

# The Benefits of Using Songs in Second Language Learning A Review of Literature

journal or publication title	Seigakuin University General Research Institute Newsletter
volume	Vol.25
number	No.1
page range	4-7
URL	<a href="http://id.nii.ac.jp/1477/00002830/">http://id.nii.ac.jp/1477/00002830/</a>

<b>Title</b>	The Benefits of Using Songs in Second Language Learning A Review of Literature
<b>Author(s)</b>	Kenneth, J McClain III
<b>Citation</b>	聖学院大学総合研究所 Newsletter, Vol.25No.1, 2015.9 :4-7
<b>URL</b>	<a href="http://serve.seigakuin-univ.ac.jp/reps/modules/xoonips/detail.php?item_id=5432">http://serve.seigakuin-univ.ac.jp/reps/modules/xoonips/detail.php?item_id=5432</a>
<b>Rights</b>	



聖学院学術情報発信システム : SERVE

SEigakuin Repository and academic archiVE

# The Benefits of Using Songs in Second Language Learning A Review of Literature

Kenneth J McClain III (K.J. マクレン)

## Abstract

英語教育において英語の歌を取り入れた試みは長きに亘り行われてきている。本論においては、これ迄数多く書かれた英語の歌に関する論文を検証した。多数の調査で、歌は学習者のやる気や自身を高めることを強く示唆している。また歌は言葉とメロディーを結びつけ、左右両側脳を活性化させながら、学習内容の記憶、保持、そして回想につながる効果があること、さらに繰り返し歌いながら学ぶことにより、ボキャブラリーの習得と共に、第二言語としての英語の発音の向上に繋がってゆくことが報告されている。

Educators have long used songs in the classroom. Several researchers have studied the use of songs in second language classes. The paper reviews the results of academic journals regarding the outcome of using songs in second language acquisition. Studies strongly suggest that songs can enhance motivation and self-confidence among learners. It has also been linked to better retention, memory and recall because of the ability of songs to combine melody with spoken words thus engaging both hemispheres of the brain. Moreover, the repetitive nature of learning songs improves phonetic skills of second language learners as well as helps them build their vocabulary.

## The Benefits of Using Songs in Second Language Learning A Review of Literature

Educators in the classroom setting have used songs and music for many years. Songs have been used in both first-language and second-language learning programs at all age levels. Research conducted regarding the impact of music and songs suggest

that the use of music has a positive impact on the process of language learning, memory and recall (Fonseca-Mora et al., 2011, Schon, 2008, Engh, 2013). In the case of language education, the utilization of songs as one aspect of a language learning curriculum is widely believed to have a positive impact on pronunciation, cultural enrichment, and memory and recall (Fonseca-Mora et al., 2011, Arleo, 2009). Despite the firm belief of educators regarding the impact of music and song on language learning, present research on the phenomenon does not have empirical laboratory data as to how music and songs specifically target learning centers in the brain leading to better outcomes in attaining new knowledge and improved language skills. Without clear and decisive physiological understanding regarding the impact of songs and music on the specific learning centers in the brain, the influence of music and songs on second language acquisition cannot be considered indisputable.

This literature review seeks to determine whether the use of songs in second language acquisition curricula is able to facilitate faster and more effective acquisition of a second language by responding to the following questions.

1. How are songs used in language learning classes?
2. How do songs and music improve the acquisition of a second language (L2)?
3. What is the impact of songs and music on the tasks associated with second language acquisition (SLA)?

Understanding the impact of songs on successful SLA is integral for educators who regularly integrate songs into their language curricula and lesson plans.

A better understanding as it concerns the real impact of using songs in learning a second language would aid educators with regard to finding the most optimal use of the songs in L2 curricula.

### How are songs used in language classes?

Songs are used in SLA classes at all levels from very young L2 learners to adult second language learners. Music and songs are used extensively by preschool educators for a number of reasons, namely for motivation and memory exercises (Schon, 2008). In the second language classroom, songs are used to remove the monotony of the class routine as well as to provide students with the opportunity to experience the second language in a different manner (Schon, 2008). The ability of music and songs to lower anxiety is also an effective tool for learning and can facilitate the faster acquisition of information and skills (Engh, 2013). For this reason, most educators have endeavored to integrate songs into a variety of classes to maximize its beneficial effects on learners.

### How does songs and music improve the acquisition of a second language (L2)?

Fonseca–Mora, Toscano–Fuentes, and Wermke explain the positive effect of melodies when acquiring language skills (Fonseca–Mora et al., 2011). In their research, they investigated the impact of songs used in the classroom as it pertains to the acquisition of language proficiency among language learners. The results of their research point out that integrating melody into language learning enhances the ability of an individual to acquire language skills that cannot be taught in the classroom such as intonation, tone, and inflection (Fonseca–Mora et al., 2011). Songs can indeed help second language learners with the soft–skills of

learning a new language that are not taught in routine language lessons in the classroom such as grammar lessons, vocabulary lessons and reading lessons (Fonseca–Mora et al., 2011).

In the same manner, Fonseca–Mora and colleagues assert that music is able to affect the auditory complex more than spoken words (Fonseca–Mora et al., 2011). Therefore, the use of infusing melody with spoken words in the form of a song is able to affect the auditory complex as well as affect the frontal, temporal and parietal lobes that affect attention span (Fonseca–Mora et al., 2011). Because of this, songs are able to enhance better acquisition of language skills since they engage more senses during the process of learning (Fonseca–Mora et al., 2011).

In addition, the combination of words and melody engages both sides of the brain and allows the learner to activate more learning centers in the brain and thus facilitate the retention of information as well as foster better memory and recall (Arleo, 2009).

In like manner, songs may be used as a tool for language learning because they aid in phonological development as a result of the effects of practicing, repetition, and less inhibition (Arleo, 2009). Moreover, the stress and intonation of singers while singing parts of a song teach learners the intonation and stress of the new language (Arleo, 2009). Hence, exposure to songs sung in a second language can help second language learners learn phonetics in a natural manner. In fact, the stress and intonation in songs mimic the natural inflections and phonetic rules of the language in which they are sung (Arleo, 2009). In the study conducted by Palmer and Kelly, the researchers found that among the 23 participants in the research, all of the participants benefitted from practicing English

songs in their reading skills and conversational skills after being asked to sing English songs as part of their second language classes over the span of one year. This proves that signing songs and participating in second-language classes where songs are an aspect of the lessons can help second language learners acquire natural ways of attaining spoken language skills.

### **What is the impact of songs and music on the tasks associated with second language acquisition (SLA)?**

Learning a second language requires the development of a variety of skills and proficiencies. Listening skills, speaking skills, comprehension, grammar and vocabulary are all important skills to develop in order to attain proficiency in any new language. One of the main ways songs help second language learners develop second language proficiency is through motivation. Songs are able to motivate learners during the process of learning a new language (Schon, 2008, Engh, 2013). Motivation is multifaceted and can come from a variety of sources in the learning scenario. One way students may be motivated is by providing them with opportunities to integrate play into learning tasks (Schon, 2008). In this case, the use of songs or music in second-language lessons is able to reduce the boredom caused by repetitive learning tasks (Schon, 2008). Songs are able to break the regular routine of lessons in the classroom and, if used wisely, may be used as a way of encouraging discussions regarding the cultural context of songs apart from the phonetic benefits they teach second language learners (Schon, 2008).

Apart from providing motivation to learners, songs are also a quality way of providing opportunities for learning language in a relaxed condition or in a low

anxiety context (Engh, 2013). The affective filter hypothesis proposed by Krashen states that learning conditions that provide low anxiety, high motivation, and promote self-confidence lead to favorable learning outcomes in second language acquisition (Engh, 2013). Songs are able to satisfy all three condition of the affective filter hypothesis because they are able to lower learning anxiety and promote self-confidence. In the context of second language acquisition, learning through singing songs can serve to lower the anxiety associated with learning and lower insecurity, which could assist learners to obtain proper pronunciation skills and the infection of words, phrases and sentences when singing (Engh, 2013). Because of this, it is easier for students to learn how to correctly pronounce words, phrases, and sentences in the new language they are learning without being overly anxious and concerned about their performance in class.

In addition to aiding in the development of better phonetic skills for second language learners, second language vocabulary skills improve with the use of songs as a learning tool in second language learning. Songs are able to introduce new words to learners that they would normally learn in a natural setting (Schunk, 1999). This means that learners of a second language are able to acquire new words and learn how these new words are supposed to be used in a natural and cultural context. Learning vocabulary can be a monotonous and boring task that is normally a challenge for many second language learners. Many second language learners learn vocabulary through memorizing new words and learning new words through reading and comprehension classes. On the contrary, songs are able to aid second language learners absorb new vocabulary and repeat these new words through song practice as well as retain the new words better

than other methods of vocabulary learning (Schunk, 1999). Because the combination of words and melody engage the right and left part of the brain, they allow the learner to increase his or her concentration and improve their verbal memory of students who are asked to integrate songs into the learning curriculum (Schunk, 1999). Mentally rehearsing songs allows students to memorize new vocabulary and learn how to match these new words to situations where they are most likely to be used in the new language. Lexical knowledge may be enhanced by learning and rehearsing songs because the act of repeating songs is able to teach new words and moreover allow students to repeat during the course of learning a song. Collocation is an important skill in second language acquisition when working towards attaining fluency in a language. Coupled with memory and recall, collocation can aid second language learners apply what they learn appropriately across a number of contexts.

## Conclusion

Based on the review of literature regarding the impact of songs on second language acquisition, like many other strategies of learning a second language, songs offer advantages that routine classroom tasks cannot offer. Songs are a combination of melody and spoken words. Because of this, they are able to engage both the right and left side of the brain, which facilitates better retention due to music's ability to improve one's attention span. More importantly, songs are quality sources of motivation for second language learners. Motivation is important in learning because it assures that the learner is able to continue acquiring a second language since learning a second language takes time and practice. In addition,

songs are able to aid in phonetics and proper pronunciation. The affective filter hypothesis proposes that learning conditions that are low anxiety and that promote self-confidence among learners facilitate better learning. Songs are also an effective way of building vocabulary and improving lexical retention among second language learners. The review of literature points out that research strongly supports the use of songs and music as methods of teaching a second as well as first language. Research also points out that integrating music to language learning and practice promotes a healthy alternative way of developing the four important skills for language acquisition.

## References

- Arleo, A. (2000). Music, song and foreign language teaching. *Les Cahiers de l'APLIUT*, 19(4), 5–19.
- Engh, D. (2013). Why use music in English language learning? A survey of the literature. *English Language Teaching*, 6(2), p113.
- Fonseca-Mora, C., Toscano-Fuentes, C., & Wermke, K. (2011). Melodies that help: the relation between Language Aptitude and Musical Intelligence. *International Journal of English Studies*, 22(1), 101–118.
- Schön, D., Boyer, M., Moreno, S., Besson, M., Peretz, I., & Kolinsky, R. (2008). Songs as an aid for language acquisition. *Cognition*, 106(2), 975–983.
- Schunk, H. A. (1999). The effect of singing paired with signing on receptive vocabulary skills of elementary ESL students. *Journal of Music Therapy*, 36(2), 110–124.

(けん・まくれん 聖学院大学非常勤講師)