, listening is a complex problem solving skill and it is more than just perception of the sounds. It includes comprehension of meaning words, phrases, clauses, sentences, and conditional discourses. Saricoban 1999,posits that listening is one of the fundamental language skills not to be neglected. It is used as a bridge by which learners of English language acquire a chuck of their information, understanding of the world.

Rivers on his part 1978 says listening is a creative skill. The music of the sound from listening raw material we derive meaning. According to him, listening encapsulates attention, comprehension and appreciation. This activity of listening integrates language skills such as fluency, intonation and stress patterns.

Also, Underwood 1990 did not hesitate to bring forth some challenges as far as listening activities are concerned, especially of the learners in question. One of the key problem is that instructors expect the learners to establish a listening pattern where they have to understand everything spoken by the teachers who probably have on their part speaking difficulties like slow speaking and intonation. Consequently, the students end up listening and lost the thread, which may leads to panic and failure we notice during listening exercise. Motivation is another problem mentioned by Brown 2006. Because listening is so challenging, teachers need good methods and techniques that will attract the students by conceiving content friendly tasks. Thus, the students will be motivated and not frightened whenever they face a listening activity.

Songs as authentic material:

For a paper such as this one, students of the songs of their own culture have not normally been forced to articulate the codes that they deploy in interpreting them. Songs is, of course, an oral form. It is normally distinguished from everyday speech, however, by a degree and type of vocal resonance, whether open (" melodious") or constrained ("harsh"). Along, with resonance, there is typically a significant type of pitch pattern. This may differ from speech by having more variation ("tune") or less variation, as in monotone chants. Songs frequently has a marked form of stress patterning ("rhythm") which may be reinforced by actions (e.g. drum beats, etc.).

Ross (2006) posits that the example of authentic listening materials is listening to song to learn more about well known bands that sing in English. It is a truism that songs are integral part of us in all aspect of our life. So, we can simultaneously listen to songs and at the same time have interest in English learning. It is therefore incumbent on teachers when designing lessons and didactic materials to take into cognizance these aspects of songs. The use of song stimulates and motivates the learners to comprehend the content of the materails.

Orlova (2003) states that it is possible to suggest that among the methodological purposes with songs used in class, it is possible to rank the following: practicing the rhythm, stress and the intonation patterns of the English language. Teaching vocabulary and grammar. Developing listening comprehension, writing skills, and speaking. For this purpose, songs and mainly their lyrics are employed as a stimulus for class interaction.

The use of song procedure in the classroom

Songs are used in the classroom in various ways; the age of the learners, the level of their students and their motivation. Even the activity itself and the song in question have a preponderant role on the procedure. The teacher on her part has to be creative and innovative in dishing out the activities.

Brown (2006) posits that procedure of any listening activity can be done by prior knowledge, the objective of the lesson should be taken into consideration. He went further by adding the following elements:

Activating prior knowledge

This is organized in schemata: abstract, generalized mental representations of our experience that are available to help us understand new experiences. This is the area the cognitive aspect of knowledge comes in. this is a method whereby information gather is process both through top-down and bottom-up. Here, top-down means using our prior knowledge and experiences. Bottom-up processing means using the information people have about sounds, words meanings, and discourse markers like *first*, *then* and *after that* to assemble their understanding of what they read or hear one step at a time.

While- listening

Setting an objective of a listening activity helps the learner listen more effectively. For example, when listening to a weather report, if our purpose is to decide whether to wear a coat, we want to focus on the temperature. In the listening activities, teachers should explain to the learners the rationale of the activity. Hence, students will develop a sense and purpose of why they are carrying out the task and think of a listening activity, they have the tendency of students recoding and doing task. They overhear other people talk and then react to that conversation. Brown (2006) states that this sort of task is important because it allows teachers to isolate students' responses and thereby gauge the progress the students. A post-listening activity may relate to a pre-listening activity, such as predicting; may expand on the topic or language of the existing text; or may transfer what has been learned to the four language skills: reading, speaking and writing.

The link between songs and culture.

Communicative competence involves sociolinguistic, strategic, strategic, sociocultural, as well as linguistic competence (Van EK, 1986). We know that competence in speaking with native speakers is far more than a question of knowing grammatical aspects and lexis. Broadly speaking, we can say that language teaching has been influenced by internal factors above all in search for techniques and methods of teaching the linguistic competence according to Chomsky, and by Hyams by external factors as far as the cultural aspects or cultural awareness is concerned.

Byram and Risager (1990) refer to cultural dimension, three related aspects of foreign language teaching and learning are considered. The first aspect is, there is the dimension of communicative competence which enable a foreign speaker of a language to understand the ways in which a language to understand the ways in which a language in a specific sociocultural settings and can refer to the cultural knowledge and pre-suppositions of specific groups of native speakers. Secondly, there is the ability of a foreign speaker to reflect upon his or her own culture, how it appears to outsiders, and how a relationship can be established between it and cultures of the others in order to facilitate communication, despite different cultural perspectives. Thirdly, there is the ability of the teacher of foreign languages to mediate between learners' culture and

others, to help students to acquire their own capacity for mediation, and to stimulate learners in other cultures in general, irrespective of the link with a specific language.

A systematic use of songs to initiate discussions of culture enables EFL teachers to avoid the historical divide in most departments between language and cultural studies, what Hiram H. Maxim (2000) calls "the various curricular dichotomies that characterize our discipline: language versus content, (…) form versus meaning , (…) cultural fact versus cultural inquiry'' (p.12). as song-based approach relies on authentic texts as the underlying linguistic linchpin to connect language acquisition to cultural literacy and thereby addresses concerns raised recently about how to develop a practical classroom pedagogy that leads students to more knowledge about the target language while pursuing a cultural studies agenda. Teachers, therefore, might want to elaborate on songs with a particular sociopolitical context or literary history that lie within a specific musical genre closely associated with their language of instruction.

Research design

The research study that was carried out in the classroom was action based. It means a research which is conducted in a classroom to increase the quality of learning practices. According to Burns (1999), the main focus of action research is on concrete and practical issues of immediate concern to particular social groups or communities. It is conducted in naturally occurring settings, primarily using methods and techniques common to qualitative research such as observing and recoding events and behavior. It can also be defined as an action that is done to solve an identified problem in the classroom.

Research Question

The main research question that guides the paper was: How can English songs be used as a tool to foster listening skill as well as to engage students in cultural knowledge?

Setting and participants

This project was carried out at a university of Yaounde 1,in Cameroon. The first semester of the academic 2023 was the timeframe when the project was administer to English language learner of EFL classroom in the faculty of education and faculty of arts and social sciences of the same university. The sample groups range from 5 TO 15 due to the students population and the timetable of the English department.The total population was made up of 100 participant. All the students need to take 4 English level during their program. 6 hours a week are programed by each level. Hence, as the semester lasts 12 TO 14 weeks according to UNESCO prescription, a total of 45 hours are used by each level.

Instruments and procedures for data collection

Information was gotten through questionnaire of students and classroom observation. Questionnaire was to find out students' motivation and their background of listening. Also, an observation was made of students' performance during the lessons.

Pedagogical design

A listening activity was used coming from the textbook that was prescribed to be used in the university to have a starting point for the process. In the task, students reviewed the topics which they had studied last level. Then a new test was designed and administered in 6 lesson plans, taking into account Van Duzer's bottom-up and top-down processing when listening as well as Brown's procedure of any listening task (pre-listening , post-listening). Each lesson plan had a workshop based on a song. Each song was presented its corresponding video clip. Although some common parameters were added to each one of the lesson plans designed. Much attention was focused on Dumitrescu (2000) who presents a concise and precise explanation for the type of material to be chosen. Different types of musical genres were chosen to make the activity recreational and provide the students with different inputs. The speed of the song was not considered because the students were to face authentic material. The songs were taken from the textbooks. Language topics were based on cultural levels of the Cameroon (use the *present simple* and *present continuous*), and (*will* for predictions) and (phrasal verbs), for family relationships; (use of *simple past*) and (the use of slang).

All the workshops had a cleared objectives which divided into four main sections (warming up, presentation, practice, and production) in order to make students feel it was a learning experience and not a listening task. At the end of the process, a final listening test including the new topics worked along this semester. The result of the final test with the results of the initial test to analyze to what extent the students developed their listening comprehension after working with the 6 workshops.

Data analysis

A triangulation technique was used in order to find a possible answer of the research question. This was based on the fact that it is used when two or more methods are employed for the data collection process. The categories that emerged in the data analysis were:

Categories and subcategories

1.Songs as a vehicle for motivating and training students when working in a listening practices

Students' attitudes and reflections towards the listening activities based on songs:

From reading the data provide from the class observations and questionnaire, it was noticed that the attitudes the students had when working in the workshops was really positive for the development of the lessons. It was again perceived that the perceptions students hand on the kind of music listened to and the video clips worked determined their performance in the class. When applying the workshops in the action, the students seemed more enthusiastic towards the listening activity.

The extent students had of understanding the songs:

From the analysis above, one comes to notice that the acquisition of the song' activity for EFL learners was not an easy task. But with some extra practice, progressively, learners start to identify some intonations and

stress patterns of the song. They equally practice speaking some of these pronunciation patterns in their daily speech.

practicing pronunciation and natural reductions that occur in spoken English:

Practicing listening with songs gives students experience and tools to understand more details during any speech. The ears become alert and comprehension becomes easier for them. Reduction and rhythmic become synchronize when speaking.

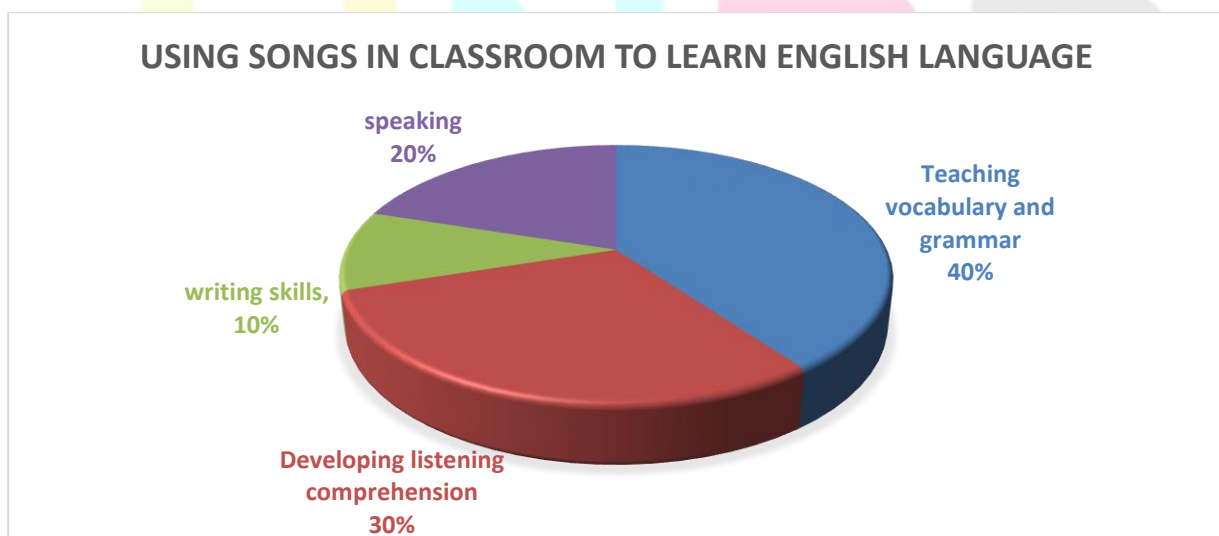*Cultural themes involved in songs*

Students' reflections on the social context around them

When students reflect on social and cultural matters, language learning becomes contextualize because students are familiar with their environment, so they can perceive and understand the importance of learning a foreign language. Culture, language, and communication are intertwined. Students identify problems in the society they are immersed on and need to propose solutions for those problems. They become active participants in the society in which they live in.

Using songs to compare cultural differences:

Henceforth, a song in an EFL classroom can be exploited in many ways depending on the learning rationale and on the systematic lesson planning teachers do. If songs are used only for creating a relaxing atmosphere or just for fun, students are going to waste not only many enriching issues that can be worked, but also different details of content or characteristic of language that can be studied to understand differences between English-speaking countries.

Using Songs in Classroom to learn English Language

USING SONGS IN CLASSROOM TO LEARN ENGLISH LANGUAGE

speaking 20%
writing skills, 10%
Developing listening comprehension 30%
Teaching vocabulary and grammar 40%

Source: Fieldwork, 2023

Conclusion

This finding makes it reasonable to suggest that the social relationships involved in the production and reception of song normally signify relations in society as a whole. Songs are therefore the most suitable type of authentic material to develop listening comprehension. This is because students feel motivated when working with this kind of material; furthermore, learners' ages and social contexts really fit with the kind of music we select to work in class.

Songs are very powerful tool which motivate students to come to school and pay attention class. Songs are byproduct of culture, and as such, share common values like customs and tradition, and even specific characteristic of spoken language. Through songs students become familiar with the pronunciation and expressions in the context. Songs in general use simple conversational language with a lot of repetition. They can strongly activate the repetition mechanism of the language acquisition, which is just what many teachers look for in sample texts.

Based on the methodology of lesson plan, it is important to state here that a degree of development has been proven right. During the process of the last lesson plans, it is worth mentioning here that, learners were not misunderstanding what the song said. Besides, students' retention spans has drastically improved. Learners feel completely immersed in a continuous listening activity which provides them with enough self esteem to any such language drill.

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