

TEACHING ENGLISH THROUGH SONGS

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4.1. Pedagogical reference about songs

Considering the fact that songs, like games, are believed to be very effective and motivating techniques to teach and learn English for the young learners, I will refer, in this subchapter, to the role that songs play in the development of young children learning a second language.

According to Martin (2000),” songs, rhymes, storytelling, role-plays and games allow children to be able to memorize and reproduce chunks of language in games, texts in songs and they should be encouraged to do so. Thus this subchapter deals with the fact that songs are definitely considered valuable pedagogical tools. Songs can help learners not only improve their listening skills and pronunciation, but also they can be very useful in the teaching vocabulary and sentence structure.

“Songs can help young learners improve their listening skills and pronunciation, therefore potentially helping them to improve their speaking skills. Songs can also be useful tools in the learning of vocabulary, sentence structure, and sentence patterns, not to mention their reflectivity of mother tongue culture” (Murphey, 1992). Thus, another relevant aspect related to songs that I will briefly refer to, is the way in which songs can reflect culture and at the same time increase students’ pleasure in learning a second language, and also how songs can be used as language tasks.

As Saricoban and Metin (2000) stated, “songs are one of the most enhancing and culturally rich resources that can easily be used in EFL classrooms.

Also Shen overemphasizes the fact that “language and music are interwoven in songs to communicate cultural reality in a very unique way” (2009: 88).

All in all, from this point of view, through songs, young learners can be given the opportunity to learn about seasonal or historical events in the target language.

Moreover, the element of fun is not to be overlooked by teachers, as pleasure for its own sake is an essential part of learning a language, and songs can add interest to the

classroom routine, and may improve student motivation. Thus, enjoyment is probably the most obvious advantage that song have during the English lessons. The majority of children enjoy singing and they usually respond well to using songs in the classroom.

Furthermore, according to Lo and Li (1998), “songs offer a break from classroom routine and the use of songs to learn English develops a non-threatening atmosphere in which the four skills can be improved.” Thus, songs, in particular choral singing, can ensure a more relaxed and informal environment, by reducing anxiety at the same time. So mention should be made that pupils think of songs as entertainment rather than study, therefore, they manage to learn English in a very enjoyable and fun way through songs.

Songs can also bring variety to the everyday classroom routine, which can increase student interest in learning the English language, by reaching higher levels of achievement.

Over the last decade researchers have noticed that the majority of the syllabuses deals with the communicative use of the English language, and that songs are included as essential tools to teach to young learners. So, one of the many advantages that songs have as teaching technique use in the young learner classroom is their flexibility. Moreover, songs can be used for a number of aims and their pedagogical value has been emphasized on in many research papers.

Rumley (1999) believed that “songs help children to learn since they provide a safe and non- threatening context which enables the pupils to play with the language.

According to Schoepp (2001) there are “three patterns coming out of the literature as to why teachers and researchers stand up for the use of songs in the EFL classroom. There are affective, cognitive, and linguistic reasons.

As for the affective reason, using songs with young learners may enhance a positive atmosphere which may lower the affective filter, which finally can lead to language acquisition.

Secondly, related to the cognitive reasons, songs may create opportunities for developing automaticity – the main cognitive reason for using songs during the English classes. Gatbonton (1988:473) defined automaticity as “ a component of language fluency which involves both knowing what to say and producing language rapidly without pauses”.

Last, but not least, there is the linguistic reason for using songs in the classroom, which emphasizes the idea that songs can offer a good variety of language samples while preparing pupils for the genuine language they will face.

Regardless the number of advantages that songs have as valuable teaching tools, there are though some limitations that should be mentioned as well. First off, the teacher's role in selecting a suitable song for his or her class can be crucial., as Richards (1969:163) stated "the language, vocabulary, and sentence structure of some songs can be quite different from that used in spoken English."

Moreover, the teacher can face other difficulties when using songs as pedagogical tools when teaching English to young learners. He shouldn't repeat the same song over and over again, because this way learners' interest in the song can easily fade provided that the song is used too often, although young learners are always happy to sing.

Secondly, another difficulty in using songs during English classes, is faced by some non-native English-speaking teachers concerning the teaching of stress and timing of the songs correctly, so they should choose only songs they are comfortable with.

And finally, as Murphey (1992) overemphasizes, "no matter how enjoyable or memorable, singing songs in itself will not teach anyone to use the language, and will not give students the ability to communicate in another language. The words in songs unfortunately do not transfer into use." Thus it takes a lot more than just playing the song. Therefore, songs should be used by teachers with a certain learning purpose and not only as activities that provide fun and entertainment. They should have a clear reason as to why and how to use them, integrating them in a scheme of work according to the cognitive and linguistic needs of the young learners.

4.2. The importance of using games while improving the listening and the speaking skills

This subchapter deals with the essential role, that songs play in the developing and improving listening and speaking skills, when used as tools to teach English to young learners, besides the fact that songs can also be used during the English classes, to present or to practice grammar and vocabulary.

When it comes to developing young learners listening skills, songs play a very important role.

According to Philips (1993), “listening skills are notably important in the Primary foreign language classroom, since they provide the pupils with a rich source of language data which enables them to build up their own ideas of the use of the English language. This knowledge of the language helps the children to begin to produce language themselves.” Thus, English teachers should actively engage their pupils in listening tasks and activities, aiming at improving them. So the aim of the active listening is to make sense of the speech, while focusing on the meaning rather than the language.

Willis (1981:134) states that there are some micro-skills, called enabling skills of listening, which enhance the learning process of the English language. Some of these skills are “to predict what people are going to talk about; to guess unknown words or phrases without panic; to use one’s own knowledge of the subject to help one understand; to identify relevant point and to reject irrelevant information; to retain relevant point; to recognize discourse markers; to recognize cohesive devices; to understand different intonation patterns and uses of stress; to understand inferred information.”

Considering that the listening skill is part of the initial stage of the language acquisition and the language learning, teachers should make sure that they provide their pupils the necessary strategies and techniques, in order to get the effecting learning result. Thus, songs can enhance the development of the listening skill in the young learners class.

Taking into account the teacher’s role in developing listening skills, mention should be made that, regardless the fact that songs inspire pupils’ creativity and imagination in a relaxed atmosphere, the teacher should consider some important aspects related to the song, before choosing it. Those are his pupils’ age and interests, as well as the content and language used in the song. Thus, in order to determine his pupils to commit, the teacher should allow them to take part in the selection of the songs.

Furthermore, the teacher should also take into account the importance of his primary goal and responsibility, that of teaching the target language.

As far as the speaking skill is concerned, songs also play a significant role in developing the pupils’ speaking skills.

Speaking is a more complicated process than it appears, and it involves more than just pronouncing the words or sentences. It is considered to be a productive skill in the oral mode.

Furthermore, speaking requires a lot of practice, as pupils are eager to learn how to produce new sounds, to practice and to experience them, and they can do through songs without getting bored and stressed. Mention should be made that songs have a natural rhythm with a periodic beat that is similar to the stress pattern of spoken English. This is what makes songs to be effective for practicing stress and rhythm.

According to Nation and Newton (2009), the aims of developing the speaking skill for beginners are: “ to help the learners to be able to cope with meaning-focused input and meaning-focused output as early as possible; to motivate the learners in their language study by getting them to engage in successful speaking and listening and to make the early learning as important as possible to their use needs.”

As a conclusion, songs are considered to be very good and productive tools for the teachers to use during their language classes in order to develop and improve their pupils' listening and speaking skills, which are very important skills for them to acquire.

4.3. Examples of musical materials useful for young learners

Songs, rhymes and chants are fantastic materials for the language teacher to use during their classes while teaching English to young learners. First off songs can be very helpful when it comes to teaching stress and intonation patterns of English. Secondly, music is considered to be a wonderful source of motivation, interest and fun. Last but not least, music and rhythm make it much easier for the pupils to imitate and remember the language target. And finally, songs may be strong means of triggering emotions that help pupils socialize and help them develop an aesthetic taste by expressing feelings and sentiments.

To cut the long story short, provided that songs are used properly, they could be excellent means for the pupils to help them acquire the target language while having fun at the same time.

According to Reilly and Ward, “children find it quite natural to turn almost anything into a chant. You can fit the words to any topic you are doing” .

For instance:

“We’re going to the beach (zoo, park, moon, etc)

We’re going to the beach

Hooray, hooray, hooray

We’re going to the beach”

“Here are several other suggestions for ELT activities with young learners, very well known in the United States ,such as: including a choosing rhyme, a singing game and two songs. These are authentic American pieces used to do classroom activities afterwards:

A. Eeny, Meeny, Miny Mo

Eeny meeny miny mo,
Catch a tiger by the toe.
If he hollers, make him pay
Fifty dollars every day.
My mother told me to
Choose the very best one.

B. Punchinello

What can you do, Punchinello funny fellow?
What can you do, Punchinello funny you?
2. You can do it too...
3. You choose one of us...

C. LondonBridge

London bridge is falling down,
Falling down, falling down,
LondonBridge is falling down,
My fair lady.

Chorus: (song after each verse)

Take the key and lock her up...

2. Build it up with iron bars

3. Iron bars will bend and break

4. Build it up with silver and gold.

D. Miss Lucy had a baby

Miss Lucy had a baby,

His name was Tiny Tim,

She put him in the bathtub

To see if he could swim.

He drank up all the water,

He ate up all the soap,

He tried to eat the bathtub,

But it wouldn't go down his throat.

Miss Lucy called the doctor,

Miss Lucy called the nurse,

Miss Lucy called the lady

With the alligator purse.

Now here are the activities based on the above rhymes and songs:

A. Eeny, Meeny, Miny Mo

The first song is a typical choosing rhyme, normally used to determine who is "it". In a group of children one child chants the rhyme while pointing to or touching

the children one by one, including himself. The child pointed to last at the end of the rhyme is out. The same thing goes on till one child is left to be “it”. Not what you say but what you do by saying that is important. So, the *if clause* here does not express any condition. All the words and structures are used to choose rather than to mean something.

B. Punchinello

Children form a circle. One child is in center as “it”. “It” makes a motion while children sing the first verse. Children copy “it’s motion during verse 2. “It” chooses another child to replace him and takes that person’s place in the circle.

C. LondonBridge

Two children join hands and form an arch. They secretly decide who is silver and who is gold. The other children form a single line to pass under the bridge. Children in line pass under the bridge. On ‘My fair lady’, the bridge falls and captures a prisoner. The bridge gently sways the prisoner back and forth. At the end of the chorus, the prisoner then stands behind the child representing this choice. This goes on until all children have been captured. A tug-of-war between “gold” and “silver” ends the game.

This is a fantastic way to turn a song into a game as classroom activity, undoubtedly increasing pupils’ interest and motivation during the English class.

D. Miss Lucy Had a Baby

1. Listen to the song and write the words in every line in the correct order.

Miss Lucy, baby, a, had,

Was, his, Tiny, Tim, name

in, she, bathtub, him, the, put

could, if, to, he, swim, see

drank, he, water, up, all, the

up, soap, he, all, ate, the,

to, bathtub, the, eat, he, tired,

his, but, go, throat, it, down, wouldn't

called, Miss Lucy, doctor, the,

Miss Lucy, nurse, the, called,

Lady, the, Miss Lucy, called

Alligator, with, purse, the

2. Listen to the song and fill in the blanks. (One may leave out, say, all the verbs)

Miss Lucy.....a baby,
His name.....Tiny Tim,
She.....him in the bathtub
To.....if he could..... .

He.....up all the water,
He.....up all the soap,
He.....to eat the bathtub,
But it..... down his throat.

Miss Lucy the doctor,
Miss Lucy.....the nurse,
Miss Lucy.....the lady,
With the alligator purse.

3. Listen to the song and put the lines in the right order

- His name was Tiny Tim
- He ate up all the soap,
- With the alligator purse.
- He drank up all the water,
- Miss Lucy called the doctor
- Miss Lucy had a baby,

- He tried to eat the bathtub,
- She put him in the bath tub
- Miss Lucy called the nurse,
- To see if he could swim.
- But it wouldn't go down his throat.
- Miss Lucy called the lady," (<http://iteslj.org> Lessons\ Cakir-Musicalactivities.html)

Furthermore, mention should be made that listening itself requires a systematic teaching taking the following steps: -first listening

- the repetition of the song by the teacher in the spoken form
- repeating altogether
- listening to the song from CD
- the repetition of the song in the instrumental version.

All in all teaching activities using songs as pedagogical tools, should be designed in such a way as to provide the young learners the enjoyable and comprehensible environment for learning the target language. As seen in the examples above, it is very clear that songs are wonderful classroom materials in that respect. Songs are definitely enjoyable, authentic and full of language we need in real life.

4.4. Songs as tasks

One way to maximize the advantages and minimize some of the limitations mentioned above might be to develop songs into language learning tasks. Although this alone will not help teachers develop a greater repertoire of songs, it can help turn a song into a useful tool for language learning and teaching (Cameron, 2001, p. 31).

Defining a Task

Cameron defines an activity for young learners as "any kind of event that children participate in" (2001, p. 31), but adds, not all classroom activities can be classified as *tasks*. For an activity to be considered a *task*, it must have more carefully planned and structured events with learner participation as the fulcrum (Cameron, 1997, p. 346). Cameron provides "a list of defining features of *task* for use in teaching foreign languages to children" (2001, p. 31).

Classroom tasks for children learning a foreign language

- Have coherence and unity for learners (From topic, activity and outcome)
- Have meaning and purpose for learners
- Have clear language learning goals
- Have a beginning and an end
- Involve the learners actively

Classroom tasks for children learning a foreign language from Cameron, 2001, p. 31.

These defining features benefit the teacher because they provide a reference point when planning a lesson or analyzing a lesson plan; for researchers, it "provides a unit around which to develop an understanding of language learning and teaching processes" (Cameron, 1997, p. 346). In addition to these five features, Cameron (2001) reports that tasks for young learners should have three stages: preparation, core activity and follow up.

Developing a Song into a Task

The Wheels on the Bus, a popular children's song often sung by children in the U.K., U.S., and Canada, is used here to illustrate how a song could be developed into a language learning task.

The wheels on the bus go round and round,

round and round,

round and round.

The wheels on the bus go round and round, all day long.

The lyrics to the first stanza of *The Wheels on the Bus*

There are several reasons why this particular song might be suitable for language learning purposes. The lyrics of the song are made up of 11 monosyllabic words, many of which are repeated several times. The phrases are short with relatively long pauses between each one and are comprised of simple vocabulary. The song also has a repetitive rhythm with a recurring beat that is similar to the stress patterns of spoken English.

The Three Stages of a Song as a Task

Cameron (1997, p. 347) states that classroom tasks for young learners have three stages that "once identified, can be analyzed, adapted, and expanded" and notes that "it has been common practice for many years to plan reading activities in three stages: pre-reading, reading and post-reading" (2001, p. 32). Cameron admits that this has been adapted for mainstream task-based learning by Skehan (1996, cited in Cameron, 2001) and adopts it herself with the following labels (Cameron, 2001):

PREPARATION

FOLLOW UP

Three Stages in "Task" for Young Learners from Cameron (2001, p. 32)

Cameron argues that the core activity is central to the language learning task and without the core, the task would collapse. The preparation activities should help to prepare the students to complete the core activity successfully. This might include pre-teaching of language items or activating topic vocabulary. The follow-up stage then should build on the completion of the core activity (2001, p. 32).

Preparation stage. Given the goal of the task is singing the song in the core activity stage, it is useful to activate the vocabulary and to form basic sentence structures in the preparation stage. This could be done using a number of methods, depending on the resources available to the teacher or the size of class. One way of activating vocabulary might be to use a picture of a bus to elicit vocabulary and form basic sentence patterns. For example, the teacher pointing to the bus driver could ask, "*Who is he?*" Students reply, "*A bus driver.*" The teacher then asks, "*What does the bus driver do?*" Students reply, "*The bus driver drives the bus.*" The teacher might then point to the wheels and ask, "*What are they?*" Students reply, "*They are wheels.*" The teacher then could ask, "*What do the wheels do?*" The students are encouraged to reply, "*The wheels go round.*" Of course this is only one option; the teacher may not have access to images to match the song and might want to ask the students to draw a picture. The pictures could be used to elicit vocabulary and practice the sentence structures used in the song. Regardless of how the teacher chooses to activate vocabulary and form sentence structures, the aim is that, at the end of the preparation stage, the students are ready to sing the song in the core stage.

Core stage. To involve the students and maximize interest, it would be advantageous to sing the song several times in the core, each time varying the pace or volume and having the students perform actions and sing along chorally. For example, the teacher could begin by asking the students to sing the word *round* at first, and have the students make a circle shape with their hands. Then the teacher could have the students turn around 360 degrees when singing *round and round*.

Follow-up stage. The follow-up stage should attempt to build on the successful completion of the core stage. In other words, the students have sung the song and now should be encouraged to use the vocabulary or sentence structures from the song. Again, this depends on the circumstances of the teacher. The follow-up stage could be used to develop written production, either through writing sentences or gap-fill activities, or oral production where the vocabulary learned is used in a situational role-play.

Maximizing the Potential of Songs

Using songs as language learning tasks can help to maximize the potential of songs as teaching and language learning tools. As stated above, there are benefits to using songs in the classroom; however, more often than not, songs are used relatively ineffectively, often as activities between learning. It was stated above that no matter how enjoyable or memorable singing songs can be, singing songs in itself will not teach learners to use the language and will not give them the ability to communicate in another language. However, developing a song from an activity into a task with preparation, core, and follow-up stages might be one way to help transfer the words in a song into use and maximize the potential of songs as teaching and learning tools.

Creating Original Songs

There are thousands of children's songs; selecting, learning, and using a suitable song for a particular class or purpose can be a real challenge for language teachers. Some teachers do not have a huge repertoire of songs and therefore tend to sing the same set of songs or avoid using songs completely. It can also be challenging to select a song to fit in with the curriculum or language point to be taught. As mentioned above, care needs to be taken when selecting a song because the vocabulary and sentence structure of some children's songs can be quite different from that used in spoken English.

With a little initiative and imagination, a children's song can easily be adapted. By slightly altering the vocabulary, grammar, or sentence structure whilst maintaining the original rhythm, a traditional song can be adapted to suit a particular theme or part of the curriculum. Below is an example that illustrates how this may be done. The song, *The Wheels on the Bus*, requires only minor adaptations to make it more suitable for teaching a different topic; in this example, it becomes a song about sea creatures.

The **fish in the sea goes swim, swim, swim,**
swim, swim, swim,
swim, swim, swim. The fish in the sea goes swim, swim, swim,
all day long.

The **lobster in the sea goes pinch, pinch, pinch,**
pinch, pinch, pinch,
pinch, pinch, pinch. The lobster in the sea goes pinch, pinch, pinch,
all day long.

The **crab in the sea goes click, click, click,**
click, click, click,
click, click, click. The crab in the sea goes click, click, click,
all day long.

The **octopus in the sea goes wiggle, wiggle, wiggle,**
wiggle, wiggle, wiggle,
wiggle, wiggle, wiggle. The octopus in the sea goes wiggle, wiggle, wiggle,
all day long.

Figure 4. The modified lyrics from the song *The Wheels on the Bus* (adaptations bolded)

By adapting the song in this way, the teacher has the advantage of being able to select a particular language feature and incorporate it into the song. This feature could be an item of

vocabulary, syntax, phonology, or a simple conversational expression. This allows the teacher to incorporate more songs into a curriculum and save time searching for and learning new songs.

In order to highlight the importance of songs as pedagogical tools, I will show the obvious incredible benefits of teaching ESL with songs, that can enhance the process of teaching English to YL.

First off, songs help learn vocabulary, grammar and syntax. Learning with songs really works as children hear whole sentences and absorb grammar and syntax subconsciously, while being an easy way for them to learn and remember words and phrases.

Secondly, songs can use meaningful language in context, As children hear vocabulary and phrases in a natural and meaningful context and no longer as isolated words or sentences.

Another significant aspect related to songs that need emphasizing is the fact that songs can be catchy and re-usable. Unlike a listening comprehension a song is catchy and fun and ESL students will be happy hearing it many times over a several months, as long as you don't play it to death in a single lesson.

Moreover, songs enhance listening skills. Naturally listening to any English songs help listening skills as long as the language is within the grasp of the learner.

Furthermore, integrating music and actions makes the English lessons appeal to wider learning styles. Along with the music, melody and rhythm actions can be found to go with the song. Actions may be used with any song and not just with obvious 'action songs' like head shoulders knees and Toes. This immediately pushes the boat out to reach more pupils by encompassing a variety of learning styles in class.

Songs can be confidence building. Using songs for ESL is a way for children to listen and practice English in a group, joining in when they can without being singled out, and gradually achieving more with each listening. A huge boost in confidence can be gained from this.

Moreover, songs are memory aids. We all know how songs can stick in our heads and this is exactly what we want for our English.

Finally, songs help with classroom management. More mundane but absolutely crucial to a teacher is that putting on a song immediately attracts the attention of the class. All pupils join

in with the actions and/or start to sing along. The teacher now has their attention if he/she did not before.

In summary songs allow pupils to hear English in context, naturally, to listen repeatedly, to enjoy learning, to be more involved with TPR (total physical response), to be focused and motivated and remember language more easily and for longer. Songs also help with classroom management.

Here are some tips for teachers on how to go about teaching with ESL song effectively:

Firstly, it goes without saying that teachers need the right kind of song, if they want to use them among their teaching strategies. If they choose music that is too fast or difficult, pupils are likely to glaze over, become distracted and in the worst scenario become demoralized by their failure to follow the song.

Secondly, songs should be specific for ESL. English songs are fine as background music while teachers are carrying on their activities, but if their aim is for pupils to be able to sing along to the song, then they need something with simpler words and which is repetitive. Here are some ways in which this can be achieved.

First of all, teachers should start by teaching the key vocabulary in the song using games and flashcards. Once that is done, they should introduce the key grammar so the pupils may use the new vocabulary in the context of a sentence or phrase.

Then, the children can hear the song a couple of times as background music while playing listening games where they learn and practice vocabulary. This helps them start to become familiar with the melody and rhythms even though they may not understand the words at this point. Previews like this help when it comes to listening to the song attentively for the first time.

It is also highly important for the teachers to use language games with the song. When teachers come to play the song expecting the pupils' focused attention on the words, they should use a game. This might be to run and jump on a flashcard of a noun when they hear that noun, or to point at it if they have a classroom situation. Or, teachers might stick four or five flashcards of nouns from the song on the board and ask the children to listen and clap whenever they hear one of those words.

Another aspect that should be taken into consideration by teachers, is to keep the song fresh. After listening to the song two or three times using a different listening game each time, teachers should set it aside until the next lesson. This keeps it fresh. At the next lesson review the vocabulary from the previous lesson, perhaps learn some new words and re-visit the song. This time, teachers should work on some actions to put to the song.

All in all, the purpose in presenting this paper is to state a case for developing songs from activities into language learning tasks. The second purpose is to highlight how, with a little initiative, teachers can adapt children's songs to better suit their teaching goals. Songs can be used as a valuable teaching and learning tool. Using songs can help learners improve their listening skills and pronunciation; they can also be useful for teaching vocabulary and sentence structures. Probably the greatest benefit to using songs in the classroom is that they are enjoyable. Unfortunately, despite these advantages, simply singing songs will not teach learners how to communicate in another language. Using songs as tasks might be one way of helping transfer words from songs into use, and maximize the potential of songs as teaching and learning tools. Adapting existing children's songs is one method that teachers can use to increase their repertoire of songs, thus giving them more opportunity to use songs in their teaching contexts.