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MUSIC AND FLL

- A theoretical approach -

Abstract

Although considered as two separate entities, language and music share a wide variety of features making the distinction between the two more blurred as deeper research is conducted. Music and music-like utterances appear alongside language from fetal phase to maturity linking it closely to first language acquisition and language development. Such insight immediately provokes the interest of educators who are in never ending search of language learning methodology that imitates the process of first language acquisition. Being universal and one of the top favorite leisure activities, music arises as an ideal tool for exploring both the linguistic and cultural features of the target language.

Key words: *language, music, modern language learning, language acquisition*

Introduction

Pinpointing the exact date in history when the first note was played or a song was recited is a task close to the realm of impossible. Instead of searching for an exact date, it is more beneficial to explore the way in which music has begun its path and evolution. Many researchers share the belief that music appeared alongside with language and that the two grew simultaneously. The most ardent music theorists such as Jespersen (1925) even claim that music preceded language. Livingstone (1973) uses anthropological evidence such as mammal behavior and evolution of birdsong to underpin his idea that song preceded speech. Larrick (1991) shares his view by stating that '...even before the written word, stories of war and odes of praise were passed along from tribe to tribe by songs and minstrels would use music to bring literature to the crowds'. Merriam (1964) believes that literature survived thanks to songs. Storr (1990) highlights the influence of music by postulating that it had to be present at the very beginning of human development since our ancestors depicted people dancing in caverns.

Obviously, dancing or some other forms of body movement are recognized as a byproduct of music.

Music was used throughout history for various purposes. Repetitive music found in army, religion or sang during hard labor has been used to achieve a special state of mind which Csikszentmihalyi (1975) describes as 'a state of flow'. The author describes *the flow* as a state of the utmost happiness where humans are fully absorbed in their work backed up by intrinsic motivation. Mora (cited in Brown, 2007) describes music and language as inseparable and believes that humans underwent a '*musilanguage*' stage in evolution which is 'neither linguistic nor musical but...embodied the shared features of modern day music and language, so that evolutionary divergence led to the formation of two distinct and specialized functions with retention of the shared features conferred onto them by the joint precursor...' Such view is supported by Rousseau (Scott, 2006) who describes the *two* (language and music) as inseparable 'thus verses, songs and speech have a common origin'.

Given the evidence, it is not uncommon to perceive music as one the defining factors in the development of language. Perhaps it is this evolutionary feature of music that drives educators to combine songs with language without stating any theoretical arguments. Such a feature makes it look natural. Language learning is a constantly developing process and going back in time may appear as nonsensical. However, understanding the way language itself came to life and its close ties with music can open up new perspectives on understanding the process of language acquisition and make language learning resemble language acquisition. For a better understanding of the music-language association, the two need to be compared and contrasted. Due to their similarities in origin, language and music share a host of common features. Chen Hafteck (2011) places music at the same level as language describing the two as a way in which humans express themselves through sound. Arleo (2000) sees songs as a hybrid between language and music. Both are used to convey a message and reach out to others; both rely on symbols, sounds, gestures and movements whereas music also embodies emphasized feelings and grace. Dorell (2005) describes musicality as an attribute of speech of every individual speaker which should be differentiated from other attributes such as identity, syntax, speech melody, rhythm and semantic content. He also notes the difference between the musicality of speech and the musicality of music itself, describing the former as subtler and personalized. It can be argued that rhythm and melody of songs correspond to stress and intonation found in speech. Other features such as pitch, volume, tone and pauses can be found both in language and music. Such common traits led to Deutsch's (2011) assertion that the perception of music, even when composed without any words, depends on the mother tongue of the listener. Music

composed by different artists is embedded with the prosodic elements of the author's mother tongue. These common features show that humans possess an intuitive comprehension of music which carries similar content but on a simpler level than speech itself. Stansell (2005) sees language and music as two sisters who are 'opposite in personality, yet the best of friends'. He further argues that the associations between feeling and meaning, time-space and simultaneity, words and memory, representation and reenactment are at the core of being human. In other words, language and music are like two sides of the same coin.

Given the close association of music and language, devising a musical approach for language learning appears as a natural step to take. Therefore, language learning through music is described in the following section.

Language learning and acquisition

The first notion to consider is that both language and songs are perceived, enjoyed and learnt in the same way-through exposure. Some studies (Harrison 1979; Lowe 1998) indicate that musical training alone has a significantly positive effect on language learning. In addition, all languages have an identifiable syntax and every native speaker freely composes and performs legitimate utterances. However, people usually do not have an innate ability to create or compose valid and interesting music. Generally speaking, when music is compared with language, it is obvious that music 'consumption' has much more in common with language acquisition, than with language learning.

Listening to a song in a foreign language, mimicking its sounds, repeating its words and phrases and ultimately memorizing its lyrics is irresistibly similar to the natural process of first language acquisition. The ultimate goal in modern language teaching is to create a context where L2 or FL is taught in such an effortless, enjoyable and natural manner.

The prime evidence of the music-acquisition link is the linguistic behavior of fetuses, infants and babies prior to their first word utterance. The fetus cannot hear consonants in the womb but only musical vowel sounds (Mora, 2010). The author states that intonation and pitched sounds are the first thing we hear when acquiring a language, picking up the musicality and communication skills later on. She also states that children imitate rhythm and musical contours long before they can utter words. Dorell (2005) recognizes the importance of music and language like sounds as one of the defining aspects of language acquisition. Loewy (1995) shifts the focus of language development from first words to first utterances distinguishing three musical stages of speech namely crying, babbling and acquiring and comprehending words. Babies express their needs by crying and later on experiment with tone, stress and pauses in

form of babbling. The author describes these sounds as music of speech and concludes that adults adapt to such speech and recognize that singing has a soothing effect. Papousek (1991) believes that speech and song are indistinguishable before the first words are spoken. Chen-Hatfeck (2011) also asserts that children do not differentiate between language and music at the beginning of their lingual development. Teachers and caregivers often unconsciously modify their speech to be more affective and music like when working with young learners. Papousek (1996) regards this phenomenon as an innate and intuitive behavior from parents. Feu and Piñero (1996) and Wermke and Mende (2006) maintain Papousek's ideas and describe such melodic language as a species-specific learning guidance towards language. Generally speaking, the language targeted at infants is song like and musical in its character (Murphey, 1990). Patel (1998) simply noted that children prefer infant directed singing over infant directed speech. This intuitive, melodic and baby-like speech is commonly known as *motherese*. Motherese is recognized as a language alteration custom made to facilitate the communication process between adults and babies distinguished by its song like nature and musicality.

Dr. Alfred Tomatis (1991) shed light on this field with his seemingly gloomy research methods involving fiber optic cameras and fetuses. However, he did discover that a fetus reacts to music by moving particular muscles to particular sounds. At a certain phase, the fetus even reacts by blinking his eyes and making dance like moves. This sensory-motor response to phonemes allows the fetus to begin the process of language learning in the uterus (Hannaford, 2005). Tomatis went on to explain the Mozart effect, i.e. listening to Mozart's music helps when doing mental tasks and promotes healing. When Rauscher (1993) published his work which connected Mozart's music with improvement in spatial reasoning and IQ, the Mozart effect received such attention that the state of Georgia provided each newborn with a CD containing classical music in 1998 and a German sewage plant played Mozart to accelerate the decomposition of waste. The whole idea was commercialized, but the fact that it has a powerful effect on the human psyche is my all means still valid.

Similar to language acquisition, children have an innate ability to recognize musical elements such as pitch or rhythm found in language (Therub, 1993). The author highlights the influence of prosody because it enables recognition of language elements and acknowledges melody as the most noticeable prosodic element. Wermke and Mende (2006) also regard melody 'as a forerunner of codified abstract meaning in the strict linguistic sense'. Mora (2000) emphasizes the importance of melody and sees it as a medium for conveying needs and emotions. Mitigated crying, cooing and babbling are produced, in a great variety of melodic forms, at a very early stage in the course of L1 acquisition. The author further postulates that a

'melodic approach' is based on the evidence that musicality of speech has an effect not only on the pronunciation skills of EFL students but also on their entire language acquisition process.

Jackendoff (1991) sees language learning as a process based on the principle of understanding aural information. Hence, a second language acquisition approach should be constructed in a similar way. Howle (1989) recognizes lullabies and nursery rhymes as the first language input to be memorized before the process of language acquisition. However, a language learning method that can equal this kind of ongoing input and exposure is yet to be found.

What do songs teach?

In addition to being accessible, diversity is one of the key advantages of music. Music based material and activities cover more or less all areas of language learning, providing ample opportunities for constructing a variety of exercises used to practice all four language skills. Murphey (1992) argues that the skills practice depends on the teacher's desires and focal point, not on the song.

Obviously, the first skill to consider is listening. Songs are pure listening material. However, one thing should be born in mind. Common, recreational listening should be differentiated from listening as a skill. In other words, hearing a song is quite simple, while listening for either comprehension or specific information involves quite an amount of pre knowledge and guidance. However, songs are a prolific ground for creating activities that foster all types of listening skills. Songs are also suitable for both top down and bottom up processing and enable the creation of a wide variety of exercises and tasks where students get to practice and enhance their listening skills at all levels. Brain research (Flohr, 1996) shows that music training changes and improves brain functioning related to listening. Children who received music training for 25 minutes for 7 weeks produced EEG¹ frequencies associated with increased mental processing. Educators can even benefit from learner's recreational music listening by transferring it to activities that enhance their aural perception.

Reading can also be practiced through music. Lyrics can be used as text where student have a chance to work on their reading skills. Many studies, including Bancroft (1983), confirmed the positive link between music-based teaching and reading improvement. Studies conducted back in the 1960's (Hutton, 1953; Maze, 1967) presented music as a tool for reading improvement even with students who have learning difficulties or disabilities. Wolff (2015)

¹An electroencephalogram (*EEG*) is a test that measures and records the electrical activity of a brain by using sensors (electrodes) attached to one's head.

also conducted several studies that showed that the use of music produces an increase in academic reading levels and improves the general participation in the class, whereas Moreno's (2006) research indicated that musical training influences reading abilities in eight-year-old children. A meta-analysis of 25 correlational studies, some involving sample sizes of over 500,000 students, found a 'strong and reliable association' between music instruction and scores on tests of reading comprehension (Butzlaff, 2000). Music also affects mental sub processes that eventually lead to enhanced reading with comprehension. Kenney (2005) sees songs and rhymes as miniature stories suitable for different reading activities. Whether used as a background mood setter or reading material, music has a beneficial effect on all aspects of the reading skill.

The meaning in every song can be elaborated and used as a topic for discussion and development of the gift of the gab. Hence songs can be used as a means of enhancing speaking proficiency. In addition, listening to target language music solves one of the major problems of speaking-speaking with an accent. Graham (1969) recognizes accent as speaking one language with the music of another, usually mother tongue. Research on accent reduction by means of music is gaining increasing popularity. Listening to authentic music is probably the best cornerstone for building up speaking skills close to those of a native speaker. Authentic songs are an example of stress, intonation and rhythm of the English language. Hence they are a great asset for showcasing the prosodic feature of the language. Since lyrics often embody the discursive features of spoken language (Brown, 1995) songs are an excellent example of spoken and everyday English which is often missing in textbooks. As Leith (1979) stated: 'There is probably not a better, nor quicker way to teach phonetics than with songs'. Li and Brand (2009) presented their research paper which showcased a huge advancement in speaking skills after a semester of language learning based on songs. Accent is closely tied with pronunciation which can also be improved through music and songs. Poliquin (1988) sees music as a positive penetration in language instruction which ultimately leads to better pronunciation. Karimer's (1984) study confirmed that ESL learners acquire a native-like fluency faster and better while using nursery rhymes, chants, and songs. Zafarghandi (2015) has written abundantly about the key role of music for practicing connected speech and pronunciation. He states that songs have a significantly positive effect on the speaking process. Connected speech is comprised of elements such as reduction, elision and assimilation which can be found in most songs. Sabaddini (2006) further develops this notion by stating that music further emphasizes the 'flow' of the words. Harmer (2005) believes that 'pop music in English saturates the planets airwaves'. Thus many people who are not English speakers can sing words from their favorite English

medium songs. Eterno (1961) also established a direct relationship between musical aptitude, musical training and foreign language pronunciation. However, it should be noted that the acquisition of prosodic features of language depends on individual students themselves. In general, students who have problems with the phonetic features of their mother tongue tend to have problems progressing in the same feature of L2 (Hu, Zhang 2008).

Writing is perhaps a bit neglected in a melodic approach. However, songs can be used as a starting point or brainstorming material for writing activities. Similar to reading, ideas and messages hidden in lyrics can prove to be great research paper or essay topics. In addition, the range of topics in songs is enormous and diverse. Wordless music, which has a profound effect on the human brain, can lead to the stimulation of the creative process which can aid the development of writing skills. Playing music isolates students from background noise and helps them fully focus on their work (Mora, 2010). It is not uncommon to use instrumental music as an impetus and inspiration for writing activities.

Other aspects

In addition to covering the four language skills, music has the potential to foster other aspects of language learning including culture, vocabulary acquisition, grammar and overall class atmosphere. An ideal language learning classroom is contextualized, i.e. the learner is placed in a target language surrounding and acquires skills needed for independent language use. Such an aspect can be difficult to achieve, but music is a simple solution to the problem. Most songs are embedded with cultural references and annotations which help the learner gain a deeper grasp of the culture of the target language. Hence covering this semantic part is made easier through songs. In addition, it is hard to find a feature of society that has not been sang about. Songs tell stories that range from love and fun to drug abuse and environmental protection. All of them are at our fingertips as well. Spanish researchers Eleuterio, Oliveira and Silva (2007) based their research paper on the song *Miss Sarajevo* performed by the popular group *U2*. Having in mind the background of the song and its connotations, the song is so abundant with cultural references that it can be explored as a sole resource for understanding a major event in a foreign country. An interesting example of culturally biased songs can be found in Orwell's novel *1984* where a character recites the old nursery rhymes *Oranges and Lemons* to explain the otherwise vanished history and culture of England. Songs can even be perceived as instrumental in the construction of the social movement culture (Roscigno, Danaher and Summers-Effler, 2002). Students can gain a deeper understanding of the world their L2 peers live in. Although non teenagers dread the idea, but celebrities such as Justin Bieber, Selena

Gomes or Eminem are worldwide culture ambassadors and role models for millions of teenagers. Songs can present an L2 culture in a fun and effective way (Murphey, 1992b). Even teachers can analyze the most popular songs and music videos of the time to get a glimpse of the world their students live in and help bridge the generation gap between the educator and the learner.

Ranging from nursery rhymes, chants and children songs which were created to focus on particular vocabulary items or constructions to everyday songs which often contain exotic words alongside core vocabulary, songs are a fruitful material for vocabulary building exercises and activities. Words, especially with younger learners, are much better acquired when they are sung, rather than read (Medina, 1993). However, the best way to acquire new vocabulary is to use a combination of words and illustrations and other teaching material. And this combination of music with appropriate class structure and teaching aids is what is missing to create a legitimate music approach. Jewlikaar and Verma (2015)² did an enormous research measuring the number of unique words used by the all-time top 100 artists. Eminem won first place with over 8000 different words in his songs, whereas the average number of different words within a musician's opus is 2667 words. Hence an album of a single artist can provide all the needed lexical diversity set to be covered during a school year. Most current pop star idols such as Bieber, Selena Gomes, Katy Perry, and Rihanna are within this average number.

However, songs are not just limited to words. They contain phrases, idioms and constructions in connected speech which are often missing in textbooks. Due to the diversity of topics covered in songs, music can also cover other aspects of language including grammar and uncommon structures. All it takes is finding a song that contains the needed elements and using it as a cornerstone for building a successful lesson. Textbook dialogues, although authentic, are usually fabricated to fit certain tasks or lessons and deprive students of real life, informal language and meaning negotiation.

Whittaker (1981) sees music as an ideal replacement for drills necessary for memorizing grammar elements. He also perceives music as convenient for adult learners to reinforce complex issues and he reports of a case where music helped students to pass grammar tests. Similarly, Beaton's (1995) research shows that students who were taught French grammar through songs scored higher than those who covered the same lessons without music. One drawback is that songs contain swear words and foul language but this can be easily avoided by finding a 'clean' version of the song marked as appropriate for broadcasting.

² http://lab.musixmatch.com/largest_vocabulary/

Creating a suitable atmosphere depends on two factors, namely setting and mood. Since the setting is usually predetermined and offers space only for minor alterations, music enables creating just the right mood needed depending on the context. A study³ conducted by Vickhoff (2013), a Swedish musicologist, shows that people who sing in a choir or a group have synchronized heartbeats and their pulse increases and decreases in unison. One can notice amazing ways to utilize such a feature; playing a soothing and relaxing tune to calm down a restless class or starting a lesson with a live and catchy tune to energize an otherwise sleepy class. In addition to the overall atmosphere and rapport, music can also help with behavioral and emotional problems, increase cooperation and decrease the level of aggressive behavior (Hallam and Price ,1998). Even simple choral singing is effective in achieving class unison.

Conclusion

After considering all the possibilities music has to offer and, it is no surprise that educators tried to facilitate songs into different language learning programs. Having in mind the close ties between language and music discussed in the paper, its omnipresence, availability and diversity, music has all the needed elements for constructing a viable modern language learning approach. Music has all the elements required to help learners practice skills needed for successful and effortless language learning. Although nursery rhymes and children's songs do find their way as teaching material, the rather informal style of modern music has repeatedly failed to make an impact in formal education.. Motivating for students, accessible for teachers and easy to use, music helps create a contextualized learning environment with motivated students and target language exposure. However, such an environment is still limited to exotic lessons and classes without particular goals or aims. A piece of a puzzle is missing to establish a way in which the memorized words, chunks, phrases, sentences and paragraphs are utilized in real life.

Simply listening to music does not aid learners in acquiring linguistic material due to the lack of activities and techniques that would facilitate the process. A more universal approach to song treatment would enable educators fully understand the effect of music on the overall language learning process. Only then a musical approach can be measured against existing methods and its real potential can be unveiled.

³<https://www.the-scientist.com/?articles.view/articleNo/36412/title/Choir-Singers-Synchronize-Heartbeats/>

Hopefully, this work can serve as an inspiration and a step forward to the establishment of widely accepted techniques and activities for covering songs and ultimately a fully operational musical approach to English language learning.

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MUZIKA I POUČAVANJE STRANOG JEZIKA

- teorijski pristup -

Sažetak

Iako se smatraju za dvije neovisne cjeline, muzika i jezik posjeduju širok spektar zajedničkih osobina koje čine granicu između dvije navedene cijeline nedefinisanom kroz dublju analizu. Muzika i njoj slični izričaji se pojavljuju uporedno sa jezikom još od fetalne faze pa sve do starosti što dovodi muziku u usku vezu sa usvajanjem i razvijanjem jezika. Takav uvid odmah i privlači nastavnike koji su u stalnoj potrazi za metodologijom učenja stranog jezika koja imitira proces usvajanja jezika. Zbog svoje univerzalnosti i statusa jedne od omiljenih neobaveznih aktivnosti, muzika se nameće kao idealno sredstvo za izučavanje jezičkih i kulturoloških odlika prisutnih u stranom jeziku.

Ključne riječi: jezik, muzika, moderni pristup učenju jezika, usvajanje jezika