

Using Songs in Class - A Case Study

Polona Fras

Shoin English Language Teaching Center

The use of songs in the ESL/EFL classroom is gaining popularity among teachers. Not only are songs a welcome change from the normal routine of classroom activities, they are also a great resource for teaching many aspects of the English language. This paper will present the implementation of a lesson plan based on a popular English song, which was used in the English team teaching classes at Shoin Junior High School. It will also present the results of the students' evaluations of these lessons.

Introduction

Repetition plays an important part in learning a new language. However, if it is not meaningful, the learner quickly loses interest. In this respect, songs are an ideal tool to improve language learning, as they provide the means of increasing the amount of repetition without producing boredom (Richards, 1969). Furthermore, understanding English songs is often one of the learner's main reasons for learning English (Adachi, 1991).

Using songs in English language class has many advantages. Songs can be used to teach sounds, rhythm, stress, vocabulary and grammar, they can add variety to lessons, motivate learners, reinforce practice, reduce anxiety, and they can provide learners with cultural information (Richards, 1969; Adachi, 1991). Songs can be used in a variety of classroom activities, such as listening comprehension, vocabulary and pronunciation practice, translation and discussion (Adachi, 1991). However, not all songs are appropriate for use in class. The songs should use vocabulary and grammar appropriate to the students' proficiency level and use the stress patterns of spoken English. Some songs might also not be suitable because of their content (Richards, 1969; Adachi, 1991).

Choosing the song

As a part of the English team teaching classes at Shoin Junior High School for *shintaihyōgen* students, it was decided to implement a lesson plan based on a popular English song. Due to its huge popularity among students, we wanted to use the song "Let It Go" from the movie *Frozen*. However, the vocabulary was deemed too difficult for the students' proficiency level, so we decided on another song from the same movie ("Do You Want to Build a Snowman?"). Because of its length and speed we decided to split the song into three parts and use it in three consecutive lessons. The same lesson plan was implemented in the classes of first, second and third year of junior high school.

Implementing the lesson plan

Each lesson followed the same pattern. First, the teachers played the song and introduced its story. This was followed by a listening comprehension activity – cloze or rearranging lines (Appendix A), and pronunciation practice. The teachers also explained the meaning of unknown words or phrases. Finally, the students sang along with the song on the CD.

Students' evaluation of the lessons

After the lessons, the students were asked to fill out a questionnaire about the lessons. They were asked whether they enjoyed the lessons, whether they had enough time to practise the song, what was the most difficult part of the song and what activities (pronunciation practice, games, songs, presentation, essay) they want us to implement in future lessons. All of the questions were multiple choice questions, but the last two were multiple response questions (the students could choose more than one answer).

The total number of students was 34 in first grade, 23 in second grade and 22 in third grade. The response rate was 100 %.

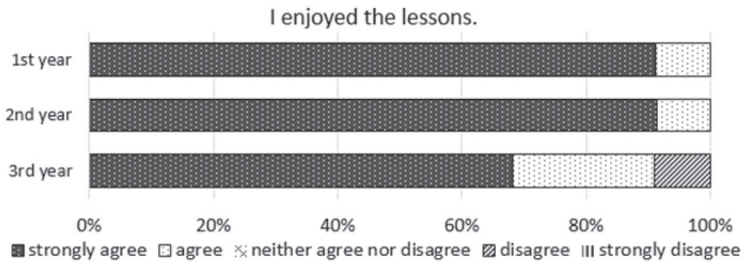


Figure 1. Students' response: Did you enjoy the lessons?

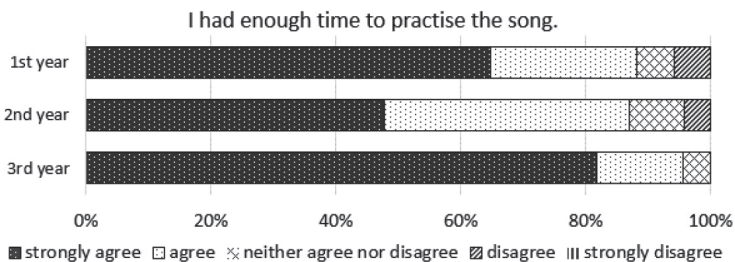


Figure 2. Students' response: Did you have enough time to practise the song?

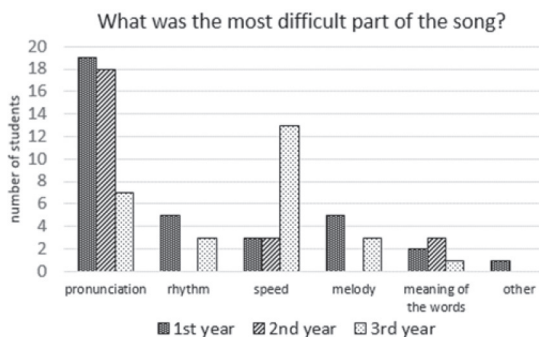


Figure 3. Students' response: What was the most difficult part of the song?

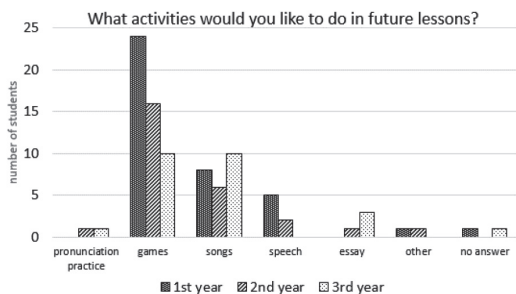


Figure 4. Students' response: What activities would you like to do in future lessons?

In first and second year the results were similar. All of the students enjoyed the classes (Figure 1) and the majority (first year: 88 %, second year: 87%) said they had enough time to practise the song (Figure 2). For most of them, the most difficult part of the song was the pronunciation (Figure 3). On the list of activities they want us to implement in the future lessons, songs ranked in second place (Figure 4).

In third year, the majority of the students (91 %) enjoyed the lessons (Figure 1) and said they had enough time to practise the song (95 %, Figure 2). However, for most of them the most difficult part of the song was its speed (Figure 3). On the

list of activities they want us to implement in the future lessons, songs ranked in first place (Figure 4).

Conclusion

Songs are a useful tool for adding variety to language learning lessons. They can be used to teach many aspects of the English language and can be used in a variety of classroom activities. As can be seen from this case study, most of the students enjoyed the lessons. The song's vocabulary and grammar were appropriate for the students' English level. However, the students expressed having difficulties with the pronunciation and speed of the song. This might be one of the reasons why songs were not the most popular activity the students would like to do in future lessons. Also, some students might prefer more dynamic activities, so games might seem more appealing to them. If songs are used in future lessons, it might therefore be better to choose a slower song and to include some actions that go with it.

References

- Adachi, T. (1991). A Musical Approach to Listening Comprehension: Using Popular Song in an ESL Classroom. *Mem. Fac. Educ. Miyazaki Univ. Hum.*, 69, 1-9.
- Anderson-Lopez, K., & Lopez, R. (2012). Do You Want to Build a Snowman? [Recorded by Kristen Bell, Agatha Lee Monn & Katie Lopez]. On *Frozen: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* [CD]. Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Records.
- Richards, J. (1969). Songs in language learning. *TESOL Quarterly*, 3(2), 161-174.

Appendix A: Listening Comprehension Worksheets

Do You Want to Build a _____? ~Part 1~

Young Anna:

Elsa?

Do you want to build a _____?

_____ on, let's go and play!

I never see _____ anymore

_____ out the door

It's _____ you've gone away

We used to be best buddies

And now _____ not

I _____ you would tell me _____!

Do you want to build a _____?

It doesn't have to be a _____...



Young Elsa:

Go away, Anna.

Young Anna:

Okay, bye ...

snowman

you

why

light

come

like

wish

snowman

we're

which

come

who

snowman

Anderson-Lopez, K. & Lopez, R. (2012). Do You Want to Build a Snowman? [Recorded by Kristen Bell, Agatha Lee Monn & Katie Lopez]. On *Frozen: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack* [CD]. Burbank, CA: Walt Disney Records.

Do You Want to Build a Snowman? ~Part 2 & Part 3~

Teen Anna:

Do you want to build a snowman?

The pictures on the walls!

All these empty rooms,

It gets a little lonely

(Hang in there, Joan.)

Or ride our bike around the halls?

I've started talking to

Just watching the hours tick by ...

I think some company is overdue

Anna:

We only have each other

I'm right out here for you

It's just you and me

They say, "have courage" and I'm trying to

Do you want to build a snowman?

Elsa, please I know you're in there,

Just let me in

People are asking where you've been

What are we gonna do?



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